

# Talking to Children About Consent

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UNIVERSITY OF  
**WATERLOO**



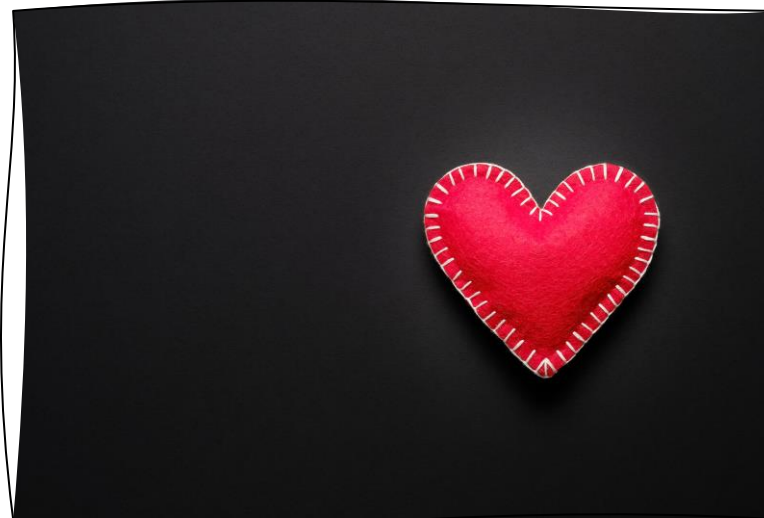
# Colonization & Consent



Image Credit: S. Jacobs, SVPRO

- **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?

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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

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**EVERYONE!**





## **WHO NEEDS TO LEARN ABOUT CONSENT?**

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People and Children of ALL Genders!

It is an everybody conversation.

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**EVERYONE!**



# Consent

## Consent:

- 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
- Used in ALL interactions, and sexual interactions

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



# Consent Culture

## Consent culture:

- a culture in which the prevailing narrative is one of mutual respect, understanding and support
- no one is forced, pressured or tricked 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 and are taught them as early as possible (question the slang used as some is offensive and derogatory, especially when referring to the vagina and vulva)



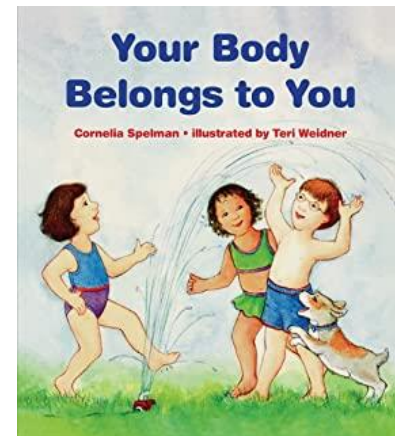
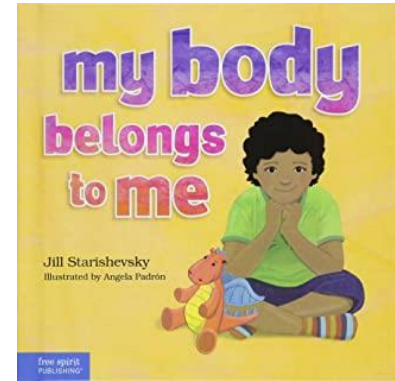
# Talking to Children about Body Parts ♥

- Boys are more often taught the correct names of their genitals
- Slang words for vulva or vagina are often more negative/derogatory 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 (for the penis) and pregnancy
- The vulva (external) is almost always referred to as the vagina (internal)



