

Father and son talk masturbation ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I am sorry if I seem maybe over-worried or so but I have a situation that I am not sure how to deal with and I need someone's help. I am a forty-two-year-old male, and I am not into masturbating. I am not sure why. As a kid, I was taught it was a bad thing to do and I was always afraid. I have two sons, one fourteen and another nine. I was getting ready to go to work the other day and I walked into the bathroom and my oldest son was sitting down on the toilet masturbating. I was deeply shocked and my son was deeply embarrassed. I did not know what to make of it. I did not know what to do about it so my son and I had a discussion alone about it. He said he has been masturbating for awhile, maybe a year, about everyday. He says it is something to him that is hard to drop, and sometimes it causes his penis to hurt, sting. He is not circumcised and he said he noticed that he had been getting red tiny veins on his penis and he was worried about it. I did not know what to do about it because I am circumcised and that has never really happened to me. I feel I didn't handle the conversation well because I was shocked and I don't know what to think of it. He seemed worried about it. Can masturbating affect his penis with the symptoms he has? What should I do or think about it? I wish I wasn't so inexperienced about this subject, and my son does not wish for me to talk to anyone about it, so I have turned to someone I don't know to spare his embarrassment. I would greatly appreciate it if you could answer this because I don't know what to do about it. And I am quite worried about it. Thank you.

D

Answer

Dear D,

No need to apologize ? you handled this parenting obstacle as best as you could! It's great that you're willing to learn more about this topic and communication strategies in order to continue the conversation. There is no one correct way for you to feel, but you may find that reflecting a bit on your experiences and discussions about masturbation and sexual health may help you figure out your thoughts (more on this in a bit). In terms of your son's physical symptoms, it's possible that they're due to the friction and pressure he applies when masturbating. It might be helpful for him to loosen his grip when he masturbates, try some lube, and use mild soap to clean his penis when showering. He might also switch to his less-

dominant hand to minimize or prevent the irritation and discomfort he's feeling. These tips are useful regardless of whether a person is circumcised. If toning down his [enthusiastic masturbation habits](#) [2] doesn't work or if he's still concerned, try offering to take your son to a health care provider. In the meantime, read on for some tips for how you may go about these conversations.

Before talking to your son again, you might find it helpful to think about your own feelings regarding masturbation in order to understand your initial reaction and how you'd like to move forward. Some questions for you to consider may include: What were your experiences with masturbation like growing up? How did you (or didn't you) talk about it with your parents? What are your beliefs around masturbation? What influences those beliefs? Culture? Religion? Family values? Other influences? Have you thought about how you'd like to broach the subject of sexuality with your children before? Thinking about the answers to these questions may help you get a handle on the root of your emotions before you address masturbation with your son again.

It may feel awkward or challenging at first to have these kinds of chats with your kids, but keep in mind you're creating an atmosphere of openness and trust with your sons by doing so. In your future talks about masturbation or other sexual health topics, you can emphasize that people choose to masturbate or not for a variety of reasons and that masturbation does have some health benefits (you can learn more about masturbation in general in the [Masturbation](#) [3] category of the [Go Ask Alice! Sexual & Reproductive Health](#) [4] archives). Continuing to be available and letting your son know you are open to talk about sexual health in general as your sons progress through puberty will be an invaluable resource for them. You may feel more at ease with a little preparation. Thinking about what information is age-appropriate to share with your sons and how you'd like to frame the information to fit with your family's cultural, religious, or other values will help you cover the information you want in the way you intend. Advocates for Youth has a [Parents Sex Ed Center](#) [5], providing information for parents to help them have these discussions at an age-appropriate level with their children. For more tips on how to handle these conversations, check out [How do I begin to talk with my children about sex?](#) [6].

Despite your discomfort and inexperience, it's great that you mustered the courage to talk about this topic with your son. You may not think the conversation went well, but your supportive actions, plus your willingness to seek out answers and communicate in a way that makes you both more comfortable with discussing this further, likely helped him more than you realize. You modeled what to do in these situations, and remember that your first conversation doesn't have to be the last on this topic.

Best of luck with more comfortable chats in the future!

Alice!

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