

Key tools for talking openly with children, teenagers, young people

- Be **honest** and **age appropriate**. Have the conversation **early and often** – it's good to touch on things periodically, when they come up over time, rather than having a one-off conversation
- With young children, talk about consent in terms of their right to bodily autonomy and **defining their own personal space** and boundaries. Encourage them to articulate when they're not comfortable with something
- Use anatomically **correct names for body parts** – it's important, from a safeguarding perspective, that children can accurately explain if something has happened to them using the correct terminology
- **Be proactive, not reactive** in talking openly – do not wait for your children to approach you
- Use **cultural prompts**. Books, billboards, ads, magazines, films, TV shows, music videos and song lyrics – and news stories, which are full of underlying cultural, social and emotional issues – can all trigger discussion
- Make use of **opportune moments** like time spent in the car or out walking so that you can talk in parallel
- Frame any information you give your children in the **context of love and a loving relationship**
- **Rehearse words** out loud that you aren't comfortable with or aren't in the habit of saying. Practising them in advance by yourself or with your partner or friend will give you confidence when you talk with your children
- **Don't be put off** by your children's negative response or body language
- **Get your message across** before your children get bored
- Explain the reason you want to talk to your children. Say: "**I would like to talk about _____** because I have questions/concerns/ideas. Would that be OK?"
- Be oblique. As an indirect way in, ask your children **what their friends say** about porn, sexting etc
- **Do not shy away from your children's questions**. If the timing is inappropriate, respond positively and come back to the subject at another time or in a different way
- **Ask open-ended questions** – rather than yes-or-no questions – to encourage your children to respond with their own knowledge and/or feelings and to see where the conversation leads
- **Never guess the answer** to a question you don't have an answer to. **Inform yourself**. Go off and do some research, read about the subject or talk to someone else about how to approach it, and then revisit it
- Steer your children to the **right resources** but do not let resources replace parenting. Include older siblings in the discussion. **Leave a good informative book lying around** for your children to look at in their own time
- **It's OK if you aren't an expert**. Admit that you aren't sure how to discuss a topic or find it challenging to talk because communicating frankly about these topics wasn't something you experienced while growing up
- **It's OK if the conversation is awkward**. Even if you stumble over your words, your children will know that you are making the effort to be open and reach out, and that you want to be approachable
- **Compare notes with other people** about their experiences with talking to their children
- See talking openly at home as a **positive challenge!** See it as a way to reconsider your own experiences and viewpoints, and what messages you are giving out and want to convey – but most importantly as a way to help in **safeguarding** your children, improving their **mental health** and **strengthening the parent/child connection**