

Talking to Children About Consent

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Stacey Jacobs, she/her

SVPRO – Sexual Violence Prevention & Response Office



Colonization & Consent



Our history is one of non-consent

- Sexual and gender-based violence has been used historically and currently to take power and control over Indigenous communities and lands
- The impacts of this are ongoing and evident in things such as non-consensual resource extraction and the large number of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit people
- In Canada this has included violence against other populations as well such as Black and Chinese people who were enslaved and faced sexual and physical violence as they worked for the colonizers' purposes





WHO IS THIS WORKSHOP FOR?

- Anyone who has little people in their lives, or wants to
 - Parents/Guardians/Caregivers/Caring Adults
 - Anyone who works with children, or wants to
 - Anyone passionate about consent
 - Anyone who wants to learn more about consent
-

EVERYONE!



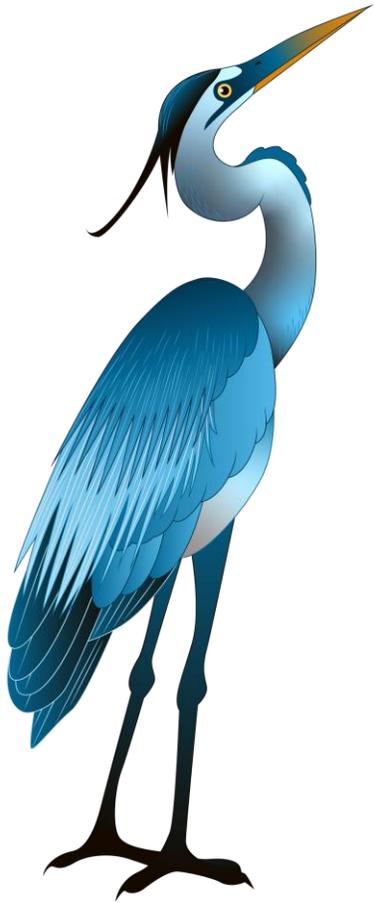
WHO NEEDS TO LEARN ABOUT CONSENT?

Adults and Children of ALL Genders
and ALL ages!

It is an everybody conversation.

EVERYONE!





Informed, compassionate and empowered children grow into informed, compassionate and empowered adults who are more likely to use consent in their lives and set appropriate boundaries.



Consent

- **Used in everyday interactions**, and sexual interactions
- a conscious decision by all people involved to engage in a mutually agreed upon activity, an agreement
- knowing and setting personal boundaries, while knowing and *respecting* the boundaries of others
- reversible, you can change your mind at any time
- a continuous process and ongoing conversation



**Helping to build a community of
respect, compassion,
understanding, support
& kindness**



Consent Culture

- a culture in which the prevailing narrative is one of mutual respect, understanding and support
- no one is forced, pressured, tricked, manipulated or coerced into anything
- based on the belief that a person is the best judge of their own needs and wants

When we create consent culture, we respect the emotional, the personal, and the physical needs of others we interact with professionally, casually, intimately, and sexually.

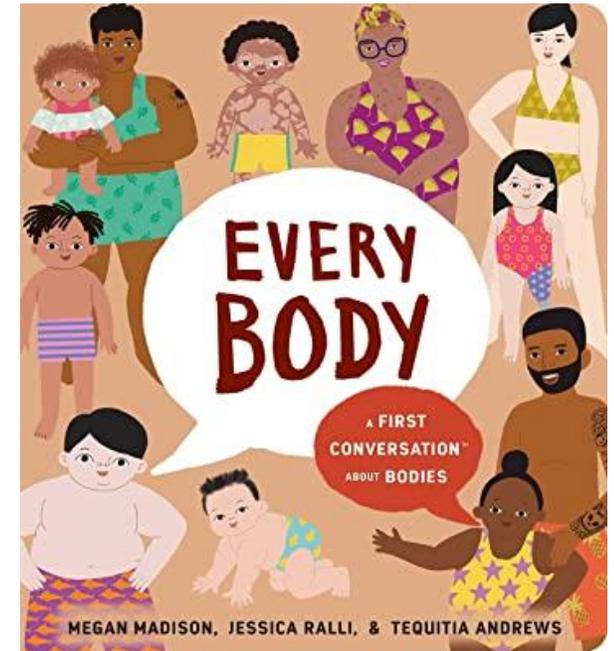
A pillar of consent culture is *autonomy*:

