

Talking to kids about...

sex education and dealing with pornography

Talking to kids about... is meant to encourage you to try. Because just the attempt to make discussing difficult topics possible means preventing violence, manipulation, sexual assault, discrimination and confusion. It also strengthens kids, no matter if they are actively listening or not. They know that they can talk to you about important things. This is because you dare to discuss unusual, maybe uncomfortable or burdensome topics.

Below you can find Information and example sentences for conversations with kids regarding questions about sexuality and dealing with pornography.

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Even if it's hard: as soon as kids are confronted with digital media, us adults are required to address pornography. This needs to happen of our own volition, because it's only a matter of time before kids are confronted with such images. If kids know that these pictures can pop up unsolicitedly and that they are like action movies, meaning that these are actors acting things out, it's already easier to deal with weird feelings, or disgust and confusion.

Even among kids at the primary school age, watching porn (together) can be a test of courage. Or a competition: who can watch the grossest videos. Usually these images are scary though, and trigger shame.

This folder is part of a series about the following 5 topics:

1. children's rights & and help against violence
2. sexual infringements among kids & consent explained simply
3. confusion & irritation caused by the behaviour of adults
4. Sex education & dealing with pornography
5. Unease, stress & trauma

The series "talking to kids about..." was developed by the team at Selbstlaut to improve conversations about difficult topics with kids who are around the primary school age. Some things may also be appropriate for kids aged 12 or 13. As a whole however, teens need different phrases which you will not be able to find in this collection.

Sex education

Expressions and words for body parts and genitalia, different ways of living and desiring, information regarding puberty and the changes happening to the body, as well as brief and factually correct answers to questions children ask is part of sex education the way numbers are part of mathematics. Playing doctor, looking at each other, giving oneself pleasant and tingly sensations, imitating adults, splashing around naked in the bath and many other things are expressions of childish sexual activities. They are commonplace.

But why should you already bring this up with primary school aged kids?, you may ask.

Children under the age of 10 are part of the age group most afflicted with sexual abuse. Adults who sexually abuse kids often use unfulfilled childish curiosity to entangle kids in sexual discussions and acts and manipulate them to get into sexually abusive situations.

Sex education protects and strengthens. If children know about topics surrounding intimacy and (child) sexuality and learn to talk about every body part without fear or shame, the hurdle of confiding to someone about sexual violence they may experience is much smaller.

If kids have questions regarding sexual topics, try to give short, accurate answers. There is no such thing as THE ONE talk.

What's sex anyway?

What should I say? For example:

The word sex stands for sexual acts. That's when older teenagers, or adults touch each other in a way that arouses them, on their genitals or other parts of the body that feel tingly.

Adults are not allowed to do that with kids. Older kids and teenagers also aren't allowed to. That is forbidden.

Conception

If your/ a child asks how babies get into the belly, they want an answer to that. They neither want a lecture, nor hear about sex positions, nor do they want to be told "later" and they don't want you to ask "Why do you ask?" or "Where did you get that from?".

Instead try these examples:

Babies can be conceived when a sperm cell meets an egg cell. Sperm cells come out of the penis. That's not urine, but a different, white-ish liquid. When this liquid gets into the vagina, a pregnancy can happen. Usually this happens when adults have sex together. They lie in bed for example, maybe on top of each other. They are naked and touch each other in a way that arouses them, on their genitalia or other parts of the body that feel tingly. They move around a lot, and during this the liquid can come out of the penis into the vagina.

Laughter and shame

Embarrassing words, weird phrases, sexualised swear words or incomprehensible technical terms - this is usually what children hear from adults about sexuality. Making it possible to talk about just that can be a big relief for kids and helps them find their way among everything that's confusing. When grownups for instance, make sexualised jokes while kids are there, that could be an opportunity to talk to kids about that,

E.g. as follows:

Adults always think that kids laugh all the time when sexuality is talked about. But most of the time adults also laugh about it. They don't really manage to talk to kids about questions kids have about sexuality, because they aren't used to it. Or maybe they're embarrassed, or maybe they think kids aren't interested in any of that. Or maybe because they've never thought about which words and sentences make sense and are good for kids and and which ones are only okay for other adults. It's not so easy to keep those things apart.

It bothered me today that X person made so many jokes about sexuality and made a stupid face when he said it. I should have said something and stopped him, but I didn't know how best to do that. Now I'm annoyed that I didn't say anything.

