It’s hard for us to believe that ten years have passed since It’s Perfectly Normal was first published and five years since It’s So Amazing! was first published. Ever since the two of us first talked about making these books, we hoped that they would be resources for children and teens to find the age-appropriate and scientifically accurate information they seek and need. We also hoped to counter the misinformation they often get from their peers or the media.

For these anniversary editions, we talked again with many experts and learned that while most of the information in both books was still accurate, some information needed updating. Some of the changes include a broader definition of sexual intercourse and the latest information on birth control methods and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS—information that will enable today’s kids and teens to make responsible decisions for themselves and their friends.

All parents want to do the best job they can to keep their kids and teens healthy. But information about puberty and sexual health can be complicated. So it’s no surprise that the parents, teachers, librarians, health professionals, and clergy we meet almost always ask us, “What is the best way to use these books with kids and teens?” Every child and family is different, so there are many ways. To help answer that question, we consulted science educator Sally Crissman. Look inside for her tips and suggestions.

If you have any further questions about these books, please feel free to contact us through Candlewick Press: 2067 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02140 (617) 661-3330, ipn@candlewick.com
WHY DO OUR KIDS AND TEENS NEED THIS INFORMATION?

- Kids of all ages have lots of ideas and questions about their bodies. Answering their questions and responding to their concerns reassures them that they ARE perfectly normal and healthy.
- By the time kids are 9, 10, or 11, in addition to thinking about their bodies, they are also wondering about sex. By this age, they have accumulated a lot of information about puberty and sex, and a lot of misinformation, as well. It matters that they have accurate information.
- As they see other children become adolescents, kids wonder how and when their bodies are going to change. Knowing what’s ahead and being aware and prepared will help them deal with puberty and adolescence in a healthy manner.

WHO’S RESPONSIBLE FOR TALKING WITH KIDS AND TEENS ABOUT SEX?

- Usually a parent is a child’s first educator about sexual health. Many kids and teens say that they count on their parents to give them straightforward and accurate information, and to listen to their concerns.
- But not every parent is able to talk about sex. That’s when another trusted adult might be invited to step in and begin to have those conversations with the child.
- In schools, reproduction and sexual health may be part of the science curriculum—everything from the class guinea pig having babies to a discussion of X and Y chromosomes.
- And when children have a checkup with their nurse or doctor, these health professionals may also talk with them about puberty, sexuality, and how to stay healthy.

WHY IS IT OFTEN DIFFICULT TO TALK WITH KIDS AND TEENS ABOUT SEX?

- Many adults find that listening to and talking with kids and teens about sex and sexual matters isn’t easy, because some of the information is complicated and because our own feelings about sex and sexuality might be complicated.
- As with all science, information changes, and scientists may disagree with each other. So we are not always certain whether or not our own information is accurate.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Read the book before you give it to your child. It’s a fascinating and fun “read” for adults too. Chances are you will learn something new—some recent scientific information—or something you’d never thought about, or weren’t quite sure about.
- Then you can say to your child, “I read this book, and think you’ll find it interesting. It might help answer some questions you may have. It answered some of mine.”
- Some kids read the book right away. Others may say, “I know all this stuff already!”
- Try leaving the book next to the TV or on the kitchen table. Usually kids pick it up in a few minutes, or within or a day or two, and start reading it.
- Most kids look at or read the book on their own. Others read it with a parent. Either way is fine.
- Let your child know that you are ready to talk with them whenever they are, about any topics in the book, or any questions they may have.
- If a child asks a question and you don’t know how to answer it, you can say, “I don’t know the answer now, but I will find out, and once I have more information and have had a chance to think about it we can talk.” This gives you time to find an answer or decide how you want to answer the question.
- This book can provide a common ground for families to talk about sex. It can help everyone develop a common language and vocabulary and a respectful way of talking about sexual matters.
- The book can become a trusted resource, one a child or adult can refer to when needed.
TIPS FOR OTHER CAREGIVERS

• Librarians, health professionals, clergy, and leaders of after-school programs and outside-of-school programs also help kids, teens, and their families learn about healthy sexuality.

• When there is a partnership that includes a child’s family, teachers, and health professionals, our kids feel valued and cared for because they know they can get accurate information from grown-ups they trust. In some communities, religious leaders are also part of this partnership.

• When librarians have the book on an open shelf, not on a restricted shelf, children often find the book on their own because they are looking for it. Or they may come across it by accident and find that it provides them with information they had wondered about. Some kids may ask a school librarian or a public librarian to recommend a book. Others feel very private about this topic and might prefer to find the book on their own. Some will read it only at the library. Others will check it out to take home. Either is fine.

• When health professionals have the book on their desk or on a shelf or in the waiting room—anywhere where kids will see it and pick it up or ask about it—it’s an opportunity to talk about sexual health and ask a child if he or she has any questions. Some health professionals recommend the book, and then discuss it with the child on the next visit. Some let kids borrow their copy.

• Religious groups and nonprofits groups also use the book as part of their curriculum or as an opportunity to teach about sexual health.

TIPS FOR EDUCATORS

• Before you start teaching about reproduction, puberty, and sexuality, send a letter to parents, telling them what you will be doing, why this is part of the curriculum, and to contact you if they have any questions. This will help parents be prepared to answer their kids’ inevitable questions while the teaching about the topics is going on at school.

• Some kids’ families have discussed growing up and sex with them. Others have not. Understanding this will help you address the disparity of knowledge that may exist in a classroom. Establish a respectful tone by acknowledging that kids may have different feelings and values as well as different levels of comfort and discomfort when talking and learning about sex.

• Introduce It’s Perfectly Normal or It’s So Amazing! to your students. Give them plenty of time—a few days or so—to look through the book before you begin your discussion.

• Let students know that sexuality, puberty, and reproduction are normal parts of the human life cycle. Understanding how the systems in our bodies work, including the reproductive system, can help kids and teens make responsible decisions about their bodies and their health.
I need these books now!

So do you.

I do?