

Tips for Parents When Talking with Youth

Tips for Parents

These suggested guidelines are based on materials from Praesidium, a company that advises us on how to keep youth safe. This information is designed to help you talk to your child in situations where there is a possibility that he or she might reveal information about abuse or exploitation.

It may be difficult to do but it's important to try to stay calm when you speak with your child. Your demeanor will communicate more than your words. Young adults can be traumatized by emotional, angry or accusatory reactions.

Things to consider before talking with your child about sensitive subjects:

- Timing and atmosphere are very important. Choose a calm, unhurried, private time to talk with your child.
 - Before entering into this type of conversation, be sure you're ready. Be calm, emotionally controlled and confident. You want to communicate to your child that you are open to discussing this topic and that you can handle whatever comes up.
 - If this is difficult for you to talk about, practice first with a friend, your spouse or in a mirror.
 - Use simple, conversational language, gauged to your child's level of understanding.
 - Don't make the talk upsetting or anxious. Sexuality and self-protection are issues that should be discussed in a calm manner with an open atmosphere. Conversations such as this should be a positive interaction for young adults so that they feel comfortable talking about their experiences. This also increases the chances that your child will seek your advice in the future. Remember, "If you can't talk about it, you can't protect it."
 - If your child shares difficult information, **STAY CALM!** Do not say, "Why didn't you tell me?" Do let the child continue to talk. Say that you are proud that he or she found a way to get help. If you are at all agitated, it may be best to wait until you have a chance to contact a local resource. Tell your child, "I'm really proud that you've shared this with me, and I think we should continue this discussion when we can get some extra help from a counselor who has helped other young adults with these things. How does that sound?"
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How to begin:

1. Start the conversation with some brief “chit chat.”

“How was your day? Or “What did you do today?” or “It’s nice to have a chance to sit and talk for a minute, isn’t it?”

2. Identify the circumstances in question.

“Do you remember going to summer camp?”; “What was your least favorite thing to do”; “Had anyone made you feel uncomfortable when you were there?”

“If anyone made you feel uncomfortable you should tell mom, dad, a teacher or another adult.”

“You know it’s very important that if anything like that happened to you that you tell me right away, right? That way I can make sure you are safe.”

3. Questions if you and your child want to continue to talk.

“Tell me more, I’m listening.”

Your child may be uncomfortable so you’ll want to do what you can to put him or her at ease. Sitting close, using a calm voice tone, giving a hug or keeping your arm around him or her will help.

You can also say something like, “Honey, you know I love you very much and I’m concerned that you might be upset about something. Can you tell me what you’re thinking?”

If your child stops talking or gets upset, continue comforting him or her.

4. If your child does disclose that something happened:

“I’m really glad you told me about this. You did the right thing by telling me. I’m going to make sure this never happens again. I know you’re upset but you know Mom and Dad are here for you.”

5. After the conversation:

Write down notes about the conversation while it is fresh in your mind. Report concerns to your local police department.