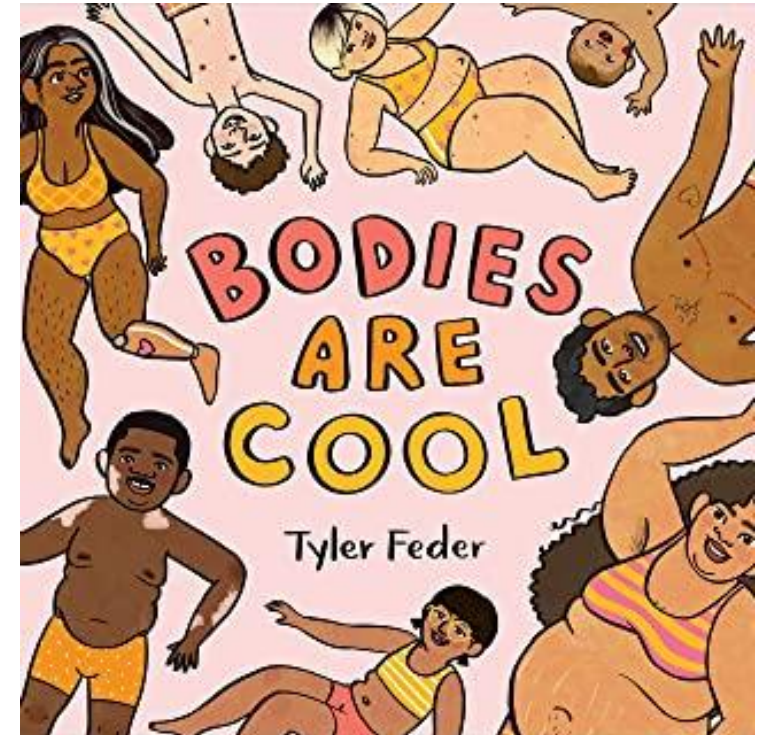
# Talking to Children about Body Parts

- Teach children consent and “Your body belongs to you”  
Their entire body, not just their genitals
- Do not call genitals private parts – try “middle parts” – privacy 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.



# Talking to Children about Body Parts ♥

- 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 “middle parts” because it feels good and they are curious – this is not harmful – it will depend on an adults beliefs and values what they think about this
- Teach children it is not OK to touch “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).



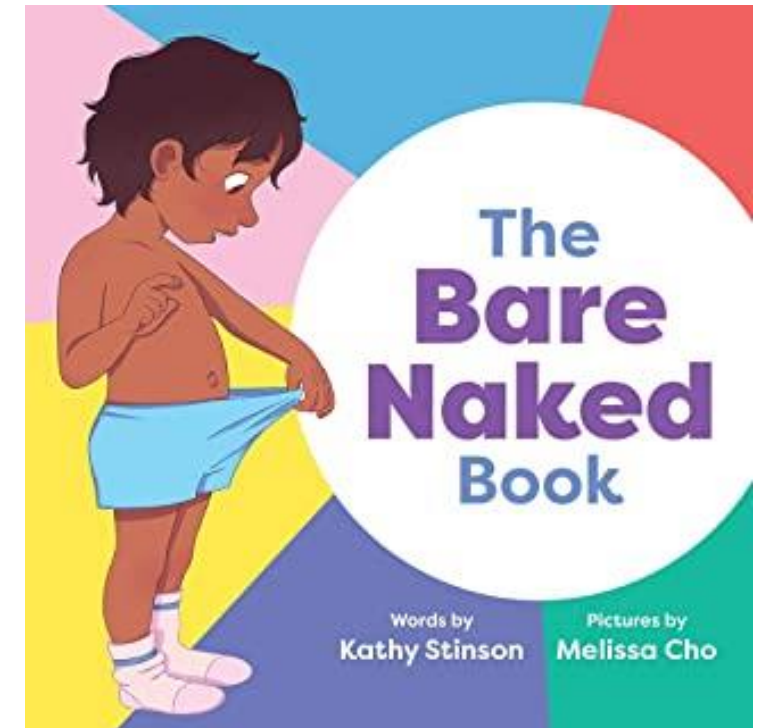
# Why it is Important to Correctly Name Body Parts

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

When they 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, 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 funny 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!





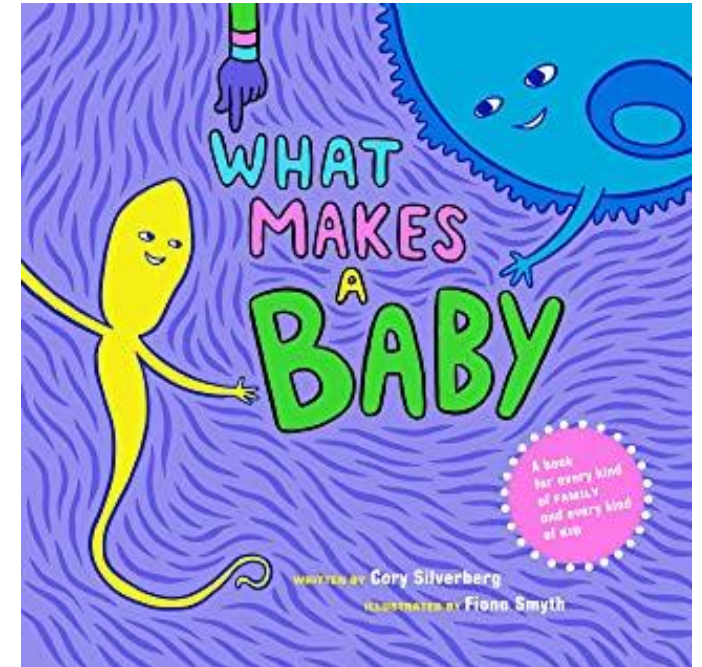
It is OK if children use the correct words for genitals at school or with other children.

