

Talking to Children About Consent

6/5/2025

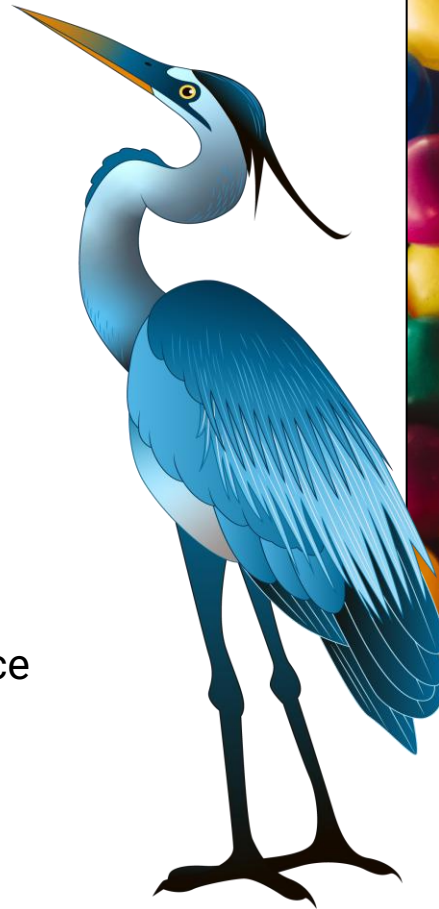


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SVPRO – Sexual Violence Prevention & Response Office



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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 from 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 who wants to learn more about consent
-

EVERYONE!

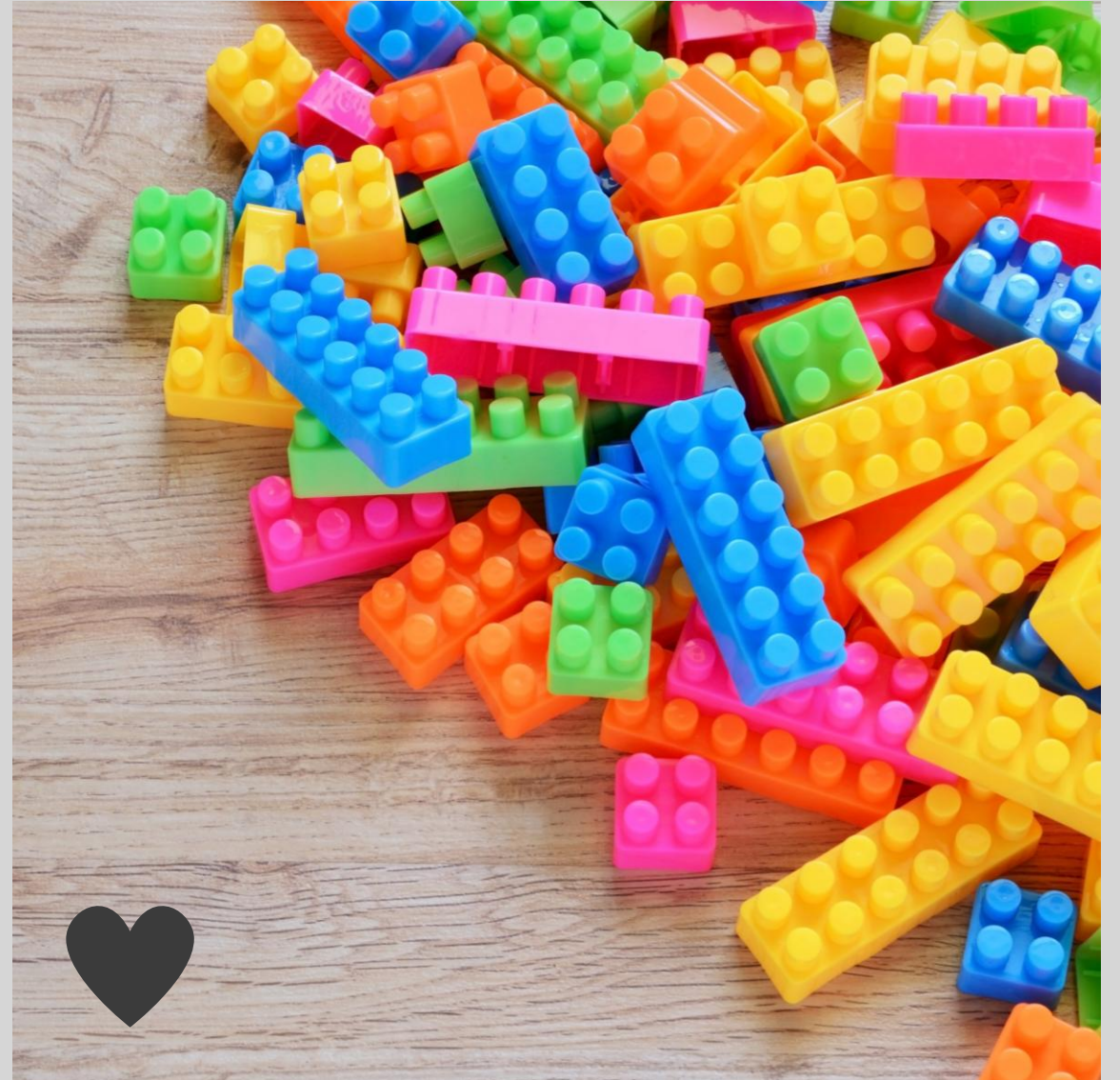


WHO NEEDS TO LEARN ABOUT CONSENT?

