

Tips on Talking to Your Child about Sexual Abuse

As parents we want to say the right things to our children. At Our Kids, we've noticed over the years, there are things parents sometimes say to children when they are worried about sexual abuse that could make it more difficult for a child to disclose the abuse.



What Not to Say	The Reasons Why	Try Saying This Instead
<p>"Don't let anyone touch your private parts."</p> <p>Or</p> <p>"No one should ever touch your private parts."</p>	<p>Adults and older children are bigger, stronger and usually able to intimidate or manipulate a child. If you tell your child not to "let" anyone touch their private parts, children may think they will get in trouble if touching occurs. Children may be hesitant to talk about the event or may even feel responsible. They may think: "Mom or dad told me not to let this happen. It did, so I will get in trouble."</p>	<p>"If anyone touches your private parts, it's ok to tell me."</p> <p>Or</p> <p>"It's always ok to tell if someone touches your private parts."</p>
<p>When referring to your child's genital area or private parts, don't call it a "nasty" or "dirty" part of the body.</p>	<p>It is important that children of all ages know the names for their body parts and know that ALL of their body is ok. In addition, using substitute names for body parts can be confusing if a child discloses to another adult and uses the substitute name. Many families may have other names, but it is important to avoid names that imply shame or something bad about that part of the body.</p>	<p>"That is your private part" or refer to the parts of the body as the "vagina" or "penis."</p>
<p>Don't ask your child constantly about being touched. "Has someone touched you?" or "Has anyone touched you down there?"</p>	<p>"Has anyone "touched" you?" can be a confusing question for younger children. In the literal mind of a child, of course people "touch" them. And young children who need assistance with toilet training may be touched "down there" in ways that are appropriate and necessary.</p>	<p>"Is there anything that is bothering you?"</p> <p>"Are you ok?"</p> <p>Has anyone done anything that worries or confuses you?</p>
<p>"I promise not to tell anyone"</p>	<p>Before a child discloses, they may ask you to "promise" not to tell anyone about the abuse or abuser. Your child needs to have a trusting relationship with you and breaking the promise can also be damaging to the child. If there is abuse, it is always in the best interest of the child to report the abuse – and required by law.</p>	<p>"I cannot promise not to tell but I can promise that I will do what I can to help you. Lets talk about what is bothering you. I want to help."</p>
<p>"I'll kill anyone who touches your private parts."</p>	<p>90% or more of children who are sexually abused, know their abuser. Often the offender is a relative, caregiver or friend of the family that has a long-term relationship with the child. While your initial reaction or thought about someone touching your child may be very strong, a child may be concerned that they are responsible for the safety or well-being of a person loved by the family. Children are generally afraid of adult anger and fear it is directed at them.</p>	<p>"My job as your mom (or your dad) is to protect you and take care of you. Since I'm not around you all the time, I can't always know what is happening. If anyone does anything that makes you feel funny inside or scared or touches you, it's ok to tell me."</p>

We recommend talking with your child regularly and generally about their activities, people in their life and how they are feeling. If you are concerned that something or someone is bothering your child, ask more specific questions. If the groundwork for open, non-scary, non-threatening conversation has been laid, then children are more likely to disclose.