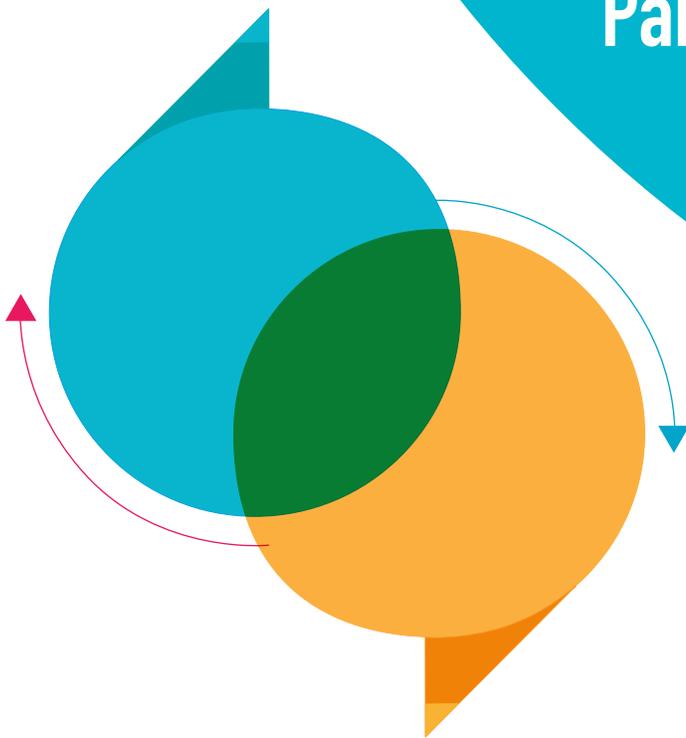




TALKING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

A Conversation Guide for
Parents & Caregivers



NO MORE

A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN NO MORE AND ESPERANZA UNITED





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3-6
1. Healthy Communication	7
1.1 Start Talking	8-11
1.2 Deepen the Conversation	12-13
1.3 Take Action	14-15
2. Healthy Relationships	16
2.1 Start Talking	17-23
2.2 Deepen the Conversation	24-28
2.3 Take Action	29-30
3. Healthy Sexuality	31
3.1 Start Talking	32-38
3.2 Deepen the Conversation	39-44
3.3 Take Action	45-52
4. Technology and Social Media	53
4.1 Digital Boundaries and Consent	55-56
4.2 Online Abuse and Harassment	57-58
4.3 Take Action	59-60
Collaborators	61

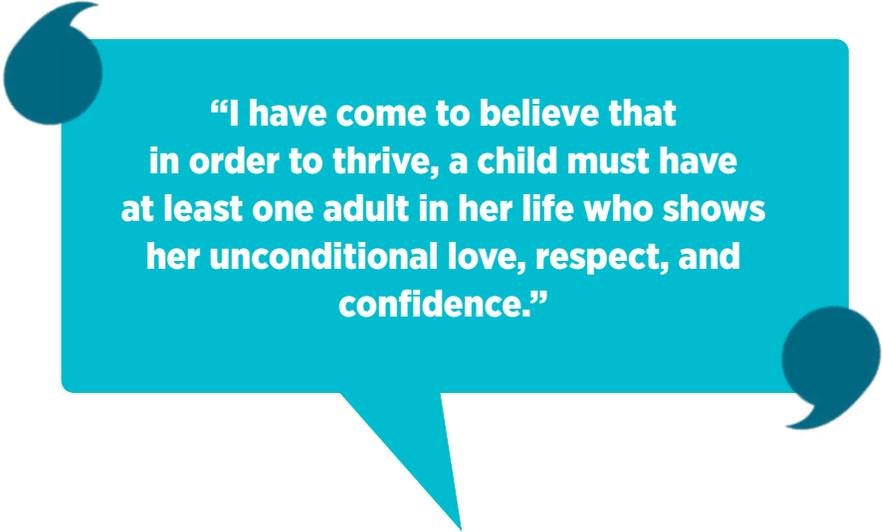
INTRODUCTION

CONVERSATION GUIDE

How do families raise children and youth who can engage in healthy communications, relationships, and sexuality? It's often a daunting task. These guides were developed to help parents in these often difficult conversations with their children.

Children have questions, are themselves sexual beings, experience peer pressure, and absorb all kinds of messages about relationships and sex from their families, peers, community, and media. These sources of information influence what young people think about sexuality, communication, and relationships and, ultimately, shape the decisions they make for themselves.

Children need an environment in which they can develop and practice skills and qualities they'll need throughout their lives to build healthy relationships and foster healthy sexuality. These skills include setting and respecting boundaries, decision making, communication, and developing high self esteem.



**“I have come to believe that
in order to thrive, a child must have
at least one adult in her life who shows
her unconditional love, respect, and
confidence.”**

**U.S. SUPREME COURT JUSTICE SONIA SOTOMAYOR
'MI MUNDO AMADO' (MY BELOVED WORLD) (2013)**

We hope that the guidance on this site provides the opportunity for children to develop into adults who are comfortable discussing and practicing healthy relationships and sexuality.

A photograph of a woman kneeling on the grass in a park, holding the hands of a young girl. The woman is looking up at the girl with a smile. The girl is also smiling and looking down at the woman. The background is a blurred green field with trees. A teal speech bubble is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing text.

The steps to having conversations with your children about healthy sexuality, communication, and relationships are complex and nuanced. NO MORE has broken the categories into steps, First, you must begin the conversation -- you must Start Talking; then, you can Deepen the Conversation; finally, you and your family can Take Action with concrete steps that you can incorporate in your home and conversations to become an advocate for meaningful conversations and bonds between parents and children.

START TALKING

Research shows that the first 20 seconds of a conversation are the most difficult. Parents often resist starting a conversation because they're afraid of those first few seconds. It's likely that many parents avoid having these conversations with their children because they don't know how to navigate them. Start Talking provides concrete material to open the door to meaningful dialogue and put a framework of mutual respect and understanding that will make the journey easier.

These are not one-time conversations, but rather decades-long discussions — even grandparents are still navigating how to have healthy sexuality. How people approach these conversations determines what they get out of it.

DEEPEN THE CONVERSATION

Now you've started your road trip and you've decided the route, you've filled up on gas, and you've got your playlist ready, but you haven't made space for unexpected things that will surface along the way. Maybe there's a detour or some unexpected traffic. Deepen the Conversation provides tools to take you to another level after you have covered the basics. Just as you can't address a flat tire on the road without the proper tools in your trunk, you can't tell your daughter to get annual checkups at the gynecologist if you haven't had a conversation about vaginas first. Deepen the Conversation relies on the foundation that Start Talking laid to have more mature conversations with children as they get older.

TAKE ACTION

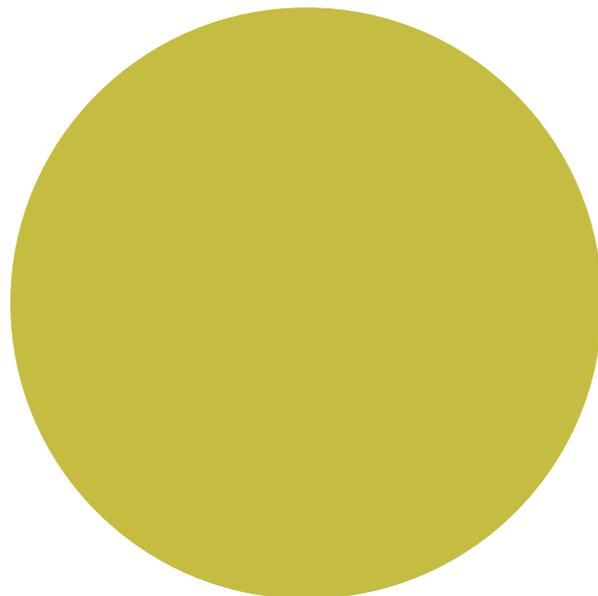
You've developed the language during Start Talking and Deepen the Conversation, and now you and your children have come to understand your own world views; your views may differ from your children's but you each respect each other and your opinions. Now the question becomes: How do we act in accordance with our values when issues surface?

To take action, you can turn lessons or values into activities your whole family can participate in, such as a jar of compliments, for which you don't need instruction or curriculum. In this Take Action section, the activities are designed to build healthy relationships, enhance communication, and openly address sexuality.



Chapter 1

HEALTHY COMMUNICATION



Chapter 1.1

Start Talking

Clear, open, honest, and frequent communication is a basic characteristic of a strong, healthy family.

Families that communicate in healthy ways are more capable of problem solving and tend to be more satisfied with their relationships. In addition, how and what parents and adult caregivers communicate about body image, peer pressure, puberty, reproduction, sexuality, love, and intimacy can make a significant difference in the well-being and health of their children.





A parent is a child's first and most important teacher; open and honest communication will allow you to teach your children some of the most important lessons they'll ever learn.

START EARLY

When young children want information and advice, they go to their parents first. Once they reach their teenage years, they tend to rely more on friends, social and other forms of media, and other people for information. As a parent, you have a wonderful opportunity to reach your children before anyone else. You have the opportunity to shape their minds and teach them values and traditions that are important to you.

REMEMBER IT'S NEVER TOO LATE

Older children still need accurate information, guidance, and support. They are more likely to come to their parents for help if the parent-child bond is strong. There are ways to build this relationship with older children, for example:

- Let them know you understand that as they get older, they might think about or feel pressured to date or have sex, have questions about their bodies, or feel like people expect certain things of them because of their gender.
- Don't be afraid to share examples from your own life – this can be an effective, relatable way to express concern and teach from experience. However, it is important not to let your own experiences dominate the conversation.
- You may feel nervous or uncomfortable, especially if these are new conversations. You can admit this to your children to show you will be open and honest with them (it might even help ease some of the tension).

- Ask yourself why you feel nervous:
 - Is it because you never had these conversations with your own parents?
 - Is it because you do not have all the answers?
 - Is it because you are worried that your relationship will be impacted?
- Consider sharing the reasons for your feelings with your children. Most important, however, is to improve the things you can – educate yourself, practice saying out loud the words that make you uncomfortable, and keep communicating with your children – so that these conversations can become more natural.

TAKE THE INITIATIVE

Your children might not always come to you with questions or concerns, or they may not have the language to do so, so it's appropriate for you to begin the conversation. Current events, TV and other media, and recent events in your child's life are good tools for this. Just one or two questions that come from everyday events can help start excellent conversations. For example, if you and your pre-teen are watching a show that has a fight between friends as part of the plot, after the show is over, ask what they thought about how the characters behaved.

BE THE KIND OF PERSON YOU WANT YOUR CHILD TO BECOME

Use language and actions that are respectful, empathetic, positive, and appropriate in your own conversations and relationships with family, friends, and community members. For example, if you are using slang or derogatory terms to describe women and girls, your children will likely believe what you say and model your behavior and vocabulary. Your children are always watching and learning from you because they respect you and look up to you. One child development expert said, "Kids hear about 1% of what we say and 100% of what we do."





REMEMBER THAT TEENS WANT MUTUALLY RESPECTFUL CONVERSATIONS

Avoid dictating and lecturing. Share your feelings and values and learn about those of your children. Questions, debates, and even challenges are signs you are doing things well; it means your children are listening and value your experience, insight, and opinions. But remember that you cannot dictate another person's feelings, values, or decisions — the best you can do is to love and support your children, even when they choose differently than you would or when they make mistakes.

TIPS TO PREPARE

How do you prepare yourself to talk to your child about sensitive subjects? Go into the conversations with these principles in mind.

BE PATIENT

Sometimes it can take a while for children to ask their question or tell a story. This may be because they're still young or because they find it difficult asking you about a sensitive subject. Try to resist the temptation to tell them to get to the point or hurry things along. By listening patiently, you allow your children to think and prepare their thoughts at their own pace, and you communicate that they're worthy of your time.

Don't interrupt your children when they're telling you a story or asking a question. Wait until they come to a full stop of at least five seconds (you can count in your head!), then ask a follow-up question before giving your opinion. Ask them, for example, "What else?" or "What makes you say that?"

BE HONEST

For example, if your children ask you how many people are LGBTQ+ and you don't know the answer, consider responding with something like: "That's an interesting question, but I'm not sure. Let's go look it up." Don't be afraid to let your children (of any age) see you don't have all the answers; this is a better response than dismissing the question or rushing to give inaccurate information because you don't know the answer on the spot. Letting your children see you don't have all the answers is also a way to model good communication and healthy relationships — they learn to be open and honest, and to give themselves and others space to learn.