Adults and Children of ALL Genders
and ALL ages!

It is an everybody, everyday
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

- **Can be used in everyday interactions**, as well as sexual interactions
- a conscious decision by all people involved to engage in a mutually agreed upon activity
- Freely given without manipulation, threat or pressure
- reversible, you can change your mind at any time
- a continuous process and ongoing conversation, cannot consent for future self
- Informed



Consent Definition for Children:

“Agreeing to do something because you want to”

“Other people agree because they also want to”



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

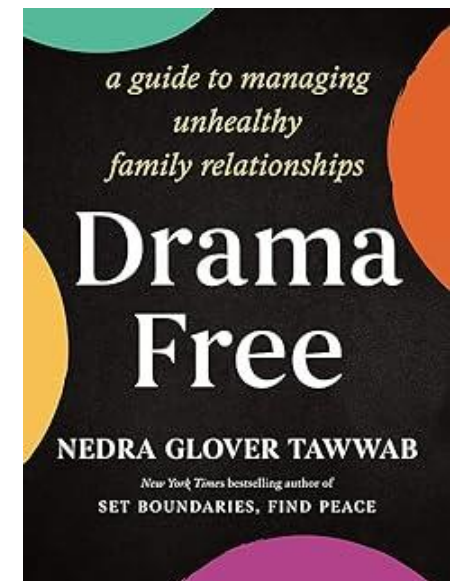
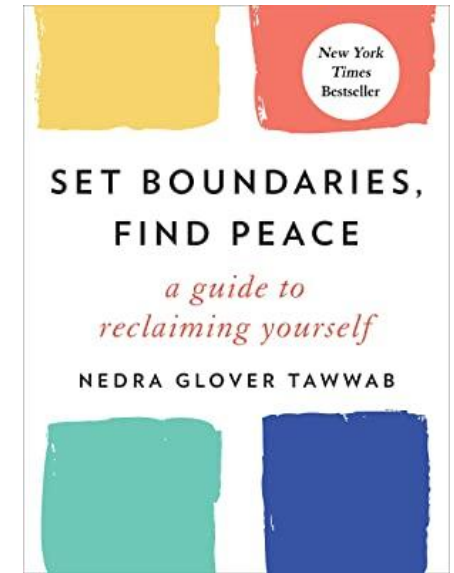
By creating and modelling a culture of consent we are creating an environment where children feel safe, empowered and have a voice.



Boundaries

- Consent requires that boundaries are set, acknowledged and respected
- Model for children setting and enforcing boundaries AND asking others about their boundaries
- State boundaries clearly, concisely and assertively
- Often people invade or dismiss boundaries – helpful for children to see examples of healthy boundary setting and respecting
- Helpful to know what boundaries people have – leads to more honest and respectful interactions

<https://www.nedratawwab.com/>



Boundaries

According to Dr. Becky Kennedy a parent has two jobs that work in tandem:

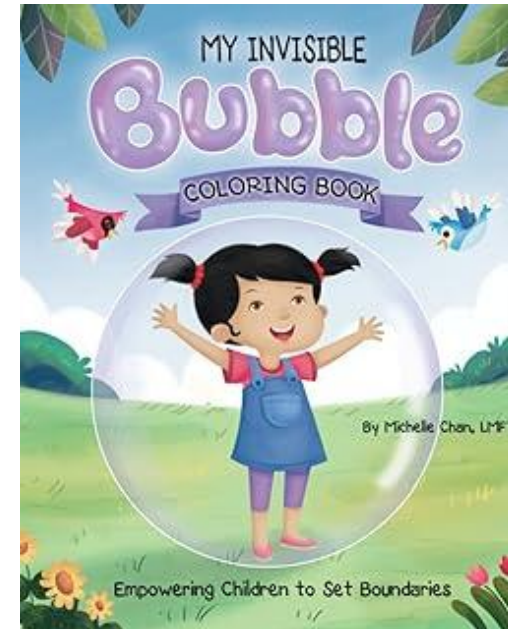
- 1) Setting Boundaries – making key decisions and setting limits that keep children safe
- 2) Validating Feelings – connecting to a child's lived experience by acknowledging their emotions

For example, "Screen time is over, I know it is disappointing when your show gets interrupted but it's time for bed."

Boundary Definition

Dr. Becky Kennedy, <https://www.goodinside.com/>

"Something you tell your children you will do, and it doesn't require your child to do anything."