- the freedom to make decisions, including decisions about your body, without any outside interference
- It challenges us to think about the power dynamics of our relationships and consider others rights, needs, and wants, as well as our own



Talking to Children about Body Parts

- Teach children the correct names for ALL body parts including their genitals. Use words such as, vulva, vagina, clitoris, uterus, ovaries, penis, scrotum, testicles, prostate, breasts, nipples...
(practice alone if you cannot say these words out loud)
- Many people/parents/caregivers do not teach children the correct words - this may be because they are embarrassed, uncomfortable, scared, or they were never taught the correct words
- Many benefits to teaching children the correct words
- It is ok if children know other words - slang - for these body parts, as long as they also know the correct words



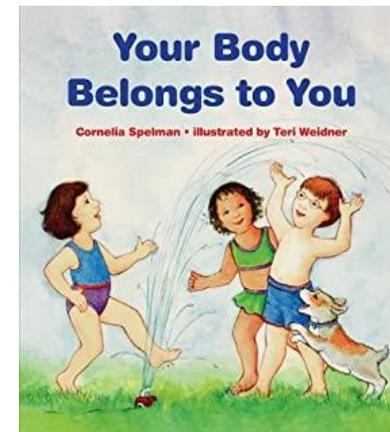
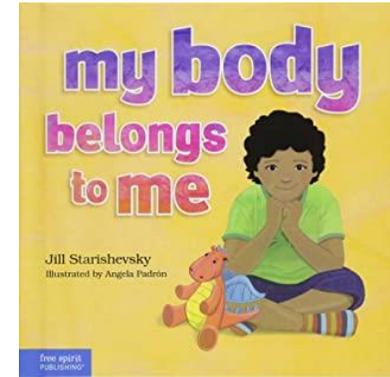
Talking to Children about Body Parts

- Boys are more often taught the correct names of their genitals
- Slang words for vulva or vagina are often more negative/derogatory/offensive than words for penis or testicles
- Boys given a larger amount of language, also given more positive and empowering language
- Clitoris is almost never mentioned or labelled, ignoring female pleasure – usually the vagina is mentioned in relation to male pleasure and pregnancy
- The vulva (external) is almost always labelled incorrectly as the vagina (internal)



Talking to Children about Body Parts

- Teach children “Your body belongs to you” - *their entire body, not just their genitals*
- Try calling genitals “middle parts” or “bathing suit parts” – calling genitals private parts may be conflated with shame and/or secrecy (Cory Silverberg)
- **Teach children to listen to their gut/tummy feelings, *their instincts****
- Read sexual health books with children - many books that discuss body parts, consent, how to say no, and your body belongs to you (*booklist in resources*)
- Believe children if they tell you someone touched them or made them feel uncomfortable. Tell them it was not their fault. Tell them you are not angry with them.



Educate2Empower Publishing

Books and resources to empower children and help keep them safe

<https://e2epublishing.info/free-resources>



My Early Warning Signs

If I feel unsafe my body lets me know.

Here is how!

