

How to

Have Age-Appropriate Conversations about Sexual Exploitation

As a parent it can be hard to know how to tailor a conversation about sexual exploitation to the age of your child. This resource has been created to explain what topics you should bring up and when.

Young Children and PreSchoolers

As children begin to walk and talk, they also begin to learn about their bodies. If and when a child points to a body part, tell them what the proper name for it is and explain which body parts are private and not to be shown to others. Do not laugh or get embarrassed but rather offer direct responses so that the conversation feels normal rather than taboo.

Preteens

At this age, engaging in a more direct dialogue with your child about sexual exploitation can help them respond to unsafe situations and get help from trusted adults. Talking about the warning signs can allow them to recognize unhealthy relationships. You can also begin to speak to your children about how to identify exploitative online relationships.

Teenagers

It is during this period of their lives that most youth will form attitudes about sex and sexuality, being highly influenced by what they see in the media, interactions with peers, and conversations at home. It is at this age that parents can play a role in helping their child adopt healthy attitudes by discussing what type of beliefs and behaviours contribute to sexual violence, abuse, and exploitation.

Unfortunately, at this age, it is not uncommon for teens to have already experienced or witnessed online sexual exploitation, especially by other peers. Young people today are exposed to enormous pressures to share intimate or nude images, and sometimes, these images are shared without their consent. This is a form of sexual exploitation. Reinforce the message that they have the right to refuse such demands, even if it's from a friend, and that sharing an image is risky and illegal. Also, tell them they should never share another person's photo.

In pop-culture, sexual exploitation is sometimes glorified. Help your teenager separate fantasy from reality. For example, help them recognize sexually exploitative advertisements or music, or scenes in a film. Challenging popular artists and their lyrics can help them become more aware of what sexual exploitation looks like and can start conversations about what is acceptable behaviour and what is not.

Parents can also speak to teens about how to help a friend who discloses they have been a victim of sexual exploitation or abuse. By providing your child with real-life accounts of criminal charges, children can recognize that there are criminal consequences for illegal behaviour. Additionally, conversations about material benefits from a relationship can provide youth with a proper understanding of luring and grooming techniques, both online and offline.