Boundaries



- Physical Boundaries – personal space and physical touch
- Material Boundaries – your possessions, your stuff – getting to decide if you share and under what conditions
- Intellectual Boundaries – your thoughts and ideas – your right to have opinions
- Emotional Boundaries – your feelings – right to have them and for them to be supported
- Spiritual Boundaries – your spiritual & religious beliefs – your right for them to be respected
- Sexual Boundaries – using consent for all forms of sexual touch, also includes comfort with sexual jokes, comments, stories and media (with children this boundary is a hard no)
- Boundaries on our time – how we manage our time, how others use our time, favour requests
- Technology boundaries – how we use technology and how others use it in relation or proximity to us, and the expectations to use it (e.g., social media)

Boundaries are Everywhere

WHAT ARE BOUNDARIES?

Boundaries make
people feel **SAFE**

Boundaries let
people say **NO**

Boundaries let
you be the **BOSS** of
your **BODY**

HOW DO I SET A BOUNDARY?

Use your
WORDS

Show with
ACTIONS

LOVE
your boundaries!

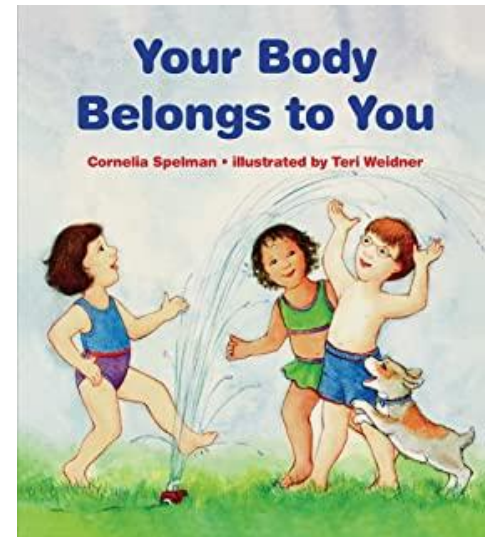
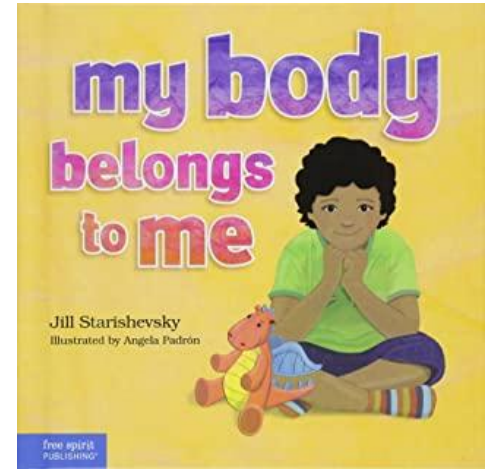
REMEMBER...

BOUNDARIES
ARE
EVERYWHERE!



Teaching Body Safety

- Teach children “Your body belongs to you” - *their entire body, not just their genitals* and “you are in charge of your body”
- Could call genitals “middle parts” or “bathing suit parts” or “private parts”
- Read sexual health books with children - many books that discuss body parts, consent, and body safety (*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

