

Talking to kids about...

Children's rights and getting help against violence

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 children's rights and getting help against violence.

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The most troubling thing for kids is when they feel that there is a difficult topic hanging in the air, but no one tells them what is going on. When they find out what is actually happening, kids know that it's not their fault, but that there are other reasons for why the world is upside down. Short statements and information is enough.

'And what if kids don't ask at all?' you may ask

Verbalise things in the child's daily life. Actively provide information to everything the kids see, feel or (already) know, but think of as taboo.

There are no patent remedies and no one right way to have these conversations with children. But there is a certainty that it strengthens children when we help them sort through their thoughts and feelings, when we help them talk and give them answers.

Talking to kids about... takes practice, time, here a few minutes, there a quarter of an hour, sometimes, just a few seconds. Either way, it takes practice. Try it. It will become easier and more commonplace.

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.

Talking to children about their rights is an important part of preventing violence. Information regarding which rights children have, what they're allowed to do, what they need so they're well, what adults are obligated to do for kids, what adults are allowed to do and what they may not do, as well as what kids can do when their rights are taken away, brings clarity and strengthens kids. They should know there are laws that adults of many countries have agreed on, so that kids can grow up safely and well.

Kids who know what their rights are, can feel more unburdened, if they are aware of their rights and know that adults who take away their rights are in the wrong. It makes it easier for kids to get help if possible.

You can start by talking to kids about what children's rights they know, and by explaining the most important ones to them:

Parents and other guardians have the duty of caring for children, to tend to them. Kids have the right to a home, enough food, drink and clothes. When kids are sick, they have the right to medicine or medical help. Every child has the right to go to school, without the parents having to pay for that. Kids have the right to free time. They have to have time where they don't have to do anything, and they can play and rest. No child may be treated weirdly, or be treated differently by adults compared to other kids. It doesn't matter what children look like, what languages they

speak, what they can or can't do, if they're feel like boys, or girls, or trans, or neither this nor that, which passport they have, if they have a disability, or which traits they have.

One important right for children is that they feel safe, strong and free. When and where and with whom do you feel safe? When and where do you feel strong? When and with whom do you feel free?

Some important children's rights:

- Right to express opinions & participation
- Right to health
- The right to being cared for
- Right to protection from violence
- Right to special care & assistance in the case of disability
- Right to play & free time
- Right to equality
- Right to education
- Right to protection during war & when fleeing
- right to protection from economic & sexual exploitation

Further information about children's rights

<https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text-childrens-version>

Child oriented example sentences and possible help:

War

War is one example of violence. Houses of people are destroyed and people are killed. In that case kids have the right to a new home, often in a different country.

Sometimes it can happen that parents/guardians don't give children enough food, or they don't/can't take care of that. Or they don't make sure kids can wash and dress, or that they don't come near drugs. That is called neglect.

Domestic Violence

It is also violence when kids are being hit. Parents and other adults are not allowed to hit children or to hurt them.

It is also a form of violence when parents insult kids, or don't talk to them anymore. Or blame them for everything. Or say mean, hurtful things. That is called psychological, or emotional violence. This too is forbidden. It makes kids feel stupid and bad and guilty. Or makes them want to disappear.

It's always important that kids know they don't deserve that and that they have the right to be treated well.

There is also violence that isn't done to children themselves, but that they see. That makes them involuntary witnesses of violence and someone being mean. For example when one parent hits the other parent. Or laughs at them. Or insults them. Or touches them or does sex in a way the other parent doesn't want. Sometimes children hear hurtful words or threats between adults. That can be scary.

There are a lot of reasons why adults may not be good at taking care of kids. Maybe because they're sick, or have too many worries, or because they want to feel powerful, or because they themselves have experienced bad things, or because they just don't care. But adults always have a responsibility for kids. Other adults then have to jump in and be there for the child.