LISTEN TO YOUR CHILDREN

While it's normal and understandable for conversations to unfold as you're performing routine tasks such as waiting for the bus, making dinner, or grocery shopping, make sure you also find time to give your children your undivided attention. Dedicating time and energy to listening to them shows you respect them, they are important to you, and the things that matter to them matter to you, too. It also helps you understand what your children really want to know, and what they already understand.

Chapter 1.2

Deepen the Conversation

As children are exposed to new ideas and experiences, it can be hard to know what to say. Nobody has all of the answers, but what's most important is to keep your conversations going.



TIPS TO PREPARE

To prepare for a conversation with your children about a potentially difficult subject, it's important to remember that as the adult, you must guide and model healthy communication.

TALK OPENLY

Encourage open, honest, and thoughtful reflection. Allow children of all ages to express their ideas, expectations, questions, and concerns. Be careful not to dismiss their ideas as “wrong” or “childish.” Rather, encourage dialogue by asking them to tell you more or describe how they arrived to a certain conclusion. Children, especially teens, will look to you for information, advice, and answers only if they feel you are open to their questions and thoughts. It's up to you to create the kind of environment in which your children can ask questions about any subject freely and without fear of consequences.

GIVE POSITIVE FEEDBACK

Give positive feedback when you see or hear of your children making healthy and respectful choices about their own communications (including practicing good listening) and relationships with friends and family. Tell your children you are impressed when they do things that reflect your values. You can say, “I admire the way you helped your sister today, even though you were annoyed. What made you react that way? It was very mature and I like it when you're kind to her.”

ENCOURAGE QUESTIONS

Be courageous. If your children are old enough to ask a question, they are old enough to hear the correct answer and learn the correct words.

- Be sure that you understand what your children are asking. Rephrase the question for clarification. For example: “I'm not sure I understand exactly what you mean. Are you asking why people hold hands, or are you asking if it's OK for you to hold someone else's hand?” You don't want to give a long explanation that doesn't answer the question.
- When possible, answer the question when it is asked. Take advantage of the teachable moments. For example, if your child asks you, “How are babies made?” as you are leaving for work, assure your child that you are happy to talk about that question because it is an important one, but that you will answer at a different time when both of you can have quality time with each other. “We'll talk about this while you and I make dinner tonight, OK?” And make sure you do make time.
- If your child has a developmental disability or is more a visual learner, use pictures and other visual aids as often as you can. For example, photos of family or friends can illustrate conversations about relationships and social interactions.

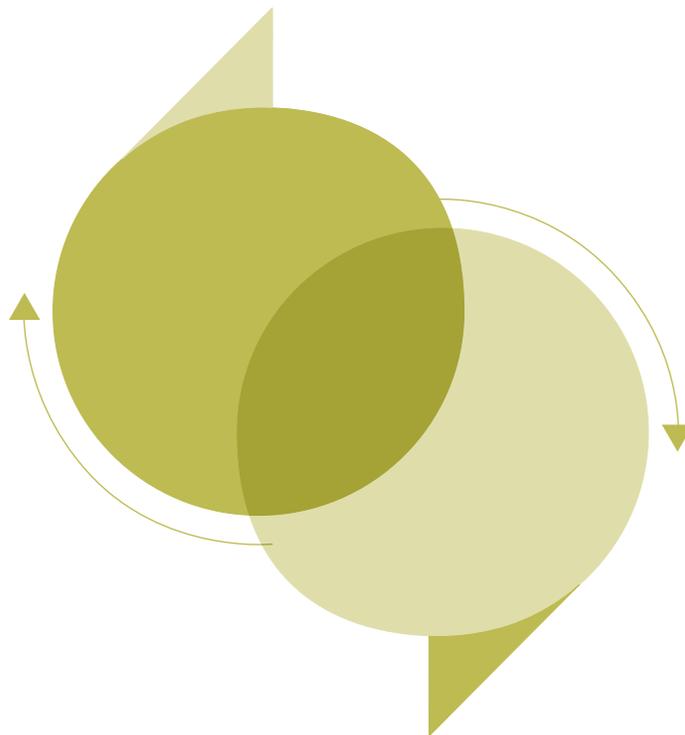
Chapter 1.3

Take Action

Developing healthy communication is the foundation for good relationships. Healthy communication is a lot more than what to say and not to say to your children. It's about developing an environment where your children feel safe; respected; and that their feelings, fears, failures and successes can be shared with someone who loves them. Sometimes, it's about how we respond to our children when we are feeling stress, anxiety or anger. Here are some ideas for ways to take action to promote healthy communication with your children.

Ask yourself:

- When you think about your experience as a child, what kinds of things made you feel trust? Either that you could trust someone, or that someone trusted you?
- What kinds of activities made you feel close to your parents or other trusted adults?
- What did your parents, or other important adults in your life do to make you feel that your feelings were heard?





CREATE A FAMILY TIME ACTIVITY IDEAS LIST

As parents, when we are stressed or short on time and patience, it can be difficult to think of fun things to do with our children. One strategy to help us have more fun and decrease stress is to create a list of activities before they are needed and pull them out when you need them.

Parent Story: We have two children, ages 7 and 2. They have different interests and abilities, so when we have 20 minutes of time at home that we can play together, it's hard to think of things that we can all do. One night, I wrote down a list of activities that include everyone. The list included things like: Blow bubbles, build a blanket fort, pretend we are a marching band, make a train with chairs and stuffed animals, dance party...etc.

I wrote the ideas on small pieces of paper and put them in a basket. The next time they were running around, needing some of my attention, I was able to engage both of them in this new game. We all had a wonderful time, and every time we are at home alone together, they ask to play the "basket game."

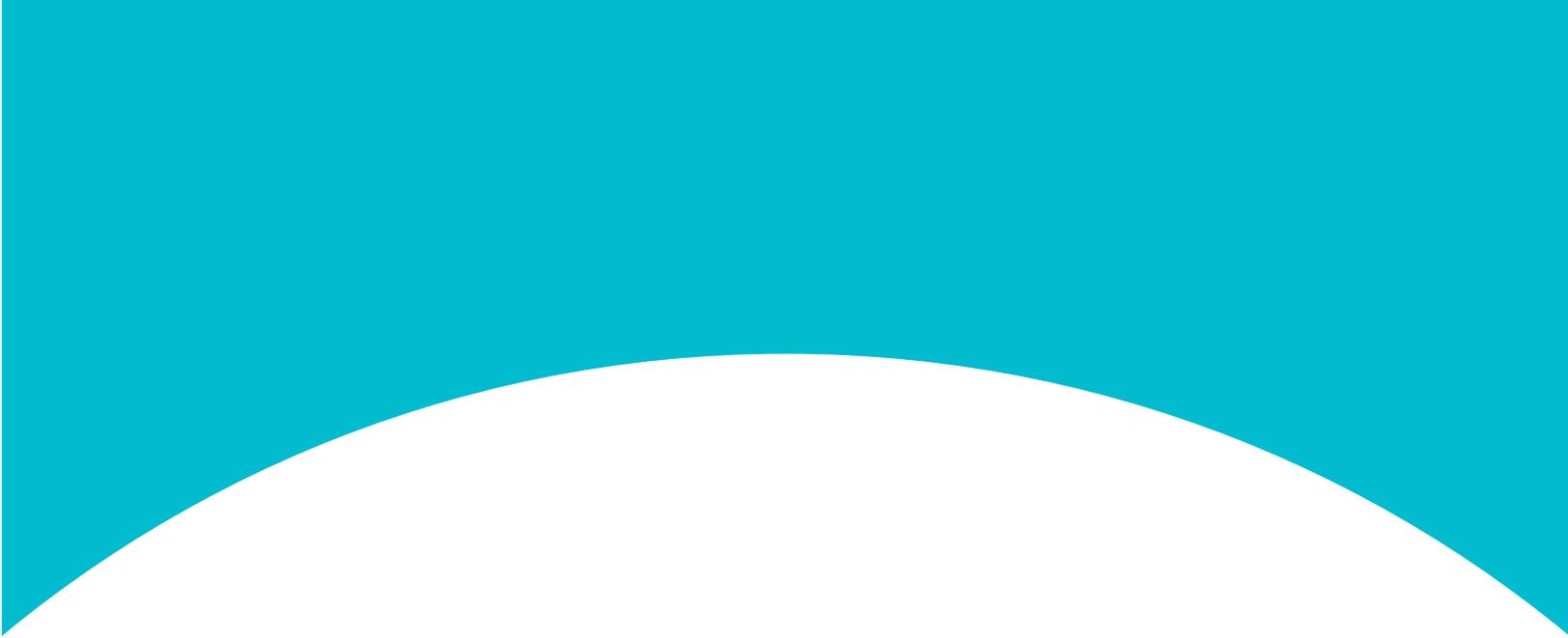
CREATE A GRATITUDE JAR

Research shows that people who focus on gratitude are happier, healthier, and less stressed. You can help develop stronger communication and a practice of gratitude with your children through a Gratitude Jar. Once a day, every person in the family receives a small piece of paper and writes or draws something that she or he is thankful for. Put them in the jar, and once a week, come together as a family and review the things that you are thankful for together. This activity will help your family practice positive communication.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

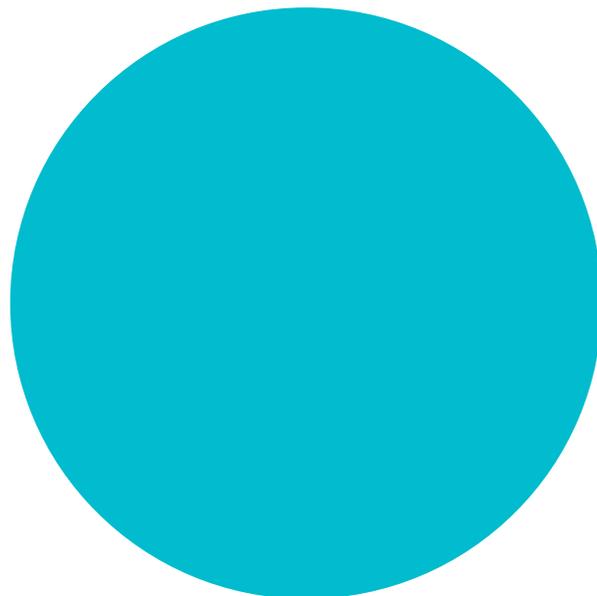
If you find yourself having a hard time finding the right words to start a conversation with your child, try some of these conversation starters.

- How did you feel when your friend yelled at you like that? Was it OK for your friend to throw things when she was angry? How else do you think she could have expressed herself?
- I noticed that you thought that the boys making fun of the girls in that movie was pretty funny. At first, I thought it was funny, too. But what do you think about that situation when it happens in real life? Do you think it's OK for guys to do that? What do you think that the boys would have done differently if they were being respectful of the girls?



Chapter 2

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS



Chapter 2.1

Start Talking

Whether with friends, at work, in families, or in intimate relationships, healthy relationships are based on mutual respect, trust, honesty, support, fairness, equality, separate identities, and good communication.

While every family is different, characteristics of healthy family relationships include:

- Support, love, and caring for family members
- Security and a sense of belonging
- Open communication
- Each person in the family feels important, valued, and respected

Healthy family relationships prepare children to cultivate healthy relationships with people outside their families, throughout the course of their lives.



RESPECTING OTHERS

If you teach your children to respect themselves and others, they will learn its importance in healthy relationships.

STATE YOUR VALUES

Parents are the primary influence on children. Make sure your children know what you believe and what you consider to be appropriate behavior regarding language, sexuality, dating, etc. Be prepared to explain your reasoning, beyond statements such as “Because I said so” or “Because I’m the adult”. Your children need to know your values so they can develop their own. And yes, they may disagree with you or even defy you, but this is often a clear sign you have done well – you have children who listened to you, are deeply thoughtful, and are capable of making increasingly mature and complex decisions.

Practice your values: Be respectful, kind, humble, and honest in your relationships with your own parents and your partner. Your words will be more meaningful if you model the values and habits you want your children to develop.