Feel sick in the tummy

Goosebumps

Sweaty palms

Shaky all over

Need to go to the toilet

Wobbly legs

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

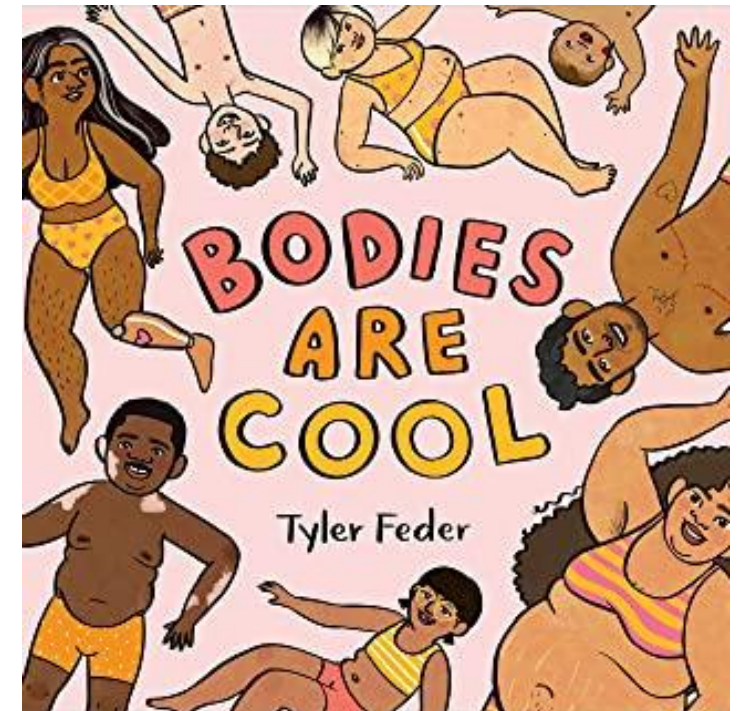


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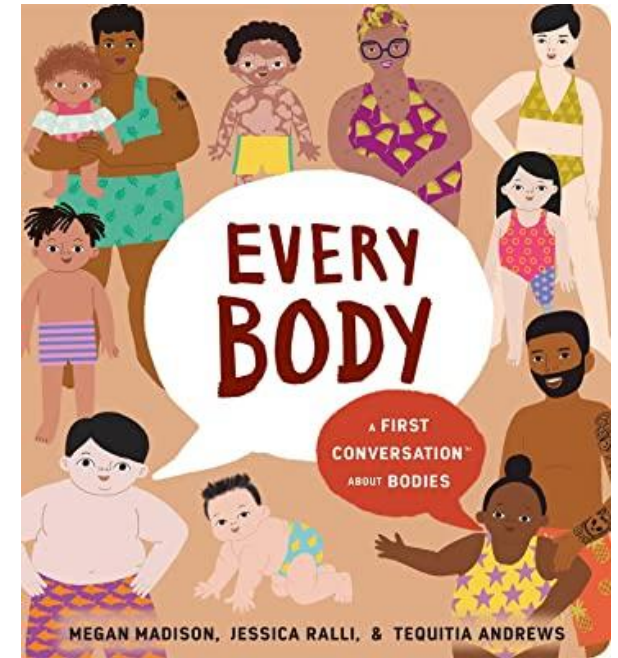
Teaching Body Safety

- No secrets! - teach children to talk about/tell you about secrets and ask for help - 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/private parts” because it feels good, and they are curious
- Teach children it is not OK to touch “genitals/private 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 ***



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, 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 themselves
- Many benefits to teaching 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



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)



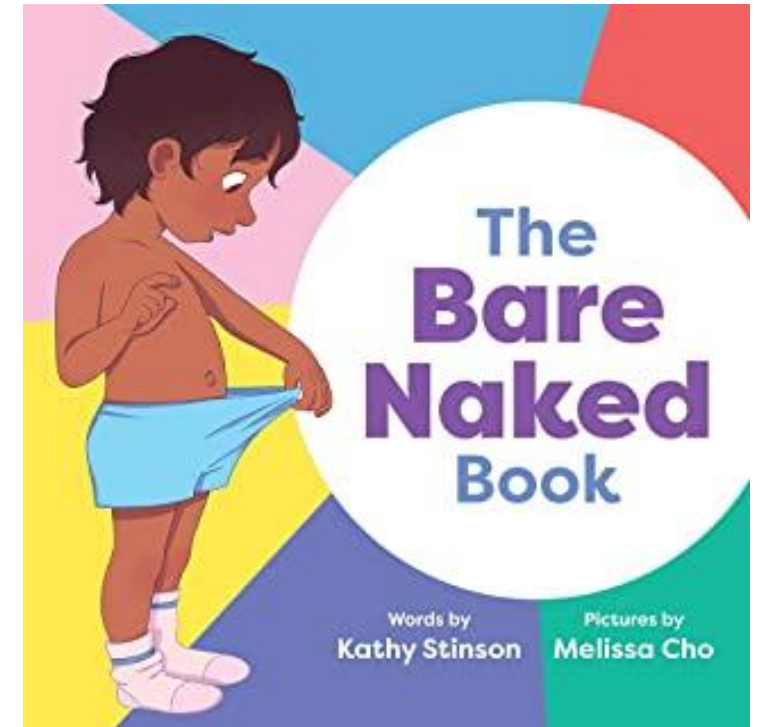
Why it is Important to Correctly Name Body Parts

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

When given a correct name, genitals 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 body parts 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.

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?

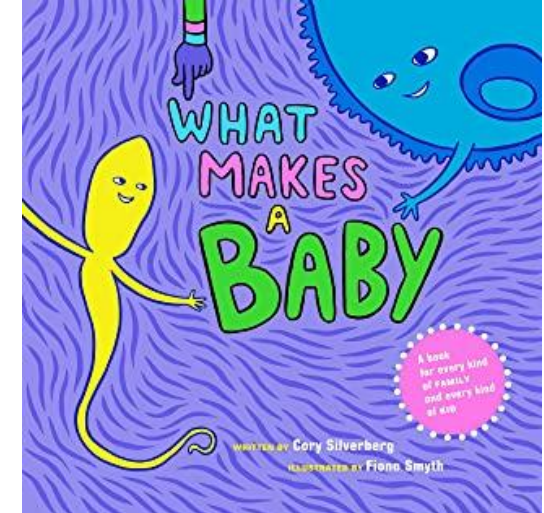
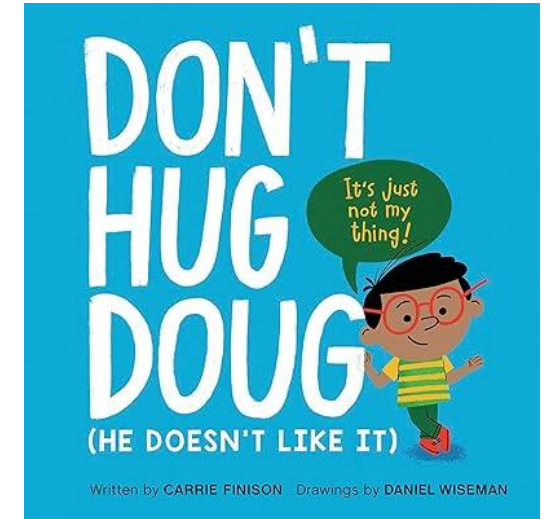
Yes! We want to normalize this language.



