

REFLECTING ON CONSENT

A FRAMEWORK FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

Preparing for a chat about consent....

We can't always plan for these conversations, especially with our neurodiverse children. One of the best ways to prepare yourself is to practice these conversations between you and your significant other/co-caregiver. This also gives you the opportunity to build an aligned approach that won't confuse your kids with opposing ideas on what consent is.

Even though it may not be possible to plan these conversations in advance, below are a couple of tips for opening up a conversation surrounding consent with your neurodiverse kid(s):

- Check the time is right – is anyone tired? Overstimulated? Distracted?
- Try to create some privacy – can you be overheard or interrupted?
- Try to reduce direct eye-contact – maybe going for a drive, sitting side-by-side on the sofa, or taking a walk would be a good starting point.
- Approach without judgement or intense reactions (both positive and negative) – let's try to not add more emotion to this conversation
- Share your own knowledge/perspectives – this can avoid an interrogation-style situation and open the space for joint sharing.
- Limit questions – neurodiverse kids may feel overwhelmed if too many questions are being thrown their way.
- Compassionate feedback – gently correct any misinformation or pose further questions rather than rejecting radical views.
- Use common interests (movies, TV shows, books) as examples – discussing a favourite character may feel more comfortable than discussing themselves.
- Approach each conversation as a small stepping stone – short and frequent check-ins rather than a long conversation.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

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Questions and conversation openers...

Consent becomes even more complex when we consider the risks of kids online. Kids are incredibly resourceful, and it can be a losing battle trying to monitor and/or restrict their online activity.

Below are some helpful questions and conversation starters that cover a variety of areas that parents/caregivers should be considering when it comes to discussions surrounding consent:

- Does your phone take good photos? Do you know what a digital footprint is?
- Your body belongs to you. What areas of the body are safe for others to touch with your permission? And which parts are just for you?
- Is there anything that has made you feel uncomfortable recently? A question? A request to do something? A certain kind of touch?
- Your body has this amazing ability to transform, and you'll see how it can change as you grow up. What changes do you think will happen when you move into high school/senior school?
- Puberty is tough. Do you have any questions about what you're feeling or the changes your body is going through/about to go through?
- These conversations are a bit uncomfortable for me, and I am sure they feel a bit odd for you too. Is there a better way that we can talk about this stuff?
- Remember when you asked/told me about...
- I hope that you know that you can ask me anything. Even if you think it is rude or bad; you won't be in trouble. I will always do my best to answer your questions and explore these difficult topics with you.
- You don't seem ready to talk about this with me right now. Can you let me know when you are ready to talk?