

# Your Personal Coach

By

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

**Dear Kathleen,**

**My daughter is only ten years old but I've noticed that she's beginning to develop breasts. My mother had one awkward conversation with me when I was approaching puberty but I was almost thirteen. I'd like to handle this better with my own daughter than my mother did with me, but I worry about the timing. When should we have this discussion about the "facts of life"?**

**-- Lillian**

Dear Lillian,

You're wise to want to talk with your daughter before the onset of menarche – a girl's first period. Many parents wait until a certain age – say twelve – because that's when their mothers had this conversation with them.

Girls are reaching puberty far earlier with each generation and it's not uncommon for normal girls to have menstrual periods at nine or ten. Though the average age for onset is still around twelve, "normal" can range anywhere from ages nine to sixteen.

Your observation that your daughter is developing breasts is a good signal that you should talk with her now, since most girls will begin to menstruate within a year or two of this sign. This is a wonderful opportunity for you to dispel any myths about puberty, and to help your daughter feel great about becoming a young woman.

What's most important about your talk is the opportunity that it gives you to listen to her concerns and feelings, as well as to impart practical information and knowledge about growing up and how her body is changing. What's more, this is a chance to talk about sex, sexuality, and for her to learn about your values.

If it makes you feel more comfortable (and knowledgeable) read up about menstruation. There's excellent information in *My Body, My Self for Girls* by Lynda and Area Madaras, as well as on the Internet. One site I particularly like for information about raising strong, empowered daughters is [www.parentsandgirls.com](http://www.parentsandgirls.com).

Of course, don't just hand your daughter a book to read or a website to peruse. Have a personal conversation with her, and use books and information as resources to answer any questions that you or she might have.

Let your daughter know that you are comfortable with any questions she might have, and that you are an "askable parent". This wonderful term is one used by the American Social Health Association -- whose mission is to reduce and eliminate sexually transmitted diseases through education ([www.ashastd.org](http://www.ashastd.org)) -- it describes mothers and fathers who let their kids know they are open to talking about sex, and are willing to impart love and values as well as "just the facts, ma'am."

Your daughter may be only ten years-old, but she, like all of us, is being bombarded by sexual images and themes in the media (Have you seen any Brittany Spears lately? Though she appeals to the pre-teen generation, the sexuality of her videos is far from subtle). It's important that your daughter gets your take on sexuality and sex, as well as those put out by MTV and VH1.

You don't mention whether you have any sons, but if you do, it's equally important to have the "birds and bees" talk with boys at about the same age as your daughter.

It used to be an unwritten rule among psychologists that kids will begin to ask questions when they are ready to know about growing up and sex. I think that, given the huge amount of media attention to sex, parents should *initiate* that conversation with their children by simply making it clear that you are open, available, and interested in answering their questions about sex (or anything else).

Check out the Kaiser Family Foundation and Children Now website at [www.talkingwithyourkids.org](http://www.talkingwithyourkids.org) for a great resource about beginning conversations with kids about a whole range of topics that you and your children need to talk about. They offer information and free booklets on subjects such as drugs, alcohol, sex, violence, growing up, and HIV-AIDS.

Children will look first to parents for information and values. If they don't get what they need from mom or dad, they'll look elsewhere, and there is no guarantee that the information they'll find will be accurate, nor that the values they learn will jive with your own. It's smart have this input now with your daughter.

Send your personal coaching questions to [kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com](mailto:kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com), call 473-4004, or direct questions to the Outer Banks Sentinel, P.O. Box 546, Nags Head, NC 27949

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