

# TALK ABOUT IT! ADAPT 4 ADOLESCENCE

April 22, 2015 | Part 3 of 3, by Ginger Kadlec, author of Be A Kid's Hero™

## Talk About It! Infant-to-Teen Sexual Abuse Prevention & Body Safety Education

### All parents should know two truths:

1. It's NEVER too early to begin teaching children about sexual abuse prevention or "body safety".
2. Kids who KNOW body safety rules are 100% better prepared to deal with attempted sexual abuse than children who are kept in the dark.

Talking with kids about body safety doesn't have to be difficult... just frame your conversations in ways that are age-relevant. And while you're at it, let's also empower our kids to take action if they ever need to.

So, how can you do that?

For starters, make a habit of practicing "Sound-bite Parenting" as your child grows... basically, share small bits (a.k.a. "sound-bites") of information that reinforce key messages in different ways, at different times, depending on the age and development of your child.

*Note: Following are general age range suggestions, so please adjust the information you share with your child based on his/her personal level of development. As your child grasps concepts or is introduced to other environmental or life influences, you may want to begin sharing certain educational concepts earlier... you know your child best!*

### Adapt 4 Adolescence

**12 – 14 years:** As kids mature, their exposure to mature media and messages will likely increase. It's important to do all you can to keep lines of communication with this age group open... hang in there! Even if they don't want to talk to you, they ARE hearing your Sound-bite Parenting messages... so KEEP TALKING WITH and LISTENING TO them! Do your best to make it a two-way street.

1. Cell phones and other online or mobile devices are an appendage to most teens. As your teens begin using these devices, it's important to continue conversations with them about Internet and social media safety.
2. Predators use the Web to stalk and even lure kids. I can't emphasize enough how important it is for you to be tuned in to what your kids are doing online! A site called "Webwise" offers a plethora of information for parents about online safety. You may even want to invest in monitoring software such as SpyAgent or Spector Pro.
3. Did you know 1 in 5 teens, aged 12 to 17, has shared a partially or totally naked picture of themselves via text or on the Internet? Are you also aware another 1 in 3 have seen a "sext" with an explicit photo of someone they know? Discuss with your kids the realities of sexting and educate yourself about the various social media apps that may look cool and fun, but are riddled with hidden dangers.
4. Some parents have found that Family Online Safety Contracts work well. Outlining expectations and parameters of online usage, these contracts can be customized to work for your specific family needs. I think they are a terrific way of helping teens understand what they should and should not do online, as well as expectations for their accountability.

5. Sadly, 43% of teens report being cyberbullied. Kids who are cyberbullied may not talk about this all-too-common form of bullying with their parents. Learn the signs and know how to respond.

6. Teach your children online Dos and Don'ts:

**Don't...**

- Don't share anything you would not feel comfortable having your family see.
- Don't share inappropriate photos.
- Don't make offensive comments or use foul language.
- Don't share personal information including your birthday, home address, vacation plans, or any information that could be used to answer security questions.

**Do...**

- Enable the privacy settings on your account.
- Parents: do monitor your child's activities!
- Parents: do have the passwords to each one of your child's accounts.
- Parents: do know your child's online friends.
- Parents: establish rules about what your child can and cannot share.
- COMMUNICATE!

**15 – 17 years:** By now, hopefully you have laid the foundation with your children for them to make sound decisions and talk with you about any abuse they might encounter. Despite your gallant efforts, though, there may be things happening in your children's lives that they will choose to keep to themselves and not share with you. They still look to you for guidance and support, so continue adapting your Sound-bite Parenting messages for their age and maturity level, and let them know through your words and actions that you indeed "have their back."

1. It's important to regularly talk about relationships and sex with kids during their teen years. While these may be uncomfortable conversations to have, know that four out of five (80%) 16-year olds regularly access online pornography. If you don't frame their perceptions of sex and relationships, the Internet and their friends will... guaranteed. And online pornography these days is readily available in forms that range from stereotypical, to fetish-focused, to violent.

2. As teens begin driving, they also begin dating. Have open conversations with your teens about various influences they will face during these years including sex, drinking and drugs. Many teens are preparing to go to college or find jobs after graduating high school... help prepare them to make sound safety decisions on their own NOW before they leave the safety of your home.

3. Date rape is a reality. Let your teen know that if she is ever a victim, she should immediately tell you. It happens to boys, too. Do your absolute best to maintain an open-door relationship with your kids so they know they can turn to you if something like this ever were to happen.

**So, in a nutshell...**

1. Practice Sound-bite Parenting using the tips in each of the suggested age groups.
2. Engage in two-way conversations with your kids... be sure to practice your own listening skills and really try to "hear" what your kids are saying.
3. As your children mature, so will the nature of the conversations you have with them... and that's a good thing.
4. Keep talking about it!

*Read Part 1: Small Children = Small Lessons*

*Read Part 2: From Elementary to "Tween"*