

Factsheet 4: How might I start a conversation about problematic and harmful sexual behaviour?

Conversation tip	Example
<p>Be specific and clear about what you want to talk about by explaining what behaviour is concerning or worrying you—and why. This tip can be a helpful way to start the conversation.</p> <p>It is also important to let the child or young person know that you are there to help them make good decisions.</p>	<p><i>I know many kids/teenagers can find these sorts of things hard to talk about, but I want to speak to you about [name behaviour]. That behaviour wasn't appropriate because [give explanation]. I'm here to talk together so we can help you make better decisions.</i></p>
<p>Let the child or young person know that you want to understand their experience and that you are ready to listen without judging them.</p> <p>Open questions can be used to invite them to share what they have to say about their behaviour. This may help them feel they are in a safe, supportive, and trusting space where they can speak openly and honestly (e.g., about their thoughts, feelings, or behaviours).</p>	<p><i>I was talking to Jessica and she told me about [name behaviour], but I would really like for you to tell me too.</i></p> <p><i>I would really like us to talk together about [name behaviour]. I know that kids/teenagers can find it uncomfortable/hard to talk about these things, but I want you to know I'm always here to listen to what you have to say. What are you thinking about all of this?</i></p> <p><i>I would really like to hear more about what happened just now/today/the other day [name behaviour if needed] and how you're feeling about it?</i></p>
<p>Some children or young people might find it difficult to express themselves by speaking. You could try asking about or offering other ways of communicating (e.g., writing, typing, texting, drawing).¹</p> <p>For children, especially young children, play-based options can also be helpful (e.g., story-telling or role-playing, even with dolls, puppets or favourite toys).²</p>	<p><i>These sorts of things can be hard to talk about. Is there another way you could talk to me—besides speaking—that would make this easier?</i></p> <p>If the child or young person finds it hard to come up with another option, try offering one of the extra ways of communicating that are listed.</p>

Conversation tip	Example
<p>Let the child or young person know you have been listening closely to what they have said by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes giving a short summary of the main point(s) they have said (i.e., ‘summing up’). You can also use these to ‘reflect back’ any thoughts or feelings in them that you have recognised. • Using ‘active listening’ skills. For tips on this, see Active listening with pre-teens and teenagers by the Raising Children Network. <p>It can also be nice to give a short summary of what they said as you move on to the next topic—or when you are winding up a conversation.</p>	<p>A short summary might sound something like: <i>Max, I want to check if I’ve understood the main things you’ve said. So, before [name behaviour] happened you were upset/angry about [insert issue] and you had no one to talk to. But then by [name behaviour], it helped you feel calmer. Can you tell me if I have covered everything and if I have understood this right?</i></p> <p>A short summary that ‘reflects back’ what they are thinking or feeling might sound something like: <i>Let me go over what you’ve told me so I can check I have everything correct. You’re feeling frustrated because you think [name behaviour] was not a good decision, but at the time you couldn’t think of another way to deal with your feelings. Can you explain if I have this right?</i></p>
<p>If you are finding it unfamiliar, awkward or challenging to talk about the problematic and harmful sexual behaviour (or related topics such as sex, sexuality or relationships), it may be helpful to say so. Like us, young people also appreciate being honest and authentic.³</p>	<p><i>I’m finding this a bit awkward/hard to talk about and I wondered if you might be too. I would really like it if you could explain to me what you are thinking or how you are feeling?</i></p>

1 Raising Children Network (2021b)

2 Hervatin (2020)

3 Daniel Morcombe Foundation (2020)