TIP: Even if, at times, you do not “practice what you preach,” this does not disqualify you from teaching your children values – being perfect is not a requirement of parenthood. Teach from your experience. If, for example, you were sexually active when you were your children’s age and are now discussing how you want them to wait until they are more mature, you can use your own experience to raise their awareness of the risks and how decisions have consequences (see “Start talking: Healthy Communication” for more information). Admitting to your own lapses in judgment or values can provide a powerful, persuasive reason for making different, healthy decisions.

INCLUDE EVERYONE

Most parents hope their children will explore and develop their interests, skills, and strengths, and that others will value and respect their children. Model the underlying values: The belief that all people are valuable and unique; mutual respect, equal rights, and opportunities for everyone; and that all people should be able to enjoy the full spectrum of human feeling and activity.



Give your child opportunities beyond gender stereotypes:

- Encourage children to use all the tools, books, videos, toys, and other resources that interest them. Choose resources that provide equally strong and positive examples of people of different genders in different roles: superheroes, cooks, inventors, adventurers, etc.
- Provide children of all ages equal opportunities and responsibilities to participate in all household work: cooking, washing the car, caring for their younger siblings, etc.
- Respond to behaviors and emotions in the same ways. For example, you might tell a young child, “Your knee must hurt a lot from that fall. It’s OK to cry when you are hurt.”



Encourage children of all ages to talk openly about how they feel about their gender. You may talk about whether they feel expected to do (or not do) certain things – sports, hobbies, career interests – because of their gender, or are they encouraged to pursue their own interests, skills, and strengths?

TIP: Provide positive feedback and advice, including examples of children who do not follow the traditional gender roles, such as girls who build and race cars (“You are becoming a serious mechanic! Do you want to take a course this summer on engine repair?”), boys who want to be nurses (“It’s really hard work, but you have helped care for your grandmother your entire life, so I think you could definitely do it.”), and children who like to experiment with makeup, fashion, and hairstyles (“I can’t afford to buy you a new outfit for the party, but do you want to make something? Let’s get on YouTube and see what other kids have done, to get some ideas.”).

ACKNOWLEDGE AND VALUE DIFFERENCE

Children notice differences all around them — gender differences, a classmate’s lunch looks and smells different from their own, their cousin is blind — and generally have curiosity about these things. Help them appreciate and learn about these differences rather than pretend they do not exist. Talk about differences among individuals and groups openly and positively. Pretending that differences don’t exist diminishes the experiences, self-expression, cultures, and values of other people.

TEACH CHILDREN THE IMPORTANCE OF WORKING OUT DISAGREEMENTS

Let them know that disagreements are normal, but what matters most in a healthy relationship is that you can talk about the situation and try to work out a solution that works for everyone involved. With young children, creating or talking about stories is a great way to start these conversations. For example, read stories that deal with conflict and ask them to discuss their reactions (“Have you ever had an argument with a friend?” “How did it make you feel?” “How can friends make up with each other when they argue?”), or role play and discuss “friendly” and “unfriendly” ways to act.



Teach children that actions have consequences that can begin, nurture, or end friendships and other relationships. For example, ask a young child, “If you keep pushing Marco, how do you think he will feel about you?”

UNDERSTANDING BOUNDARIES

Discussing the importance of boundaries with your children is one of the foundational steps to understanding limits and respect for oneself and others.

SET LIMITS

Limits create structure and stability. For example, if your child wants to purchase a violent video game, you have the right and responsibility to say, “I don’t like the messages that game sends. Violence is bad and hurts people, but that game makes it seem like fun. I know you play that game at Alex’s house, but I don’t want it played in our house.” Or if your older child argues against having a curfew any longer, you might say, “I believe this rule is important for your safety and your health. If I know when you are coming home, I’ll know more quickly to look for you if you are in an accident or in trouble. And keeping to a consistent schedule is a great way to make sure you’re getting enough sleep and down time, eating properly, and taking care of your responsibilities without too much stress.”

LIMITS TEACH CHILDREN SELF-CONTROL

By setting limits and allowing children to exercise self-control, they learn what behavior is acceptable, how to work through feelings of frustration when they do not get what they want, and to respect other people’s boundaries. Children will push limits; in fact, one of the key elements of adolescence is to test limits. But if children learn to understand limits, they are more likely to be able to set and respect them as they mature. Imagine, for example, you tell your children that after they do their chores, you will take them to the swimming pool. Your children choose to watch videos instead, so you do not take them to the pool. Your children experience the consequences of their choices and see that you respect yourself by meaning what you say — in this case, you demonstrate that you cannot be coaxed into changing your mind.

Notice, however, that you are not trying to control your child. You simply made your values, expectations, and consequences known (work is important, everyone in the family has household responsibilities, and if you do not meet your responsibilities, I am not taking you to the pool). You also demonstrated that you respect yourself, your values, your decision, and your integrity enough to follow through. This is different from trying to “make” your child behave the way you want them to by, for example, nagging, threatening, arguing, or creating punishments. Instead, you are communicating to them that their behavior is their choice and their responsibility, to which they will be held accountable.

Limits are about establishing a “safety zone” in which children and youth can learn and practice new skills independently. It is natural that as children mature and your relationship with them develops, limits will be negotiated, tested, and changed as appropriate.

TEACH ABOUT PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

Teach your children that in relationships, people decide for themselves what they want and don't want. Take advantage of everyday activities to talk to your children. For example, tell young children during bath time that their genitals belong only to them and no one else should touch them except as needed for cleanliness and to keep them healthy.

Help your children understand that they should be free to discuss their personal boundaries without fear of repercussions, and have these boundaries respected. Create opportunities for them to think this through. For example, you can ask, "Since you and your sister share a room, what are some ways you can give and respect each other's privacy?"

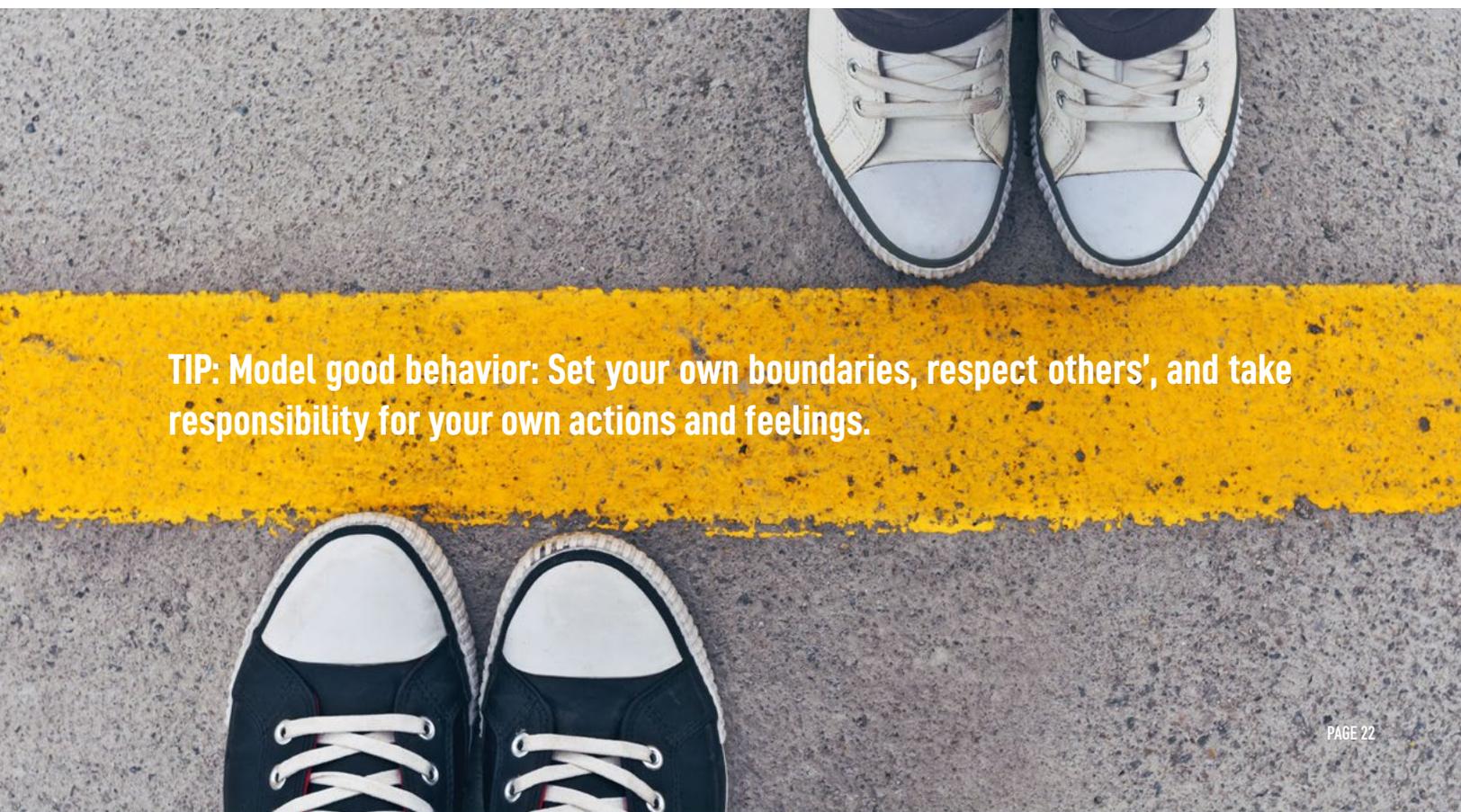
Let your children know no one has the right to demand or expect anything from them, for example, that just as they should have been able when they were younger to refuse to kiss and hug family members, they don't have to kiss anyone on a date or be pressured into sex.

TEACH RESPECT FOR OTHERS' BOUNDARIES

You can show children you respect them by allowing them to exercise options and make choices within healthy frameworks, then acknowledge and accept their choices.

Generally speaking, there are a few interconnected ways to teach children to respect others' boundaries:

- teach your children about personal boundaries
- teach your children how to communicate directly and honestly
- respect your children's boundaries
- set consistent, reasonable limits for your children



TIP: Model good behavior: Set your own boundaries, respect others', and take responsibility for your own actions and feelings.

TEACH HEALTHY MASCULINITY

The burden of sex education often falls overwhelmingly on mothers, but fathers should step up and be part of the conversation – especially with boys. Fathers or other male caregivers can model how to break out of the “tough man” stereotype and call out gendered stereotypes in the community. For example, refraining from using derogatory language when describing a woman or being an active bystander by calling out an uncle or brother who says things like “Her skirt is a bit short isn’t it?” There are many organizations such as [A Call to Men](#), [Promundo](#) and [Men Can Stop Rape](#) that offer tools, training and resources that promote healthy, respectful manhood which can be used by any adult caregiver.



Chapter 2.2

Deepen the Conversation

Learn to talk with your child rather than to them — listen more than you speak and avoid reacting. Make sure to cultivate open, two-way communication with your child, as it forms the basis for a positive relationship.





ADDRESSING CONFRONTATION

Violent relationships in adolescence can have serious ramifications by putting victims at higher risk for substance abuse, eating disorders, risky sexual behaviors, and further domestic violence. Teaching your children to control themselves when faced with confrontation will equip them with tools to build healthy relationships.

TEACH ASSERTIVENESS, NOT AGGRESSION

Teach your children to make their feelings known by stating their opinions, desires, and reactions clearly. Give them language to help them negotiate difficult situations. For example, “I’m not comfortable; can we talk about this?”

TEACH NEGOTIATION

Help your children recognize their personal signs for anger. Do they have tensed arms and shoulders? Do they feel their hearts pounding? Are they clenching their fists? These are signs and feelings that need to be acknowledged and resolved. Give them tools to help them recognize and name their feelings. Additionally, give them tools to calm down, such as deep breathing, counting backward from 10, reminding themselves that they have control over what to say and do next, or if nothing else, walking away. Teach your children that any incident of violence in a relationship is a serious problem.

Parent Story: My 5-year-old son is learning about anger control at his preschool. They taught him that when he is feeling angry or frustrated, he can help calm himself by taking some “belly breaths” (deep breaths with his hands on his tummy). Since he learned this skill, we have tried to reinforce it at home so that he keeps using this positive practice in his daily life, and it really does help him calm down and think more clearly about what is happening and how to resolve it.

Lately, though, when he sees that I am frustrated or angry, he will suggest that maybe I need to take some “belly breaths.” Honestly, my initial response was embarrassment that he could tell that I’m upset, and anger because it felt like he was telling me how to behave. But he is usually right, and I have started to respond to his caring suggestions with less defensiveness. I am now able to smile, and take a few “belly breaths” that help me calm down and think more clearly about what is happening and how to resolve it.

