

Talking to children about a difficult topic like sexual abuse can be challenging, but it's one of the most important things you can do to keep them safe. The goal is to provide them with the knowledge they need without causing unnecessary fear.

Here are some key principles to follow:

Focus on Safety and Empowerment

Instead of focusing on "stranger danger," which is often misleading, teach children about **safe and unsafe behaviors**. Explain that a trusted adult's job is to keep them safe, and that no adult should ever ask a child to keep a secret that makes them feel uncomfortable. Remind them that they have the right to say "no" to anyone who makes them feel uncomfortable, no matter who that person is. This empowers them with agency and helps them trust their own instincts.

Use Clear and Simple Language

Avoid using vague or technical terms. Use simple, direct words like "private parts" or "swimsuit areas" to explain what body parts are private. You can use phrases like "your private parts belong only to you" or "no one has the right to touch your private parts unless it's for something like a doctor's checkup or bathing." The goal is to make the information understandable without being scary.

Create an Open and Trusting Environment

Make sure your child knows they can talk to you about anything, and that you will always believe them and help them. You can say something like, "If anyone ever touches you in a way that feels wrong, or asks you to do something that makes you feel yucky, please tell me right away. I promise I will listen and help you." This establishes a foundation of trust that is crucial if a child ever needs to report abuse.

Talk to Them at an Age-Appropriate Level

The conversation doesn't have to be a one-time event. You can introduce these concepts gradually as your child grows and matures. For very young children, start with the idea of body privacy. As they get older, you can introduce more complex concepts like secrets and tricky situations.

Would you like me to provide some specific scripts or examples of how to start this conversation with a child of a particular age?