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, how they are touched, who sees them, how we move them...
- Some children are not comfortable with physical touch, especially children with some forms of neurodivergence, we want to respect this
- 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

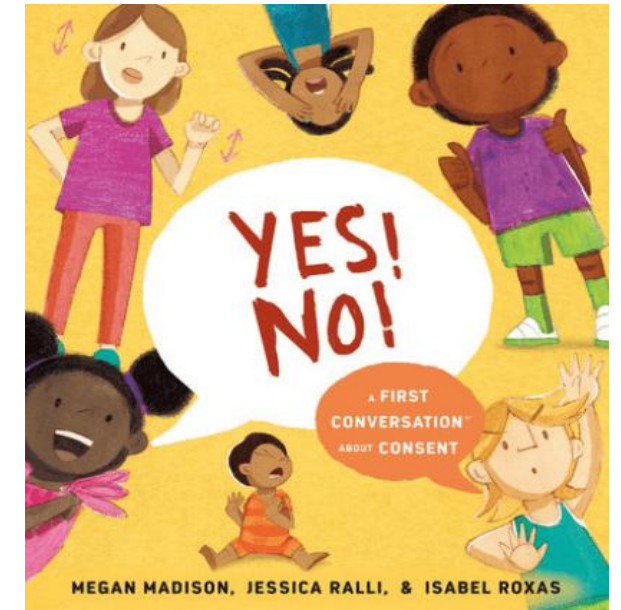
- Use the word consent! Explain what it is.
- A child who understands consent is more likely to say no to someone who is touching them inappropriately or making them feel uncomfortable and tell a *trusted adult**
- They are also more likely to have healthy, consensual, satisfying and pleasurable relationships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



Teaching Children Consent

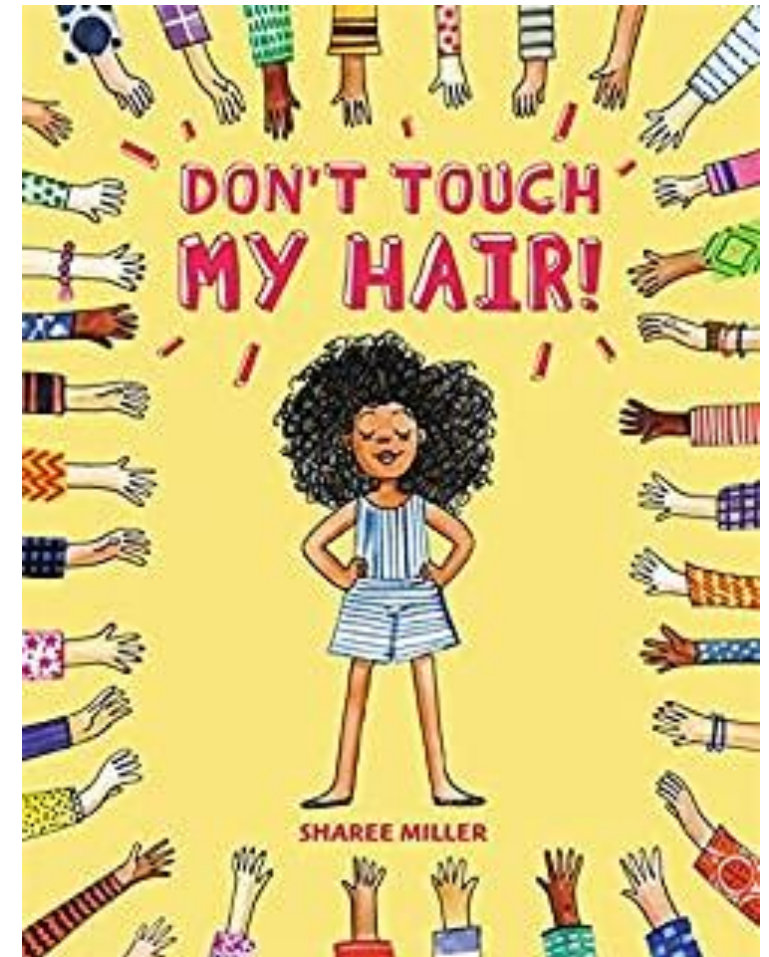


- Teach how to both get consent and give consent
- Talk about the many ways to say yes and no*
- Ask children before you touch them, expect children to ask before they touch you (this will take time and consistent practice)
- Respect their answer if they say no, thank them for setting a boundary
- If 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 and how they feel is important
- 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



People/children say no in many ways...



