

# Having proactive conversations

FOR CARERS

We can prevent problematic and harmful sexual behaviours (PHSB) from developing by ensuring kids have accurate and comprehensive information about sex, relationships, consent, pornography and various forms of diversity. Ongoing, proactive conversations are vital to increasing understanding and accurately answering their questions.

## Proactive conversations

Kids will naturally have questions about sex and relationships. By openly responding to their queries and engaging in ongoing conversations, you will satisfy their curiosity; reduce their embarrassment; and lessen the likelihood that they will seek information from other sources. They will also be more likely to come to you with questions or worries.

### Conversations about pornography

It's important to have specific conversations about pornography, to ensure kids understand and think critically about what they might see. These conversations can protect them from potential harms, and reduce the possibility that PHSB will result from exposure to pornographic content.

Use targeted conversations to help kids think critically about pornography. Where exposure has occurred, this will equip them to process what they have seen, and make good choices about their behaviours. Critical thinking doesn't come naturally to kids, as their brains are still developing, but practicing with an adult will help.

## Topics to support critical thinking

To help kids build critical thinking skills, particularly around pornography, you should address several key topics:

- Sexual education - correct names and functions of body parts; reproduction; public and private spaces; puberty; safe and unsafe touch; masturbation; gender and sexual identity; safer sex and contraception; sexually transmitted infections (STIs); legalities relating to consent and sex
- Relationships - healthy and unhealthy relationships; respect and consent; dating; expectations and boundaries; types of relationships; dating violence and communication
- Pornography - legalities relating to sexting and pornography; body image; sexual practices portrayed in porn; online safety; digital reputation; image-based abuse



### Tips for proactive conversations with kids

- Take time to plan before each conversation. Think about the topic or topics you want to cover, any questions you're going to ask and how you will introduce the discussion.
- Plan your conversation for an appropriate time and place. Allow enough time for discussion so you can really listen. Ensure you have privacy so there are no interruptions. These strategies help to build trust and allow for greater openness.
- Just before starting your conversation, take a few deep breaths. This will help to centre you.
- Let kids know what you will be discussing - introduce the topic and ask for their thoughts.
- Be sure to listen, give them time to think and respond to what you are saying. If you ask questions, allow enough time for them to answer.
- Check in and monitor comfort levels with the topics being discussed. Pay attention to emotions and reactions, and support kids to remain calm, involved and connected.
- If you notice them becoming upset, stop the conversation and help them to manage their emotions. You can return to the conversation later. Before trying again, consider the best way to communicate and whether you - or they - need support.
- Try to assess whether they understand what you're discussing, and the reasons for the conversation. Use age-appropriate terms during the discussion.
- Ask questions to understand any worries or concerns they have. Kids may not have a response immediately, and that's okay. Checking in on their response allows you to return to the conversation later.
- Try not to judge or criticise their ideas, responses or behaviours – allow them to speak openly.
- If you're unsure how to start discussions, respond to questions or manage ongoing conversations, consider asking for support.
- If you identify increased support needs for kids, it's important to ask for help. Work with your caseworker to determine appropriate supports.

### Next Steps

To be most effective, conversations should continue over time. You might use things you watch or read, or consider surfing the internet together, to restart these discussions. Otherwise, you can simply plan a monthly discussion.

### Further reading

- Sexual education - <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au>
- Information about bodies, relationships and health - [bodytalk.org.au](http://bodytalk.org.au)
- Pornography - [www.itstimewetalked.com](http://www.itstimewetalked.com)
- Staying safe online - [www.esafety.gov.au](http://www.esafety.gov.au)