

How to Talk To Your Kids About ...

BODY SAFETY

A Conversational Guide for Parents and Caregivers



About this Guide

Child sexual abuse occurs at alarming rates, yet many people find it challenging to discuss the topic with their children. Often parents and caregivers are afraid of scaring their child or introducing sex at a young age. The conversation is avoided and as a result, most childhood sexual abuse victims do not disclose their abuse in childhood.

This guide is an effort to make it easier for caregivers and children to talk about sexual abuse without scaring children, or prematurely giving them information on sex. It describes the "uh oh" feeling that causes children to freeze and normalizes this response, rather than shaming a child for not yelling and running away if abuse has happened. It also helps children and their parents to really understand what it means to be the Boss of Your Own Body and to understand that Secrets Are Not Safe. You can use this practical, digestible advice and age-appropriate conversation starters to help you feel comfortable talking with your child during those everyday moments.

When to Start Talking

You can capture a few minutes during those everyday moments with your child to bring up the topic of personal safety. If your child isn't receptive right away, like most children will be the first time something new is brought up, that's okay, try again another time. The most important aspect of these talks is to create an open line of communication.

Bath Time



When bathing your young child, you can teach them the correct names for all body parts, so if they are harmed, they can accurately describe to you what happened. Also, research indicates that sex offenders report seeking out children that do not use anatomically correct words because they are less likely to tell.

Can you name all the parts of your body?
Ears, eyes, elbows, penis, knees..."

Can you point to all the parts of your body covered by a swimsuit? They're covered because they're private."

Leaving the House



When your child is getting ready to go to school, an activity, or a friend's house, this can be your cue to remind them about personal safety rules.

"Let's have a quick chat before you leave. I want to go over a few safety rules."

"Just in case you need me for anything, I want to make sure you know the safety plan and have all of our emergency contact information."

Bedtime



When tucking your child in at night or snuggling on the couch, you can read together (this book!) and ask open ended questions about the book themes or situations that might relate to personal safety.

"What touches did you notice that might give you an "uh-oh" feeling?" What would you do in that situation?"

"Some touch is never okay, like hitting. Other touches depend on the person and the situation. No adult should ever touch you and then ask you to keep it a secret."

Play Time



Playing games together can be a good opportunity to start teaching basic concepts of consent. Start by explaining rules for safe and unsafe touches. Teach them that it's always okay to refuse touches, even if it seems fun (like tickling).

"Always ask before touching someone else."

"Listen when someone says 'No' or 'Stop'."

Side by Side



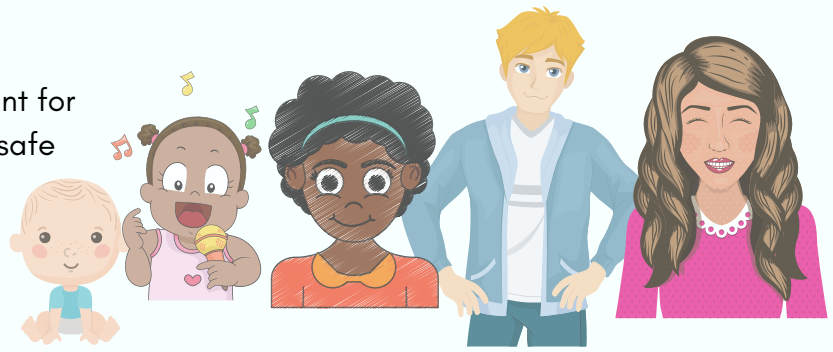
Older kids often find it easier to talk when they're not looking directly at someone. The best time to connect may be while engaged while riding in a car or cooking a meal together. Ask open ended questions and listen carefully for any comments that might hint at discomfort. Try watching the news or a movie together, using the context to bring up specific topics, such as new romantic feelings.

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

"It's always okay to say 'No,' even if you've already said 'Yes.'"

Talking Tips by Age

Having regular talks about personal safety is important for raising a confident, resourceful child who can make safe choices.



Keep conversations short and simple

0-5

with toddlers and young children. Focus on teaching basic personal safety rules, the correct names for all the body parts, and how to refuse unwanted touches.

"A bigger person should NEVER touch your private parts. If they do, they are breaking the rules."

"You can always say 'No' or 'Stop' if you don't like something."

"Secrets about your private parts are never okay." Help your child know the difference between 'secrets' and 'surprises'.

Be more specific

with the rules and continue to regularly remind your child of the personal safety rules. It should feel just as normal to say, "Remember: No one should ever touch your private body parts except to keep you healthy."

6-8

"Safe touches make you feel well-cared for and loved, like a hug from a parent. They're good for you. Unsafe touches give you an "uh-oh" feeling and might even hurt."

"It is never okay to play games with , to show, or to touch anyone's private parts."