When kids experience violence, it's their right to get help. That's why it's very important that kids can trust and confide in someone. For that to happen there need to be adults that kids can trust and who dare to get involved. That could be people in the child's family, or family friends. Or teachers, child or youth service workers, or the police. It's very brave when kids who experience violence - no matter in what form - try to get help and don't give up when someone doesn't take them seriously or doesn't listen.

Child and youth services

When parents/guardians can't take good care of kids, they themselves need help. In Austria for example there is the Kinder- und Jugendhilfe, also called child and youth services in English. They are responsible to help kids and also parents when they or other adults take away the children's right to protection from violence. The people from child and youth services talk to the parents and try to help them take good care of the children.

Sexualised violence

It's also called violence when there are inappropriate, confusing touches. So when adults touch children between their legs on their buttocks, on their vulva or penis, or demand of kids that they touch adults that way. That is also forbidden.

Crisis management centres and living communities

When children find out that a kid in their class has moved to a crisis management centre or into an assisted living community, it is often the case that no adult talks to them about it. Kids remain alone with lots of questions and possibly fears.

What should I say? you think. For example the following sentences:

X from your class has moved into a crisis management centre, you said. When kids can't stay at home anymore, because no one takes good care of them, or because there is violence, they stay at a crisis management centre for a certain time to recover from all the stress. Then it can be seen if the child goes back to their family or if they move into a living community for kids, or to foster parents. That can be very hard and sad. But it can also be a big relief for the child. The important thing is that no one is allowed to harm the child, and that includes their own parents.

A living community is a completely normal apartment with rooms, a kitchen, a living room and bathrooms etc., where a few kids live together. They live there with caretakers from child and youth services, who take special care to make sure kids have all of their rights. The kids keep going to school as usual and grow up in this kind of new family.

Did you talk about how X is doing in the living community in your class? What's on your mind?

Anger

Kids who have experienced violence are often very angry and usually feel guilty for that. Anger, fear and sadness are important feelings though, to notice anything that shouldn't be done to children. Or when no one notices anything, or no one dares to speak up or interfere and kids feel all alone.

What can you say when your/a child is very angry?

I understand that you're angry. Or: I see that you're angry. It may feel as if your head is exploding. Or maybe you want to break everything around you. When someone is that angry, they can't think anymore. I'm going to get a pillow and you can hit it. And then we'll come up with a space rocket that we'll put everyone you want to send to the moon into. We can also draw a rocket and when everyone who you want to send to the moon is in there we'll start the rocket. Boom.

Maybe you just want to be alone. I'm here, if you want to tell me later why you're angry. Or who you're angry with. Or if you just want to sit with me without talking.

If it's too hard to talk to me about it, think about who you trust. Maybe you can write a message to that person. Or call them. You don't have to tell me about it. Everything that's good for you, is good to me.

Basic first sentences to say when a child tells you about sexual abuse:

Comfort

I'm sorry that you experienced that. That someone was this mean to you.

Recognise bravery

It's very brave that you're talking about this.

Name it

What this person did to you is called violence (sexual abuse). No one is allowed to do that to a child.

Provide knowledge

There are other kids who experience things like this. You're not alone.

Clarify responsibility

It's not your fault that this happened to you. The only one responsible is the one who did that. No matter what you got in return.

Explain the next steps

I need to get help myself and then we can think together about what might be helpful for you. I'll try everything I can so you feel better and so that something like this doesn't happen again.

Don't question your/the child. When you ask questions try to leave them open. No yes/no questions, but open ones, e.g.

What do you think about the new situation? What do you think about our conversation?

What do you wish for in the near future at home (in your class/school)?...

Your/the child decides if they ever want to talk to you about the situation or not. But you can signal that it's important to you how the child is doing.

Silence only helps those who are violent. Every attempt to give kids age-appropriate information about this taboo topic that is usually considered shameful, no matter how clumsy, can be the first step out of a violent situation. It's not about cautionary tales. They make children weaker. It's about helping them speak and sort through everything they're experiencing and about giving a signal that they are not alone.