

TALKING WITH YOUR KIDS ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE



Starting the Conversation

USE EVERYDAY MOMENTS

Choose a time when you and your child are relaxed and comfortable. To be effective, these conversations should be frequent, especially with younger kids. And remember, this is first and foremost a safety conversation.



Bath and bedtime: A great time to discuss body parts with young children. Experts recommend teaching the correct names for private parts (penis, vagina, anus, nipples, bottom) like you do with knees, elbows, and toes.



Reading time: Consider [reading books](#) about safety for private body parts, or pick up themes from a regular story ("The coach gave Andy a pat on the back.") Ask open-ended questions: "What kind of safe touch happened?" and use your child's comments for further discussion.



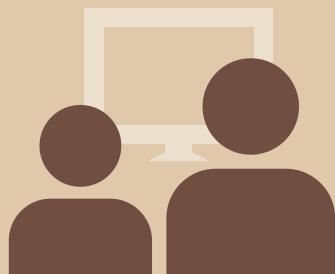
Leaving the house: Go over safety rules, especially when they're leaving without you. Your rules can include general safety ("Wear your seatbelt.") and private body parts ("It's never okay to touch someone else's private body parts.")



Over a treat: Over hot chocolate or another treat, bring up the topic of safety rules. Whether it's unsafe play (never play with fire), household safety (never play with guns), or private body parts, the topic can be broached as part of a general safety conversation.

FOR TWEENS AND TEENS SIDE-BY-SIDE MOMENTS

With older kids, there's more to talk about (see page 3) and often less time.



HOW TO BEGIN

It's normal to feel uncomfortable and nervous at the idea of talking to kids about safety for private body parts. But you should emphasize that these things are important. It may help to frame it as a safety talk:

"It's time we went over rules about safety."

"I want to have a talk about safety today."

Try starting with general safety rules for their bodies: wearing a bike helmet to protect their head, waiting for hot chocolate to cool to avoid burning their tongue. Then move to the rules for private parts.

"We have safety rules for all parts of the body, and that includes your private parts."

If you get flustered or interrupted, keep trying. These should be ongoing conversations, and the more you bring it up, the more natural it will feel each time.

"I know you don't want to talk about it, but this is important. Let's talk for one minute."

"It's weird for me too, but it's important that we have this talk."

REPEAT AND REVIEW

Kids need frequent reminders and practice of all family safety rules. Make sure your children learn the rules and skills to stay safe by reviewing them often during normal family activities.

Strike up conversations

when riding in a car, preparing a meal, or after watching a movie that shows a romantic or sexual relationship.

With a movie providing the context, you can discuss the characters and the decisions they made, making the topic more approachable. You can also use relevant news stories as jumping-off points for conversations.

Conversations by Age

5 AND UNDER

Keep rules simple and easy to remember, and bring them up frequently. Example talking points:

"A bigger person should NEVER touch your private parts except to keep you healthy."

"Never keep secrets about touching."

AGE 6 TO 8

As kids get older, you can introduce more rules and specifics. Again, go over the rules from time to time. Example talking points:

"No one should EVER touch your private body parts except to keep you healthy."

"You shouldn't touch other people's private body parts, either."

AGE 9 TO 10

By this age, children can handle detailed rules. Example talking points:

"Another person should NEVER touch or ask to see your private body parts except to keep you healthy."

"You should NEVER touch or be made to look at another person's private body parts."

"No one should take photos of your private body parts or show you photos of other people's private parts."

RULES FOR KIDS OF ALL AGES

- Never keep secrets about touching.
- Always ask the adult in charge if it's okay for another adult to give you something or take you somewhere.
- It's never your fault if someone touches your private body parts.
- Tell an adult if someone makes you feel uncomfortable, and keep telling until someone believes you.

NATIONAL HOTLINES

- Childhelp: **800-4-A-Child (1-800-422-4453)**
- Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN): **800-656-HOPE**

What to Do If Your Child Tells You

AFTER THEY DISCLOSE SEXUAL ABUSE

Stay calm, remain warm and caring, and avoid expressing anger or blame.

WHAT TO SAY RIGHT AWAY

Assure them they did the right thing, that you believe them, and that you'll keep them safe.

"I am so proud that you told me."

"You were so brave to tell me about this."

"I can help keep you safe because you told me."