- Stop
- Not really
- Silence
- Not today
- Maybe, Maybe later
- Shrug
- I don't like that
- I'm not sure
- I don't know
- Crying
- Looking away, looking down
- I must ask _____ first
- Not a good time for me
- Hiding
- I'm tired
- Not today, but maybe tomorrow
- Shaking head, no
- I'd love to, but I can't
- I don't have the capacity right now
- I'm busy
- I'm honored you asked, but no
- Sounds lovely, maybe next time
- Changing the subject
- Ignoring the question
- Making excuses
- **Everyone has the right to say no**



Consent for Kids

CONSENT
for
KIDS



<https://youtu.be/h3nhM9UIJjc>

2 min 42
secs



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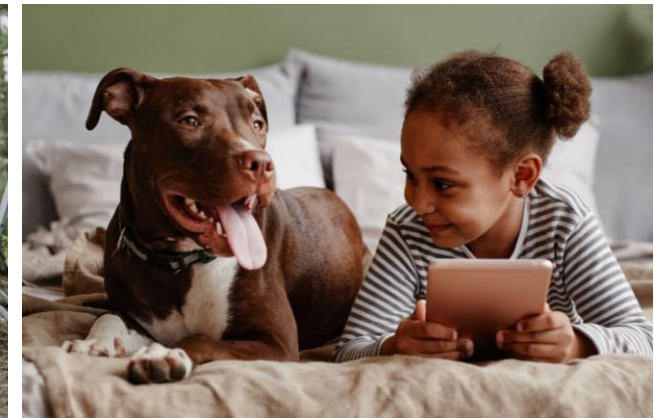
Examples of Using Consent and Setting Boundaries

- 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 us a new book! 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.
- I can't put you to bed tonight, 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.



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

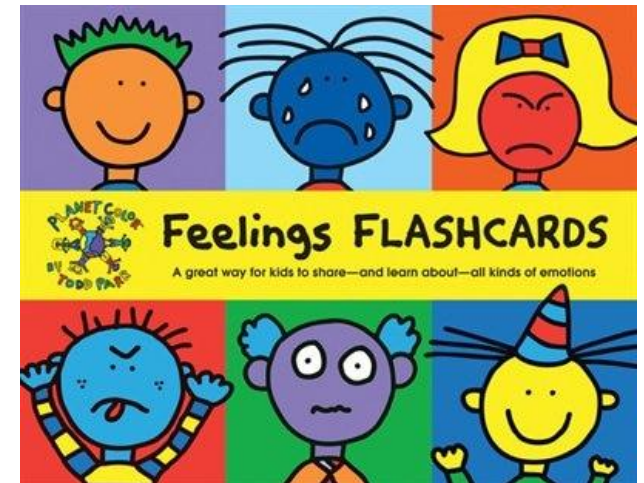
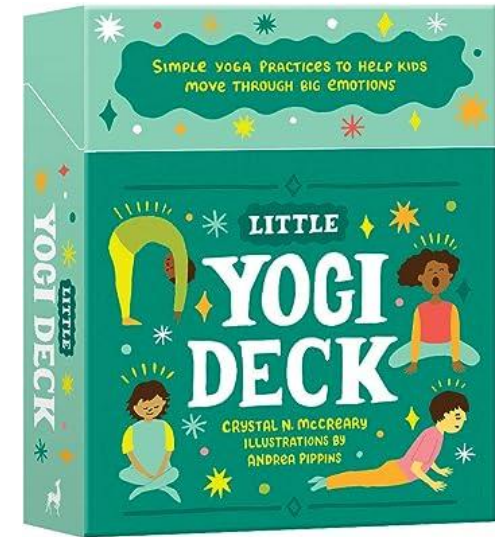


Talking about Feelings

- Give permission to talk about strong complex emotions (anger, shame, powerlessness, fear, sadness, guilt...)*
- Ask children to put themselves in another's shoes
- **Margaret Atwood: "fiction teaches empathy"**
read stories together
- Much of our communication is non-verbal

Useful skills:

- Ability to read facial expressions
- Ability to read body language
- Ability to be empathetic to others
- Understanding theirs and others' emotions



HAPPERMATIONS™

SEX POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS FOR TODDLERS

GREAT FOR
AGES 2-7



WORDS TO DESCRIBE FEELINGS



Happy

Tired

Hurt

Joyful

Bored

Sad

Confident

Calm



Excited

Loved

Worried

Lonely

Cheerful

Brave

Nervous

Confused

Motivated

Special



Embarrassed

Proud

Playful

Awkward

Hopeful

Silly

Anxious

Overwhelmed

Supported



Surprised

Jealous

Curious

Shocked



Afraid

Interested

Hyper

Scared

Mad

Useful

Upset



Relaxed

Stressed

Angry

Grateful

Quiet

Disgusted

Frustrated

Peaceful

Safe

Showing Affection

- Teach children how to show affection, if you like someone you can...
- If you like someone you do not tease them, pick on them, pull their hair...
- People of all genders can show love and affection