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...
- 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

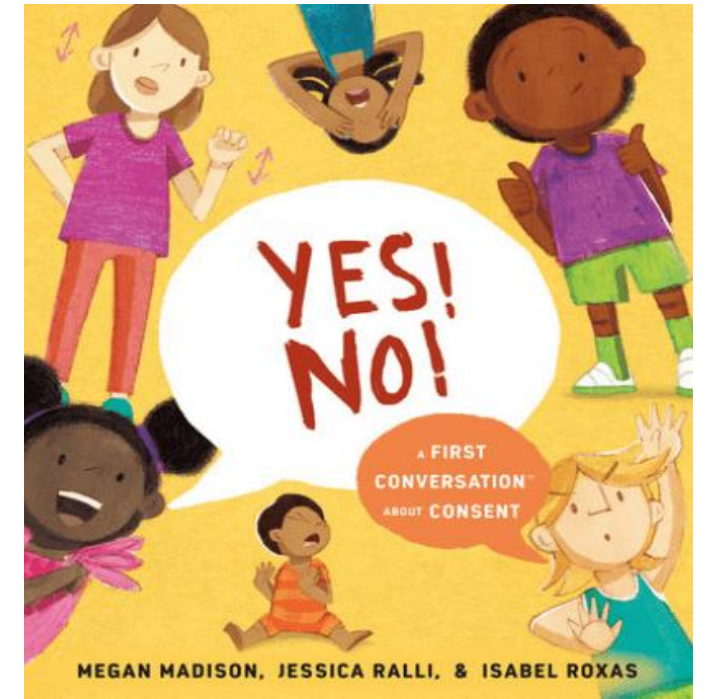
- A child who understands consent is more likely to say no to someone who is touching them inappropriately and tell a *trusted adult* – use the word consent
- They are also more likely to have healthy, consensual, satisfying and pleasurable relationships throughout their lives if consent is taught early 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





