

confused or mixed up. (Our Whole Lives emphasizes “asking for help” rather than “telling,” because some authority figures discourage “tattling,” and children may feel “telling” is a form of tattling. “Asking for help” is more widely acceptable.)

- helps children identify adult helpers. Developing connections and open communication between children and trusted adults is a key part of sexual abuse prevention.
- lays the groundwork for children’s future learning about consent. Understanding the

importance of saying and respecting both “yes” and “no” is not only part of preventing children from victimizing others but is also critical to healthy childhood friendships and teen and adult sexual relationships.

We believe that this approach, in combination with actions that make adults responsible for preventing abuse (by creating appropriate organizational and institutional policies, educating parents and caregivers, training staff, etc.), is the best approach we can take to preventing child sexual abuse.

WHAT WE DID IN OUR WHOLE LIVES TODAY

Today’s topics were body boundaries and sexual abuse prevention. We talked about many nice ways to share touch (hugging someone you love, holding hands with a friend, etc.). We also discussed that sometimes we like touch and sometimes we don’t, and that both are okay. We learned that when we’re touching or being touched by another person, we both need to agree about the touching. We played a game that let us practice

asking permission, saying ‘no’ to touches we did not want, and listening to the other person. We talked about how touching is never secret. We discussed and drew pictures of “helper people” we know, adults at home or school to whom we could talk if we felt confused or worried about something. We learned about the idea of “personal space.” And we celebrated that our bodies belong to us.

WHAT YOU CAN DO THIS WEEK

- Ask your child about their “helper people,” people whom they feel safe asking for help if they are ever confused or worried about something. Children who are sexually abused often feel confused or mixed up, so it can help them to know that it’s worth asking for help when they feel this way, and to know who they might ask. Never shame or question a child about their choice of helper people, including whether or not they included parents/caregivers.
- Help your child choose a photo of your family or draw a picture of them to bring to Our Whole Lives next time.
- Borrow from the library, or buy for your family, a children’s book about body boundaries. Some good choices are listed below. Read the book and talk about it with your child.
- Be an alert parent/caregiver. Familiarize yourself with the warning signs of grooming behavior that often precedes sexual abuse; a good description of them is on the website of Prevent Child Abuse Vermont, at pcavt.org/grooming-overview. If you notice behaviors that seem suspicious or make you uncomfortable, there are suggestions for actions you can take at pcavt.org/boundary-violations.

You are your child’s most important teacher about body boundaries!

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW AND IN THE YEARS AHEAD

- Respect your child’s wishes regarding being touched. For instance, if you notice they do not want a hug or kiss from a relative, suggest alternatives like high-fiving, shaking hands, fist bumping, blowing a kiss, or waving goodbye. Give your child as much bodily autonomy as possible, while recognizing there will be some exceptions, such as those involving health or safety.
 - Teach children that if someone (a sibling, a friend, etc.) says “no” or “stop,” whatever is being done needs to stop immediately. Children should expect the same if they are the ones saying “no” or “stop.” Creating these expectations around consent is valuable in childhood play, and perhaps even more so when it comes to sexual abuse and sexual assault prevention as children grow up. Some families use this rhyme: “Hop, hop, hop on Pop, when someone says ‘stop’ you *have to stop*.”
 - Reinforce for your child that touching is never a secret. Make sure they understand they will have your support if they share information about touching with you or another one of their “helper people.”
 - From time to time, remind your child that they can tell you anything, and that it’s never too late to tell.
 - Teach children to notice and read body language, to practice understanding both verbal and nonverbal communication. Point out what you notice so your child can gain the same skills. For instance, you could say things like “Look at your baby brother’s face, it doesn’t look like he likes the way you’re squeezing him,” or “Did you notice our neighbor looked kind of sad?”
 - Check out the prevention tools from Stop It Now! (stopitnow.org/help-guidance/prevention-tools) for tip sheets and guidebooks with detailed advice for parents and caregivers about protecting your kids from sexual abuse.
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BOOK AND MEDIA RECOMMENDATIONS

Our Whole Lives advises parents/caregivers to review books before sharing them with children to ensure each is the right match for a given child and family.

An Exceptional Children’s Guide to Touch: Teaching Social and Physical Boundaries to Kids, by Hunter Manasco

While this book is primarily meant for children with special needs, it could be useful and appropriate for any child. With simple illustrations and just a sentence or two on each page, it explains societal rules about accidental touch, friendly touch, hurtful touch, touching oneself, and more.

Let’s Talk about Body Boundaries, Consent, and Respect, by Jayneen Sanders

This book helps children understand appropriate boundaries and their own and others’ personal space. It is best suited for children with attention spans for slightly longer books.

No Means No!, by Jayneen Sanders

A girl chooses to say “no” to touch in a variety of situations, such as when an aunt wants to kiss her, a friend wants to hold her hand, etc. The book shows the other people respecting her choices and finding simple alternatives.

More Than Fluff, by Madeline Valentine

This book, which we read during today’s OWL workshop, is about a bird who is soft and whom everyone wants to cuddle. Her mom supports her in figuring out how to say how she does and doesn’t want to be touched.