Review family safety rules

9-10

and go into more detail about privacy, different types of touches, and how to recognize behavior that makes them uncomfortable. At this age, your child may spend more time away from you at friend's homes or activities, and they may also spend more time online without your supervision. Know who your child spends time with, including coaches, music instructors, and friends' older siblings.

"Not all abuse involves touching. It's not okay for someone to show you their private body parts or ask to see yours, in person or online."

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

Many of the same safety rule

apply to older kids but might need to be framed in a way that's more open-ended. Rather than giving a one sided talk about safe choices that your child may tune out, focus on open, honest, and ongoing dialogue. Build trust and comfort over time and adapt your conversations to be more informative and nuanced as they age.

11+

"I've noticed you hanging out with some new kids at the basketball games. I'd love to hear more about them."

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

"I know you have strong feeling for your girl/boy friend, so even though it may seem awkward, we need to talk about safety and consent."

"It's always okay to change your mind and stop sexual activity at any time, even if you've already said 'Yes.' Your feelings and safety come first."

"It's important to watch out for your friends. If you see something inappropriate, say something."

Tips to Remember:

Bring a sense of warmth, comfort, and normalcy to personal safety conversations so your child will feel more comfortable coming to you with questions and concerns in the future. Short, meaningful conversations now, sets the stage for open communication later.



Anytime is the right time to talk with your child, but it helps to feel calm and relaxed. If you display sadness or anger, your child may be scared to come to you in the future.



Look for opportunities in your daily routine that allow some privacy, like bedtime or in the car, because your child may not want to open up about a sensitive topic in a public place.



Be ready to respond appropriately if your child tells you about any inappropriate behavior.

"It took a lot of courage to tell me about this. I believe you."

Simple Safety Rules

Make sure to keep safety rules simple so they're easy to understand and remember, and repeat them frequently, particularly for younger children.



RECOGNIZE the difference between safe and unsafe touches

REFUSE unwanted touches if you can. If getting away or saying 'stop' is too hard, be sure to...

REPORT the abuse to a safe adult as soon as you can.

"You can always say 'No' to unwanted touches."

"It's never your fault if someone sexually abuses you."

"Always ask the adult in charge if it's okay for another adult to give you something or take you somewhere."

"Never keep secrets about touching."

"It's never too late to tell."

What the research says



Children who are informed about their bodies and who feel comfortable talking openly with a caring adult are **less likely to be abused** and more likely to disclose abuse if it happens.



Many parents are reluctant to educate their children about sexual abuse because they view it as an **uncomfortable topic to discuss**.



In about **90 percent of sexual abuse cases**, children know their offender. Often it is someone the family knows and likes, which is why many children are afraid to tell.



If your child discloses abuse, stay calm and believe them; **children rarely lie about abuse**.



It is estimated that nearly 36 percent of offenders are older children and teens, so, it's **critical to thoroughly explain personal boundaries and consent**.

Additional Resources located on

RiverBridgeRC.org/family-center/

- Online Resources
- Child Abuse Articles
- Books for Parents, Caregivers, and Survivors
- Books for Children
- Podcasts
- Videos
- Internet & Social Media Safety
- Problematic Sexualized Behavior



Many tips and parts of this guide were taken from Committee for Children Hot Chocolate Talk, www.secondstep.org/. Additions and edits were made by River Bridge Regional Center.



River Bridge
Regional Center Inc.

If you suspect abuse or have a concern about a child, please contact



1-844-CO-4-KIDS
(1-844-264-5437)

Learn more at
CO4Kids.org



"River Bridge gives children the support and understanding and the knowledge to get back what they have lost and back to good health. To move on with their life and be a kid."

*Terry Wilson, retired Chief of Police-
Glenwood Springs*

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River Bridge Regional Center is a nationally accredited child advocacy center. River Bridge is a calm, neutral facility where law enforcement and child protection work together to investigate child abuse allegations. Mental health therapists, medical providers, and family advocates help children and families heal. The District Attorney's office is supported in holding offenders accountable.

River Bridge also provides outreach and education to the community about child abuse, in hopes of breaking the cycle of abuse.

All clients are referred to River Bridge by Department of Human Services and/or Law Enforcement.

What We Provide Forensic Interviews

A developmentally appropriate, non-leading and neutral conversation that allows a child to share their experience and provide information aiding in the investigate process.

Family Advocacy

A family's guide during this vulnerable and confusing time. Our family advocate's provide resources and ensure their needs are met along the way.

Mental Health

Our mental health coordinators will provide referrals and evidence based therapy for children and their non-offending family members.

Medical Examination and Consultations

Our forensic nurse examiners help ensure the health of children, address any medical needs, provide education and consultation to assure a child of their health.

Community Outreach

Community outreach and education to the community to improve treatment and enhance the prevention of child abuse