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

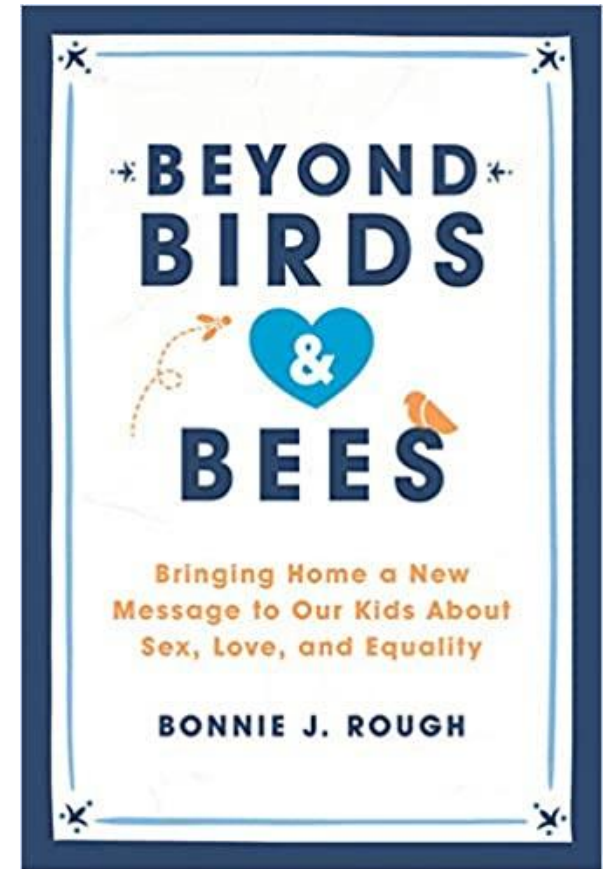


Politeness Conditioning

“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 our instincts
- Pestering/pushing/pressuring – raises tolerance for being bothered, bullied, harassed
- **Resistance becomes normalized**
- Being taught 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 and sexual violence



Media Education/Literacy

The issue of sexuality is raised for children every time they look at their phone, computer, tablet, turn on the TV, step out their front door, browse the Internet...

Therefore every child is being taught by a sex education curriculum developed by the media.

- David Hingsburger



Helping Others

- Model helping and supporting others
- Say or do something when you see teasing, harassment or harm
- Talk about harm (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 or role play
- Talk about being sorry and apologizing - accountability



Bystander Intervention for Kids! Be a Super ally with the 5D's



<https://youtu.be/js5oGnS41PM>

3 mins

Gender

- Make a point to think about gender - gender stereotypes are prevalent and influence how people behave in relationships and often determine who has power and control in our society
- Gender influences if, when, and how consent is used
- Clothing, toys, books, behaviour, feelings, colours etc. are gendered
- Children are socialized to act in gendered ways (e.g., politeness conditioning, “boys will be boys”)
- Gender expectations and roles are often placed on children, gender scripts* can lead to non-consensual sexual behaviour
- Children of all genders should receive the same Sexual Health Education, Relationship Education and Consent Education



Lego - a non-gendered toy

Femmephobia

- Femmephobia refers to the way society devalues and regulates femininity, or anything deemed feminine, whether expressed by women, non-binary people or men.

Dr. Rhea Ashley Hoskin

<https://uwaterloo.ca/news/arts/naming-and-dismantling-femmephobia>

Try to let children be themselves & make choices based on what makes them happy



Learning Assertiveness

- It is okay to be assertive, even for people who identify as girls and women
- Being assertive does not mean you are being difficult or angry or bossy
- Assertive is not the same as aggressive
- Depending on someone's gender we view being assertive in different ways; it is often a prized trait in men and boys and a problematic trait in girls and women
- If girls and women are not encouraged to be assertive, they may struggle to say no and set boundaries



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 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
- Think about social media and what you post
- 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.

