

Talking to kids about...

Confusion and irritation regarding the behaviour of adults

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 confusing situations and words.

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Irritations can happen when someone does or says something that confuses others. The situation starts to feel strange and uncomfortable. Often you don't know what to say. And if that what the adult said or did is funny or mean. It's especially difficult when adults act like everything is normal and don't say anything. Then kids feel bad and alone.

Recognising irritation and confusion and labelling it as such is never easy. When we as adults are role models who do this, a huge step has been made towards making it easier for kids to entrust their feelings to us when something seems strange to them.

Talking to kids about... takes practice, takes time. It takes a couple minutes here, a quarter of an hour there, and maybe only a few seconds some other time. It simply takes practice. Try it. It will get easier and more mundane.

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.

You are a mother, aunt, father, brother, godparent, grandparent...

You are confused by and irritated with the way a close family friend is tickling a child and creating inappropriate closeness..

What could you say...

You don't want to falsely accuse anyone, you don't want to ruin the fun for the child, most of all you want... it's not easy at all to keep a clear head.

Tickle-situations in a private setting

I can tell you have a lot of fun with X person. It looks like you get along well. I still want you to know that I find it strange how he plays with you. I'm bothered by it. He tickles you in a way that makes me wonder if it's still pleasant and fun for you. He sometimes creates a kind of special trust with you that I think about a lot. Maybe I'm making it more complicated than it is. In that case don't think about it anymore. If you yourself find it a little complicated and confusing, now you know that I for my part think about whether or not this is okay for you.

Inappropriate behaviour of a fellow teacher - an example that makes it clear how addressing strange behaviour could sound like. (even if every situation and irritation is different)

If you are e.g. a teacher and you're accompanying a primary school girl to her special tuition. There are several kids and the tutor present in the room. There is no free seat left. The tutor asks the girl to sit on his lap. The situation is strange and inappropriate. You take the student with you away from the tutor and allow her to play near the teachers' room for the rest of the school day.

What you could say to the girl

I decided to take you with me, away from the tuition class, because I found it inappropriate and not okay that the teacher suggested you sit on his lap. He should have found you a chair, or we could have thought together about where you could have sat comfortably. I'm sorry if this situation made you feel embarrassed. It's important to me that teachers don't get kids into unclear or strange situations. It's possible that the teacher didn't think about it. It's possible that he creates moments like these often to get kids to sit in his lap and feel close to them. He's not allowed to do that. I will try talking to him and telling him that I find his behaviour inappropriate. If he's doing it on purpose the head of the school will have to talk to him too. I think your parents may also be able to support you. Maybe you could tell them about this. What do you think? ...

What you could say to the other students in this tutor's class

Last week I took your fellow student away from the class with me after the tutor suggested she sit in his lap, because I found that inappropriate. I think that the teacher should make sure there are enough chairs for everyone. It's possible that some kids want to sit on his lap. It's not fair for him to create moments like these, so it feels like a competition. How did that situation feel for you? Maybe I forgot something, or didn't see something that would have been important. ...

Some general sentences for prevention about the relationship between teachers/social workers/etc. With students.

Teachers have the responsibility to take good care of every child. They can't play favourites and take less good care of others.

When a child is sad and needs to be comforted it can be good for the teacher to comfort the child by e.g. putting them on their lap.

A teacher should not, however, sit kids in their lap all the time. The school is where teachers work and it's not the place they cuddle. On top of that it's bad for the kids who don't want to sit on the teacher's lap. Especially when everything seems normal and comfortable. Who would say "I don't want this." to a teacher?

It's important to me that you kids feel comfortable at school, but also that you feel sure that every teacher and everyone else who works at the school follows the same rules.

Kids can sit on each other's laps, they can cuddle, hug, hold hands, play-fight, fall in love with each other, tell each other secrets, give each other presents, and lots more, if it feels good and right for both kids.

Teachers should never tell kids secrets. They especially can't ask kids to keep secrets.