Hair feels like it is standing on end

Sweaty brow

Start to cry

Heart beats fast

Goosebumps

Feel sick in the tummy

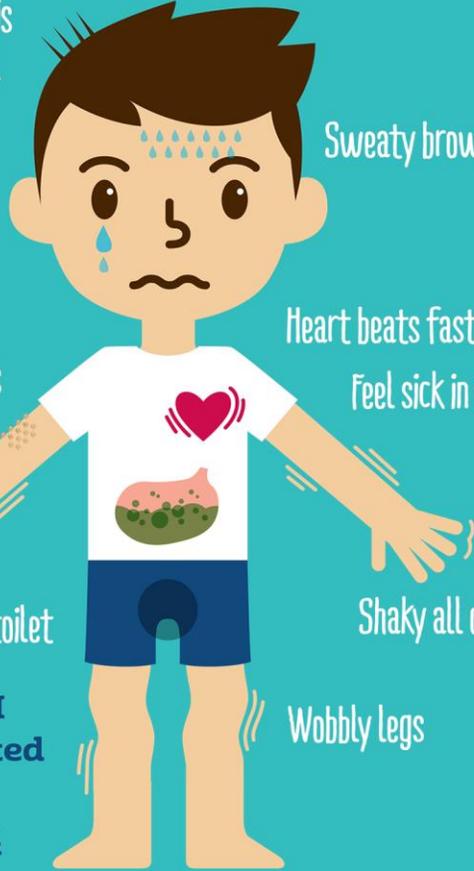
Sweaty palms

Need to go to the toilet

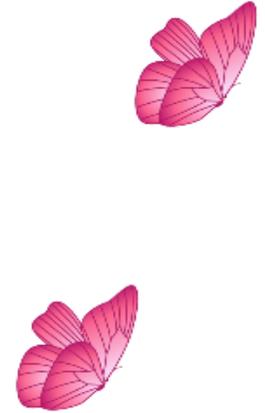
Shaky all over

If I feel unsafe, I must tell a trusted adult on my Safety Network straightaway!

Wobbly legs



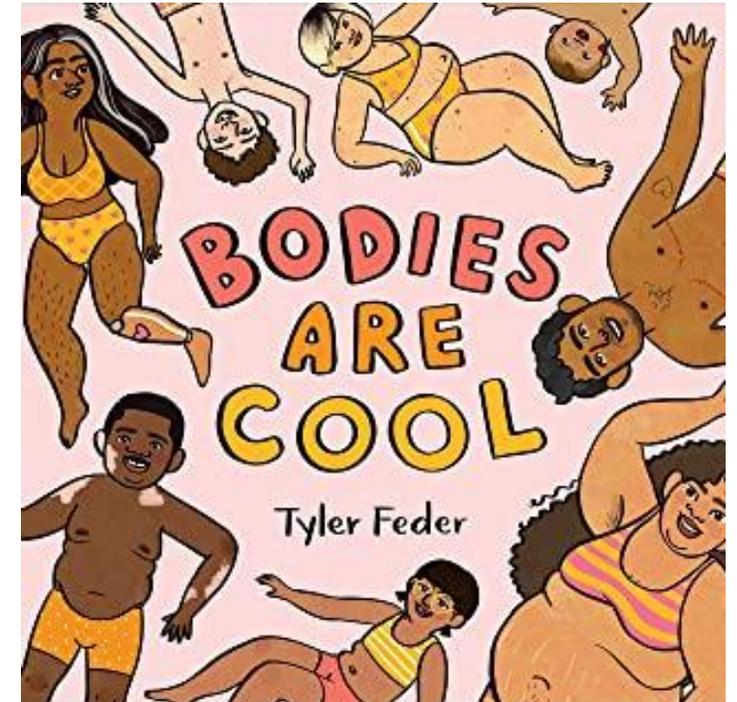
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Talking to Children about Body Parts



- Set a no secrets rule - teach children to talk about/tell you about secrets - often people who harm children ask them to keep it a secret
- **Instead of using the word “secret” at home, try using the word “surprise”***
- Children often touch their “genitals/middle parts” because it feels good and they are curious*
- Teach children it is not OK to touch “genitals/middle parts” in public – this is something that should be done alone in places such as bedrooms and bathrooms
- Do not shame children for this behaviour – it is not sexual when they are children, it is common behaviour*



Why it is Important to Correctly Name Body Parts

1. It may prevent childhood sexual abuse.

Some sexual offenders avoid children who know the correct names for their genitals because it tells them the child has been educated about their body and is more likely to tell someone about the abuse.

2. It may end childhood sexual abuse more quickly.

Children who have been taught the correct names for their genitals are more likely to disclose abuse, are more likely to be taken seriously when they disclose and are more likely to be understood when they disclose, leading to a more positive outcome for the child (e.g., ending the abuse, getting support and/or counselling, abuser being charged)