GUIDELINES FOR HANDLING THE CONVERSATION

Stay matter-of-fact and objective. Repeat what they tell you and encourage them to open up:

"Tell me more."

"What happened next?"

Don't insist on precise details, numbers, days, or times. Let them know it won't happen again and that you will help them.

IF YOU WERE TOO UPSET TO LISTEN

It's perfectly fine to revisit the conversation once you have calmed down. "Remember what you told me about Uncle John touching your vagina? Can we talk about it again?" Then follow the same guidelines outlined above.

"WHAT IF" SCENARIOS AND THE THREE RS OF SAFETY

These rules apply to any unsafe situation, and can help you discuss "what ifs" with your kids. As with all conversations, discuss and practice safety scenarios on a regular basis.

Recognize: Is it safe? Does it break a rule?

Report: Always tell if someone breaks a safety rule.

Refuse: You can say no to any situation or touch you don't want.

Find additional information and resources at EarlyOpenOften.org

Talking to Teens and Tweens About Sexual Abuse

Continuing safety conversations with tweens and teens is critical in helping them navigate their changing bodies and changing worlds. Help them establish healthy and informed decision making with these suggested conversations. Continue to reinforce the message that it is never okay to engage someone else of any age in online or in-person sexual activity that is just for their own personal benefit. This is considered sexual abuse. And if it is with someone their own age, there *must* be mutual consent.

WHAT IS CONSENT?

Consent means permission for something to happen or a freely-given agreement to do something. Legal definitions of consent, particularly sexual consent, differ from state to state. One thing is always true:

It is not just someone not saying no—it has to be an actual, authentic yes.

WHAT IS ASSAULT?

According to the [United States Department of Justice](#), sexual assault is "any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient." Sexual assault is an umbrella term that includes a range of sexual activities such as rape, fondling, and attempted rape.

What to Say to Kids 11 and Up

NORMALIZE THE CONVERSATION

Talking about sexuality and sex can be awkward. Even if they roll their eyes, it's important to normalize the conversation to make them feel okay to talk.

"I know this is awkward, but it's important."

"You can always talk to me about this."

ROMANTIC FEELINGS AND SEXUALITY

Acknowledge that having feelings for someone and wanting to have a physical relationship with them is normal. Then focus the conversation on boundaries and consent.

"Your body's changing. You may experience a lot of intense feelings, including sexual feelings. That's normal."

"You may start having romantic feelings for someone you know. So, it's important for us to talk about safety and consent."

WHAT'S OKAY AND WHAT'S NOT OKAY

Romantic relationships and sexual situations are new and can be hard to handle. Be direct about what is and isn't okay and give examples so they can recognize situations if they happen.

"It's always okay to stop sexual activity you both initially gave consent to—at any time. Even if someone says it's not fair to them for you to change your mind, your feelings and safety must come first."

NEARLY 36%
of offenders
are older children
or teenagers.

"It's never okay for someone to use sex or your feelings to try to control you. If that happens, tell them it's not okay, and then tell me so we can talk about it."

Create an open, loving, and honest dialogue about your child's relationships. Consistent support and information help to build trust and comfort in talking about things.

"I noticed you and Sean were holding hands today. You both looked happy! What are some things you like about him?"

"Being in a relationship can sometimes get tricky. Let me know if you ever want to chat about how things are going."

UNDERSTANDING THE LAW

Tweens and teens can inadvertently become abusers. Talk about what assault is, and call out behavior that can be considered assault or even criminal.

"I know you love your girlfriend, but now that you're 18 and she's 16, having any sexual contact with her is considered statutory rape, which is illegal and can land you in jail."

"Because drugs and alcohol muddle people's ability to make good decisions, having sex with them while they're under the influence of these substances is considered assault."

"You don't have to touch someone to abuse them. Making sexual gestures, like grabbing yourself, or allusions to sex, can be unwelcome and make someone uncomfortable, even if you're kidding."

WATCHING OUT FOR FRIENDS

Being an upstander—someone who stands up for others and reports or helps report abuse—can make a positive impact and potentially stop abuse. Tell your kids to keep an eye out for others.

"Safety is important for everyone. If you see something, say something."

If you see inappropriate behavior at school or with friends, speak up. It could really help someone who may feel afraid to say no."