They're not allowed to cuddle with kids.

They're not allowed to give kids presents to get the kids to do something for them.

Teachers are not allowed to confuse kids on purpose.

Those are important rules at school and it's important to me that every teacher, the partners and the kids know this. That way everyone is well-informed.

Comments by adults about the appearance or identity of a child.

You are upset with another adult for commenting and laughing about your/a child.
"I don't even know if you're a boy or a girl."

We often don't manage to tell the person that the comment wasn't funny and in fact inappropriate, or irritation, or unfriendly or just unnecessary. As adults we worry about upsetting the other person, ruining the mood, or being wrong ourselves, if the comment was actually meant to be friendly.

How could you, later, when the moment has passed, talk to the child about it?

For instance:

It bothered me what X person said and how that person laughed. There are no rules about how kids should look. It's not the responsibility of kids to make sure adults are informed. Also there are lots of different ways a child can feel and present themselves.

Some adults want to control everything. Even if someone is a boy or a girl, or what country they're from, or who it should be. Who you are and who you want to be is your decision alone and it's very brave to make your own path in life.

I'm very sorry that I didn't know what to say in the moment this happened. I don't know if it even bothered you, but next time I'll try to say something. For example, I'll say that not all kids feel like a boy or a girl. And that kids can also feel in between, or different, or it can change, or at least want to feel right in their body and that such comments are not helpful for that. Instead these comments are uncomfortable. Or something like that. It's sometimes hard to find the right words. Is there something you wish for me to say if someone says something similar to you again?

Sexualised comments from adults

Someone says to your child: "When you're grown up, you're going to turn all the men's/women's heads." Or: "If I saw you on the street I'd look twice." Or: "It's a shame I'm so old..." etc.

Most of the time, the adults who witness such comments laugh, regardless of whether they really think the comments are funny or embarrassing, inappropriate, shameful or irritating.

Children learn from this behaviour from adults in their environment that they should also smile or even feel honoured.

It may actually be that the child doesn't feel bad, but rather sees the comment as a nice compliment. However, such comments are usually embarrassing or awkward for children of primary school age.

This is often used as another source of adult amusement and jokes are made about there being no reason to blush.

Many adults know these or similar comments from their own childhood and can remember feeling uneasy. If no one intervenes, children learn that some adults create a strange atmosphere when it comes to topics related to bodies, attractiveness, sexuality and being in love.

And that other adults find it funny. This means that kids learn that that's just how it is with adults.

Everyone seems to think it's normal. Children have to get used to it. Even if it is embarrassing and irritating for them.

What could you realistically say to your/the child only when the situation is over?

I was annoyed with X. He thinks that everyone and especially children find it funny when he says things like that. He's actually talking about sexual things. He knows this isn't appropriate. So he acted like it was a joke. So that no one tells him to stop and that that's not okay. Adults can fall in love or look after someone or desire a sexual relationship with other adults, but not with children.

So because they know it's not appropriate, they talk so mysteriously and laugh strangely. Such situations are confusing for everyone and especially for children. Some adults enjoy it and feel good and powerful when they confuse others. For many other adults, this is so normal that they no longer notice it. I find it annoying and inappropriate and I don't want an adult to confuse you and say things to you that are unclear, stupid or make you feel weird.

How was the situation for you?

If you want, we can think together about what I should say to X the next time I see him.

Of course you can also say something, but it's not easy to stop laughing adults.

Closeness and distance

Maybe you could make closeness and distance, pleasant and uncomfortable, irritating touches an active topic at home, but also at school.

Which greeting and goodbye rituals with adults, but also with each other, do the children like? Which ones don't they like, and which ones would they only sometimes actively agree to. Maybe there are relatives or adult friends whose beard scratches when they kiss, who smell funny, look at the kids in a weird way, or whose greetings or comments embarrass children.

How do greetings and farewells work at school? Are they different depending on the teacher? Which forms of touch and situations with teachers in which physical contact occurs are pleasant to the children and which are not.