

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

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.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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>

## **Parent/Carer's Guide to Consent and Harmful Sexual Behaviour<sup>2</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

---

<sup>2</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=h3nhM9UIJic>

### **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>

## **Parent/ Carer's Guide to Consent and Harmful Sexual Behaviour<sup>3</sup>**

### **Guidelines for Young People (ages 13-19)**

#### **1. Build young people's self-esteem.**

We tend to build up our younger children by telling them how great they are. We stop telling children all the wonderful aspects of who they are when they reach secondary school. Sometimes they are pushing the boundaries while exploring their independence which makes conflict more prevalent in the teen years. This a very crucial time to be building up our child's self-esteem, and not just about physical attributes. Remark to them regularly about their talents, kindness, work ethic as well as how good a friend they are to others.

Even if they shrug you off with a, "Dad! I know!", it's always good to hear the things that make you great.

**3. Continue having talks with young people about relationships and sex,** but start incorporating information about consent. We're often good at talking about waiting to have sex, or about sexually transmitted infections, or about practicing safer sex. We don't usually talk about consent. Encourage them to expect their "No" to be respected, and how to hear "No" without it being a devastating rejection.

Ask questions like, "How do you know whether your partner is ready to kiss you?" and "How do you think you can tell if a someone is interested in you?"

This is a great time to explain enthusiastic consent and about asking permission to kiss or touch a partner. Explain that only "yes" means "yes." Don't wait for your partner to say "no" to look for consent. Even if the words coming out of their mouth are "Yes" if their body language is telling you "No" or "I'm not sure". Stop and check in with your partner.

**3. Nip sexual bullying in the bud.** Secondary school is the age where sex-talk begins in gender-segregated environments. Their crushes and desire are normal and healthy, but we need to do more than just stop young people from talking about others like they're objects. We also need to model how to talk about our crushes as whole people.

If you overhear a young person say, "I'd tap that" you could say, "I think she's more than just someone with an attractive body!" You can keep it jokey, and they'll roll their eyes at you, but it sinks in. They need a model for grown-ups who are doing things right. Even saying something like, "How about that she's kind and a proper laugh?"

**4. Explain that part of growing up is having big emotions,** and that sometimes they make it hard to think clearly. Sometimes that means our desire feels overwhelming, or that we're angry, confused or sad. It's common, and perfectly okay, to be overwhelmed or confused by these new feelings.

Tell your children that no matter what they're feeling, they can talk to you about it. However, their feelings, desires and needs are no one's responsibility but their own.

---

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from <https://goodmenproject.com/families/the-healthy-sex-talk-teaching-kids-consent-ages-1-21/> accessed on 15.12.2021

They still need to practice kindness and respect for everyone around them. Just because they are feeling turned on, it's not their partner's job to meet those needs.

**5. Support boys and young men to explore what masculinity is.** Men need to talk to boys about what's good about masculinity. Ask what hasn't been so good about our culture of masculinity in the past. How can we build a more inclusive form of masculinity that embraces all types of lads: from athlete to theatre geeks to LGBT+ people? These conversations can encourage a non-violent form of masculinity for the future.

Boys need to start talking about building a healthy masculinity starting in secondary and continue through college, because transforming masculinity is vital to transforming a culture that doesn't always call out harmful sexual behaviour. Encourage them to call out their friends that make sexist comments that makes someone feel upset, scared, offended or humiliated, or is meant to make them feel that way. Teach them to stand up for, and seek help for, a fellow partygoer who has been using substances and they are drunk or high.

**6. Talk honestly with children about safer partying.** Make it clear that you don't want them drinking or using drugs, but that you know young people party and you want your children to be informed. Ask them questions about how they are going to keep themselves and others safe when they're partying. Questions such as:

- How will you know when you've had too much to drink?
- How does your behaviour change when you've had too much drink or drugs? How can you protect others from yourself in that situation if, perhaps, you become an angry drunk or start violating people's space or safety?
- How will you know whether it's okay to kiss someone, touch someone, or have sex with someone when you've had a lot to drink or used drugs?

Explain that decisions sometimes become cloudy, and signals become unclear when we are impaired. A person cannot give consent when they are drunk, high, sleeping or unconscious. Even if their partner is saying "yes", they cannot give consent because they aren't thinking clearly. To have clear communication about consent, both people should be sober and alert. It's better to just stop and wait until you both no longer have drugs or alcohol in your system.

**7. Help them to consider online and offline relationships equally.** If your child gets a social media account, talk with them about sharing images. If your child wants to share images of other people, they always need to ask first. Likewise, your child can expect other people to ask for permission before sharing your child's image. Your child should feel free to say no. If they receive a request for naked images of themselves from a partner, classmate or a stranger, they need to know if they create an indecent image/ video of a child (themselves), send the image/video or keep the image/video they are breaking the law and they need and they need to get help from a trusted adult. Anyone under the age of 18 cannot create, distribute or possess indecent images of a child even if they are the child themselves or if the other person is under 18 and they create it or send it consensually.

**8. Use everyday moments or examples from shows, movies, books and media stories to get the consent conversations started.**

• 'I liked the way he accepted her decision when she changed her mind about having sex in *Scott Pilgrim vs the World*. Why is that important?'



- ‘Does that person look comfortable being touched?’
- ‘I never saw the character ask for consent. How would a person have asked for consent?’
- ‘Do you think the character was able to give proper consent if they were drunk?’
- ‘I really like that scene in *Frozen* where Kristoff asks Anna whether it’s OK for them to kiss. That’s a good example of asking for consent. What do you know about consent?’
- ‘What do you think about the way Han Solo backs Princess Leia into a corner and kisses her?’

**9. Consent is important when in longer term relationships too.** You can’t assume consent because people are in a relationship. You can’t assume consent just because it was given for the same activity yesterday, the day before or on 100 previous occasions. Permission must be asked for and given each time an activity begins, changes, or continues. Consent can’t be assumed or implied. Flirting, clothing, sexual texts or social media communication is not consent.

**10. An enthusiastic Yes is what we are looking for.** A ‘yes’ is not consent if someone feels pressured, forced, threatened, guilty, blackmailed, intimidated, bullied or harassed. Silence, not answering, or not resisting physically is not consent. ‘No’ always means ‘no’, whether given verbally or non-verbally: A ‘yes’ that’s not enthusiastic or freely given is also a ‘no’.

### **Consent videos**

Consent for Kids (pre-adolescent) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3nhM9UIJjc>

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

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

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

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