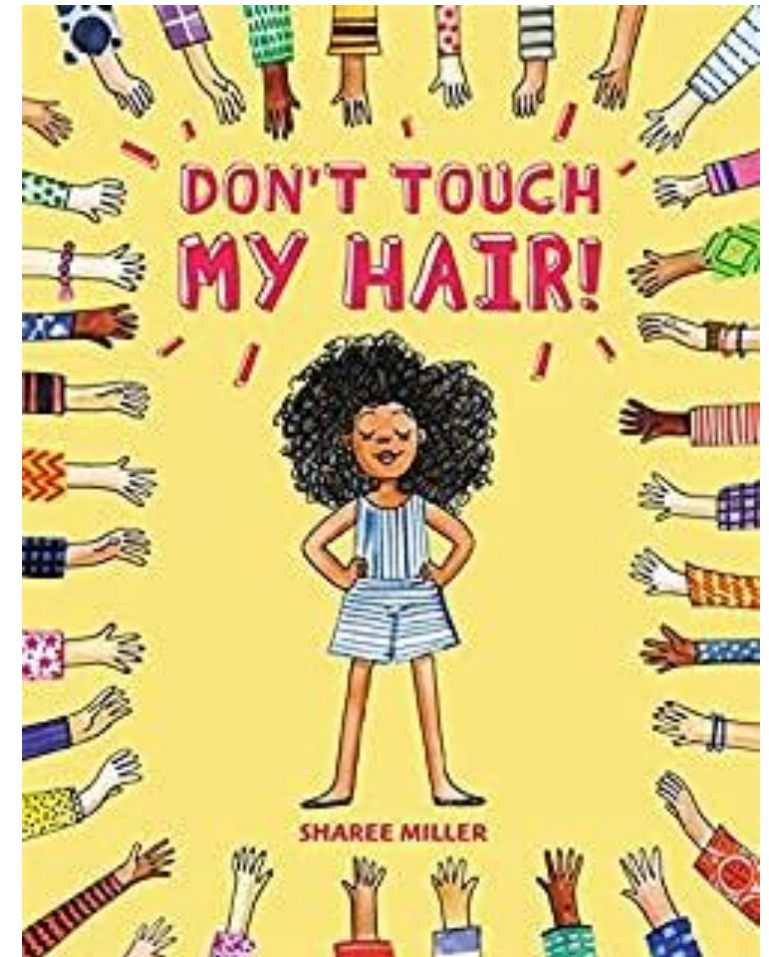
# Teaching Children Consent

- Teach how to both get consent *and* give consent
- 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
- 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



# 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
- They get to decide – they have agency



# Examples

- Can I pick you up?
- Would you like to hold my hand?
- Please ask before jumping on my lap.
- This is your belly button. This is your vulva.
- Would you like to read a book? Which book?
- They also like to play with this toy, how could we share it?
- I bought a new book, I would really like to read it with you, we could read it today or tomorrow, which would you prefer?
- It sounds like they changed their mind, can you please check in and see how they are feeling.
- Did you ask before you ate one of their cookies?
- They do not look happy; did you ask before holding their hand?
- I found a video that I really like, I would like us to watch it today.





