

Addressing Sexual Abuse with Youth

How do I talk to my child?

- If you've decided to engage in a conversation with your child, plan what you want to say in advance
- If you think they may already be aware of some information, start by asking them what they know and listen
- Assess your child's developmental level and share information in ways that feel appropriate and digestible for them
- Create a calm space to have a conversation – check in with yourself to make sure you're emotionally regulated and pick a time when your child is also calm
- Tell the truth about what happened but this does not have to include all the details
- Share your feelings – you may be feeling sad, scared, angry, or any number of complex feelings. Sharing this will give permission to your child to share their feelings with you and will model that you are able to manage those feelings even though they might be scary
- Use "I" statements and validate your child's feelings ("I understand this may be confusing and sound scary to you." "It's okay to feel however you're feeling about what I'm telling you.")
- Create feelings of safety – this includes reassuring your child that you will do everything you can to keep them safe, educating them around safe and unsafe touch and coming up with a plan to help your child identify safe adults and how to contact them in an emergency
- Acknowledge that abuse is never a child's fault. Explain it can be hard in the moment to speak up to an adult and that they will not get in trouble for reaching out for help
- The conversation does not stop here! Continue to educate your child about names of body parts, safe and unsafe touch, saying "No", and exploring feelings as they come up
- Help your child access a calm activity after the conversation in order to help them self-regulate

Taking Care of Yourself

Talking about and experiencing a community trauma such as this reported sexual abuse can be exhausting. It can bring up a variety of complex feelings and can resurface old traumas. Make sure you as a parent are engaging in self-care and seeking support when you need it.

Other Resources

- Middlesex County Child Advocacy Center (<https://middlesexcac.org>)
- YouTube Video on Consent for Kids (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wOqcU79Rh8>)
- How To Talk with Kids About Personal Safety and Sexual Abuse – Committee for Children (<https://www.cfchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/resources/child-abuse-prevention/docs/all-ages-sexual-abuse-prevention-conversation-guide.pdf>)
- Helping Youth after Community Trauma – National Child Traumatic Stress Network (https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/tip-sheet/helping_youth_after_community_trauma_for_educators_final_explosions.pdf)
- Reach out to a local therapist through PsychologyToday.com

About

This material was prepared by Kelly Miller, LMHC at KAM Counseling in Brookline, MA. Kelly is a psychotherapist who has experienced working with traumatized children in hospital, residential and outpatient settings. She can be reached by email at kellymillerlmhc@gmail.com or by phone at 617-444-9353 if you have any questions or need further support. The information on this document is intended as a guide and is not intended or implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment.

1. SAMHSA (2007). Tips for Talking to children and youth after traumatic Events: A Guide for parents and educators.
2. RAINN (2007). Talking to your kids about sexual assault. <https://www.rainn.org/articles/talking-your-kids-about-sexual-assault>
3. American Psychological Association (2023). How to talk to children about difficult news. <https://www.apa.org/topics/journalism-facts/talking-children>
4. Committee for Children (2022). How to talk with kids about personal safety and sexual abuse. <https://www.cfchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/resources/child-abuse-prevention/docs/all-ages-sexual-abuse-prevention-conversation-guide.pdf>