

Why Sex is Like Pizza And Other 4 Ways to Have ‘The Talk’ With Your Daughter

By: Liz Newman

Having a frank and open discussion with your teenage daughter about sex is kind of like high school itself: It goes by faster than you expected, it’s painfully awkward, and nobody really learns much. That’s because no girl wants their father to say “penis.” Ever. It’s probably why the refrain, “Go ask your mother” has become the strategy most often used among dads. But according to Peggy Orenstein, bestselling author of *Girls & Sex*, if you want to have a kid who is going to be responsible about sex, the responsibility starts with you.

“There’s that idea of ‘I’m just going to get a gun, and lock my daughter away until her 30s,’” she says. “But your job as a parent is to guide and nurture your child into a healthy adult, and part of this is having a healthy sense of your sexuality. The way your father treats you will follow you for the rest of your life, I think every woman knows that.”

Of course, like most things in life, there’s a right way to do this and a wrong way. Here is how an expert says that you can (and should) have a successful conversation about ... y’know.

Watch Your Body Language

You probably tell your daughter that she looks beautiful, because she does, and because you want her to feel good about herself. But according to Orenstein, pay careful attention to how much you’re praising aesthetics. “We tend to over compliment girls for appearance as opposed to character,” says Orenstein. “It’s critical for fathers to show an unconditional regard to their daughters, and to remind them they are who they are and deserve to be respected and valued for this — not how they look. Compliment them on how well they did on a math test, or what a great friend she is — as opposed to just ‘You look beautiful today, honey.’” This can also be applied to other women in your life. Like your wife.

Also, women — including those in your family — don’t respond well to playful jabs about their physique, and it can have a substantial effect on how girls view themselves. “Like if a Dad says something like, ‘Gaining a few pounds there chub!’ — that has a long-term impact on their body image,” says Orenstein. It also may have a short-term impact on the side of your head.

Be Really Nice To Mom

How you treat the mother of your child is an example your daughter will take with her into her future relationships. If you and your spouse make out on the regular in front of the kids — that’s gross. But it does show them how they should be treated in a relationship. And if you don’t because your ex is a soul-devouring harpy — fake it and be civil so your kid doesn’t wind up in the same situation.

Teach Them How To Say ‘No’

Not all predators you teach your child to fend off are of the creepy street-dwelling variety. In fact, they could most likely be posing as the new frat-tastic boyfriend they brought home last week. “Girls are afraid of being rude,” says Orenstein. “They’re taught from such an early age to please, and they have difficulty saying no loud and clear. So when things get coercive in a sexual situation, things may be progressing when they don’t want it to.”



You need to tell your little girl that if any guy starts getting handsy, they can stop being polite, and start getting real ... angry. “This is something fathers can really help with,” she says. “When somebody is pushing past her limits, she doesn’t have to be polite. They’re the ones being rude. And she can just say screw you, and walk away.” If he persists, then she can politely kick the shit out of him.

Don’t Be So Direct

This is kind of like a Jedi mind trick on your daughter (these are not the boys you’re looking for — none of them, and certainly not the older ones.)

“The key is not to be so direct,” she explains. “For instance, dads can say something like ‘I was talking to a guy at work about talking to his teenage daughter about what’s going on with oral sex these days. He was asking my advice on how you would talk to a 14-year-old about that. So, I was wondering what you would say to him.’”

Orenstein admits the first time she pulled it off with her own daughter, she really did just want her opinion, and what resulted was the most honest sexual talk they’d ever had. “Rather than make it just about the 2 of you and more of a one-way conversation, it enlists them in the conversation, and you’re working as partners.”

Sex Is Like Pizza, Not Baseball

Orenstein stresses parents should shift from the time-honored “bases” analogy when explaining sex. “It’s not even winners and losers, it makes girls the field,” she says. “And the guy is running around on her. That’s a horrible metaphor.”

She credits sexual educator Al Vernacchio as the brainchild behind “sex is like pizza” theory. (And it’s not because the setup for a lot of porn is a guy delivering a pizza.)

“The idea is, you decide you’re going to have pizza. You discuss what you’re going put on it — you negotiate the pizza,” she says. “It’s a metaphor that takes into account that everyone is invested in other people’s decisions and you’re having a shared, enjoyable experience. If you can’t agree on it, you don’t have pizza together. You can’t even really be embarrassed when you’re talking to your kid about sex as much when you’re using it pizza as the metaphor.”

Or you can just tell them the truth: Pizza is better than most sex.

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