TEACH PROBLEM-SOLVING

Help your children work through problem-solving skills.

- Examine what happened and what might have caused the problem
- Think of different ways it could be resolved
- Consider the consequences to each alternative
- Discuss their choices



TEACH PROBLEM-SOLVING

When they are small, talk aloud about your own problem-solving so they can observe what you do. For example, as you pack lunch for work, you might say, “Two tamales and some coffee is enough at lunchtime. But I get hungry again in the afternoon. I could pack more lunch but I think that would just make me too full. I think I will pack a banana for a quick little snack for later, instead.” Beginning when they are small, permit them to make age-appropriate decisions (“Which toy do you want to sleep with?” “Do you want to play with your blocks or read a book?”) This allows your children to begin practicing problem-solving skills. As they mature, they can make progressively more complex decisions (“You may choose what to do with the five dollars your aunt gave you for your birthday,” etc.); just make sure to be clear about any limits (“No firecrackers”) and help them think through the steps.

As your children get older, help them work through the steps above to resolve disagreements between siblings or friends. You and your children can also discuss problems that characters in stories and videos experience as well as possible outcomes if the characters had made different choices.



Don't underestimate your teens' abilities to think critically. Teens have values and are capable of making mature, responsible decisions, especially when they have all the important facts and can discuss their options with supportive adults. Remember, though, that teenagers' decisions may be different from your own — but this is true of any person in your life.



TEACH NEGOTIATION

Teach your children to acknowledge difficult situations and give them the skills to state their point of view honestly to help create options that benefit all parties. Learning to brainstorm options (thinking of different ways to solve the problem) is an important skill. Make sure to provide your child with the opportunity and time to practice. Once they learn, many children will invent and create options on their own, but often need reminders and help to see the process through (even adults often forget to seek options that keep both people happy or to remember shared interests, such as “I love you,” to motivate the negotiation).

Chapter 2.3

Take Action

As you learn more and talk more about healthy relationships, it may happen that youth or other adults will tell you that they are experiencing violence. Here are five questions that you can ask to provide support and connect the person to a good resource:

1. Are you in danger?
2. Are you hurt?
3. Do you feel safe?
4. Are there weapons at your house?
5. How can I be of support?



KEEP CONTACT INFORMATION READILY AVAILABLE

If a young person discloses that they are in an abusive situation, you'll want to help connect them to resources.

BE PREPARED

- Save the phone number for the National Domestic Violence Hotline in your phone.
- Access the NO MORE Global Directory (nomoredirectory.org) which features frontline helplines and resources for domestic violence and sexual assault for more than 200 countries and territories around the world.
- Print off emergency contact cards and keep one with you.
 - You can make your own cards with the following information, or print this template:

CONTACT CARD SUGGESTED INFORMATION:

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1.800.799.7233

Love Is Respect: 1.866.331.9474

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1.800.273.8255

Local Shelter/DV/SA Program

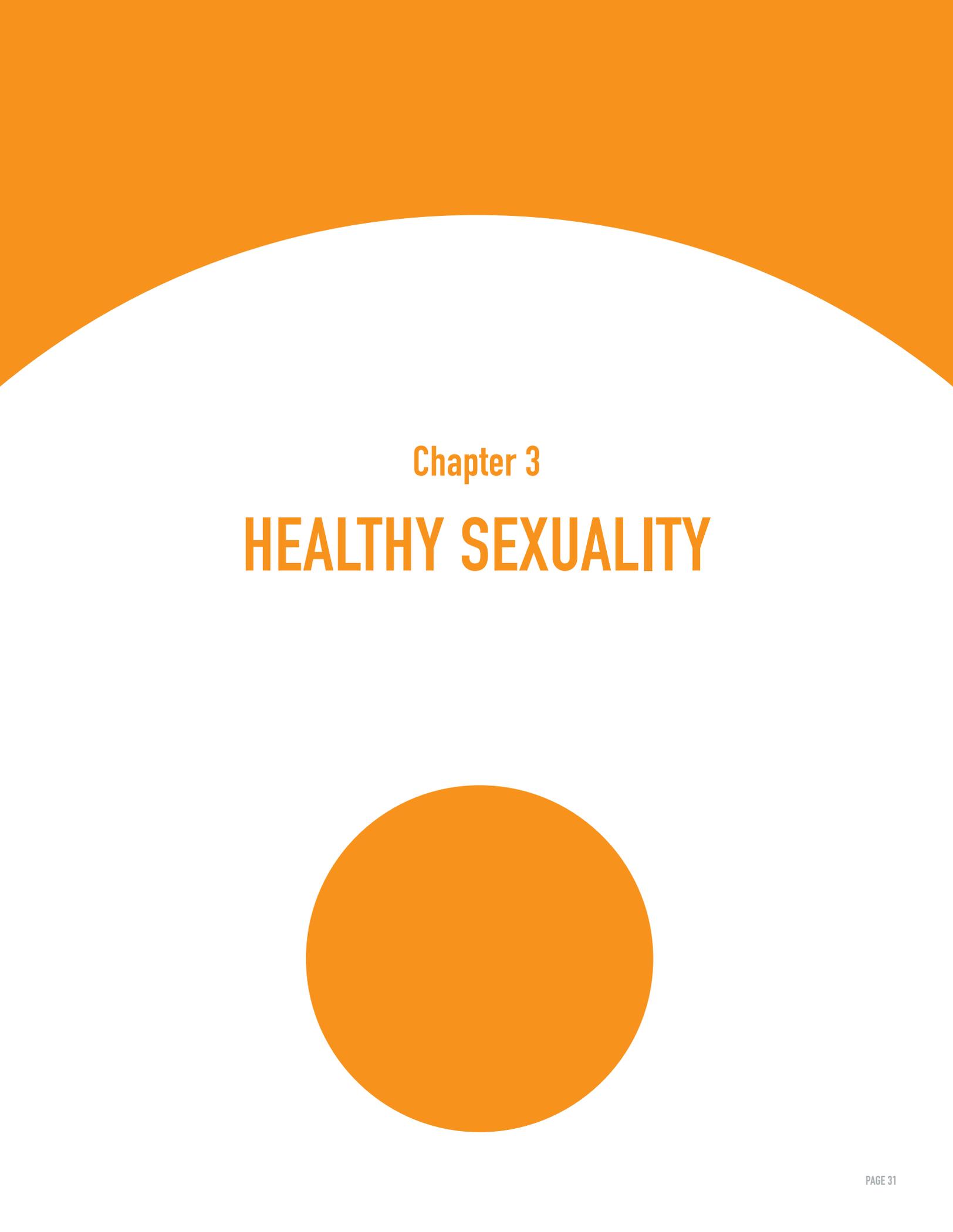
(to find one closest to you, see domesticshelters.org)

Local youth/teen resource

CREATE A RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS CALENDAR

Performing even the smallest act of kindness in a relationship creates a sense of goodwill, joy and thoughtfulness and communicates to your partner that s/he is important to you. Create a calendar of daily small actions to express kindness to your significant other to foster a respectful and happy relationship. You can get ideas for your calendar from the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation.





Chapter 3

HEALTHY SEXUALITY

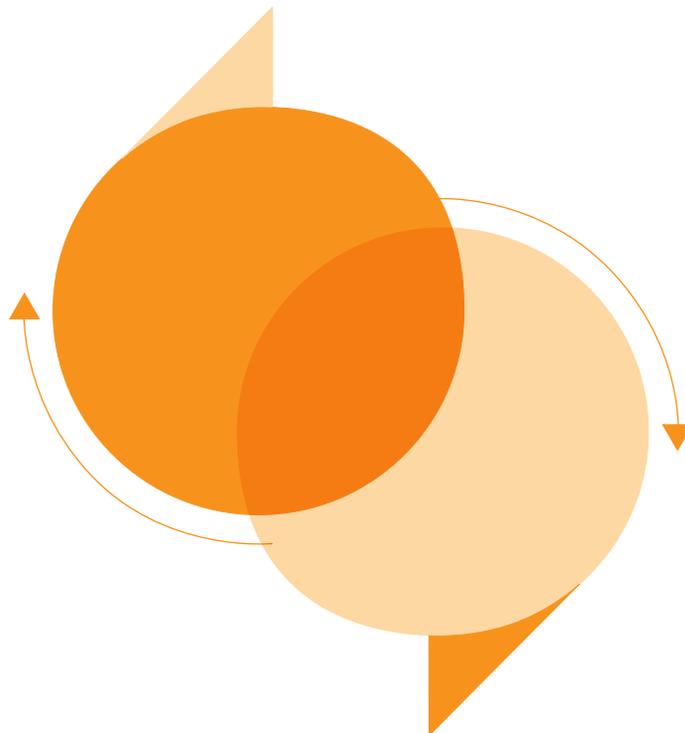
Chapter 3.1

Start Talking

The strategy is simple: Tell the truth — that is, that sex and sexuality are pleasures as well as responsibilities.

As children are exposed to new ideas and experiences, it can be hard to know what to say. Nobody has all of the answers; what is most important is to keep your conversations going. The discussions are about more than just sex — they are about puberty, changes in bodies, sexual desires versus sexual actions, and knowing and understanding healthy sexuality. Conversations about it should be about aspects of sexuality that are not sexual, as well.

The question then becomes, what is your role as a parent in that process? The stages of healthy sexuality listed in this section will help you navigate that role as your children go through this learning process so they can better understand what healthy sexuality looks like.



When parents talk to their children in a supportive and respectful manner, young people are more likely to develop positive, healthy attitudes about themselves. This is also true about sex.

REMEMBER IT'S NEVER TOO LATE

If you haven't had conversations with your children, it's OK! They still need accurate information, guidance, and support, so there are always opportunities to open a conversation with your children at any age about healthy sexuality.

When you do talk about bodies and sex, it's often easier to talk about "disasters" (sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancy, or violence), or what we don't want for children's relationships and sexuality. But think about how sex and sexuality are good and positive aspects of life, too. For example, you might hope your children learn to:

- appreciate their bodies
- understand the difference between gender identity, sex and sexuality
- express love and intimacy in appropriate ways
- enjoy sexual feelings without necessarily acting on them
- practice "wellness" habits such as regular checkups and breast or testicular self-exams
- when they are mature enough to act on their feelings, talk about sexual limits (theirs and others'), safer sex, and, if needed, contraceptive practices



Many parents and adult caregivers worry about how to do this without encouraging early or inappropriate behavior. The strategy is simple: Tell the truth; that is, that sex and sexuality are pleasures as well as responsibilities. Many young people who have had a crush know the pleasurable feelings of intense attraction to someone, whether that “someone” is a movie star, an athlete, or a classmate. These feelings lead many young people to want to be close to the other person, including having a sexual desire to be with them, and these feelings are both normal and important in a person’s development. Affirm these feelings and discuss your family’s values about sexual activity and relationships. And remember that young people are capable of expressing sexuality in healthy, responsible ways.



An example: “You’ve done a really good job learning how to take care of your shellfish allergies. I’ve seen you check food labels, ask about ingredients at restaurants, and even tell your friends about your EpiPen. One other thing I need to make sure you know, though, is that your allergies can also be triggered by kissing someone who has just eaten shellfish. It’s important that you have this conversation with anyone you are dating, and ask them to make sure to do certain things to help keep you safe. The two of you need to agree that if the other person eats shellfish, you won’t kiss for the next 24 hours, and that before you do, they should brush their teeth and rinse well. We’ll double-check this with your allergist, to make sure this is good advice for you.”

Parents and adult caregivers must also be prepared to offer the same support and guidance to children and young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). Many people know at an early age that they are LGBT; others will take time (sometimes many years) to figure this out for themselves. As a parent or adult caregiver, be sure to educate yourself on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, as they may apply to your child. Beyond that, each of your children, including your LGBT ones, deserve to be respected and loved in their relationships and families.

THIS MIGHT BE UNCOMFORTABLE FOR YOU, TOO

You may feel nervous or uncomfortable, especially if these are new conversations. You can admit this to your child — it can show you will be open and honest with them (it might even help ease some of the tension). Ask yourself why you feel nervous: Is it because you never had these conversations with your own parents? Is it because you do not have all the answers? Consider sharing the reasons for your feelings with your children. But you can prepare yourself; educate yourself on the topics you want to discuss with your children, practice saying words that make you uncomfortable out loud, and keep communicating with your child so that these conversations can become more natural. It also helps to talk to other parents about these conversations.



