

KEEPING THE PEOPLE YOU SUPPORT HEALTHY, HAPPY AND SAFE USING LANGUAGE, BOUNDARIES AND CONSENT

Language

Many of us do not use the correct terminology for our genitals; words such as, vulva, vagina, uterus, ovaries, penis, scrotum, testicles and breasts. Many of us therefore, do not teach others, including the people we support, the correct terminology or words. This may be because we are embarrassed, uncomfortable, scared or we were never taught the correct words. However, there are many benefits to knowing the correct words for ALL body parts. It is ok if people know other words for these body parts, as it would be almost impossible not to learn any, as long as they also know the correct words.

Why it is Important to Use the Correct Words for All body parts

1. It may prevent sexual abuse. Sexual offenders may avoid people who know the correct names for their genitals because it tells them that the person has been educated about their body and is more likely to tell someone about the abuse.
2. It may end sexual abuse more quickly. People who have been taught the correct names for their genitals are more likely to disclose what happened, are more likely to be taken seriously when they disclose and are more likely to be understood when they disclose, leading to a more positive outcome (e.g. ending the abuse, getting support and/or counselling, abuser being charged).
3. It helps people develop a healthy, positive, body image when their genitals are not something to be ashamed of. When they are given a correct name they are respected like other body parts. We don't call other body parts by funny or derogatory names. We also don't leave out other body parts. We make genitals unspeakable by not naming them.

4. It gives people power, as language is power. The more language we have about our bodies, the more empowered we are.
5. It provides the necessary foundation for subsequent sexual health education about relationships, consent, puberty, reproduction, safer sex, pregnancy, birth control, STIs etc.
6. It gives people the ability to talk to people they trust, such as support staff, parents and health care providers, about concerns they may have such as itchiness, irritation and pain. And allows them to be specific about the body part and area they are referring to. Only knowing funny or made up words can often cause confusion.
7. It gives people the ability to ask questions about their bodies using words everyone can understand.

Boundaries

When talking about the correct terms for body parts, you can also talk about body privacy and your body belonging to you. It is important that people know who should, and who should not, be touching their body and why.

Okay Touch and Not Okay Touch

It is important that people know what ok touch and not ok touch are, and who can touch them (e.g. parent, care giver, health care provider) and why. Not ok touch can be abuse, such as secret touching, but it can also be a touch that is painful or uncomfortable from a family member or friend (e.g. someone hitting you, a housemate hugging too tightly).

It is important that people can say NO if they are feeling uncomfortable, afraid or being hurt. When we know that our bodies belong to us and we get to decide what happens to it, our confidence, personal agency and respect for ourselves increases. It is important to listen when people say no and respect their decision. If this is not possible (e.g. someone must go to the dentist, you must help them in the washroom) explain why. Only phrase things as questions that are actually a decision the person can make. If it is a demand phrase it this way, "You have a cavity that is hurting you and we must go to

the dentist so they can fix it for you, compared to, "Would you like to go to the dentist today?"

Consent

Just like you get to decide who touches you and how, so should the people you support. Ask the people you support before you touch them, teach them to ask before touching someone else. Respect their answer if they say no. Give them options (e.g. would you like a hug? Can I give you a high five or fist bump?). Teach them about rejection (e.g. someone saying no to a hug is their decision and doesn't mean they don't like you).

Just like you, the people you support have good days and bad days, times when they want to be touched and times they don't. By touching people who do not want to be touched we are teaching them that they do not have control over what happens to their bodies and that others can do to their bodies what they want. A person who understands consent is more likely to say no to someone who is touching them inappropriately and tell someone they trust. They are also more likely to have healthy and consensual relationships throughout their lives if consent is taught and becomes a natural part of their understanding of relationships.

Talk to the people you support about reading facial expressions and body language. Sometimes people cannot communicate or use clear words. The ability to read others signs is a useful skill.

Learning consent is preparing for future relationships, including intimate relationships, and helping to prevent sexual abuse and sexual assault.

HOW TO KEEP THE PEOPLE YOU SUPPORT HEALTHY, HAPPY AND SAFE:

1. Model language by using the correct names for ALL body parts including genitals. Use words such as, vulva, vagina, uterus, ovaries, penis, scrotum, testicles and breasts. Make sure the people you support know these words.
2. Teach, "Your Body Belongs to You" and respect the people you support when they do not want to be touched. Ask before you touch them, or let them know you are going to touch them if it is not optional.
3. Teach and model privacy. Private body parts, private places etc.
4. Read sexual health books with the people you support or take them to the library to get books. There are many books that discuss body parts, privacy, how to say no, puberty and relationships.
5. Believe the people you support if they tell you someone touched them or made them feel uncomfortable. Tell them they are not to blame.
6. Teach and model how to give and get consent.
7. Try to model behaviours such as bodily autonomy, healthy relationships, using correct names for body parts etc.
8. Talk about and practice reading facial expressions and body language.
9. Teach the people you support to trust their "gut" feelings (instincts, tummy feelings) as they are often your body's way of letting you know something is wrong or someone has negative intentions.
10. Communication is key! If you make things such as consent and correct terms for body parts, part of everyday conversation it becomes the norm.