

Parenting 101: Understanding the need of giving sex education to children

Recently, there has been much talk about sex education — long considered a social taboo in Bangladesh. Specialists agree that comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) should be an integral part of school curriculum, and that in an ideal setting, it should begin at home.

Breaking the myth

Contrary to the popular belief, sex education is not solely about 'intercourse.' It ideally teaches the student about sex, sexuality, reproductive health and hygiene, sexually transmitted diseases and how to prevent them, and how to have safe sex. Comprehensive sex education also teaches matters related to sexual dysfunction, and overall healthy sex activity.

With a conservative social fabric, we shy away from discussing matters of procreation with our children. Laila Khondkar, a child protection specialist, has observed this trend in Bangladeshi parents. She, however, revealed that it is not easy for most parents in different parts of the world to talk about sex with their children. However, in some countries that offer sex education, resources have been developed to support parents in having proper conversations with children on this issue.

"Most parents in Bangladesh are reluctant to give young and adolescent people accurate sexual information. They fear that knowledge about sex leads to early sexual activity," she said.

Tanha Salahuddin (not her real name), mother to children aged 14 and 11, feels that some parents are actually misinformed themselves about sex education, and their children's sexual behaviour.

"When it comes to discussing sex with children or exposing them to sex education, most people think that a forbidden secret of their lives will be revealed to children and they will be misguided after learning about sex. Some parents even feel that children will become interested in sex after learning about it, and will make huge untimely mistakes in life."

Research negates these notions. Global studies have shown that children who receive sexual education, in fact, lead healthier sex lives, and are more likely to make informed, mature decisions. They are also most likely to delay having sex, avoid unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.

The price of miseducation

Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed, Associate Professor, Child Adolescent and Family Psychiatry, National Institute of National Health, raised an interesting point — "You will perhaps not find a single adult person completely unaware of how procreation works. In most cases, they received information from peers, friends and classmates. Sometimes, the source is pornography. These are 'deviated' sources, which may not provide the correct

information. It is also common that such foundations provide incorrect information about sexual pleasure and behaviour, often promoting risky behaviours, which is all too common in society these days. Whether we like to admit it or not, a great majority of young adolescents are already exploring their sexuality. We can no longer ignore this."

If media reports are any indication, sexual abuse of children is on the rise. Specialists believe that one of the contributing factors to this steep rise in social malice is the lack of sex education in children. A generation of children grew up without even the basic knowledge of 'safe and unsafe touch' and were prey to sexual predators. As they do not share a friendly relationship with their parents and guardians, these heinous acts remain unaddressed and children suffer needlessly.

Tanha Salahuddin, 40, is part of a generation that did not receive sex education at school. This, she feels, makes her knowledge inadequate to give sex education to her children.

"Most of the parents in our country do not know how to educate their kids in this certain area and might end up giving wrong ideas to them."

In her opinion, "Experts and trained people can be very helpful to educate kids.

It is quite natural that children of this age will be aware of their sexuality from an early age. We live in a world highly sexualised, whether it is television or conventional media. Social media, too, is filled with racy content.

are some issues in implementation of that policy, however these problems will be solved with time," hopes expert in this field like Abu Sadat Mohammad Sayem, Health

question about sex, parents should ask what he or she already knows. They should correct any misconceptions, and then offer enough details to answer specific questions. They should not dismiss the child's questions by scolding or laughing. Parents should encourage a child to take care of his or her body, develop a healthy sense of self-respect, and seek information from trusted sources," said Laila Khondkar.

Children will learn/know about sex in their own way. Sexual development is part of human growth; infants as young as 3 years of age are aware of their body parts, between the age of 4 and 6, they become curious about the world in general, and this includes human reproduction. It is pivotal that children receive correct, age appropriate information on human propagation.

Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed, Associate Professor, Child Adolescent and Family Psychiatry, National Institute of National Health, stressed on the importance of imparting correct and age appropriate information.

"Most children are fed made-up stories when they ask questions related to their birth. This creates a fantasy among children and when this is shattered with reality, they subconsciously develop trust issues with their parents," said Dr Ahmed.

"Such lies also create multitude of problems and often the child grows up having negative connotations about sexual intercourse. This often has a profound impact of his/her adult sex life," he added.

Dr Ahmed also iterated an important aspect often missed by those who oppose sex education.

"Lessons learnt at home and in schools, colleges, and universities are values and information we use throughout our lives. Sex education also provides information that one can carry to adulthood. Receiving correct information can improve a person's adult sex life."

To conclude

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Although the Government of Bangladesh is trying to incorporate sex education at various levels of the curriculum, it is still up to the parents to make the major move of opening up to their children. Sex education, like every major lessons in life, should begin at home.

A small step towards creating family that can talk about all matters of life in a healthy and meaningful manner will go a long way!

By Mannan Mashhur Zarif
Photo: Collected



This will mitigate the curiosity of the young minds about sex and will help them in making right decisions in future."

Sexuality education in Bangladeshi curriculum

Schools are where children get information related to science and arts, civic behaviour, even religion and everything relevant in life. It seems like a strange notion that children cannot receive 'sex education' at school and this says a lot about today's Bangladeshi society.

"There are no doubts at the policy level for the introduction of comprehensive sex education in school curriculum. There

Specialist, Maternal and Adolescent Health, UNICEF, Bangladesh.

How to start

Sex education can start at home with matters as simple as knowing the human body parts. As the child ages, his/her inquisitive mind will lead to further queries, and such curiosity should be satiated with age appropriate, correct information.

"In this age of the Internet, all answers are a mouse-click away. Children will receive information on sex anyway; some of which may be incorrect. It is better when parents respond to the queries with age appropriate answers. When a child has a