BODY SAFETY *Conversation Guide*

Childhelp
FOUNDED IN 1959 BY SARA O' MEARA + YVONNE FEDDERSON
PREVENTION EDUCATION

Child sexual abuse is preventable when adults focus on creating safe environments, recognizing concerning behaviors in adults or other youth, respecting children's boundaries, and being available when children need help. Adults can also play a critical role by having open, ongoing conversations with children to help them build safety knowledge and know where to turn for support.

Like the **3 Keys to Protecting Children** for Adults, our youth-focused program teaches kids the **3 Keys to Personal Safety**. This is a great way to frame age-appropriate conversations about body safety, boundaries, and child sexual abuse. You can teach kids the following key points:

1. You have the RIGHT to be safe.

- Your body belongs to you, and some parts of your body are private.
- Healthy relationships respect boundaries. No one should involve you in sexual behavior or ask you to keep secrets about touching, activities, or even conversations.
- Sexual abuse is never your fault, no matter who was involved, what happened, or how you responded.
- If something unsafe or confusing happens, you are not alone and help is available.
- It is never too late to tell or get help.

2. You have POWER.

- You can learn to recognize safe and unsafe behaviors, including whether someone respects your boundaries and follows safety rules.
- You can learn to recognize warning signs of grooming.
- You can recognize healthy relationships and notice unhealthy behaviors that are manipulative, controlling, secretive, or unsafe.
- Your boundaries matter. You have the right to say no, move away, change your mind, or get help if something feels uncomfortable or unsafe.
- Talking with safe adults and staying connected to people who support and protect you are powerful safety tools.

3. You can SPEAK UP.

- You can speak up in different ways, such as saying no, or getting help from a safe adult.
- You can identify safe adults who listen, respect boundaries, take concerns seriously, and help protect you.
- If the first person you tell doesn't listen or help, you can keep telling until someone does.
- Speaking up can also mean helping a friend get support from a safe adult when something unsafe or harmful happens.

Some children may feel embarrassed, uninterested, or reluctant to discuss body safety. Avoid forcing the conversation. Keep discussions brief, use everyday opportunities, and remind children that you are always available to answer questions. If harm happens, remember, children may freeze, comply, be confused, or not recognize concerning behaviors when they first happen. A child who does not say no, leave, or tell immediately has not failed to protect themselves.

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TALKING WITH YOUTH AT DIFFERENT AGES:
EARLY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

When talking with children of early-elementary school age, it's important to keep conversations simple, concrete, and reassuring.

TOPICS TO FOCUS ON	PROMPTS TO HELP START CONVERSATIONS	THINK & PRACTICE
• Correct names for private body parts • Body autonomy and boundaries • Importance of asking permission before touching • Difference between surprises and unsafe secrets • Identifying and talking to safe adults • Telling and continuing to tell a Safe Adult about confusing or harmful behaviors	• "Your body belongs to you." • "You can tell me if someone does something you don't like or don't understand." • "Safe adults follow safety rules and respect people's boundaries, like asking permission for hugs." • "If anyone asks you to keep a secret or says you can never tell, you can still tell me or another safe adult." • "You can always ask questions about your body or about someone's actions." • "You won't be in trouble for talking to me or another Safe Adult."	• "Who are three safe adults you could talk to?" • "If someone didn't listen the first time, who could you tell next?"

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TALKING WITH YOUTH AT DIFFERENT AGES:
UPPER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

As children get older and enter upper elementary grades, you can begin to have conversations that add more complex topics. Remember to keep discussions developmentally appropriate.

TOPICS TO FOCUS ON	PROMPTS TO HELP START CONVERSATIONS	THINK & PRACTICE
• Healthy vs. unhealthy relationships • Gifts, favors with strings attached, or secrets • Special treatment or attempts to get children alone • Safety rules • Concerning behaviors children may see online • Children's right to change their minds • Telling a Safe Adult even if they think they did something wrong	• "Sometimes a person seems trustworthy and then slowly starts breaking rules and crossing personal boundaries." • "Someone can seem really nice and still make an unsafe choice. That's why we pay attention to what people do, not just whether we like or trust them." • "If anyone breaks a safety rule, online or offline, you can tell me. You are not responsible for getting an adult in trouble."	• "What is it about a person's behavior that makes them a Safe Adult?" • Provide "What-If" scenarios and ask, "What do you think makes this unsafe?" and "What would you do?"

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TALKING WITH YOUTH AT DIFFERENT AGES:
MIDDLE SCHOOL-AGE YOUTH

As children enter pre-adolescence or middle school grades, you should talk more directly about body safety and sexual abuse prevention topics such as grooming, pressure, healthy vs. unhealthy relationships, consent, and sexual boundaries.

TOPICS TO FOCUS ON	PROMPTS TO HELP START CONVERSATIONS	THINK & PRACTICE
• Grooming as a pattern of behaviors from an adult or another, more powerful youth • Healthy relationships, online and offline • Consent and power differences • Sexual comments/jokes • Requests for intimate images • Isolation, boundary testing, secrets, gifts/favors • Adults treating a young person like a romantic or peer partner • Harmful peer behaviors • Helping a friend	• "Sometimes unsafe behavior doesn't start out looking unsafe. Someone might begin by being really helpful, giving someone special attention, or making a person feel important." • "What could be a warning sign that someone's attention has crossed a boundary?" • "Why is it sometimes hard to talk to an adult?"	• "What would make you concerned about the way an adult or older teen was treating someone your age?" • "What would you tell a friend if someone asked them to keep actions a secret?"

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TALKING WITH YOUTH AT DIFFERENT AGES:
HIGH SCHOOL-AGE YOUTH

As youth enter adolescence or high school grades, conversations should mature with the child. Discussions should center on topics such as relationships, power, and consent. This is also an important time to discuss self-advocacy, and advocating for or looking out for others.

TOPICS TO FOCUS ON	PROMPTS TO HELP START CONVERSATIONS	THINK & PRACTICE
• Healthy vs. exploitative relationships • Consent, boundaries, authority, and power differences • Grooming, manipulation, sexual coercion and pressure • Sexting and sextortion • Helping friends and peers • Knowing that previous consent doesn't eliminate the right to change one's mind • Seeking help without blame or shame	• "You deserve to have others respect your boundaries. If someone crosses a boundary, it is never your fault." • "Even if you broke a rule or made a choice you regret, you can always come to me. My priority is always to help you stay safe." • "You can change your mind about something you thought was okay at first." • "You can come to me if anyone pressures you to share intimate images, or if you've shared them and someone is pressuring you to send more."	• "Why might someone have a hard time recognizing grooming while it's happening?" • "If a friend told you something happened with an adult or another young person, how could you help?"

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