UNDERSTANDING OUR BODIES

START EARLY

Affirm that the body is a good and special thing. Small children (infants and toddlers) touch themselves as they discover their bodies. They also often ask the names of different body parts. Tell them the names using appropriate language. When teaching your toddler about the nose and eyes, name the vulva or penis, as well. Use correct words and be matter-of-fact; this also communicates that their questions are welcome and important.

When babies discover their bodies, they also learn what feels good. Allow this discovery without pushing the baby's hand from their genitals, making faces, or saying things like "don't touch that" or "that's dirty." In this way, you can avoid giving early negative messages about the genitals. Young children who touch their genitals do it simply because it feels good, not because they are fantasizing about sexual relationships. We need to remember to take off the "adult glasses" and not overreact to children's early genital exploration.

TEACH THEM ABOUT PRIVATE BEHAVIOR

If your child is touching his or her genitals in public, make sure your child is aware of the behavior; acknowledge that it feels good but that such activity is to be done in private, and help your child identify "public" and "private" spaces. Naming the behavior is helpful; for example, "I see you are touching your vulva. I am sure that feels good to you. That's something you enjoy in private, OK?" In this way, you communicate the precise behavior and limit to your child. It's helpful to talk about this as simply as possible and without shaming. Remember, you want your child to know how his or her body works and what brings pleasure.



TAKE INITIATIVE

Sexuality can be a difficult or uncomfortable subject to talk about with your children, so they may not come to you with questions or concerns. But it does get easier with practice – for both you and your children. Talk with all of your children, regardless of gender or age. For example:

- Talk to young children about appreciating their bodies, what their bodies can do, how their bodies feel, and how to keep their bodies healthy.
- Pre-teens (ages 9-12) who are or will soon be going through puberty will begin to have conversations about the changes in their bodies and what to expect. Although many schools will teach basic human anatomy and the logistics of puberty, parents and adult caregivers can and should take the lead. Give information and impart your values while creating a safety net for learning (“You can ask me questions about any of this. There’s nothing to be embarrassed about. It’s all part of growing up.”).
- Pre-teens and teens will have sexual feelings. Research indicates that young people with little information about sexuality and sexual health may experiment more and at earlier ages than those who have more accurate information. Be prepared; your child and family do not need to pay for the consequences of lack of information.
- Discuss the differences between love and lust. Help your children understand that self-esteem plays a vital role in managing these feelings responsibly.
- Discuss the positive feelings of intimacy that people can have without sexual intercourse. Getting emotionally close to someone – taking the risk of telling them one’s thoughts and feelings, with the hope these feelings will be returned – can be very frightening and/or very pleasing. Young people may need your support and help understanding this process, especially in their first romantic relationships.
- Discuss different healthy ways to express sexual feelings, including masturbation, noting that sexual intercourse is only one way to express such feelings.
- Have conversations about the importance of safe sex. Talking with young people about sex doesn’t mean you condone it any more than conversations about designated drivers condones underage drinking or drinking and driving. On the contrary – if you discuss values, reality, and consequences with your children, they are more likely to continue to come to you with questions and make better decisions.

These conversations may occur when many young people are trying to become more independent, so they may push you away or seem to pay little attention, but you are still critically important in their lives. If your conversations with your children balance messages about responsibility, healthy decision-making, and values with messages about the positive and pleasurable aspects of developing relationships, you can continue to have a close and caring relationship with them, which will support their maturation and healthy sexual development.



DON'T BE AFRAID TO USE CORRECT WORDS

Using correct words (instead of “code” or vague words and messages) gives the message that body parts and their functions are natural. Using proper terminology helps do away with the idea that our bodies and sexuality are shameful, embarrassing, or bad.

If a young child repeats a sexual obscenity, parents and adult caregivers should explain what it means without being afraid to use the word. This can have several benefits:

- The child will know the word will not have power over you.
- The child will know no question or topic is “off limits.”
- By explaining the meaning of the obscenity with correct words, you are treating the subject of sex with respect.

Children who know the right terms will be able to better communicate to you their questions and concerns. If your child has a developmental disability or is more a visual learner, use pictures and other visual aids such as charts, a full body drawing, or an anatomically correct doll.

Give accurate, age-appropriate information. Discuss the changes happening in your child’s body (or why his or her brother’s voice is changing, an aunt’s pregnancy, etc.). Anticipate the next stage of their bodies’ development and discuss that, too, so that your children are prepared for future changes.

Chapter 3.2

Deepen the Conversation

Even if conversations about sexuality feel overwhelming, the first 20 seconds are the most difficult. After that, conversation typically becomes easier.

We know that many young people engage in sex. Even those who are not will likely experience a wide variety of reasons to make them think they should, such as:

- When they fall in love; perhaps they believe sex will help build a relationship
- As their bodies are changing, they may experience sexual desire, and they may also begin to learn that others see them as sexually desirable
- Ongoing pressure from peers and the media, which often links sexual activity with maturity, attractiveness, or love
- As a means to cure or distract from insecurity, loneliness, or other feelings related to feeling disconnected from people



So what can a parent or adult caregiver do? How can you help children not just make sense of these pressures and feelings, but also make healthy decisions when they do have sex? How can you help them make decisions that will help protect them and their partners from sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy while still recognizing the benefits of healthy sexuality?

While many of us might agree parents should be honest and accessible to their children to talk about sexuality, it can be difficult to figure out how exactly we can do that. The following questions, adapted from the Parents' Sex Ed Center at Advocates for Youth, provide some initial guidance as to where to start:

Assess your own values:

- How do you expect men and women to act?
- How should people behave when they disagree?
- How should decisions be made in a relationship?
- How do you feel about love and sex?

Think about how you learned and practiced communication. Recognize that to communicate openly with your children, you must be able to talk openly in your own adult relationships and be sensitive to your own feelings. Ask yourself questions such as:

- How do I expect children and adults to communicate with each other?
- Am I satisfied in my own relationships?
- Am I able to express affection?



EXPLORING SEXUALITY

CHECK IN WITH YOUR OLDER CHILDREN

Puberty brings a collection of physical, mental, and emotional changes that challenge young people (and their parents or adult caregivers) to varying degrees. You can reassure young people experiencing dramatic changes – menstruation, wet dreams, changing body shapes, body hair, etc. – by letting them know these changes are normal. Sometimes, it can be helpful to talk about your own experiences at the same age. Part of the conversation can center around the sexual feelings that often come at this stage of life – reassure your child that these feelings, too, are normal. Remember to let your children know that their individual experiences fall within the range of normal – many worry about entering puberty earlier or later than their peers, if they should be masturbating or masturbate too much, why they feel so emotional, why they don't care about love or sex even though it seems that's all their friends think about, etc. There is no one “right” way to experience these kinds of changes.

You can also help anticipate what can happen. For example, if your child begins dating, talk through important topics such as sexual behavior, open and honest communication, and making healthy decisions based on negotiation. This will help your child prepare.

TALK TO ALL YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT THE RANGE OF SUBJECTS INCLUDED IN SEXUAL HEALTH

All sexually-active people are at risk for sexually transmitted infections, of course (and so condoms and other preventive measures are important to discuss). Also:

- Talk to LGBT+ young people about contraception because many teens and young people experiment with both sexuality and identity. Some young lesbian and bisexual women may become pregnant, and some young gay men may father a pregnancy.
- Talk to young people about oral sex, anal sex and online sexual activity. Some young people may consider oral or anal sex as a way to avoid sex and/or pregnancy. Oral and anal sex, however, are sexual activities – they require the same level of maturity to negotiate consent and protection from sexually transmitted infections.

LET THEM KNOW YOU UNDERSTAND THEY ARE GOING THROUGH CHANGES

Let them know you are aware that as they are getting older, they might have romantic feelings about people, think about or feel pressure to date or have sex, have questions about their bodies, or feel like people expect certain things of them just because of their gender. It can be very helpful to have one or two concrete examples – current events, a movie or television show the two of you have just watched, or a recent event in your child's life – to help you continue.

EXPRESSING SEXUALITY

Although having “the talk” can be daunting, it is vital that your children understand your values and that they have correct information.

TALK ABOUT CONSENT

Consent is simple – it is an unambiguous “yes.” It should be an enthusiastic agreement - if it is not a clear yes, it is a no. It’s possible to teach even young children about consent. Doing so not only reinforces your messages about establishing and respecting personal boundaries (see “Healthy Relationships”) and appropriate/inappropriate touch (see “Healthy Sexuality”), it will help them become young people who value and practice consensual sexual relations.

Teach your children:

- To ask for permission to touch another person, including friends or classmates. Teach them to ask things like, “May I hold your hand?” or “May I give you a hug?”
- Consent can be given or taken away at any time. For example, your friends may decide after a little while that they no longer want to hold your hand, or that even though they wanted a hug from you yesterday, they don’t want you to hug them now. Teach your children to check in frequently.
- Teach your children that just because someone didn’t say “no,” that doesn’t mean they’re definitely saying “yes” (only “yes” means “yes”). Teach your children that the other person gets to say, “Yes, it’s OK for you to hug me,” before your child may touch them.

There are also many online resources such as the [Tea Consent](#) video on Youtube or the [Pizza Recipe for Consent](#) resource which can help initiate conversations.

Model these rules for consent and actively support your children’s practices of consent and setting personal boundaries.

TALK ABOUT ABSTINENCE AND SAFER SEX

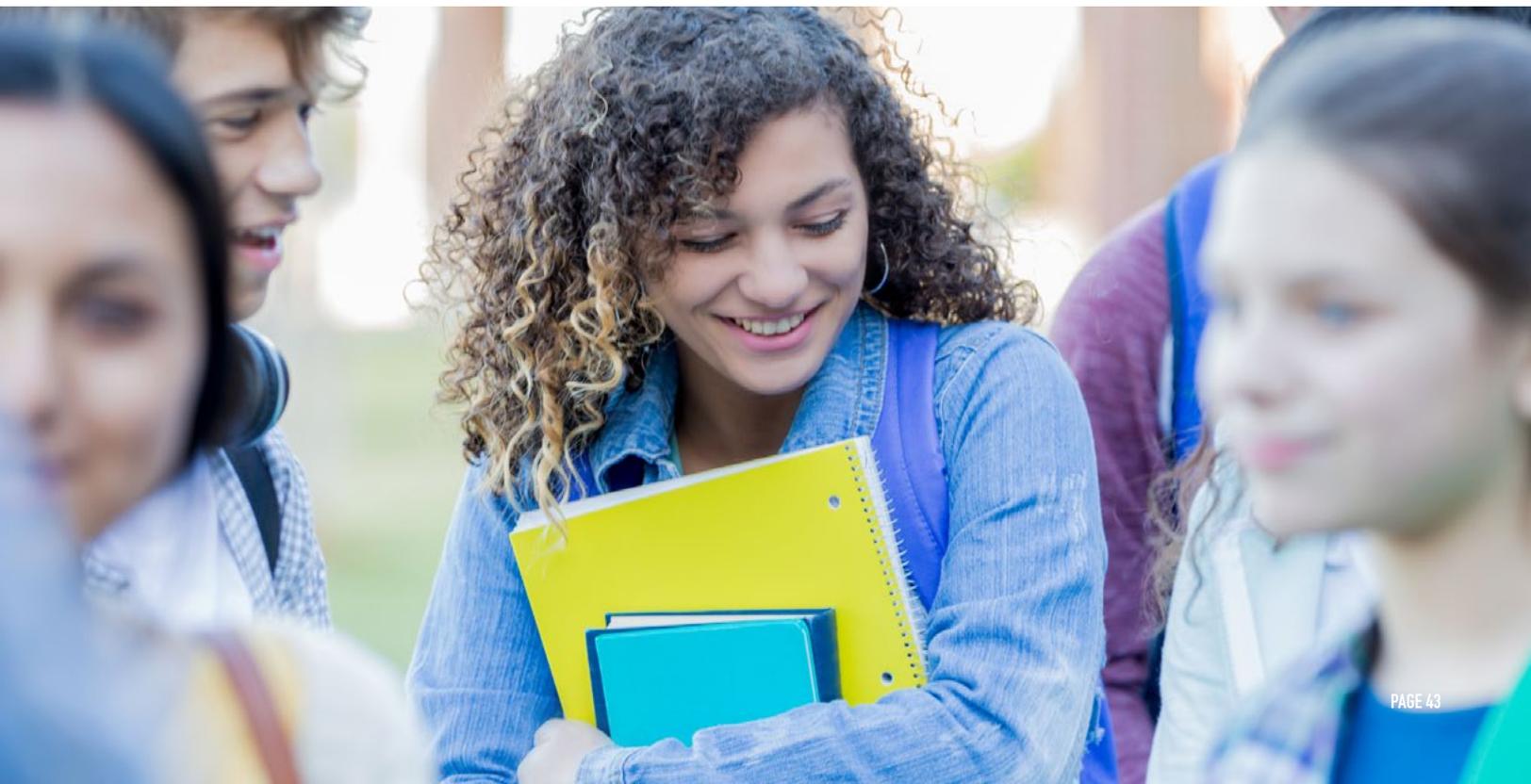
It’s possible to talk to young people about both abstinence and safer sex without sending a “mixed message.” From a young age, most of us hear mixed messages about a variety of things, which is not necessarily a bad thing. For example, your children’s grandparents might tell them to eat everything on their plates, but you might tell them they should stop eating when they’re full.

