



Reprinted from Moment Magazine, December 2006, "Ask the Rabbis" column

When, and how, should parents start discussing sex with their children?

Response by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer

The classic story: a little boy comes to his mother and says, "Where did I come from?" She gets flustered and nervous, but manages to give him a brief lesson on sex education. But the answer doesn't satisfy the boy. He asks again, "But where do I come from – you know, where was I born?" And the answer "Cleveland" or "Boston" or wherever was what he was looking for in the first place and would have saved the mother considerable anguish had she figured out what he really wanted to know.

The time for parents to start discussing sex with their children will be when their children indicate that they are interested in learning about it. Each child has his or her own timetable. Parents are rarely the ones who need to start the discussion. Children invariably take the lead. Parents ought to welcome and encourage their children's curiosity. And they should give honest, direct, age-appropriate answers. They also don't need to get ahead of themselves. Children usually just want simple responses. But not to worry, in due time, they'll come back again and again asking for more.

Just the other day, my son, 5, and his peers, were asking their teacher how babies were made. She immediately showed them pictures of embryos growing in a mother's uterus. Apparently nobody asked how the sperm and the egg met up in the first place. But when the question comes, we'll be ready for it. In the meanwhile, their teacher reported that the kids "made the connection that only a man and a woman can technically make a baby, which sparked a subsequent conversation about how same-sex parents have babies," leading to even more talk about adoption and surrogate mothers. What a great teaching moment – all instigated by the children!

Rabbi Peter Schweitzer presents a view of Humanistic Judaism as a regular contributor to Moment Magazine's "Ask the Rabbis" column. The response printed here may be slightly altered from the version that first appeared in the magazine. You can find Moment Magazine on-line at www.momentmag.com.