Grownups shouldn't tell kids in any detail about their own grownup sexuality, or make jokes like that. That can be confusing for kids, or make them feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. Either way it's not okay. Sometimes also for other adults, by the way.

Adults are not allowed to tell kids any secret things about sexuality and they are not allowed to ask kids to keep secrets.

Grownups should try, though, to answer the questions kids have about sexuality in a short and correct way and not tell kids false things.

Sometimes it's easier to talk about it in school than it is at home. But if you have questions, or if something is bothering you, or is especially interesting to you, I will try my best to answer you.

Pornography

What if children were confronted with pornographic images or videos against their will, or at least without the option to knowingly consent? Such images can disgust, irritate, but also be funny or trigger arousal which confuses kids. Address these conflicting feelings that such images may trigger. Don't pretend as if these images didn't exist. Children need guidance and the opportunity to express feelings of discomfort or curiosity, or just be confused.

A lot of the time pornographic depictions paint a picture of sexuality and lust that has more to do with power, force and violence, than sexuality. For instance, they often claim that women find violence arousing. These depictions are rarely about feelings. What is especially inappropriate for children is that pornography thwarts or prevents one's own fantasies, wishes, desires and needs. Overwhelmingly, normalised pictures that are made to turn a profit, interfere with desire that has yet to develop.

Porn is often also violent towards minority groups. They are racially charged, humiliating for specific groups of persons and train viewers to fantasise about superiority and inferiority.

For children pornography is problematic, because it is made for adults exclusively, and often ties sexuality to violence and presents them as belonging together. Consuming pornography can be confusing and disturbing for kids. We highly recommend being open and answering questions kids have and comments they make regarding such confusing and overtaxing images. And we, as adults, are required to state that pornography unfortunately exists in the lives of kids.

But what should I say?, you may think..

When kids are occupied with pornography/sexting/nudes/online sexual assault at home, in the classroom/living community/group, teachers, social workers and parents usually don't know what exactly happened. They can't find out 100% of what went on. This is not that important though, to be able to talk about these topics and make it easier for kids to talk about them. It's less important to search for the "truth", instead try giving age-appropriate information and adding something to it. This way you become easier to assess as a person the kids can trust and you can open doors. That is much more important than asking a lot of questions,

And could sound as follows:

I've heard that there are videos being sent around in the class(room), in which you can see adults having intercourse, so having sex. Maybe some of you have received such videos or forwarded them themselves. I want to say the following about that:

Such videos are called porno videos, porn, or pornography. These videos are made for adults. Some adults watch them because they find it exciting, some don't want to see them at all. Kids and teens are not allowed to watch such videos, just as kids aren't allowed to watch horror movies, because they are confusing or too much, or scary. I know however that a lot of kids watch movies or clips like these anyway, either on purpose, or because they accidentally found them, or they were sent to them.

Porn is made by actors and it's important to know that sex is very different in reality. In such videos there is often violence and other upsetting things. If you've seen such a video it's possible you're confused. You may find it gross. Maybe it's totally embarrassing, or weird or strange. It's also possible that it feels very exciting, or funny. Or uncomfortable and appealing at the same time. All of these feelings are okay. It's important you know though for you to know that no one is allowed to send kids such videos. It's forbidden and punishable.

It's possible that you forward this video to someone else or show it to them because you're overwhelmed and really want to share that or make it go away. Kind of like a cry for help. It's possible that a kid forwards this to confuse or annoy another kid, because that's a way to feel big and powerful. It can also happen that you don't even want to watch such videos, but you still watch them again and again, and somehow can't stop. That's kind of like an addiction.

And sometimes kids watch videos like that again and again because maybe something bad happened to them, like violence. It's also a kind of violence when adults touch kids between their legs, on their penis, or on their vulva or vagina, or force kids to touch adults' genitals. No one is allowed to do that to kids.

It is also forbidden for adults or older kids to show kids porn or send it to them. Adults who do something like that make this kind of violence into a secret. When kids experience something like this, they really need help from others. It's so brave to talk about it and find help.

I don't know if any of these thoughts are true for you, but it's important that you/everyone feels comfortable here and that's why it's important to me to talk about this with you.

For kids it makes sense to install filters on devices and search engines, but it's not a guaranteed protection.

Kids should not use devices that adults use to watch porn, or other videos that are harmful for kids unsupervised, or at all, because associated ads may pop up at any time.