

Our Whole Lives Sexuality Education for Grades K-1

How a Baby Begins

By T. Anil Oommen (rev. February 2015 // modified August 2016)

Version One

Maya is seven years old. Her dad called to her just as she was putting on her fairy wings for the Fairy Ball party at her friend Quinn's house. Quinn's family just adopted a new baby and Maya was very excited to meet her.

"Maya," Dad called. "It's time to go." Maya came running into the front room wearing her wings. Maya was holding a smaller pair of wings that she and her dad made for the baby. She couldn't stop thinking about the new baby. She opened up the small wings so Momma could see the whole thing.

"Oh, how lovely!" Momma exclaims.

Maya wrapped her arms around Momma. Maya loved to hug the roundness of her momma's changing body. She felt the baby give a little kick as she pressed her right cheek onto her momma's roundness. "He wants to come out and meet me!"

"I'm sure he does," says Momma as she gently hugs Maya. Maya and her parents have talked about what it means to be pregnant and how a baby is growing inside Momma's uterus. She learned that the baby gets food through a tube in her mother's body called the umbilical cord and that when the baby is born, the cord will be cut and the place where the cord was will become the baby's navel.

Maya knows many things about new babies, but she is really curious about one thing. "How does a baby get in there?" she asks. She has tried to figure it out for herself, but how the baby begins is still a puzzle to her. Maya climbs onto her dad's lap and leans closer to hear Momma's tender voice.

"It takes sperm and an egg to start a baby," says Momma. "The sperm comes from a male and the egg comes from a female. The female has an egg inside of her, but it's not like a chicken egg. It doesn't have a shell, and it is very, very small. We call it an ovum and it comes from the ovaries. Can you guess how small the egg is?"

Maya makes a little circle with her right hand. "This small?"

Momma shakes her head and says, "Even smaller."

Maya makes the circle smaller.

Momma shakes her head again. Dad lifts Maya off his lap, stands, and gets a pencil and paper. He makes a little dot with the pencil and says, "Would you believe this small?"

Maya's jaw drops open in surprise as her dad lifts her back onto his lap.

Momma says, "That is the part of the baby made by a female's body."

“The male’s part of starting a baby is called a sperm,” her dad adds. “It’s also very, very small and it’s shaped like a tiny tadpole. Here,” he says, “I’ll draw one for you.” He draws a little dot shape with a bit of a tail.

“Believe it or not,” Momma explains, “The sperm is even smaller than the egg. Both are so small that you would need a microscope to see them. When an egg and a sperm join together, a baby begins,” she says. “Now, it’s time to go. Our friends will be wondering where we are.”

Maya jumps out of her dad’s lap and picks up the fairy wings she and her dad made for Quinn’s new baby sister.

Version Two: *Continues on from where Version One ended...*

As Maya and her family drive to the Fairy Ball party, Maya asks more questions.

“Where are the sperm stored?” she starts.

“The sperm are stored in the male’s testicles, which are inside a sac behind the penis called the scrotum,” answers her dad.

Momma adds, “When the sperm are ready, they come out through the penis. And when an egg and sperm join together, a baby begins.”

“You already told me that,” Maya responds. “But I still don’t get it. If the egg is inside the female’s body and the sperm is inside the male’s body, how can they join together?”

“Well,” says her dad, “families bring the egg and sperm together in different ways. One way this can happen is when a male and female lie in bed together and they kiss and hug and stroke each other. Then the male’s penis becomes firm and can fit into the female’s vagina. That is the way they connect so that the sperm can come out of the penis and travel into vagina and uterus. When the sperm reaches the egg, a baby begins to form. This is called sexual intercourse, which some couples call making love because grown-ups have sexual intercourse when they want to express their love for each other and also when they want to create a baby.”

“I think I get it, but what about Aunt Nancy and Elena? Elena has a baby inside her uterus, but where did the sperm come from? Aunt Nancy and Elena are both women.”

“Remember,” Momma says, “families can bring the sperm and egg together in different ways. Sometimes a doctor helps bring the sperm and egg together outside of the female’s body and put the zygote (the beginning of a baby) into the uterus. A male donated sperm so Aunt Nancy and Elena could grow a baby for them to parent. Every family has its own story of how their babies began, but every baby starts with the joining of an egg and sperm.”

“Now I get it.” Maya says. “In our family’s story, your egg and dad’s sperm made me, and in Aunt Nancy and Elena’s family story, Elena’s egg and donated sperm from a male person made their baby.”

“Right,” says Momma. “Every family’s story is different, but all babies start from a sperm and an egg joining together.”

Maya looks at the small wings that she holds in her lap. She can’t wait to meet Quinn’s baby sister.