

Responding to Sexual Behaviors

When adults are prepared to respond to children's sexual behaviors they have the tools to step in earlier if concerning or sexually abusive patterns start. How you react is important to help the child deal with any confusion, anxiety, shame, or anger they may feel about their behavior.

Here are some tips.

- Keep calm. Children often do not understand that how they're behaving is wrong or why they behave this way.
- Be clear about behavior you want to see.
- Be compassionate and sensitive to how the child might feel.
- Promote accountability. Set an appropriate limit, rule, or expectation to promote the child's responsibility for their behavior.

Things you can say

"We don't take our clothes off in public. We change our clothes in the dressing room to keep our bodies safe."

"Remember our rule! We treat our friends with care and respect."

"It is not OK for someone to show you their private parts or to ask you to show you their private parts."

"In this classroom we ask before we give hugs. You can say, 'Jessica, can I have a hug?' And if Jessica says no, that means no hug. We respect everyone's personal space here. Do you understand?"

"Your friend asked you to stop _____. When someone asks us to stop, we respect them."

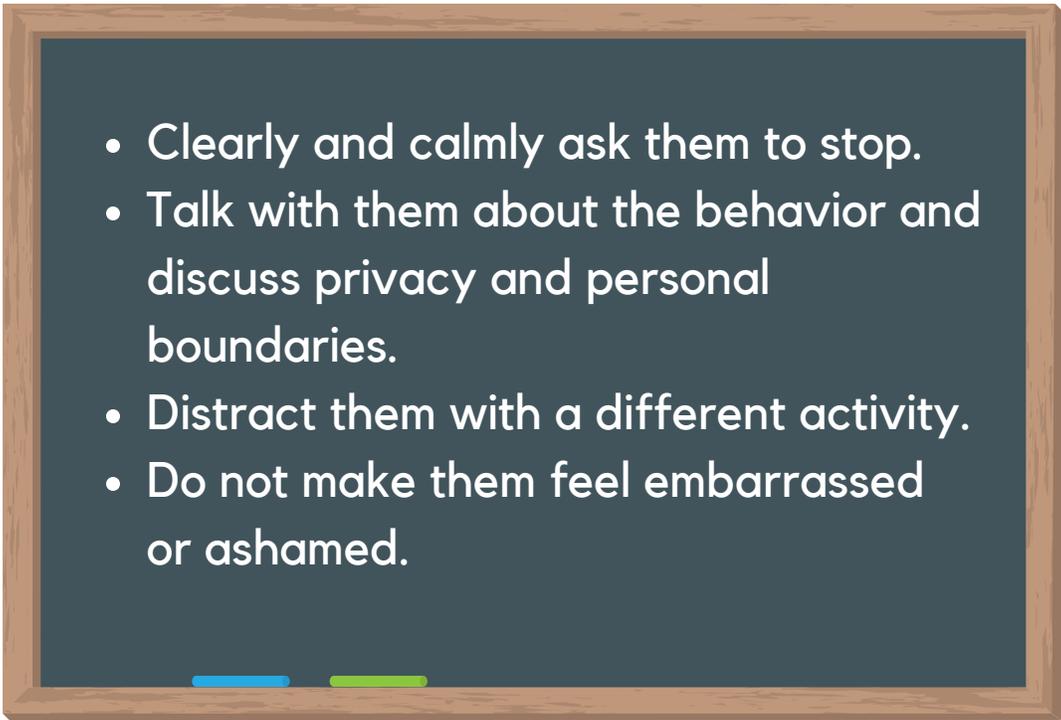
"The reason I asked Tori to leave you alone was because I felt they were not being safe around you. You didn't do anything wrong, but Tori was breaking a safety rule."

Responding to Sexual Behaviors Cont.

Things to avoid

- Appearing shocked.
- Acting in a way that makes the child feel embarrassed or ashamed.
- Ignoring the behavior.
- Assuming that sexual abuse has happened.
- Using language that labels a child as a "pervert" or "sex offender."

If behavior is age-appropriate

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- Clearly and calmly ask them to stop.
 - Talk with them about the behavior and discuss privacy and personal boundaries.
 - Distract them with a different activity.
 - Do not make them feel embarrassed or ashamed.

For more information about preventing and responding to child sexual abuse, visit childrenssafetypartnership.org.