

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 do 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.

We also read this retelling of a Bible story from 2 Samuel 13. In the original text, King David’s daughter Tamar is sexually assaulted by her half-brother Amnon. This retelling focuses on Tamar’s assertion of her bodily autonomy and who she was able to ask for help. It does not include Absalom’s revenge upon Amnon.

## RETOLD BASED ON 2 SAMUEL 13

King David had a big family with a lot of kids. Some of them were full siblings with the same parents and some of them were half siblings with one shared parent and one different parent. The oldest of them was Amnon. When he grew up, he was planning to be the next king. People usually did whatever he said. One day he told his dad King David that he was sick. King David asked what would help him feel better. Amnon said that he would like his little sister Tamar to cook cakes for him. David said ok and Tamar went to visit her half-brother Amnon. She made the cakes for him and brought them to his room. Then he told everyone to go away. He told Tamar he wanted to touch her and it would be a secret because no one else was there. She told him that she did not want to be touched. “No,” she said, “my body

belongs to me.” Amnon was older and stronger. He touched her anyway then told her to go away. Tamar felt very confused. As she walked away she began to cry. She had another brother who she trusted. His name was Absalom. She asked Absalom for help and he told her she could stay with him where she would be safe and it wouldn’t happen again. Tamar knew that touching is never a secret. She trusted her dad, King David, to help her too, and he did not let Amnon touch Tamar again. Her body belonged to her.

Note: If you are concerned about child sexual abuse, or if your child or another child discloses to you, you can find out more about what to do at [nctsn.org/resources/caring-kids-what-parents-need-know-about-sexual-abuse](https://www.nctsn.org/resources/caring-kids-what-parents-need-know-about-sexual-abuse).

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## 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](http://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](http://pcavt.org/boundary-violations).
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***You are your child’s most important teacher about body boundaries!***

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## 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](http://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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