If, instead, young people learn about several options, it helps them think critically about things. This means that when they are in a situation where there’s temptation to engage in potentially perilous behavior, they have the ability to consider alternatives and what the outcomes might be. Teach your children from a young age to make progressively more complex decisions (see “Healthy Relationships”), so they’re comfortable weighing alternatives and understand that decisions have consequences. This is all part of critical thinking, which is an important skill to develop and practice in order to make healthy decisions throughout life.

Families, schools, and communities provide different messages that children need to sort out. It's the adults' responsibility to assist children in this task. Parents (and adult caregivers) have the advantage of having years to demonstrate their values to their teens. They know their teens' attitudes and personalities. They understand their teens' histories and goals for the future. Parents and other adults have had their teens' entire lifetime to impress upon them what messages are most important. We sometimes don't give our children enough credit for being able to navigate the values we provide.

Parents, teachers, or other adults send a clear message to children when they say, "I feel strongly that not having sexual intercourse while you're a teenager is your best option. It is also important for you to receive information about birth control or protection so that someday, when you are ready to have intercourse, you'll be better prepared to prevent an unplanned pregnancy or disease." This message communicates both the values-based behavior you expect from them during their adolescent years and necessary information for future reference.

These conversations empower young people to act responsibly because they will need accurate information about things like contraception and sexual health at some point. Adults should consistently share their hopes and values when discussing this topic with their children; for example, "I hope you will wait to have sex until you are older and more mature," and, later, acknowledge that young people are more mature than children, and need important information in order to make healthy decisions. For example, "When you decide to be sexually intimate with somebody, please make sure you always, always use protection against sexually transmitted infections and [if applicable] pregnancy."



TALK TO YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT GETTING “CAUGHT UP IN THE MOMENT”

When asked why they didn't use contraception or condoms, many young people will say, “I wasn't planning it; it just happened. We got 'swept away' and didn't use anything.” Make clear that this is not OK by reinforcing that they're responsible for healthy decisions for themselves. (“You must be prepared — this is the mature way to act.”)

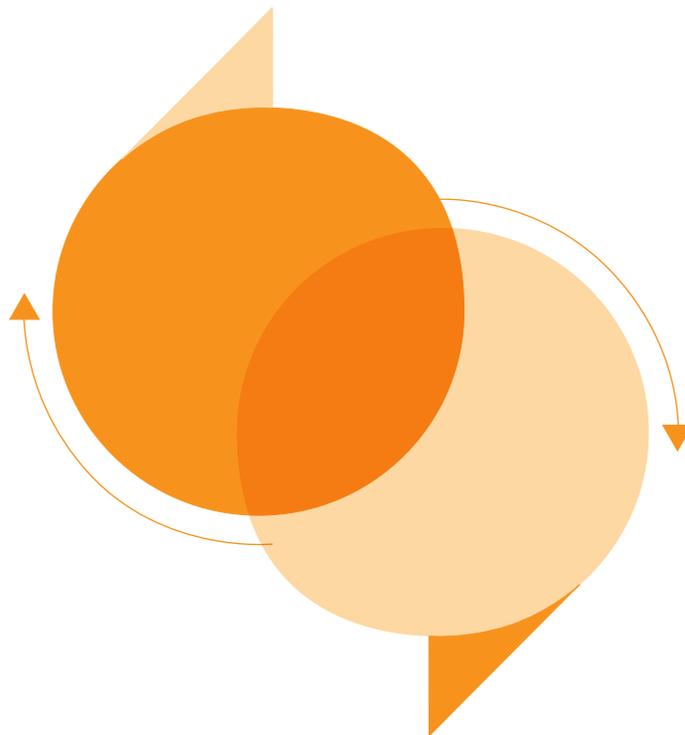
You can do this! Imagine the following scenario: You find condoms, contact information for test sites for sexually transmitted infections, or contraceptives in your teen's room. Take a deep breath and remember these are signs that your ongoing conversations are important, that your teen is paying attention, and he or she is now trying hard to make responsible, mature decisions. Use it as an opportunity to have a conversation – support your teen in making healthy decisions, share your feelings, and talk together about intimacy, love, and responsibility.



Chapter 3.3

Take Action

Talking to your children about sex can help prevent sexual abuse because they will be better equipped to understand setting boundaries and respecting those boundaries in themselves and others. Researchers say that conversations about sexuality also leads to less risky sexual behavior, should teenagers choose to engage in sex. Now that you're prepared to talk with your kids, take action by making sure you know how you'll approach the conversations as you guide them into the topics.



EDUCATE YOURSELF

In order to have honest and insightful conversations with your children about healthy sexuality, first educate yourself so you can answer appropriately the inevitable string of questions they will have. If parents become empowered with information, children will in turn become empowered.

- Learn about the various methods for pregnancy prevention and their respective rate of effectiveness
- Learn how STDs are transmitted, how to detect them, and how to prevent them
- Learn more about how to have a healthy relationship with one's own body and sexuality in a way that reflects your values

It's worth it to take the time to learn about the different aspects of healthy sexuality so that your children do not walk away with myths or misinformation.

SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Think about ways to impart your knowledge, formally or informally. Prepare yourself to recognize seemingly innocuous moments that open the door to educate your children about healthy sexuality. For example, if your child comes home from school and tells you that school officials made some classmates change their clothes because their attires were inappropriate, you can ask for your child's thoughts about the school officials' actions, and how those actions tie to a person's sexuality.

Alternatively, you can talk with your children about healthy sexuality through "formal" time set aside to sit down and discuss it. Some parents find it easier to go into the conversation when both they and their children are expecting what the conversation will entail.



TAKE A STEP

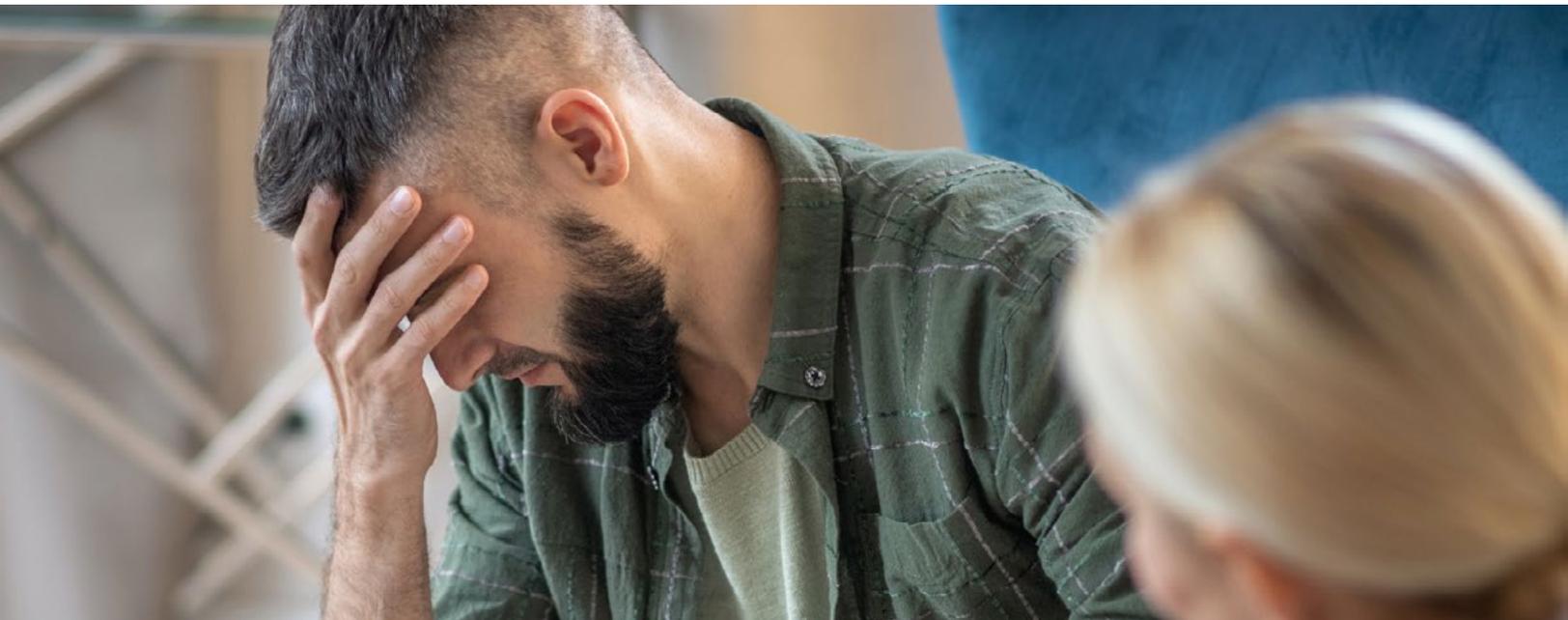
If you were to consider running a marathon, you would first think about what you need to do – what kind of training schedule you will follow, what type of shoes will maximize your speed, how you will track progress, and how you will hold yourself accountable to accomplish your goal. The same concept applies when you prepare to talk with your children about healthy sexuality. For example, before you explain to your daughter the importance of scheduling an appointment each year with a gynecologist, you should first talk with her about her vagina. Taking the first step in conversations about healthy sexuality may mean practicing in the mirror or talking to your partner about it. The point is simply taking that first step.

Take the first step: Be prepared to answer these questions in the following bystander scenarios, developed by NO MORE. Some of the following scenarios are directly relevant to parents and adult caregivers, whilst others are designed to be worked through with your children or teens to help them too become active bystanders.

YOU THINK SOMEONE IN YOUR FAMILY IS IN AN ABUSIVE OR UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP. WHAT DO YOU DO?

Once you recognize the warning signs that a situation might be abusive, you can then identify how to respond in a way that feels appropriate and comfortable.

Talk privately with the victim/survivor, and express concern by saying you've been worried about them. Listen without judgment and if they don't want to talk, then let them know that you'll be there for them if they ever do want to talk.



TIP

Allow the victim/survivor to make their own decision. Personal style, culture, and context of the survivor's life may affect their reactions. A victim/survivor may not be comfortable identifying as a victim or with naming their experience as abuse or assault, and it is important to respect each person's choices and style of coping with this traumatic event.

Listening without judgment may make them feel comfortable opening up, and if they do disclose abuse, let them know you believe them. You can reassure them that they are not alone, this is not their fault and that you are here to help. Some useful things to say might be, “No one deserves to be treated this way,” “You are not to blame,” or simply, “What’s happening is not your fault.”

TIP

Remember that although you may be having a strong reaction to what happened, it’s important to focus on the feelings and reactions of the survivor rather than your own. Try not to outwardly judge or confront the abuser as it may make the situation worse or more dangerous for the victim, and could put you in danger, too.

Offer options by letting them know free, confidential resources are available and that you are here to support them in whatever choices they make. In the US, national hotline services include the National Domestic Violence Hotline 1.800.799.7233 (www.thehotline.org), the National Sexual Violence Hotline 1.800.656.HOPE (4673) (www.rainn.org) and loveisrespect 1.866.331.9474 (www.loveisrespect.org or text ‘loveis’ to 22522) – these can offer you guidance and point you to local resources in your area that will help keep them (and any children that may be present in the home) safe. For global resources, visit nomoredirectory.org.