# Consent for Kids

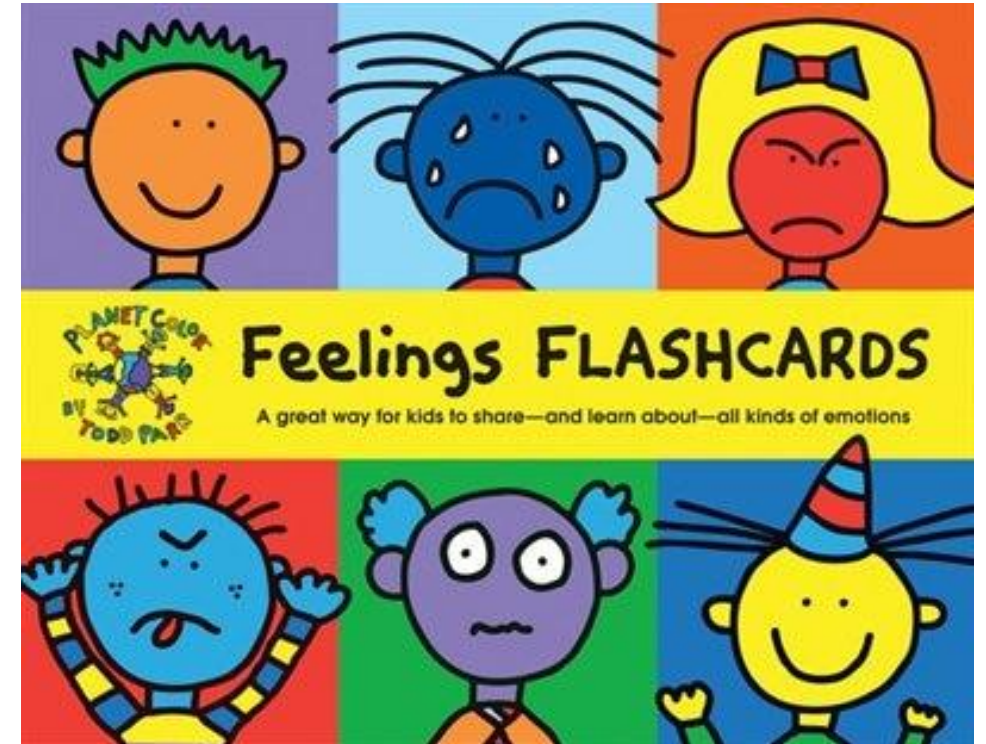


2 min 42 secs - <https://youtu.be/h3nhM9UIJjc>

# Teaching Children Consent

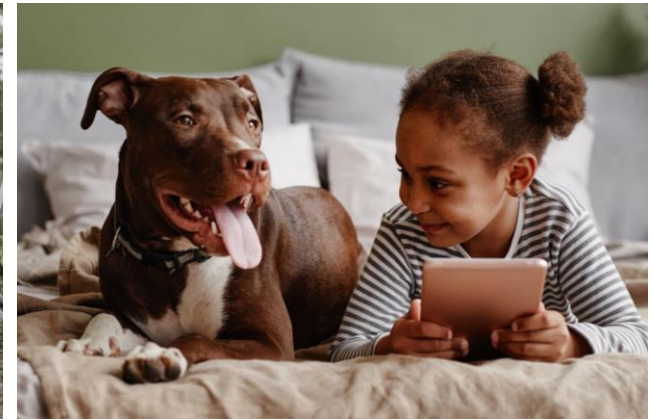
Useful skills:

- Ability to read facial expressions
- Ability to read body language
- Ability to be empathetic to others
- Understanding theirs and others' emotions
- Much of our communication is non-verbal
- Sometimes people cannot communicate verbally or chose for various reasons not to use verbal language
- If unsure always ask and get clarification
- Give permission to talk about strong complex emotions (anger, shame, powerlessness, fear, sadness, guilt...)





# Teaching Children Consent Using Pets!





# Modelling Consent

- Model how to give and get consent
- Entire community could/should model this behaviour
- 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



# Helping Others

- Model helping others
- Model supporting others (e.g., Are you OK?)
- Talk about harm in language children understand (e.g., someone's feelings were hurt, someone was crying, someone looked sad)
- Discuss why this happened, how it could have been prevented, what can be done during and after
- Brainstorm strategies/role play
- Talk about staying safe, safety first
- Talk about saying sorry



# 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.



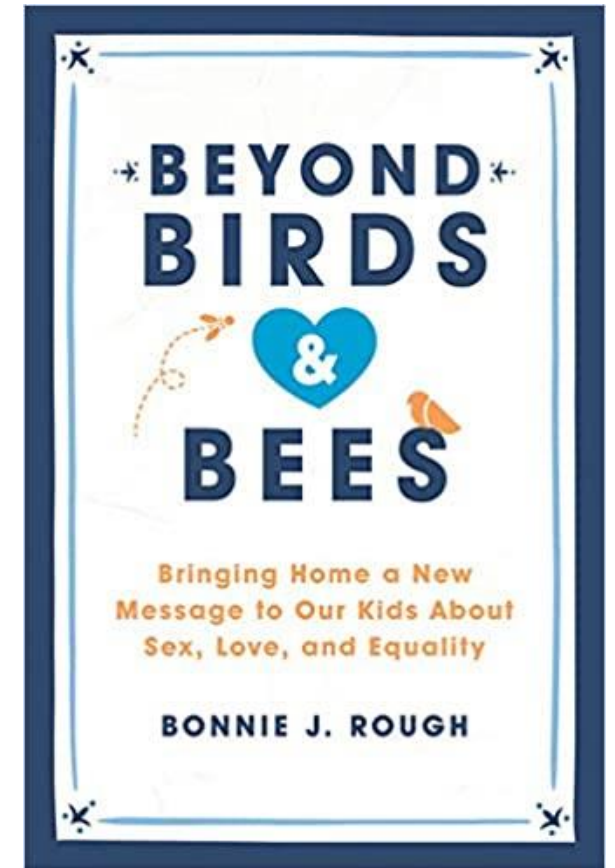


# Politeness Conditioning

“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 leads to the normalization of sexual harassment, sexual assault and sexual violence



# Communication is key!!

- Begin talking to children at a young age (the earlier the better) and continue these conversations as they age
- 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
- Talk to other caregivers/parents/people who work with children...
- Discuss emotions, show emotions, explain emotions
- Model helping others
- Role play scenarios with children, practice saying no, practice accepting no
- Role Model - Practice consent yourself in everyday activities



# Gender

- Make a point to think about gender – gender influences how people behave in relationships and influences who has power and control in our society
- Gender influences if, when, and how consent is used
- Clothing, toys, books, behaviour, feelings and colours are gendered
- Children are socialized to act in gendered ways (e.g., politeness conditioning)
- Gender stereotypes still exist
- Gender expectations are often placed on children
- Children of all genders should receive the same comprehensive Sexual Health Education





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



# VALUES CLARIFICATION EXERCISE

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



# RESOURCES



<https://uwaterloo.ca/sexual-violence-prevention-response-office/resources/training-workshop-resources>





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