

“Where Did I Come From?” Answering Tough Questions from Kids

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All children are curious about the world they live in and the people with whom they come in contact. It's important to answer their questions honestly, with age-appropriate information.

The mother of a four-year-old asks, "My daughter asked me, 'Where did I come from?' I told her she came from mommy's belly, but then she said 'How, mommy? Did it hurt?' What's the best way to address questions like these?"

You may feel envious of the parents from previous generations who told their children "the stork brought your little brother," but giving this kind of misinformation does a disservice to children. Parents are their child's first teachers, and the more kids can talk to you, and know you'll respond with information and caring, the more they'll trust you throughout their childhood and beyond.

Here are some tips for this mother, which are also applicable to other tough questions children ask:

- If you're caught off guard and aren't sure what to say, or don't feel comfortable talking about where babies come from while you're on a crowded bus, you can say "That's a great question. Let's talk about it when we get home, and don't let me forget later." This will give you a little time to organize your thoughts.
- Start off by asking your child what they know, what they've heard, and why they're interested. Your child may have been confused by the idea that a baby comes from mom's belly since she can't figure out how the food that goes into the stomach can be in the same place as the baby. In this case you could simply say, "Oh, there's a special place in a woman's body that's called a uterus or a womb, and babies are safe and cozy there as they grow." If that satisfies your child, you can stop and see if she has any more questions.
- Use the appropriate words. Because of our own embarrassment, we may avoid words like breasts or penis, and instead use words that are silly or were passed down to us from our parents. Since children learn the appropriate names for elbows, knees, and other body parts, it makes sense they would learn the appropriate names for the parts of the body related to reproduction and sexual pleasure.
- Keep it simple. "You began to grow in my uterus after a seed from mommy and a sperm from daddy (or from the sperm bank) joined together." You can talk about planting seeds in the garden and watching the flowers and pumpkins grow. If your curious child wants to know more than you've planned, get some help from a friend or a book.
- If you're not sure what you want to say about the "special kind of hugs that are for adults only," Robie Harris has a great series of books. The one for four-year-olds is called, *It's NOT the Stork!*

When you're thoughtful about a child's questions, your attitude encourages their curiosity and trust.