TIP

Offer to let them use your phone or computer to look up local resources or contact someone that can help them and any children involved.

YOUR FRIEND TELLS YOU THAT HE/SHE THINKS THEY WERE RAPED. WHAT DO YOU DO?

The support survivors of sexual assault receive from the people they love and trust can be invaluable to their ability to cope with and heal from sexual assault. Following are some helpful suggestions (via The Rape Crisis Center).





LISTEN

Allow your friend to talk about what happened and control the direction of the conversation. Do not ask a lot of questions or focus on the attack itself, but rather on how he or she is handling the trauma.

LISTEN WITHOUT GIVING ADVICE OR TRYING TO “FIX” THINGS

When we care for someone, we often try to give advice, solve their problems or fix things for them. While it comes from a place of caring, our instinct to try to problem-solve or give advice can sometimes leave a survivor feeling as though their emotions are being dismissed. Sometimes, the issues a survivor is having will not feel fixable to them or to you, and it’s much more helpful to just be there to listen to whatever a survivor wants to share with you.

LET THE SURVIVOR HAVE CONTROL

Allow survivors to make decisions for themselves and assure them that their decisions are supported. You don’t have to agree with their decisions but it is important to give them the authority to decide how they will handle things.

BELIEVE

It is important that the survivor knows you believe what happened.

NORMALIZE A SURVIVOR’S FEELINGS

Every survivor will react to their experience differently. Survivors may experience many upsetting, conflicting, confusing feelings after an assault. Survivors often re-experience the event through flashbacks, may feel on edge all the time, or may be prone to sudden outbursts, which can feel especially upsetting and leave a survivor feeling even more disempowered. Some survivors may blame themselves for and feel frustrated by these intense feelings, and it’s important to remind a survivor these feelings and responses are out of their control and are the body’s way of responding to a traumatic event. Something helpful you could say would be, “You are having a normal response to an abnormal situation.”

PROVIDE UNCONDITIONAL SUPPORT

It will help your friend to hear that they are not to blame for the assault. Regardless of an individual’s choices prior to the attack, no one ever asks to be or deserves to be raped or sexually assaulted.

BE PATIENT

Healing takes time, and every survivor copes with trauma differently. Don't pressure or rush your friend to be "normal" or to "just move on." Instead, reassure your friend that support will be available throughout the healing process, however long it may take.

LET THE SURVIVOR KNOW THAT HELP IS AVAILABLE

If they are interested and open to receiving assistance, tell them about the National Sexual Assault Hotline, or offer to help find local services for them.

SOME HELPFUL STATEMENTS INCLUDE:

- I believe you.
- This is not your fault.
- I am so sorry that this happened.
- You did not deserve this.
- I am happy that you are safe and that you are here to talk with me.
- Thank you for being brave/comfortable enough to talk with me.
- How can I help you right now?

SUPPORTING A SURVIVOR

Supporting a survivor can feel challenging for a number of reasons: you may be worried about upsetting the survivor, you may have other personal experience with this issue, or you may feel you don't know what to say at all. The most important things you can do for a survivor are to listen, validate, ask how you can help, know where to refer a survivor for further help, listen without judgment, and care for yourself.



MAKE SURE YOU ARE GETTING THE SUPPORT YOU NEED

Watching a friend or loved one work through the aftermath of a sexual assault can be an extremely difficult and painful experience. Common feelings of those supporting someone who has been assaulted include helplessness, frustration, anger and guilt. It can be helpful to talk with someone other than the survivor about these feelings.

You understandably may be experiencing discomfort, shock or uncertainty, and have a lot of questions. To respect the survivor's discomfort and give yourself the space you need to process your own feelings, wait until you're away from the survivor and call the National Sexual Assault Hotline for free, confidential support.

YOUR MALE FRIEND TELLS YOU THAT HE HAD AN UNWANTED SEXUAL EXPERIENCE WHEN HE WAS YOUNGER WITH SOMEONE HE LOOKED UP TO. HE QUESTIONS IF IT WAS SEXUAL ASSAULT BECAUSE HE WAS SEXUALLY AROUSED DURING THE INTERACTION. WHAT DO YOU DO?

Some possible options (depending on your comfort and his openness to further discussion) include:

- Offer encouragement for his willingness to consider a challenging question.
- Listen neutrally. Ask him what factors make him think it might have been abusive. Avoid defining what happened for him.
- Explore whether he feels there was a power imbalance in the relationship.
- Offer to help him find resources to learn more about unwanted and abusive sexual experiences for males and why it might be difficult, but important for a man to address it.
- Do a safety check. See if he has healthy strategies to manage negative feelings when he starts thinking about this question. If not, help him find a hotline or local crisis service should he start to feel overwhelmed.

YOU ARE IN THE LUNCHROOM WITH YOUR FRIENDS AND A GROUP OF STUDENTS NEARBY START MAKING SEXUAL GESTURES AND COMMENTS TO ONE OF YOUR FRIENDS THAT'S SITTING WITH YOU. THOUGH TRYING TO IGNORE THE COMMENTS, YOU SEE THAT YOUR FRIEND IS UPSET. WHAT DO YOU DO?

- You can tell the group making the comments to stop their sexually harassing behavior, or ask them to imagine how they'd feel if someone made that comment about one of their family members or someone else they cared about.
- You could ask your friend if they want to leave and talk to a teacher or counselor.

Whatever you choose to do in the moment, you should tell an authority figure about the harassment and ask them to intervene. While it's not physical violence, these types of harassing behaviors help foster an environment that condones domestic and sexual violence in our society.

A CO-WORKER STARTS TALKING ABOUT A RECENT HIGH-PROFILE RAPE OR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASE AND BLAMES THE VICTIM FOR WHAT HAPPENED. WHAT DO YOU DO?

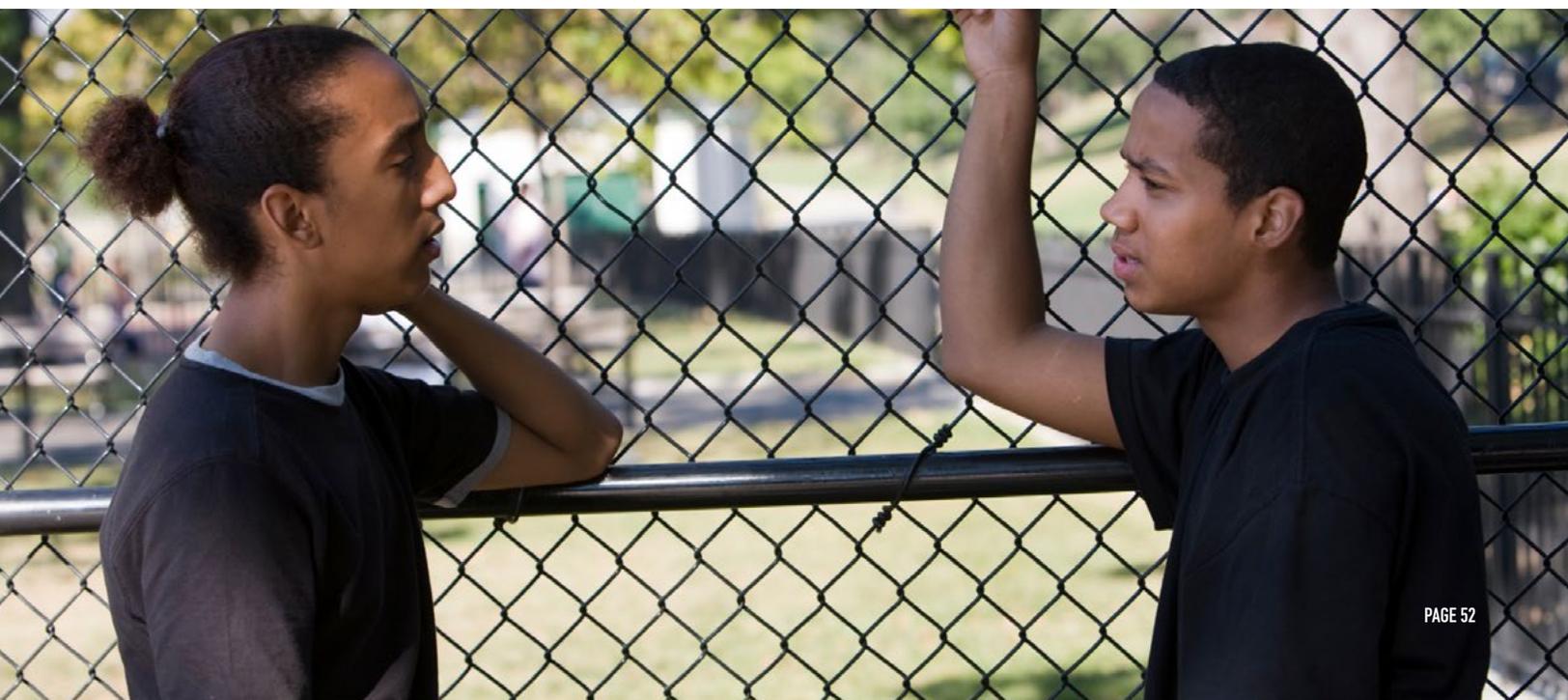
- Tell them that regardless of what they think happened that it's never the victim's fault.
- Give them resources that explain the realities of domestic and sexual violence.
- Contact your human resources representative or immediate supervisor and ask that the staff receive training on these issues.

A TEEN IN YOUR LIFE TELLS YOU THEIR BOY/GIRLFRIEND IS HURTING THEM, HARASSING THEM AND/OR FORCING THEM INTO SEXUAL SITUATIONS. WHAT DO YOU DO?

- Assure the person that what is happening to them is not right, it's not their fault and everyone deserves a healthy, respectful relationship.
- Offer to help them look for [local resources](#) to keep them safe.
- Ask them if there is an adult at their school, like a teacher, counselor or principal or a parent they can talk with to help them stay safe.
- Check in with them to see if they are safe and offer to help them involve individuals resources to help make the abuse stop.

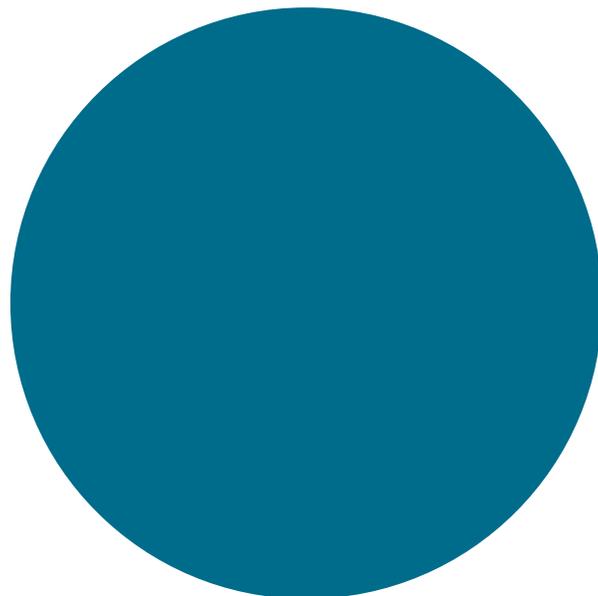
THE GUYS ON YOUR TEAM ARE CONSTANTLY MAKING LEWD, RUDE OR DEGRADING COMMENTS ABOUT WOMEN AND GIRLS OR CALLING EACH OTHER NAMES THAT IMPLY THEY ARE "WEAK LIKE GIRLS." WHAT DO YOU DO?

- Pick up that their comments are degrading to their teammates and to women in general and it's not cool with you.
- Talk to teammates individually about the situation and ask that they not join in those behaviors.
- Ask the coach to talk to the team, or individual, about how harassment and the degradation of women and girls is not okay.



Chapter 4

TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA



From apps to online dating websites, there are many ways people are connecting online. In the age of increased social media and technology-use to maintain relationships, it is important that both parents and children have a clear understanding about healthy relationships with other people online to create respectful online spaces.



