



Talking to Kids

Stop It Now! believes that adults, not children, are responsible for preventing the sexual abuse of children. We also believe that children need accurate, age appropriate information about child sexual abuse.

About Others' Behavior Towards Them

Use concrete examples. When talking with children remember that in 90% of situations where someone sexually harms a child, the child (and often their family) knows the person who is acting in a sexually inappropriate way. When talking with kids about child sexual abuse, use examples and situations that acknowledge this. (For example, “What if you are at Kaycee’s house and her older brother asks you to play a game where you take off your clothes?” “Sometimes grandparents or uncles or cousins don’t know the rules and touch children in inappropriate ways. If that ever happens, be sure to tell Mom or Dad or another trusted adult so that we can help that person learn the rules.”)

Model healthy boundaries. Sometimes we unwittingly confuse children by insisting they hug Grandma even when they don't want to or when we say “Do what the babysitter tells you to do.” Help your children practice setting healthy boundaries. When children tell us they don't want to hug and kiss everyone at a family gathering when it's time to leave, support them by helping them find an alternative way to show respect to family members (such as shaking hands, high fives, saying goodbye). Model saying “no” and teach your children that their “no” will be respected. If adults in your child's life don't respect your child's boundaries, as the adult you should reinforce your family rules and your child's rights to set boundaries.

Talking about touch. When talking with children about touch, remember that sexual touch can be very confusing. In a strictly physical sense, sexual touch can feel good and for a victim of sexual abuse, this can create more shame and confusion about the situation. “If my body responded this way, this must mean that I liked it and wanted it to happen.” Many families prefer to talk about “secret” touch or touch that makes a child uncomfortable. “It is not OK for anyone to touch you in any way that makes you feel uncomfortable—not Mom, Dad, aunts, uncles, teachers or even your friends. Your body is yours and yours alone and you always have a right to say no to someone.”

Talk about tricks. Some people who sexually abuse children tell the child that it is their fault, that no one will believe them, that if they tell anyone they will hurt their family or pet, etc. Explain these tricks to your children and reassure them that you can handle the situation. “As your parent, aunt, guardian, I will always be here to keep you safe and will always believe you and love you.” “If someone touches you in an uncomfortable way it is never your fault.” “They just tell you that to trick you.”

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Involve other adults. Children need to know that there are other adults in whom they can confide. Sometimes children are afraid that they will “get in trouble” if they tell their parents about something that happened. This fear can be reinforced by the person who is harming them. Help your children to realize that there are other adults who can help them if they don’t want to talk to Mom or Dad or if Mom or Dad is doing something that concerns them. Ask “If you don’t feel comfortable talking to me about something, who else can you talk to?” or “What if something happens at school, church, the park, who could you talk to?”

Be approachable. By initiating conversations about healthy sexual boundaries, by answering questions accurately and respectfully, by handling disclosures calmly and reassuringly, you send the message that you are someone your child (or other children you care about) can talk to even when something has already happened.

About Their Behavior Towards Others

Stop It Now! believes that adults, not children, are responsible for preventing the sexual abuse of children. We also believe that children need accurate, age appropriate information about child sexual abuse.

Why this is important. In 30 – 50% of child sexual abuse cases, a child is sexually harmed by someone under 18 years old. Most parents talk with their children about how to keep themselves safe from others who may sexually harm them. We also need to talk to our children about why it is so important for them not to harm others. “Just like it is not OK for you to hit and hurt other people, it is not OK for you to touch other people in a way that makes them uncomfortable.” “It is never OK to sexually touch a child.”

Developmentally expected behaviors. Children are born as healthy sexual beings. Just as they are curious about the solar system, airplanes and animals, they will be curious about their bodies and other people’s bodies. As parents, it is very helpful to be knowledgeable about Healthy Sexual Development in Children so we are able to discern expected behaviors from behaviors that may be cause for concern.

When you find your child exploring their own body or when you find children playing “doctor,” calmly acknowledge what you’ve seen and set clear expectations. “It looks like you and Janie are comparing your bodies. Now get dressed and remember, we keep our clothes on when we’re playing.” “It feels good to take our clothes off. But remember, in our family we don’t leave our bedrooms without clothes.” If a child continues behaviors after you’ve set clear limits, you may want to talk with a professional. For referrals to professionals, call Stop It Now!’s SAFE AND CONFIDENTIAL 1-888-PREVENT (1-888-773-8368) Helpline.

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Talking to Teens

Stop It Now! believes that adults, not children, are responsible for preventing the sexual abuse of children. We also believe that children need accurate, age appropriate information about child sexual abuse.

Research shows that many adults who sexually abuse children started their abusive behaviors as teens. Some adults who are sexually attracted to children (pedophiles) were first aware of this as teenagers. As parents, we can be an important source of information and expectations for our teenagers. “Sometimes people find themselves having sexual thoughts about children. And I want you to know that it is never okay to act on those thoughts and if you ever have thoughts like that, there are people who can help you.” “It is never okay for you to sexually touch a child. It is illegal and the consequences are very high. It is also harmful to the child.”

Minnesota Legal Definitions. Teens need information not only about child sexual abuse but also about the laws of consent in their state. As our judicial system holds more teens responsible as adults, there are significant and long-lasting results for teens who engage in illegal sexual behaviors. “I know you and Brittany love each other but you are 19 years old and Brittany is 15 and that makes being sexual with each other illegal in Minnesota. If Brittany gets pregnant or her parents press charges, you could have to register as a sex offender for the rest of your life. It is important for you and Brittany to wait until you are older.” For more information about Minnesota Legal Definitions, visit <http://www.stopitnow.org/mn/legal.html>.

For additional information about talking with your children or teens about sexuality visit these web sites:

- Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention and Parenting (MOAPPP) <http://www.moappp.org>. Resources for parents when talking to their children and teens about sexuality and decision-making.
- Planned Parenthood of Southwestern Oregon has developed a web site that includes year by year recommendations for how to talk with your children about sexual issues including child sexual abuse. <http://www.noplacelikehome.org>
- Advocates for Youth Parents’ Sex Ed Center at <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/parents/index.htm>
- Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) web site section called “Families Are Talking.” <http://www.familiesaretalking.org/parents.html>