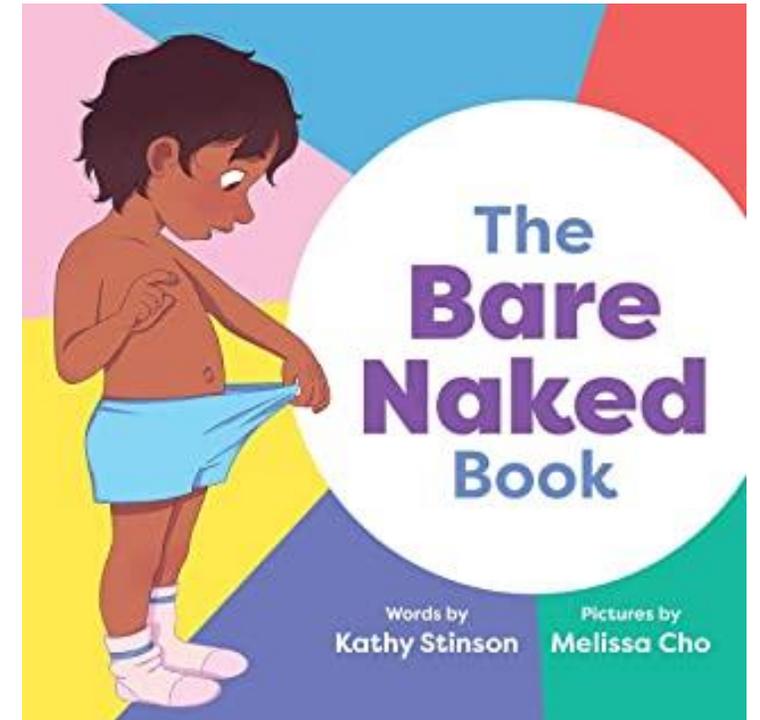
Why it is Important to Correctly Name Body Parts

3. It helps children develop a healthy, positive, body image when their genitals are not something to be ashamed of.

When genitals are given a correct name, they are respected like other body parts. We don't call other body parts by funny or derogatory names. We also don't pretend other body parts do not exist. We make genitals unspeakable by not naming them.

4. It gives children power, as language is power.

The more language they have to talk about their body, the more empowered they are.



Why it is Important to Correctly Name Body Parts

5. **It provides the necessary foundation for subsequent sexual health education** about relationships, consent, puberty, pregnancy, birth control, STIs, etc.

6. **It gives them the ability to talk to adults they trust**, such as parents and health care providers, about concerns they may have such as itchiness, irritation and pain.

It allows them to be specific about the body part and area they are referring to. Only knowing slang or made-up words can cause confusion.

7. **It gives them the ability to ask questions about their bodies** using words everyone can understand. Questions and curiosity are good!



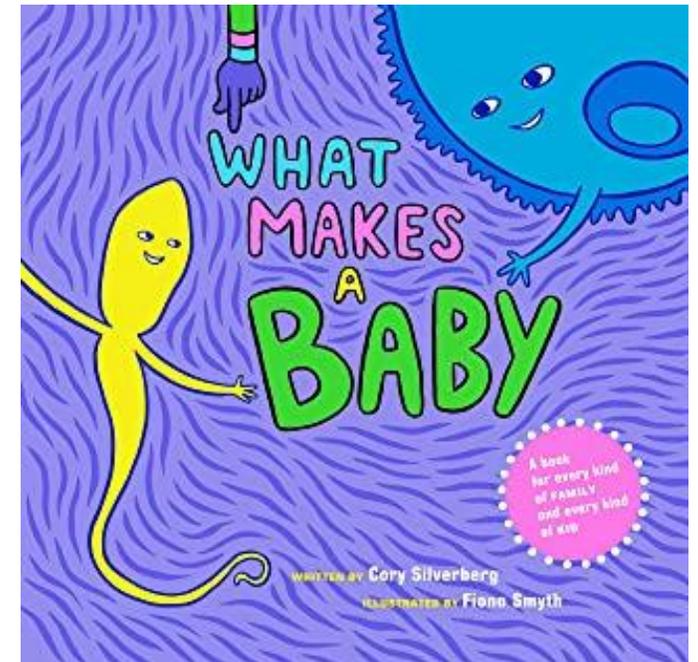
It is OK if children use the correct words for genitals at school or with other children?

Yes! Want to normalize this.



