CRITICAL

CONVERSATIONS

Talking to Your High School Child about child abuse.

Conversation Starters

It's important to have dialogue about topics like safety and abuse with your high schooler. Consider these prompts to engage them in conversation.

Use the media to make it relevant.

Ask your high-schooler's opinion on something happening on social media, in the news, in a new movie, or on a popular TV show. You could even watch an episode with them and ask follow-up questions. Asking their opinion shows them that you value their point of view and opens the door for more conversation.

Use your own experience to tell a safety story.

Sharing your own experiences can make these conversations relevant and feel more real to teens. If you don't have an experience you feel comfortable sharing, you can tell a story about someone you know.

Talk about caring for their friends — not just about their own behavior.

Talking about how to be a good friend can be a powerful way of expressing to a teen that you trust them to do the right thing without sounding like you're targeting their personal behavior. It also gives you the chance to communicate safety practices that they may not otherwise be receptive to.

Talk about sexual abuse directly.

Most high schoolers have a broader knowledge of terms associated with sexual abuse, but may also still have some misconceptions about what the terms actually mean. Often, the definitions of these concepts come from their peers or social media, which may not be accurate. Take time to teach your teen about sexual abuse, and make sure to use real terms and definitions.

Discuss personal boundaries and consent.

Discuss personal boundaries and consent, and how these topics can be part of their decision-making process when it comes to relationships. Consent is not optional and should be present at all levels of a relationship. Consent is not limited to romantic relationships. Requiring consent for any physical touch is appropriate and acceptable.

Help your kids understand relationship violence and abuse.

Anyone could be a victim of relationship violence and abuse. Use research and statistics to back up your claims. For example, research confirms that as many as one in five adolescent females and one in ten adolescent males have been abused physically or sexually by a dating partner.

Discuss grooming and how an abuser may exert power and control to abuse a minor.

Grooming is when someone builds a relationship, trust, and emotional connection with a minor so they can manipulate, exploit, and abuse them. Grooming by an abuser prepares kids and often families and the community to trust them. This trust creates opportunities for the abuser to lure a minor into risky behavior. The minor might struggle with conflicting feelings about the abuser, experiencing changes in their own behavior, and exhibiting self-blaming behavior.

Make sure your kids know who they can talk to.

Make sure your kids know who they can talk to if abuse occurs or has already occurred. Have them talk about adults they trust and that they would feel comfortable talking to about abuse. Safe adults may or may not include parents. The key is that the adult is responsible and trusted.

Recognize the courage.

Recognize the courage it takes for a child to tell you about abuse.

Emphasize your unwavering support.

Emphasize your unwavering support, as it is the best indicator of the healing outcome for your child.