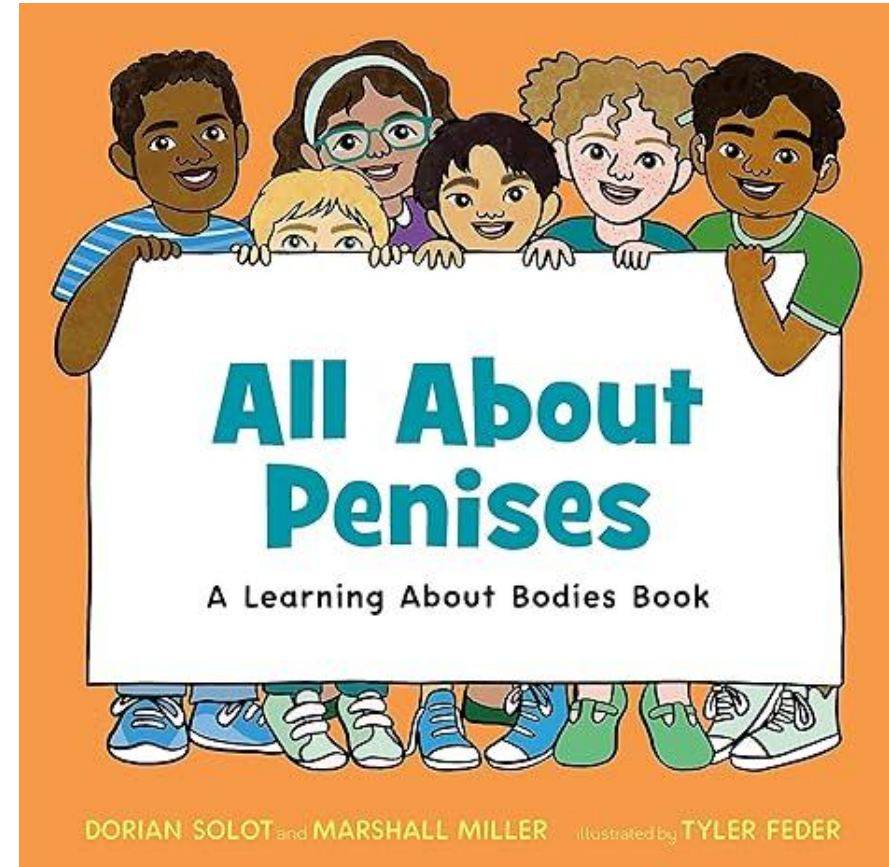
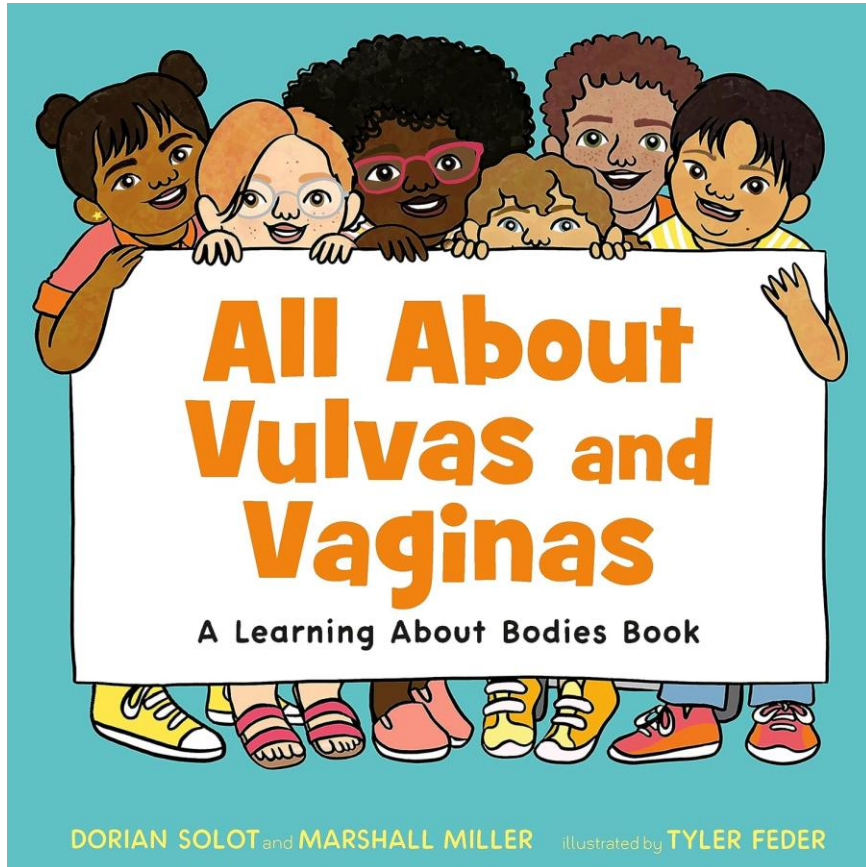


RESOURCES



Found in Resource Section of SVPRO website – click on title

BOOKS



Found in Resource Section of SVPRO website – click on title

CARE



MODELING CONSENT

"CAN I HELP YOU PUT YOUR
JACKET ON?"

"IT'S OK IF YOU DON'T WANT A
GOODNIGHT HUG."

"DO YOU NEED A BREAK FROM
TICKLING, OR ARE TICKLES
STILL OKAY WITH YOU?"



BODY BOUNDARIES

DO



"IT IS OKAY IF YOU WANT TO
LEAVE SOME OF YOUR MEAL"

DON'T



"YOU HAVE TO EAT EVERYTHING
FROM YOUR PLATE, IT IS GOOD
FOR YOU"

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Our greatest impact happens together.