**Y**

**ou can prevent sexual violence** by promoting a healthy foundation for relationships and development, by talking openly with your children about sexuality, their bodies, healthy relationships and consent. As a parent or guardian, you may feel uncomfortable talking about sexuality with your children, but all children will eventually learn about sexuality with or without your input. You are a “positive youth influencer” and can make sure your child learns correct information and healthy attitudes by having conversations early and often. Below are a few tips and talking points for communicating with your child.

**Tips to Communicate with Children:**

Before connecting with your child:

* If you have a partner, talk with him/her and any other adults, such as childcare providers, who spend time with your child to ensure your messages are consistent.
* Clarify your own values about sexuality, and consider how these values may affect your relationship with and attitude toward teaching your children about healthy sexuality.
* Establish age-appropriate content for when you will talk to your child.
* Seek out trusted community resources to help you talk with your child. Local family planning clinics, pediatricians, domestic violence sexual assault programs, or children’s school counselors and social workers may be a good place to start, and they may be able to direct you to other helpful, trusted resources.
* Connect with other community members your child looks up to, such as teachers, coaches, friends’ parents, and faith community leaders, and discuss your values about sexuality and if their willing to be another askable adult for your child.

When communicating with your child:

* Be an askable adult by being approachable, trustworthy, welcoming questions, and remaining calm when your child becomes naturally curious about sexuality or related issues. By remaining calm and approachable, you can build a safe and trusting environment for healthy growth and development, and your child will likely reach out to you for input rather than learn it from potentially harmful outside venues.

**“It takes a village to**

**raise a child.”**

Be a part of that village for all of the youth in your community, if possible, by becoming that askable adult and a “positive youth influencer”.

Surround your child with other village members who can help you raise a child who understands the value of healthy relationships with adults and peers.

* Establish yourself as a trusted resource. Do not tease your child for

asking certain questions.

* Be careful that your tone and body language are inviting
* If you do not know the answer to a question, tell your child you are not

sure but will look into it.

* Seek out teachable moments. You do not necessarily have to set

aside a specific time for “a talk”. Take the time when the family is

together to address questions as they come up, or engage in dialogue

with your child by questioning a comment he/she makes. Sitting

down for meals as a family is a protective factor and a pleasant time

for discussion. Youth who eat meals with families have lower rates

of depression, anxiety, substance use and related risk behaviors as

well as increased success at school.

* Make discussions about healthy sexuality the norm so that it is not a

taboo and uncomfortable subject in the future.

**You can start talking to your child about healthy sexuality and relationships as toddlers and continue the dialogue through all their stages of development and into adulthood.**

**Talking Points for toddlers and young children:**

* Sexuality is a natural part of life.

As an adult, you know this, but your child does not. Children can learn at a young age

that:

* + boys and girls have many parts that are the same – and some that are different.
  + use the correct anatomy when talking about the body. For example, teach your child vagina instead of “vajajay”.
  + some body parts are kept private.
  + physical touch is a basic human need that can help us feel safe, happy and loved.
* Bodies have many automatic responses.

Our bodies respond to certain actions and feelings in certain ways.

* For example, we laugh when tickled, cry when upset, shiver when cold, and sweat when hot.
* Bodies have natural sexual responses, too.

Touches, sights, sounds or thoughts may trigger them. It is natural for children to discover that touching their private parts feels good. For example:

* babies may touch their genitals in the bath.
* a toddler or preschooler may do this as a self-soothing behavior at nap or bedtimes or when feeling stressed.
* older children may also do this as self-soothing behavior or because it feels good.
* Sexual responses are normal – not shameful.

When you were small and learning about our body, did a parent or guardian:

* honestly and clearly share the basics of sexuality giving you more details as you

were ready for them?

* help you feel comfortable with your body and its changes and responses – and

not afraid, guilty, confused or ashamed?

* Talk about what is appropriate and when:
* talk to your child about who can and cannot touch certain parts of their body. For example, mommy or daddy can touch body parts briefly while giving a bath if the child is unable to do so.
* explain to your child that there are appropriate times when body parts can be exposed and when they should not, but do so in a manner that does not make your child feel shameful about their body parts.
* though certain touch may feel good biologically, it is important that your child knows that is not always safe or healthy.
* Consent can be taught early

You can teach children the importance of consent by:

* respecting your children’s space when they ask not to be tickled
* talk to them about sharing, and that it hurts another child when they take

their toy without permission.

When children learn about healthy sexuality at a young age, they have a greater potential to engage in healthy relationships and behaviors. By talking to your child, you are not only developing your relationship with them, but you are teaching them to be agents of their own bodies, needs and desires.

**Resources:**

Some of the content of this document is from:

*Teaching Healthy Sexuality to Help Prevent Child Abuse* [Booklet]. (2013) Channing Bete Company/Prevent Child Abuse America.

Prevent Child Abuse America <http://www.preventchildabuse.org/>

You may find the following resources helpful:

* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Essentials for Parenting Toddlers and Preschoolers website <http://www.cdc.gov/parents/essentials/>
* Stop it Now organization’s website <http://www.stopitnow.org/ohc-content/childrens-sexuality-development-and-behaviors>
  + They have a specific page explaining age appropriate sexual behaviors here: <http://www.stopitnow.org/ohc-content/what-is-age-appropriate>
* The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) has a lot of great information:
  + *It’s Time…to talk to your children about healthy sexuality* factsheet and scenario and discussion points <http://nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/SAAM_2012_Child-development.pdf>
  + *It’s Time…to learn more. Healthy sexuality glossary* [*http://nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/SAAM\_2012\_Healthy-sexuality-glossary.pdf*](http://nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/SAAM_2012_Healthy-sexuality-glossary.pdf)
  + *An overview on healthy sexuality and sexual violence prevention* <http://nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/SAAM_2012_An-overview-on-healthy-sexuality-and-sexual-violence.pdf>
  + *Healthy sexuality: A guide for advocates, counselors and prevention educators* [*http://nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/SAAM\_2012\_Healthy-sexuality-a-guide-for-advocates-counselors-and-prevention-educators.pdf*](http://nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/SAAM_2012_Healthy-sexuality-a-guide-for-advocates-counselors-and-prevention-educators.pdf)
  + *It’s Time…to get connected. Healthy sexuality resources* [*http://nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/SAAM\_2012\_Healthy-sexuality-resource-list.pdf*](http://nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/SAAM_2012_Healthy-sexuality-resource-list.pdf)
  + *Preventing child sexual abuse resources* [*http://www.nsvrc.org/projects/child-sexual-assault-prevention/preventing-child-sexual-abuse-resources#Sexuality%20Child%20Development*](http://www.nsvrc.org/projects/child-sexual-assault-prevention/preventing-child-sexual-abuse-resources#Sexuality%20Child%20Development)
* The Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (WCADVSA) has assembled a list of children’s books that may be helpful to you as you communicate with children about healthy sexuality, relationships and respect. You may access the list here or by visiting BETHESOLUTIONWYO.ORG.

**Visit BETHESOLUTIONWYO.ORG for additional information about preventing sexual violence.**

This product was supported by Grant No. 2012-WR-AX-0016 awarded by the

Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice.  The opinions,

findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication are those

of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.