

While you should never say anything that is not truthful, you need not give *complete* information at all times. When my children were very young, and they asked my husband and me how parents have a baby, our first line of response was always, “The first thing you do is *daven* to Hashem to help you have a baby.” This response was both truthful and imparted our *hashkafah* and was usually quite satisfactory, at least initially. I remember that when my son was about nine, he asked me, “If non-Jewish people don’t *daven* to Hashem how can they have a baby?” I answered him truthfully (but not completely) that a man and woman could have a baby without *davening* to Hashem, but that was something that Jewish people did. My son didn’t probe any further. But if he had, I would have explained that beyond *davening* to Hashem, there was something that *Immas* and *Abbas* do together to help make the baby, and answered any further questions that arose.

In a case where you are unsure of how to respond to a question, you are better off providing a minimal, accurate answer than saying something that is not completely true. This leads us to the next guideline.

Guideline #3: Provide age appropriate information.

Clearly, the same question asked by your 5 year old and your 10 year old would not warrant the same response. But, it is not always easy to evaluate how much detail to provide. The best suggestion for children of all ages is to start out by asking them what they think the answer is. You might find that they are very much on the wrong track, or you might see that they already know the answer and are just looking for some confirmation and reinforcement. Secondly, keep your answers brief, using clear and simple language, and then confirm that you answered your child’s question. If you didn’t and they remain unsatisfied, you can provide further information.

A Conversation Between a Mother and Daughter, Age 5 1/2

Little Girl: Imma, When can I have a baby?

Imma: That's a good question Rivki, what makes you ask?

Little Girl: Shuli said she is going to have a new baby soon.

Imma: When do you think you can have a baby?

Little Girl: I don't know.

Imma: Well, children don't have babies. Girls can have babies when they grow up to be ladies and get married.

Little Girl: So how is Shuli getting a baby?

Imma: I think that when Shuli said she was going to have a new baby soon, she meant that her Imma will be having a new baby soon, so there will be a new baby in her family.

Does that answer your question?

Little Girl: Yes

It is best to start with the simplest, least involved answer adding more detail and information, bit by bit as necessary. Your child will let you know when they are satisfied or have heard enough either directly, e.g., "Okay, I get it.", or indirectly, e.g., by changing the subject. While on the one hand you want to provide a full response to your child's question, you also need to respect their limits for being able to absorb it. Allow your child to take the lead in showing you how much he or she can process at a time.

I remember the morning that my children and I were sitting around the breakfast table enjoying our cereal and milk. Conversation turned to the fact that while three of my children and I like milk with our cereal, one of my sons, like my husband, does not. At this point I said, "I guess he got Abba's cereal genes." My then nine-year old stopped eating for a second and was quiet. He then said, "If Avrami grew in your belly—how did he get Abba's genes?" *Oh boy*, I thought. *I didn't think I'd be having this conversation quite yet.* As I began to answer, I remembered to proceed slowly. I said casually, "Well, it takes a part of the Abba and a part of the Imma to make a baby." And then I was silent. You should know that my son is extraordinarily inquisitive and I was ready for a barrage of further questioning. But, all he said was, "Oh yeah, I know all about that." And with that he ended the conversation and went back to eating his breakfast.