Teaching Children Consent

- Just like adults have the right to bodily autonomy, so do children
- We all have the right to decide what we want to do with our bodies – who touches them and how, who sees them, how we move them...
- Some children are not comfortable with physical touch, especially children with some forms of neurodivergence
- By hugging, kissing, tickling and chasing children who have not said yes, they are being taught they do not have control over what happens to their body
- When adults touch children without asking and/or ignore the verbal or non-verbal 'no' of the child, children learn adults can touch them without permission and without their consent



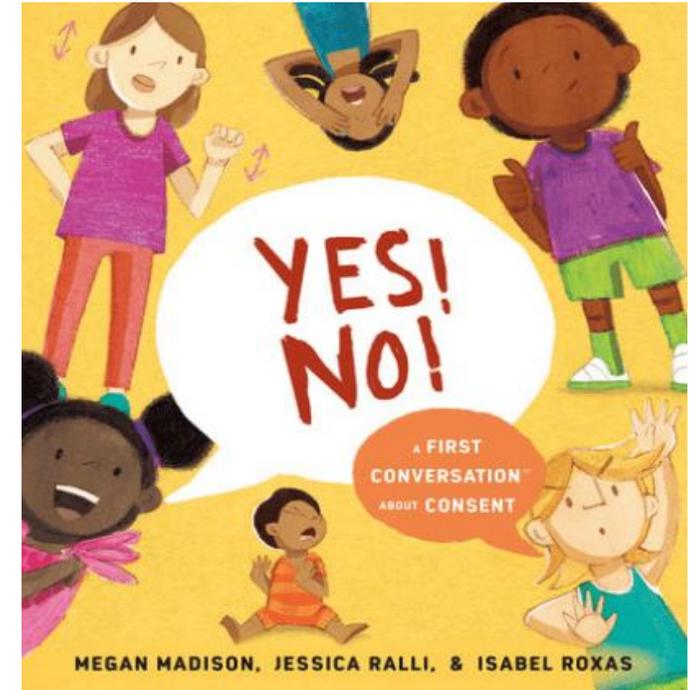
Teaching Children Consent

- Use the word consent!
- A child who understands consent is more likely to say no to someone who is touching them inappropriately or making them feel uncomfortable and tell a *trusted adult**
- They are also more likely to have healthy, consensual, satisfying and pleasurable relationships throughout their lives if consent is taught early and becomes an expected part of their relationships
- Relationships with friends, family members, co-workers and intimate partners
- They are also more likely to pass this expectation on to other children they interact with



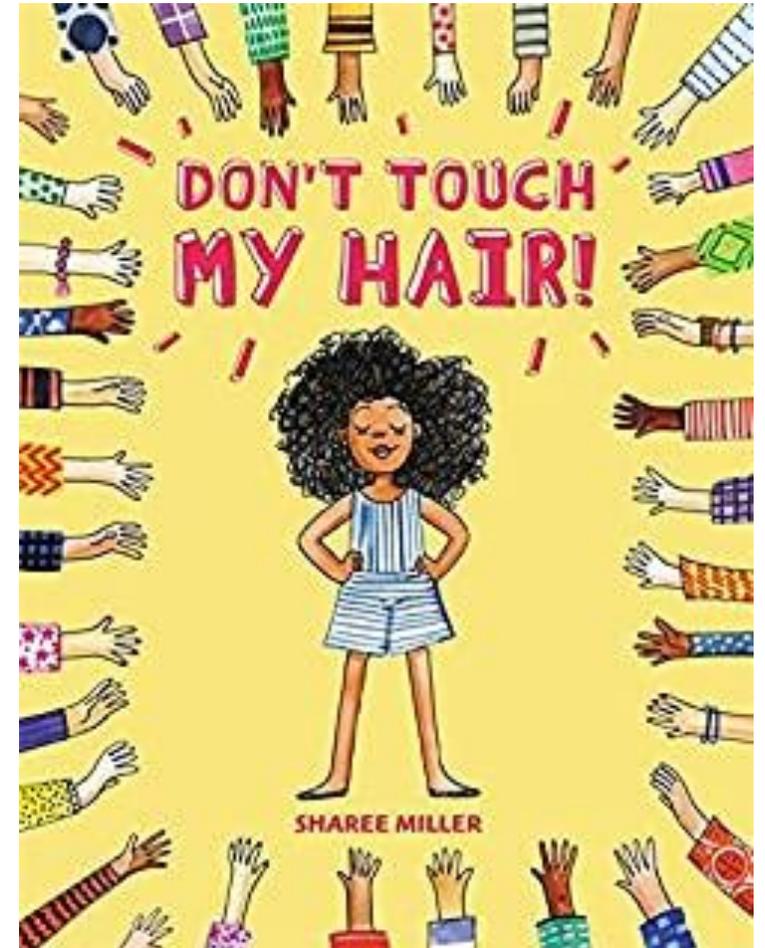
Teaching Children Consent

- Teach how to both get consent *and* give consent
- Many ways to say yes and no*
- Ask children before you touch them, expect children to ask before they touch you (this will take time and consistent practice)
- Respect their answer if they say no, thank them for setting a boundary
- If it is not optional, explain to them why you need to touch them (e.g., need to wash their face, put on their bike helmet, braid their hair, hold their hand on the street etc.) and **do not** phrase it as a question
- Give them options if possible (e.g., would you like to hug Auntie, blow them a kiss or say good-bye?) make sure all options are realistic – this teaches respect for self and others *

