

What Not to Say	Try This Instead
<p><b>“DON’T LET ANYONE TOUCH YOUR PRIVATE PARTS.”</b></p> <p><b>“NO ONE SHOULD EVER TOUCH YOUR PRIVATE PARTS.”</b></p>	<p>“If anyone touches your private parts, it’s okay to tell me.”</p> <p>“It’s always okay to tell if someone touches your private parts.”</p>

As parents, we always worry that what we do and say is in our kids’ best interest. The idea that a child may be sexually abused is disturbing and frightening. However, our words and actions can harm more than help. Find the right words to talk to your child about sexual abuse.

Adults and older children are bigger, stronger and usually able to intimidate a child. The use of “let” implies the child has the power to prevent it, which is false.

What Not to Say	Try This Instead
<p><b>WHEN REFERRING TO YOUR CHILD’S GENITAL AREA OR PRIVATE PARTS, CALLING IT A “NASTY” OR “DIRTY” PART OF THE BODY.</b></p>	<p>“That is your private part.”</p> <p>Refer to the parts of the body as the “vagina” or “penis.”</p>

Don’t refer to your child’s genital areas as “dirty” and “nasty” parts of the human body. The human body is not dirty, nasty or anything to be ashamed of. Children of all ages must know the names of ALL of their body parts. Using terms that imply shame, something bad or something different keeps can confuse others. Instead, **refer to body parts using the correct term, or simply as private parts.**

What Not to Say	Try This Instead
<p><b>“HAS SOMEONE TOUCHED YOU?”</b></p> <p><b>“HAS ANYONE TOUCHED YOU DOWN THERE?”</b></p>	<p>“Is there anything bothering you?”</p> <p>“Are you okay?”</p> <p>“Has anyone done anything that worries or confuses you?”</p>

Children’s minds are simpler than adults’. Constantly asking about if anyone has “touched” them is confusing. Of course people “touch” — give and receive hugs and kisses, need assistance with toilet training, etc., which are appropriate and necessary. Instead, a simple **“are you okay?”** or **“is there anything bothering you?”** will suffice.

What Not to Say	Try This Instead
<p><b>“I PROMISE NOT TO TELL ANYONE.”</b></p>	<p>“I cannot promise not to tell, but I can promise that I will do what I can to help you. Let’s talk about what is bothering you. I want to help.”</p>

Don’t make promises you can’t keep, such as “I promise not to tell anyone.” If and when a child discloses, they may ask you to promise not to say anything. Given the fact that 95% of perpetrators are someone who the child or family knows and trusts, the child may want to protect them. Gain your child’s trust, but don’t make a promise you must break.

Say: **“I cannot promise not to tell, but I do promise that I can and will help you. Let’s talk about it.”**

### What Not to Say

**“I’LL KILL ANYONE  
WHO TOUCHES YOUR  
PRIVATE PARTS.”**

### Try This Instead

“My job as your mom (or dad) is to protect you and take care of you. Since I’m not around all the time, I can’t always know what’s happening. So if anyone does anything that makes you feel funny or scared or touches you, it’s okay to tell me.”

Children are often sexually abused by relatives, family or caregivers who have a relationship with them. Your initial reaction may be strong — and understandably so — but adult anger scares children, and they may feel responsible for keeping their abuser safe.

Stay calm and collected in front of your child. Instead, **stress that your job is to always protect them, even when you aren’t around.** Encourage them to talk about any behaviors that make them feel worried, confused or scared.