



awareness to action
Wisconsin
Child Sexual Abuse Prevention

HOW TO TALK TO CHILDREN ABOUT HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

TODDLER AND PRESCHOOL YEARS (2-5 YEARS OLD)

Keeping the lines of communication open with your children – regardless of their age – will help you have open and honest discussions about sexuality. Take some time to understand your own values, feelings and beliefs. Remember, children learn by observation, so how you express yourself non-verbally is just as important as what you say to them.

HEALTHY BEHAVIOR

- Develop language to describe genitalia
- Should clearly know difference between males and females
- May know basics of human reproduction (e.g., babies grow inside mother's tummy)
- May touch themselves or appear to be masturbating; usually used as self-soothing technique
- Often engage in consensual genital exploration with same age peers
- May show curiosity about adult genitalia (e.g., may try to see Mommy nude)
- No inhibitions about nudity

TIPS FOR FACILITATING HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

- Encouraging child to use correct terminology to describe their body
- Teaching child the difference between comfortable/appropriate touch and uncomfortable/unacceptable touch; avoid "good touch/bad touch" as an example as children at this age can associate touching of the genitals as something that feels good
- Teach children that they have your permission to say NO to unwanted or uncomfortable touch. Make their "NO" mean something. (i.e. no forced hugs or kisses, no wrestling if child protests)
- Modeling the importance of privacy during bathing and toileting
- Giving child permission to be private about his/her own nudity
- Using everyday opportunities to teach child fundamentals of sexuality (e.g., if child asks questions about sex, give simple and direct answers)
- Teach children that touching oneself is part of healthy sexual development, but should be done in private
- Teaching child to respect other people's boundaries and privacy