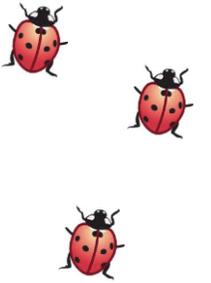


Teaching Children Consent

- Asking children before touching them let's children know they are being listened to and respected
- Teaches children they have a voice and what they have to say is important, how they feel is important and should be respected
- They get to decide – they have agency
- Try to be clear with your language, say what you mean, follow through with what you say
- By 18 months many children can understand “no” and respond somewhat appropriately



Consent for Kids



<https://youtu.be/h3nhM9UIJjc>

2 min 42
secs

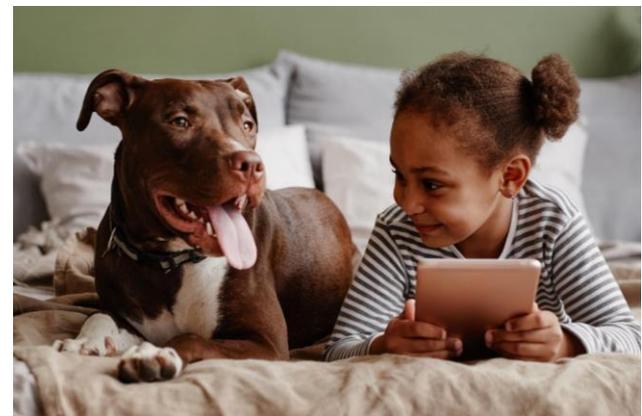
Examples

- May I pick you up? Would you like a hug?
- Please hold my hand while we cross the busy street.
- Please ask before jumping on my lap.
- She also likes to play with this toy, how could we share it?
- I bought a new book for us; would you like to read it today or tomorrow?
- It sounds like they changed their mind, can you please check in and see how they are feeling.
- Remember I told you on Tuesdays I spend time with my friends.
- He looks upset, did you ask before eating one of his cookies?
- I have a video I would like us to watch today. Would you like a snack while we watch it?



Teaching Children Consent Using Pets!

Pets/animals communicate with body language and noises, but not words.

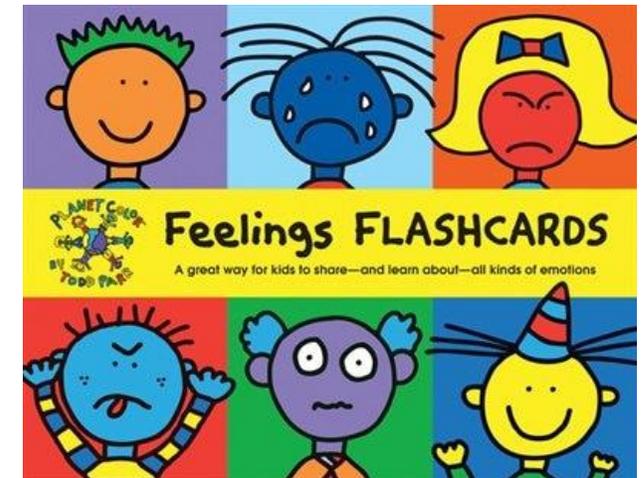
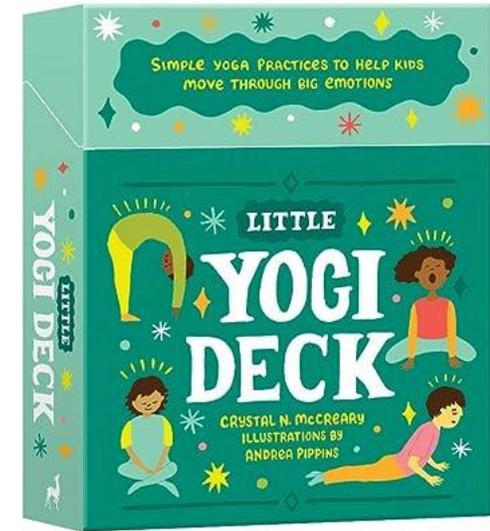


