

It is typical and healthy for them to be curious about their own and others' naked bodies and genitals, and they often explore their own genitals through masturbation.

Children this age can recognize stereotypes and other expressions of racism and ableism in their immediate world, so we encourage facilitators to remember their responsibility to actively teach anti-bias. Here are some strategies to do that:

In all activities, highlight that physical diversity among people is desirable, and that all colors, shades, and shapes of people are beautiful. Talk about differences in a tone of delight and interest. Create a vocabulary that encourages children to look at themselves and others and admire their sameness and their uniqueness. Just as we do not wait until a child asks questions about how to read before planning how to provide a range of literacy learning opportunities, anti-bias education is the teacher's responsibility, not the child's, to initiate. Caution—never single out one specific child when you do activities about the physical characteristics linked to racial identity. Every activity should be about all of the children, as everyone has a racial identity. Moreover, doing activities about all children reinforces that differences and similarities can be found within each racial identity group as well as across groups. (Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards, *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves*, 2nd ed. [Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009]. Used with permission.)

Parents, caregivers, and teachers of five- to seven-year-olds can testify to the many questions these children have about themselves and the world around them. The ways parents, caregivers, and others respond to these questions sends messages to children about themselves as sexual beings. These responses can provide the foundation for promoting and fostering healthy attitudes and behaviors in sexuality education.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Our Whole Lives is guided by the following two principles: parents and caregivers have primary responsibility for their children's sexuality education, and sexuality education happens through open and honest communication among adults and their children. The organization offering an Our Whole Lives program has a responsibility to provide resources that help these adults talk about sexuality with their children. In this way, parents and caregivers and the organization become partners. For simplicity, this program refers to all loving adult caregivers, such as grandparents, aunts, and foster parents, as parents and caregivers. Any loving adult caregiver can be an effective sexuality educator.

Because we do not live in a non-racist and non-ableist society, adults in a child's life are also responsible for initiating anti-bias education regarding race and ability. Adults are often silent about these issues at a time when children are trying to make sense of their experiences, and this silence leads to miseducation about sexuality, race, ability, and the intersections among them. The following articles can help lift the silence and start conversations:

- “How to Talk to Your Kid About Disabilities,” by Caroline Bologna, [huffpost.com](https://www.huffpost.com)
- “Teaching Young Children about Race: A Guide for Parents and Teachers,” by Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards. teachingforchange.org/teaching-about-race

Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades K–1 begins with a Program Information Meeting to introduce the curriculum and answer parents’ and caregivers’ initial questions. Those who enroll their children in the program then attend a mandatory Parent/Caregiver Orientation while their children are in a simultaneous orientation, followed by a combined parent/caregiver and child orientation. In this way, adults and their children begin the program together and adults gain a deeper understanding of the program content. HomeLinks, which are provided to parents and caregivers after each workshop, are also helpful in supporting conversations at home.

Each parent’s and caregiver’s commitment to and participation in this program enhances their child’s knowledge, skills, and values related to sexuality education. As a facilitator, you will become a trusted partner in the process.

GETTING STARTED WITH OUR WHOLE LIVES

One: Gain Support

Before beginning an Our Whole Lives program, obtain the support and endorsement of your organization and, if appropriate, its governing board. Fully inform all organizational leaders about what the program teaches and who is facilitating it. The following suggestions may be helpful in this effort:

1. Clearly communicate the philosophy and goals of the Our Whole Lives program to the decision makers in your organization.
2. Make the materials and resources available for all.
3. Describe your plans for identifying people who are or could be trained to facilitate Our Whole Lives.
4. Answer questions to ensure transparency.

Once you have the support and approval of your organization, proceed with the steps below while you continue to provide information and to invite the support, cooperation, and partnership of others.

Two: Choose Our Whole Lives Facilitators

In order to be successful, Our Whole Lives needs qualified, caring, and trained facilitators who meet specific criteria. The program is designed to be led by at least two adults trained to use the Our Whole Lives curriculum and to be in compliance with the sponsoring organization’s safety and abuse prevention and reporting guidelines. When choosing facilitators, ensure that they are

- committed to values-based, accurate, comprehensive sexuality education. Their values should be aligned with the Our Whole Lives program and goals, and they should feel comfortable with their own sexuality.