



# Ten Simple Prevention Steps for Parents/Guardians/Care Takers

## 1 Know and practice consent

Consent is as simple as getting and giving permission to do something. It is important to get consent before physically interacting with others. You can easily ask someone whether it is ok to hug them before just doing so. If they say no, then don't do it. We can teach the children in our lives that they do not need to hug others if they do not want to. Teach family members and other adults that they, too, should ask kids for hugs. Using consent gives everyone power over their own bodies and space. Another way to teach children about consent is by giving them choices about their body. You can read an article on practicing consent with children by using haircuts [here](#), or watch this [Consent Kids video](#) together!

## 2 Discuss and model boundaries

Boundaries are our lines in the sand about things to which we will say yes and no. It is important to talk to children about boundaries including how to decide what theirs are, how to uphold their boundaries, and how to respect other people's boundaries. Everyone will have different boundaries, and they may shift over time. Like consent, there will be things children just cannot set limits around, like saying no to going to the doctor. There are cases where we can allow space for children to discover their own boundaries and as adults respect those boundaries. We can model holding and respecting boundaries in all the relationships in our lives.

## 3 Foster open and honest conversations

Talking about tough issues with youth and children can be scary, but it is necessary. You can keep conversations age appropriate while still using accurate language and being honest. In fact, be honest about what makes you uncomfortable when talking about sexual violence or sexual health. Most children and youth have real questions around relationships, sex, and trauma. If they are not getting a safe and honest answer from you, they will look elsewhere and may not find the best information. The more open and honest you are with the youth in your life, the more likely they are to be open and honest with you. Talking about sex and sexual health with children and youth improves their safety and does not increase the risk of early sexual activity.

## 4 Children exploring sexuality is natural

This can be challenging for adults to recognize and accept, but it is true. It is natural for children to explore their bodies and partake in sexual experimentation. MNCASA has a resource, [Sexual Development in Children](#), to help adults understand what sexual behaviors and developments are common or uncommon by age group. This resource also provides some tips to support healthy sexual development.

## 5 Promote healthy relationships and sex education

Do you know what your children's healthy relationships or sex education classes teach? Be connected with your local schools to know what youth are learning. If you feel there is not enough education being

provided around healthy relationships and healthy sexuality, use your voice, ask the school to do more. You can also connect with your [local anti-sexual violence agency](#) for resources and to assist in providing education within schools. [Here](#) is a list of curricula for educating about healthy relationships and sexual health to share with your community's schools. You could also display the [equality wheel](#) in common areas of your home, school, or work to promote acceptable healthy relationship behaviors. The more you know, the more easily you can fill in the gaps outside of school for the youth in your life.

## 6 Use your voice for policy change

Policies may feel far off and removed from your daily life, yet they affect every part of our lives. Policies affect the way we drive, how our children experience school, and work place practices. If you want to learn more about policy work, start with MNCASA's [Back to Basics Policy 101 resource package](#). You will gain tips for political involvement, voting resources, and suggestions for communicating and connecting with your elected officials. MNCASA also has a resource package about preventing sexual harassment within [schools](#) and the [workplace](#). You have the power to influence these policies and influence change!

## 7 Be aware of media representation and use it to start conversations

Media is a powerful tool. There are countless movies, T.V. shows, and music videos where sexual violence is portrayed as romantic and women's bodies are objectified. When sexual violence or abusive relationships are portrayed in media it can be an opportunity to start conversations. Discuss why those actions or behaviors are not acceptable or healthy. Remind children and youth that what we see in the media is not always what reality is. Check out the films [Miss Representation](#) and [Tough Guise](#) for more information on harmful media representation and messaging.

## 8 Challenge harmful gender norms

Within our culture there are harmful norms that cause and excuse sexual violence, gender norms being one example. When we have rules around what is acceptable and unacceptable for boys and girls, we create strict boxes that are harmful for everyone. Our culture genders toys, clothes, jobs, and even colors. You can challenge gender norms by allowing children to play with all types of toys. All genders are allowed to play with baby dolls, trucks, building blocks, kitchen sets, and dress up clothes. Nothing has to be off limits due to someone's gender. [This article](#) contains even more great examples of ways to challenge gender norms.

## 9 Be willing to intervene and challenge other adults

Not all adults are going to parent or interact with children the same, and that can be a good thing. It is on you to stand up to inappropriate adult behavior and messages. If you hear another adult make a harmful comment, such as "you play like a girl" use it as a learning opportunity. Adults are not perfect and are learning, too. It's important to speak up, but to also give others some grace.

## 10 Be a support system for your children and their friends

Let your children and their friends know they can come to you for help and will not be judged for it. Simply be ready to listen and offer to be a sounding board if they need advice. You may not always have all the answers, but knowing you are willing to hear them out and provide positive feedback is a good start. Don't be offended if your children confide in another family member or friend's family. It's important for kids to have multiple adults in their lives whom they can trust.