Talking about Feelings

- Much of our communication is non-verbal
- Sometimes people cannot communicate verbally or chose not to
- If unsure always ask and get clarification

Useful skills:

- Ability to read facial expressions
 - Ability to read body language
 - Ability to be empathetic to others
 - Understanding theirs and others' emotions
- Give permission to talk about strong complex emotions (anger, shame, powerlessness, fear, sadness, guilt...)



Modelling Consent

- Model how to give and **get** consent
- Entire community could/should model this behaviour – talk to your friends, family and communities about it
- Ask before taking a picture of someone, including children
- Ask before posting a picture of someone, including children
- Depending on child's age you can ask their parent/guardian/caregiver



Rejection



- We live in a world where people often do not take "no" for an answer
- People pester, push, pressure, bribe and manipulate to get what they want
- **When a person is worn down over time and finally says "yes", this is not consent.** The person pushing for a "yes" is disregarding the needs, boundaries, and autonomy of the other person and are instead choosing to act in their own self-interest

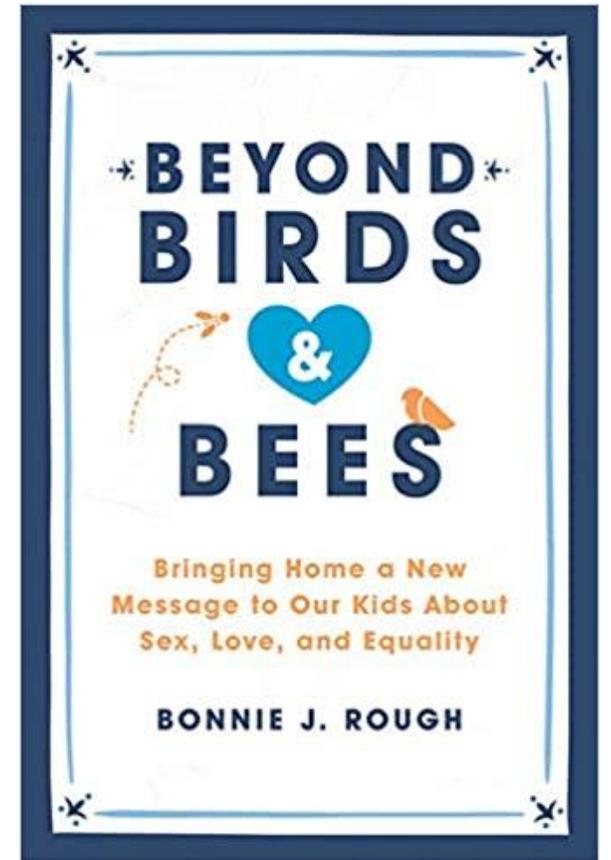


Politeness Conditioning

“When somebody asks you to touch them and you say no, it’s not okay for them to keep asking. It’s hard to keep saying no, but you have the right to do that.”

(Bonnie J. Rough, 2018, Beyond the Birds and Bees)

- Not taking no for an answer – taught in our society
- Wearing people down teaches to go against instincts
- Pestering/pushing/pressuring – raises tolerance for being bothered, bullied, harassed
- **Resistance becomes normalized**
- Learning to be polite while ignoring our own comfort and boundaries (politeness conditioning) leads to the normalization of sexual harassment, sexual assault and sexual violence



Co-view and have discussions
Media is very influential
and often portrays non-consent



Communication is Key!



- Begin talking to children at a young age and continue these conversations*
- If you make consent and correct words for body parts, part of everyday conversation it becomes the norm and it becomes comfortable and expected
- Read books - or listen to them (many are on YouTube) Watch videos
- Talk to other caregivers/parents/people who work with children...
- Discuss emotions, explain emotions, normalize emotions
- Model consent in everyday activities
- **Role play** scenarios with children, practice saying no, practice accepting no



Values Clarification Exercise

An opportunity to reflect on your values, beliefs, attitudes and biases.



RESOURCES



Found in Resource Section of SVPRO website

CARE



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