

Factsheet 5: How can I use conversations to encourage healthy sexual behaviour and positive choices?

Conversation tip	Example
<p>Be clear and consistent about what behaviours are healthy, safe, and appropriate—and what behaviours are not. Always:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain what behaviour is inappropriate or concerning—and why. • Explain what behaviour is appropriate or what you want them to do instead. • Check they have understood what you said (e.g., by asking them to repeat it back in their own words). • Give supportive comments and praise when they make good choices about sexual behaviour (or have tried to make a good choice). <p>Think about supporting your conversations and teaching with visuals from trustworthy authors/ organisations (e.g., picture books, videos, anatomically correct dolls).</p> <p>For young children, visuals can be especially helpful. Also try to go beyond just spoken words when giving praise (e.g., big smile, thumbs up, high five, positive tone of voice).</p>	<p>You might find it helpful to follow this structure when providing feedback on behaviour:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let them know what behaviour is inappropriate. Be clear and specific. • Tell them what behaviour is appropriate and/or what you want them to do instead. <p>For example: <i>Alex, you need to stop touching your penis/vagina here. It's not appropriate to do that in places where there are others around. If you want to do that, you need to go to your bedroom which is a private area.</i></p> <p>When giving supportive comments and praise for good choices about sexual behaviour, you might say: <i>I really like the way you have been making better choices and [give example of a good choice].</i></p> <p>You can also recognise and praise any efforts: <i>I can tell you have been trying really hard this week to make better choices.</i></p> <p>Examples for young children: <i>Taylor, children don't touch each other's bottoms, but they can hold hands.¹</i> <i>Max, I really like the way you have been keeping your clothes on at day care this week. Great job!</i></p>

Conversation tip	Example
<p>If the problematic and harmful sexual behaviour was towards someone else, try to build their awareness of the impact their behaviour has had on that person through asking open questions. This should be done carefully so that the child or young person themselves does not feel judged. Sometimes the child or young person may not understand that the behaviour was potentially harmful. For example, they might say the other person 'liked it' or that they were 'teaching them about sex.' Situations where this might happen include when the behaviour was towards a sibling or when there has been exposure to inappropriate or blurred boundaries about sexual behaviour.² If a child or young person talks in this way, speak with your caseworker/agency or a professional to help work out how to respond to this difficult situation.</p>	<p>Introduce the topic using open questions. For example: <i>I wonder how [name person impacted] might have felt when you [name behaviour]. How about we try to brainstorm some feelings they might have had together? Can you tell me any to get us started?</i></p> <p>Show you have heard their thoughts about how the other person might have felt. For example: <i>You are thinking that Sarah might have felt angry and uncomfortable when you [name behaviour].</i></p> <p>If the child or young person finds it hard to come up with ideas of how the other person might have felt, try offering some options to get started: <i>When [name behaviour] happened, do you think that [name person impacted] did or didn't like the behaviour? How could you tell?</i></p> <p>For younger children, start small by just giving one or two options of how the other person might have felt. For example: <i>Do you think [name person impacted] did or didn't like it when you [name behaviour] or</i> <i>Do you think [name person impacted] looked happy when you [name behaviour].</i></p>

1 Government of South Australia, Department for Child Protection (2020)

2 NSW Government, Family & Community Services (2016); Tucci, Fernandes and Howell (2020)