

# **Parent/Carer's Guide to Consent and Harmful Sexual Behaviour<sup>1</sup>**

## **Guidelines For Older Children (Ages 5-12)**

Teaching kids to respect one another's space, from even a very young age, helps grow empathy.

**1. Teach kids that the way their bodies are changing is great,** but can sometimes be confusing. The way you talk about these changes, whether it's loose teeth, pimples and pubic hair, will show your willingness to talk about other sensitive subjects.

Use the proper science terms (e.g. penis instead of winky or vulva instead of hoo-hoo) in a direct manner, and answer any questions your child may have, without shame or embarrassment. Again, if your first instinct is to shush them because you are embarrassed, practice until you can act like it's no big deal with your kid. Practice saying words like penis or vulva in the mirror while you brush your hair to get used to saying the words without a whispered voice or a red face.

**2. Encourage them to talk about what feels good and what doesn't.** Do you like to be tickled? Do you like to be dizzy? What else? What doesn't feel good? Being sick, maybe? Or when another child hurts you? Leave space for your child to talk about anything else that comes to mind.

**3. Remind your child that everything they're going through is natural,** growing up happens to all of us. Remind them that everyone grows at a different rate. If they are feeling like the shortest one in the classroom, you can let them know they may not have hit their growth spurt yet, and depending on genetics they may still grow a little or a lot taller. Use age appropriate books to help them understand the physical and emotional changes they will experience through puberty.

**4. Teach kids to stop their play every once in a while to check in with one another.** Teach them to take a time out every so often, to make sure everyone's feeling okay. Get them to check in if a child has withdrawn from play and may be feeling isolated or left out. Help them to practice saying phrases like, "When Sarah took the ball from me and pushed me, I felt angry and sad. What I'd like would be if Sarah would have asked me for the ball."

**5. Encourage kids to watch each others' facial expressions** during play to be sure everyone's happy and on the same page. If they see an expression and they are not sure what is being communicated, encourage them to not wonder or guess, but go and ask the person what they are feeling and if they need help.

**6. Help kids interpret what they see on the playground** and with friends. Ask what they could do or could have done differently to help. Play a "rewind" game, if they come home and tell you about seeing bullying.

"You told me a really hard story about your friend being hit. I know you were scared to step in. If we were to rewind what happened, what do you think you could do to

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from <https://goodmenproject.com/families/the-healthy-sex-talk-teaching-kids-consent-ages-1-21/> accessed on 15.12.2021

help next time if you see it happen?” Improvise everything from turning into a superhero to getting a teacher.

Give them big props for talking to you about tough subjects. Help them think of a list of trusted adults to talk to about the situation.

**7. Don't tease children for their friendships**, or for having crushes. Whatever they feel is okay. If their friendship with someone else seems like a crush, don't mention it. You can ask them open questions like, “How is your friendship with Sarah going?” “What makes Sarah a good friend?” “How are you being a good friend to Sarah?”

**8. Teach children that their behaviours affect others.** You can do this in simple ways, anywhere. Ask them to observe how people respond when other people make noise or don't pick up dog waste when they go for a walk. Ask them what they think will happen as a result. Will someone else have to clean up the dog waste? How might someone feel if they accidentally stepped in the dog waste? Explain to children how the choices they make affect others and talk about when are good times to be loud, and what are good spaces to be messy.

**9. Teach kids to look for opportunities to help.** Can they pick up the litter? Can they be more quiet so as not to interrupt someone's reading on the bus? Can they offer to help carry something or hold a door open? All of this teaches kids that they have a role to play in helping ease both proverbial and literal loads.

**10. Education about “good touch/bad touch”** remains crucial, particularly in the early years of secondary school. This is an age where various “touch games” emerge: butt-slapping, snapping bra straps, hitting one another in the genitals and pinching each other's nipples to cause pain. When young people talk about these games, a trend emerges where boys explain that they think the girls like it, but the girls explain that they do not.

We must get children talking about the ways in which these games impact other people. They will try to write it off, but it's important to encourage them to talk it through, and ask them how they would feel if someone hit them in that way, or did something that made them feel uncomfortable or violated.

When you see it happen, nip it in the bud. This isn't “boys being boys” or “just a bit of banter”, this is harassment, and sometimes assault.

As they get to the age when they will be attending secondary school, we need to start reinforcing ideas of respect, mutuality and consent in all relationships

Consent is more than the absence of “No”. Consent includes:

- An enthusiastic “Yes” to a specific activity, partner and occasion which is communicated verbally and/ or non-verbally
- A “Yes” that can be changed or revoked at any time
- Being coercion-free; no one is forced, pressured or manipulate into participating
- All individuals being conscious; individuals are awake, aware and informed
- Being specific. Saying “Yes” to one act, doesn't mean “Yes” to other acts
- Being informed; no deceiving or lying about things like contraceptives being used
- Being legal able to make the decision because the individuals are old enough to make the decision, are not intoxicated by substances, and have the freedom to decide without threat, harm or coercion

Harmful Sexual Behaviours are sexual behaviours expressed by children and young people under the age of 18 years old, that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards self or others, or be abusive towards another child, young person or adult.

### **Consent videos**

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

### **Consent videos for Secondary School Children**

Ping Pong consent on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/178529042?ref=em-share>

Enthusiastic Consent <https://youtu.be/AqBQH1e7XwQ>

Screwball <https://truetube.co.uk/film/screwball>