

A Framework to Help Parents Talk with Their Kids about... Body Image and Sexual Bullying Ages 11-13



When parents initiate a discussion or an opportunity arises to talk, here are some helpful steps for healthy and meaningful conversations. These steps do not always occur in this order and you may jump around to different steps during different parts of the conversation.

1. Invite your child to a conversation with you.

- a. Mom asks "Something you want to talk about?" to daughter. Even though the daughter doesn't enter into the conversation right away, her body language and comments show there is something bothering her and she wants to share.

2. Assess your child's readiness: If the child's discomfort is high, make the conversation brief and positive to build comfort and trust for further conversations.

- a. After her daughter answers "No!" she tries a little reverse psychology to see if her daughter really doesn't want to talk about it (high discomfort) or just needs some more nudging:
 - i. "Okay...if you don't want to talk about it now, then..." but daughter shows she does want to talk and explains the situation so her comfort level is okay.

3. Share facts and values with your child.

- a. Mom says, "...that is really tough language" after her daughter explains Jenny used the word slut. This shows that this word is not to be used lightly and can really hurt people's feelings.
- b. Mom says, "Well, I wear a real bra. That doesn't give Jenny a right to call me names." The mom is stating that no one has the right to call someone else names.
- c. Mom says, "Everyone's body, regardless of age, deserves to be treated with respect, both by other people and by ourselves." This shows the daughter how important it is to respect yourself and expect others to respect you, too.

4. Invite your child to share feelings, thoughts, and concerns.

- a. "What do people at school mean when they use the word "slut?" Mom is checking for understanding.
- b. "Honey, how do you think it made Alicia feel when someone made assumptions about her behavior based on her breast size?" This will make the daughter put herself into someone else's "shoes" and think about how she would feel. She may also think about Jenny's perspective.

5. What does my child want and/or need from me? This could mean things like more information, support with what they are thinking/feeling, strategies to help them deal with a situation, and/or space to think things through.

- a. Daughter says, "I didn't know what to say. I don't know why she'd be so mean" which leads mom to learn that she didn't know what the word "slut" meant. Mom gave her a definition.
- b. Daughter realizes that Jenny used that word because Alicia has big breasts due to mom's effective questions. Mom is helping her get some perspective. How would both Alicia and Jenny feel?
- c. Daughter asks, "But what if I don't know what happens to a woman's bodies?" Mom sees she would like more information and they both go to a website to learn together.

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6. **What do I want from my child?** The most important thing is for your child to be comfortable to come back for more conversations and to understand what was discussed.
 - a. Mom says, "Then all you have to do is ask me. Any time."

7. **Check back in with your child frequently to double check their understanding and keep the conversation going.**
 - a. After going to the website and talking, Mom can check back in with her daughter after school the next day to see how things were resolved. Maybe the next time there could be discussion about how the daughter could handle future situations with Jenny if they come up.