

Assertive Communication: From Playground Fights to Effective Communication

Sometimes teaching kids communication skills can feel harder than calculus. When kids try to communicate, emotions can run high and having a productive conversation is difficult. But assertive communication is an important life skill and can be key in preventing child sexual abuse.

Here are some ways you can help foster good communication skills regardless of your child's age.

•Build confidence.

When your child talks to you, listen and take what they say seriously. It will build their confidence that what they think and say matters to you.

•Help kids set boundaries.

Help set boundaries that make kids feel comfortable and safe, and teach them how to communicate those boundaries to others.

•Welcome questions.

When kids come to you with questions and concerns, it's a golden moment for you as a parent. Listening and responding will open a dialogue.

EXAMPLES:

Here are some scenarios you can talk through with your kids to help them think about how they can use assertive communication skills in their interactions. Pick scenarios that are appropriate for the age of your child and try coming up with a few scenarios of your own.

1. You race toward a swing on the playground and reach it at the same moment as another kid. The kid exclaims, "I got here first!" You reply, "No, I did. It's mine!" You're both losing your patience. What are some ways you could respond in this situation?
2. You ask me if you can go to a movie with a couple of your friends. I respond, "No. You have school tomorrow." Yet, you finished all of your homework, and the movie starts at 7:30, so you shouldn't be getting home too late. How could you respond?
3. You and your boyfriend have been dating for a couple of months. He's been kind and respectful, and you both really like each other. The longer you date, you notice that physical affection is important to him. In general, you like showing physical affection, but last week there was a moment where he pushed you to be more physical than you wanted to be. What would you say?

4. You and your sister have been fighting lately because you think she's spending too much time in the bathroom every morning. She says that she's getting ready as fast as she can, but you're almost late for school every day. How could you address this situation?

5. You turn in an assignment in your math class the day after it's due. You don't really have a good excuse for not getting your work in on time. Your teacher gives the assignment back to you the next day and says that you won't get any credit. You've worked hard in this class, and this is a big assignment. In fact, you might not be able to pass the class if you don't get any credit. What could you say to your teacher?