

*Words Can Work* offers information, communication strategies and the words to help keep kids safe.

**Talk with children about their changing bodies.**

Parents can say: "Some young children begin to walk and talk earlier than others. Adolescents develop at different rates, too." **Dr. Rauch**

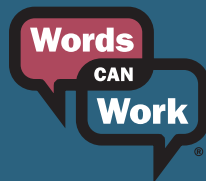
**Help your kids think through consequences of their actions.**

You can ask, "What do you think your life would be like if you were a dad now?" "How would you spend your time?" "I wonder what you'd have to give up?" **Dr. Rauch**

**Tell the truth.**

If you're asked a question you're not prepared to answer, you can say, "That's an important question. I'd like some time to think about it." And then get back to your child with the correct information. **Dr. Rauch**

Read more communication strategies in this *Words Can Work* booklet.



**WORDS CAN WORK®**  
*When Talking With Kids About Sexual Health*

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# Words Can Work: When Talking With Kids About Sexual Health



A guide for young people, parents, and other caregivers



# About Us

## **WORDS CAN WORK®** *When Talking With Kids About Sexual Health*

Published by Blake Works Inc.  
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Some names in this booklet have been changed to protect identities.

Use of some photos courtesy of Rianna Riggs.



Author Jeanne Blake is a medical reporter and the creator of *Words Can Work*®. She is also founder and president of Blake Works Inc. (certified as a Woman Owned Business) and Family Health Productions, which produce multimedia about the public and mental health challenges young people face growing up.

Blake is an affiliated faculty member of the Division on Addictions at Harvard Medical School, and a trustee of McLean Hospital, Harvard's largest psychiatric facility. She has earned the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Journalism Award and has appeared on *Oprah*, *The Today Show*, *The Cristina Show*, and CNN, and has been featured on NPR and Bloomberg Radio.

Jeanne Blake speaks nationally to parents, healthcare professionals, educators, and work/life professionals about how adults can help kids make healthy decisions. She is a consultant to communities and corporations on how to implement programs to support effective parent/child communication.

### **wordscanwork.com**

At [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com), you can learn about other *Words Can Work* booklets and DVDs that help young people face challenges growing up. You can read *Issues and Answers* columns in which young people, parents, and experts share their experience dealing with substance abuse, bullying, depression, and more. You can also read Jeanne Blake's blog.

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# Words Can Work

When Talking With Kids About Sexual Health

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## Note From the Author

Children are inundated with sexual messages from TV, radio, and the Internet. As a parent, you can balance these influences by talking openly with your child.

This can be challenging. Many parents grew up in homes where sex was rarely discussed. They aren't sure how or when to begin to talk about sex. Some worry they'll encourage the very behaviors they hope to prevent. Others mistakenly believe they can delay these discussions until their child is a teen.

There's a more effective approach. Day to day, you can watch for opportunities to share your thoughts, to ask questions, and to listen to your children.

This booklet tells how some families talk about sexual health. David Satcher, M.D., Ph.D., and Paula Rauch, M.D., generously share their expertise. They review each true story and offer the information – and the words – you can use in similar situations. *Words Can Work: When Talking With Kids About Sexual Health* will help your family begin and continue important conversations. This is how you can raise sexually healthy children – kids who love and trust themselves and who make healthy decisions.



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# Girls and Puberty

**A**s children go through puberty, they experience dramatic physical and emotional changes. By talking with their parents, other trusted adults, and well-informed older siblings, young people can learn that these changes are a natural part of growing up.

## FACT:

Girls usually begin puberty between eight and thirteen years of age.<sup>1</sup>

Kate tries to attend all her eleven-year-old daughter's soccer games. She wants to support her daughter, and she also enjoys chatting with the other parents.

Kate remembers one mom describing the moods of her teenager. "One minute we have smiles," she said, "and tears the next."

"Sounds like hormones to me," Kate said.

She shared a strategy she'd used when her daughter Maddy went through puberty. "Maddy asked why she'd cry sometimes for no reason," Kate recalled. "I said, 'You have hormones, honey. Chemicals that affect your moods.'"

Kate urged Maddy to chart her moods on the calendar to help her anticipate irritable or sad feelings. Kate said the chart helped her, too. She'd know when to give Maddy a little extra room.

Other parents wondered if she'd talk with *their* daughters. Kate agreed, under two conditions: The girls would choose the topics, and whether to participate.

On the day of the gathering, twenty excited girls arrived. Kate displayed several sexual health books. "Everything we talk about will stay between us," she promised. The girls peppered Kate with questions: "When will my period start?" "What if I'm at my desk at school?" "Do tampons hurt?" Kate answered one question after another. "When I didn't know the answer," she says, "we'd look it up."

# Additional Resources

## Recommended Resources

### ***Raising Healthy Kids®: Families Talk About Sexual Health*** **(Two DVDs – 20 minutes each)**

Communication about sexual health begins at birth. These parents and young people tell how they discuss sexual health. Experts offer insight and skills to help families start and continue these conversations. For parents and other caregivers.

**Program #1.** *For Parents of Young Children* Addresses setting limits for safety, telling children the truth, how babies are made, self-touch, appropriate/inappropriate touch, and more.

**Program #2.** *For Parents of Preadolescents and Adolescents* Addresses open communication, values, postponing intercourse, birth control, nurturing relationships, and more.

*“Raising Healthy Kids: Families Talk About Sexual Health offers a clear and important message: parents are a child’s best teacher about love, sex and values. Many parents will find these well-crafted videos useful aids in starting these critical discussions with their kids.”*

**Sarah Brown**  
**Director**  
**National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy**

*“Raising Healthy Kids: Families Talk About Sexual Health DVDs are rich triggers for the kind of discussions that NEED to happen in faith communities, in families, in school, in the workplace, and on the street corner.”*

**Jan Lunquist**  
**Director of Education, Training, Communications, Volunteers, and Public Affairs**  
**Planned Parenthood of West and Northern Michigan**

## Recommended Resources (cont.)

### ***In Our Own Words®: Teens and AIDS (20-minute DVD)***

Five young people living with HIV talk candidly about denial, condoms, postponing sex, alcohol use and risky behavior, and healthy decision-making. Also available dubbed in Spanish (VHS only). For grades 5 through 12, parents, and other caregivers.

*“If you’re a teacher, you’re a principal, you’re a superintendent, In Our Own Words: Teens and AIDS is a video you should get for your schools... You can save a lot of kids.”*

**Oprah Winfrey**

### **TIPS for Parents of Children of All Ages (two-sided cards)**

Offers parents tips and phrases for starting and continuing open communication with kids of all ages.

## Also available at [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com)

### **Words Can Work® Booklets**

Words Can Work:  
When Talking About Alcohol

Words Can Work:  
When Talking About Bullying

Words Can Work:  
When Talking About  
Depression

Words Can Work:  
When Talking About Drugs

Words Can Work:  
When Talking With Kids  
About Sexual Health

Words Can Work:  
When Talking About Steroids

### **DVDs**

Alcohol: True Stories Hosted  
by Matt Damon

Boys on Bullying

Depression: True Stories

Drugs: True Stories

In Our Own Words:  
Teens and AIDS

The Power of Girls:  
Inside and Out

Raising Healthy Kids:  
Families Talk About Sexual  
Health

Steroids: True Stories Hosted  
by Curt Schilling

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## wordscanwork.com

At [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com), learn about other *Words Can Work* booklets and DVDs that tell true stories about challenges kids face growing up. You can read *Issues and Answers* columns in which young people, parents, and experts share their experience dealing with substance abuse, bullying, depression, and more. You can also read Jeanne Blake's blog.

## Endnotes

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