

Parent/Carer's Guide to Consent and Harmful Sexual Behaviour¹

Consent is about boundaries. Early talks when children are young lay the groundwork for open and direct conversations as children get older. For your younger child, you can introduce ideas about consent without relating it to sex. As your child gets older, you can start talking more openly and directly about sexual consent.

Young Children (ages 1-5)

1. Teach children to ask permission before touching or embracing a playmate.

Use language such as, "Sarah, let's ask Joe if he would like to hug bye-bye." If Joe says "no" to this request, cheerfully tell your child, "That's okay, Sarah! Let's wave bye-bye to Joe and blow him a kiss." Set a good example for your child by being clear about your own personal boundaries. E.g. if you need privacy while you go to the toilet, explain this to your child and ask them to wait outside.

2. Help create empathy within your child by explaining how something they have done may have hurt someone. Use language like, "I know you wanted that toy, but when you hit Michael, it hurt him and he felt very sad. And we don't want Michael to feel sad because we hurt him."

Encourage your child to imagine how they might feel if Michael had hit them, instead. This can be done with a loving tone and a big hug, so the child doesn't feel ashamed or embarrassed.

3. Teach kids to help others who may be in trouble. Talk to kids about helping other children, and alerting trusted grown-ups when others need help.

Ask your child to watch interactions and notice what is happening. Get them used to observing behaviour and checking in on what they see.

Use the family pet as an example, "Oh, it looks like the kitty's tail is stuck! We have to help her!"

Praise your child for assisting others who need help, but remind them that if a child needs help with anything, that it is a grown-up's job to help. Praise your child for alerting you to people who are in distress, so that the appropriate help can be provided.

4. Teach your kids that "no" and "stop" are important words and should be respected. One way to explain this may be, "Sarah said 'no', and when we hear 'no' we always stop what we're doing immediately. No matter what."

Also teach your child that their "no's" are to be respected. Explain that we always stop doing something when someone says "no", and that our friends need to always stop when we say "no", too. If a friend doesn't stop when we say "no," then we need to think about whether or not we feel good, and safe, playing with them. If not, it's okay to choose to not be friends with that person anymore.

If you feel you must intervene, do so. Be kind, and explain to the other child how important "no" is. Your child will internalise how important it is both for themselves and others.

¹ Adapted from [The Healthy Sex Talk: Teaching Kids Consent, Ages 1-21 - The Good Men Project](#)

5. Support children to learn to read facial expressions and other body language: Scared, happy, sad, frustrated, angry and more. Charade-style guessing games with expressions are a great way to teach children how to read body language.

6. Never force a child to hug, touch or kiss anybody, for any reason (including relatives). If Grandma is demanding a kiss, and your child is resistant, offer alternatives by saying something like, "Would you rather give Grandma a high-five or blow her a kiss, maybe?"

You can always explain to Grandma, later, what you're doing and why. But don't make a big deal out of it in front of your child. If it's a problem for Grandma, so be it, your job now is doing what's best for your child and giving them the tools to be safe and happy, and help others do the same.

7. Encourage children to wash their own genitals during bath time. Of course parents have to help sometimes, but explaining to the child that their genitals/ private parts are important and that they need to take care of their body is a great way to help encourage body autonomy and a sense of ownership of his or her own body.

Also, model consent by asking for permission to help wash your child's body. Keep it upbeat and always respect the child's request to not be touched.

"Can I wash your back now? How about your feet? How about your bottom?" If the child says "no" then hand them the washcloth and say, "Ok! Your bottom needs a wash. Go for it."

8. Give children the opportunity to say yes or no in everyday choices. Let them choose clothing and have a say in what they wear, what they play, or how they do their hair. Obviously, there are times when you have to step in (e.g. dead of winter when your child wants to wear a sundress would be one of those times), but help them understand that you heard their voice and that it mattered to you, but that you want to keep them safe and healthy. Help them to understand why wearing a warm coat, hat and mittens are important so that they know it's not just because you said so.

9. Allow children to talk about their body in any way they want, without shame. Teach them the correct words for their genitals, and make yourself a safe place for talking about bodies and how babies are made.

Say, "I'm so glad you asked me that!" If you don't know how to answer their questions the right way just then, say, "I'm glad you're asking me about this, but I want to look into it. Can we talk about it at bedtime? Ensure you follow up with them when you say you will.

If your first instinct is to shush them or act ashamed, then practice it alone or with a partner. The more you practice, the easier it will be.

10. Talk about "gut feelings" or instincts. Sometimes things make us feel weird, or scared, or icky in our tummy and we don't know why. Ask your child if that has ever happened with them and listen quietly as they explain.

Teach them that this "icky in our tummy" is sometimes correct, and that if they ever have a gut feeling that is confusing, they can always come to you for help in sorting through their feelings and making decisions. Remind them that no one has the right to touch them if they don't want it. Only trusted adults should be touching their genitals/ private parts if they are helping them with health or hygiene. E.g. A doctor or nurse might ask to see your body. That's a good reason, but only if I'm there too.

Consent videos

Consent for Kids (pre-adolescent) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3nhM9UIJc>