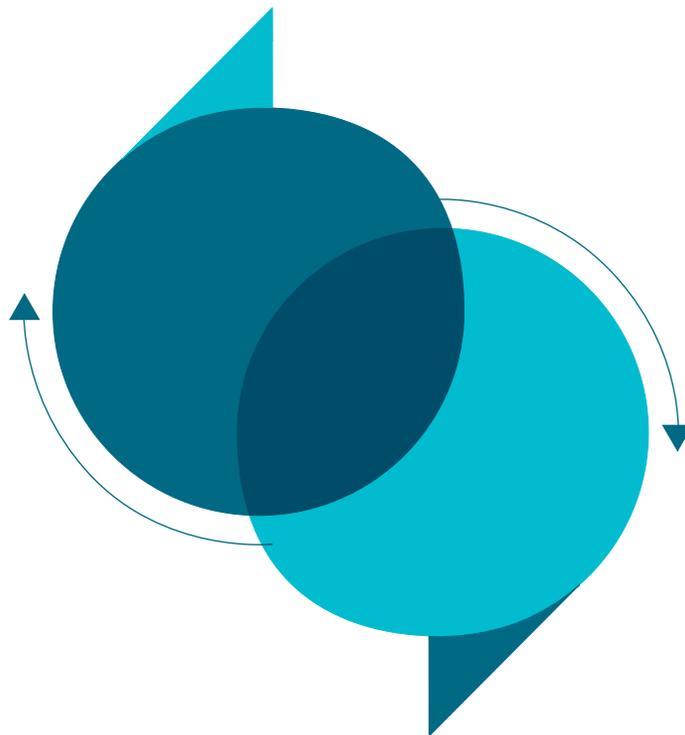
Chapter 4.1

Digital Boundaries and Consent

Social media and mobile phones allow teens to connect with one another more frequently and in a different way. Like adults, it allows them to stay in touch with friends. Many teens in relationships view social media as a place where they can feel more connected with their significant other's life, share emotional connections, and let their significant other know they care – however these platforms can also complicate teenage relationships.

It is important to have conversations with your teens about their relationships, and how they use social media and their phones to interact with their friends and partners. This is a good topic for setting boundaries (see “Healthy Relationships”). Consider discussing the following questions with your teen about the pros and cons of social media in relationships:

- Do any of your friends have boyfriends/girlfriends? Do you think their relationship is healthy?
- How do your friends use social media or their phones to communicate with their partners?
- What are some examples of unhealthy behaviors on social media or the phone when people are dating?



DISCUSSING DIGITAL BOUNDARIES

The Internet allows young people to stay in constant contact with one another. While this does wonders for fulfilling social interactions, it can also be overwhelming. It is important to remind your children that just because they can talk to their friends or partner 24/7, it doesn't mean they have to. Encourage your children to speak up about what they are comfortable with. Learning to proactively set boundaries in their personal relationships is a skill which they will use for the rest of their life.

Setting and discussing boundaries online is a healthy thing for partners to do. Digital boundaries are things that your children need to set with their friends and romantic relationships to feel respected and independent about how they want to be online. Some ideas for you to discuss with your teens about setting digital boundaries in their relationships include:

- Tagging others in posts or photos
- Following each other on different platforms
- Posting about the relationship (and feelings about the relationship)
- The types of photos that are okay to post
- Not responding to strangers or people they don't know well
- Taking pictures without consent

People have different audiences online (friends, employers, family etc.) and might feel differently about what they post and the impact on different areas of their life. Conversations with your teens about how they can set digital boundaries in their relationships can teach them about how best to respect everyone's different levels of concern around privacy on social media.

UNDERSTANDING DIGITAL CONSENT

It is important that your children know that they have agency in all aspects of their life - whether that is while trying to navigate digital intimacy, knowing how to turn down requests for nude photos, or being informed on how to make the right choices for them. Remind your kids that consent is not just for in-person.

When it comes to sexual activities that take place through screens, such as sexting, sending nude photos, or connecting for in-person physical sex, digital consent is a baseline for moving forward. Teach your teens that they can practice digital consent by:

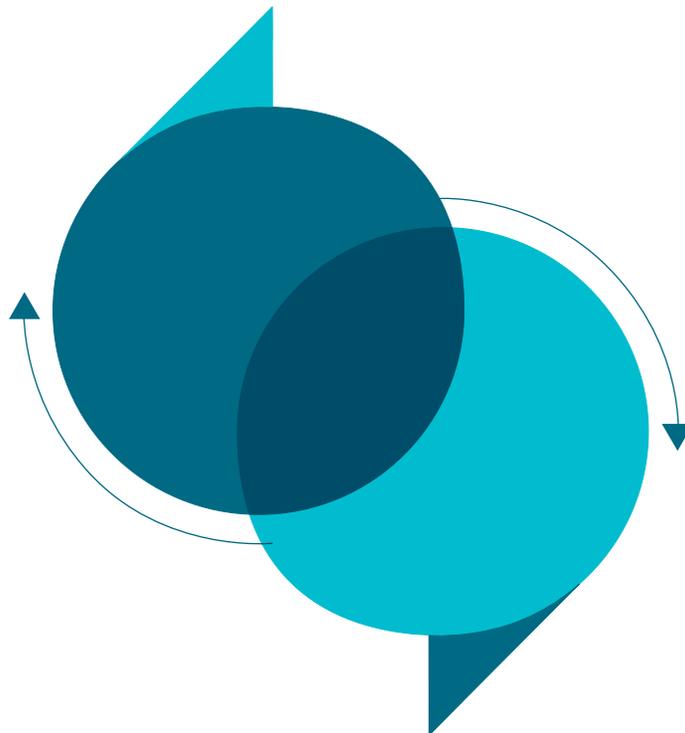
- Asking for consent before sending explicit messages or photos
- Respecting the decisions of others - it's never okay to coerce or pressure someone to send photos or record sexual acts. Teach your kids that if someone says no after they ask for digital consent, respect their choice and move on.
- Asking each time - Even if a partner agreed to something before, they are not obligated to agree to do it again.

Chapter 4.2

Online Abuse and Harassment

Abuse and harassment are serious both online and offline. According to a 2013 study from the [Urban Institute Project](#), 25% of teens that are dating have been victimized through technology by their partners. New technologies such as social networking sites, emails, texts, and mobile phones can give abusers the ability to stalk their partners, send degrading messages, publicly embarrass them or pressure them for sexually explicit photos.

Given that technology is an integral part of a teen's life and relationships, many do not realize that they are experiencing abuse until it becomes a severe issue. It is common, especially at the beginning of a relationship, to mistake digital abuse for indications of their partner's love for them. For this reason it is important that both teens and parents are aware of the signs of digital abuse in order to prevent it.



The [Urban Institute](#) describes digital abuse as...

- Coercive - When someone pressures or harasses you to do things that you are not comfortable doing.
- Controlling - When someone is dominating and attempts to control or gain power over you.
- Degrading - When someone belittles and devalues you.
- Embarrassing - When someone threatens to share embarrassing information about you, or posts personal or intimate information publicly.

They also provide examples of digital abuse or harassment, such as:

- Using your social media account without permission or demanding access to your phone
- Sending unwanted sexual photos and messages, or sexting without consent
- Sending so many messages or liking so many of photos and posts that it makes you uncomfortable
- Making you feel afraid when you do not respond to calls or texts
- Looking through your phone frequently to check in on your texting and phone call history
- Spreading rumors about you online or through texts
- Creating a profile page about you without your permission
- Posting embarrassing photos or information about you online
- Using information from your online profile to harass you
- Writing nasty things about you on their profile page or anywhere online
- Sending threatening text messages, DMs, or chats
- Pressuring and threatening you to send sexual photos of yourself, or making you feel inferior if you don't comply
- Taking a video of you and sending it to anyone else without your permission
- Telling you who you can or can't be friends with or what posts you can or can't like on social media



Chapter 4.3

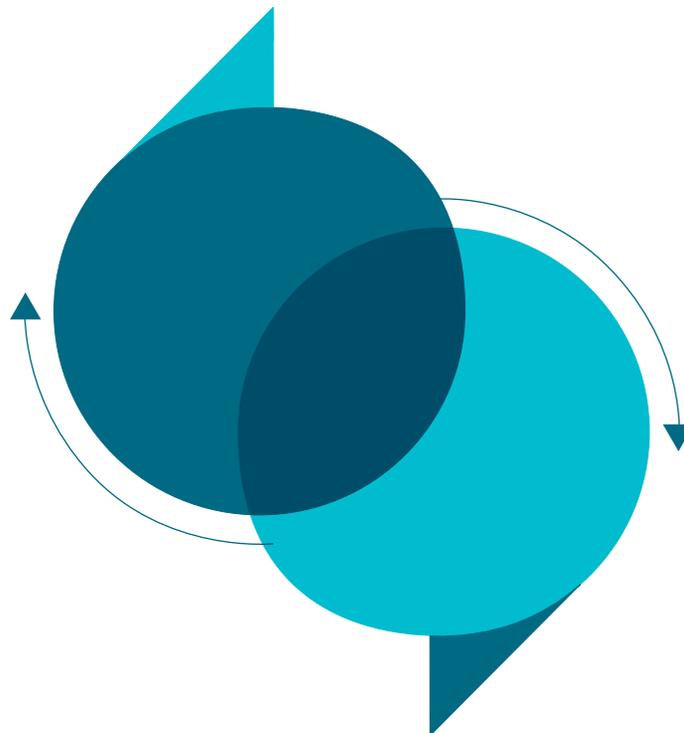
Take Action

START A CONVERSATION

There are some positive steps you can take to reduce your teen's risk of digital abuse. Start a conversation. Ask your teen if they know about digital abuse or whether they know someone who has been a victim?

Make sure your teens know about the above signs of digital abuse - many young people do not recognise that abuse is more than just physical. Keep the conversation going and let them know they should come to you if it happens to them or a friend.

The answer to tackling online digital abuse is not to shut off the computer or take away your kids' phones. Instead, it is about educating teens on what to look out for, raising awareness of help-seeking resources and spreading awareness about what digital abuse is and why it is so harmful.



BE PREPARED

Educate yourself on what resources are available to keep your children safe and help them practice healthy relationship skills online. NO MORE has collected the following resources to help you make the first step. The list is not exhaustive so do some research and talk to your children about what they would find useful.

- Safety Net Project offers [comprehensive toolkits and information](#) on the use of technology for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and trafficking including App Safety and Confidentiality resources.
- The CyberSmile Foundation has specific [advice for teenagers](#) to tackle all forms of bullying and abuse online.
- eTAG (End Tech Abuse across Generations) has a range of [resources to download](#) that address the use/misuse of technology in domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking cases.
- Women's Media Center [Speech Project](#) raises awareness of online harassment and provides links to emergency resources, guides and support organizations
- [Digital First Aid Kit](#) is an open-source guide that walks you through questions about online harassment and offers specific guidance in multiple languages



COLLABORATORS

Decimos NO MÁS is a collaborative effort between Esperanza United and NO MORE. Decimos NO MÁS, a sister campaign to NO MORE, was developed using original research and input from youth and parents.

NO MORE

TOGETHER WE CAN END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & SEXUAL ASSAULT

The NO MORE Foundation is dedicated to ending domestic violence and sexual assault by increasing awareness, inspiring action, and fueling culture change. NO MORE is a groundbreaking, global initiative comprised of the largest coalition of nonprofits, corporations, government agencies, media, schools and individuals addressing domestic violence and sexual assault. We are committed to engaging, reaching, and working with people from diverse communities.

We work to amplify and grow the movement to stop and prevent domestic violence and sexual assault, in homes, schools, workplaces and communities around the world by creating and supporting innovative campaigns, partnerships and tools that leverage the power of the media, entertainment, sports, technology, and collective action. With more than 1,400 allied organizations and over 40 state, local, and international chapters, NO MORE sparks grassroots activism, encouraging everyone—women and men, youth and adults, from all walks of life—to be part of the solution.



Esperanza United mobilizes Latinas and Latin@ communities to end gender-based violence. From a humble but mighty beginning as an emergency shelter created by a small group of persevering Latinas, Esperanza United has grown into the largest, most-respected Latin@ organization in the country focused on ending gender-based violence.

Formerly Casa de Esperanza, Esperanza United leverages the strengths of Latin@ communities to end gender-based violence. Founded and led by Latinas, we ground our work in listening to the community adapting to meet their changing needs. We work with the community, other service providers, and systems to ensure Latinas, their families, and our communities receive culturally relevant advocacy and quality, appropriate, and effective resources. Our Latina Advocacy Framework provides the foundation on how best to support Latin@ survivors, families, and communities gain greater safety, connectedness, and self-sufficiency. Nationally, we are immersed in the provision of training and technical assistance, policy advocacy and research and evaluation practices grounded in the lived realities of Latin@s.