

A PREMIUM PARENT GUIDE

Before The World Teaches Them

The African Parent's Age-by-Age Guide to
Body Awareness, Boundaries, Healthy
Conversations & Child Safety

By Esther Olabanji

Confidence • Communication • Prevention • Protection

PLANNING OVERVIEW

Product Promise (one paragraph): Every child will eventually learn about bodies, boundaries, and relationships — the only question is who teaches them first, and how well. *Before The World Teaches Them* gives African parents a clear, age-by-age roadmap for having these conversations early, calmly, and confidently — from toddlerhood through the teenage years — so that children grow up knowing their bodies belong to them, understanding what healthy boundaries look like, recognising unsafe behaviour, and trusting their parents enough to come to them first. This is not a guarantee against harm; it is a practical toolkit that helps parents become the informed, approachable adult their child needs.

Unique Selling Proposition: Unlike generic Western sex-education books or thin pamphlets, this guide is built specifically around the realities of African family life — extended family, respected elders, community and religious life, domestic help, boarding schools, and rising smartphone access — without stereotyping any single culture. It combines developmental science with real scripts a parent can say out loud today, plus worksheets designed to actually be filled in and revisited.

Key Transformation: The parent moves from *"I don't know when or how to start this conversation"* to *"I have a plan, I have the words, and my child knows they can come to me."*

Estimated Page Allocation (expanded, ≈65-75 pages):

- Front matter & Start Here: 5 pp
- Ch.1 Why This Conversation Starts Earlier Than You Think: 5 pp
- Ch.2 The Age-by-Age Roadmap: 18 pp
- Ch.3 Teaching Bodies Without Shame: 6 pp
- Ch.4 The Body-Safety Toolkit: 5 pp
- Ch.5 Recognising Unsafe Behaviour: 6 pp
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- Ch.9 Conversations Parents Are Afraid to Have: 8 pp
- Ch.10 If Your Child Tells You Something Concerning: 5 pp
- Ch.11 Building a Home Where Children Talk: 4 pp
- Ch.12 Common Parenting Mistakes: 4 pp
- Ch.13 The Parent's Action Plan (8 weeks): 5 pp
- Premium Printables (fillable worksheets): 10 pp
- Bonus Scriptbook: 6 pp
- References & Further Reading: 1 pp

Visual/Design Direction: Warm neutral palette (terracotta, sand, deep green, ink navy), clean serif headings paired with a humanist sans body font, generous white space, simple line-art age-group icons, soft-cornered callout boxes, printable worksheet pages with real fill-in lines, checkboxes, and boxed writing space.

Research/Source Strategy: Grounded in publicly available guidance from UNICEF, WHO, UNESCO's International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education, the CDC, and established child-protection organisations (e.g., NSPCC, Stop It Now, Darkness to Light's "5 Steps to Protecting Our Children"). Statistics are cited only where a credible source is referenced; otherwise, guidance is framed as professional recommendation rather than statistic.

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A NOTE TO PARENTS

If you are reading this because something already worries you, take a breath — you are doing the right thing by seeking information. If you are reading this simply because you want to be prepared, that is exactly the right instinct too. Nothing in this guide requires you to have a single "big talk." It is built so you can open it, read a few pages that match your child's age, and start speaking — today, imperfectly, and still well.

You do not need to read this guide cover to cover before you begin. Many parents start with Chapter 2, find their child's age band, and simply try one sentence this week. That is enough to start.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Start with Chapter 2, find your child's age band, and read the "What to Teach" and worked conversation examples first. Return to the earlier chapters whenever you want deeper explanation of a principle. Use the printable worksheets at the back as living documents — fill them in with a pencil, revisit them every few months, and update them as your child grows. This is a guide you grow into, not one you finish once.

START HERE

Sex education for children is not one conversation. It is a series of small, age-appropriate conversations that build on each other as your child grows — the same way you don't teach a child to read with one lesson, but through years of small, repeated exposure.

You do not need to have everything figured out before you begin. You do not need the perfect words. You do not need to wait until your child asks the "big question." You only need to begin — with simple, honest, age-appropriate information — and keep the door open as they grow.

REMEMBER: A child who knows they can talk to you is easier to protect.

CHAPTER 1 — WHY THIS CONVERSATION STARTS EARLIER THAN YOU THINK

Age-appropriate body education is not about teaching children adult sexual behaviour. It is about giving a child accurate words for their body, a clear sense that their body belongs to them, and the confidence to speak up when something feels wrong. A three-year-old who knows the correct name for their body parts and understands "private" is not being sexualised — they are being protected, in the same way a child who knows their address and phone number is being protected.

Why early body awareness matters. Children who understand their bodies, use correct anatomical language, and know they are allowed to say "no" to unwanted touch are, according to child-protection organisations such as Darkness to Light and the NSPCC, generally better equipped to recognise and report inappropriate behaviour. Silence does not keep a child innocent — it simply means that if something happens, the child may not have the words to describe it or the confidence to tell you.

Why silence can leave children looking elsewhere. If a child cannot ask you where babies come from, why their body is changing, or what a strange interaction with an adult meant, they will ask someone else — a classmate, an older cousin, a stranger online, or nobody at all. The information gap does not stay empty. It gets filled, often by unreliable or harmful sources.

Why shame makes communication harder. A child who is scolded, shushed, or laughed at for asking a body-related question quickly learns that these topics are forbidden. That same child may then hesitate to tell you if something confusing or frightening happens to their body, because they have learned this is not a topic you welcome.

Why parents should be the trusted source. You do not need to be your child's only source of information forever, but you can be their *first* and *most trusted* one. When you are approachable early, your child continues coming to you as questions get more complex.

What this looks like in a busy, extended-family household. Many African households include grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, house helps, and family friends who spend real time with children — this is a strength, not a risk to avoid by isolating your child. It simply means body-safety language needs to be shared consistently by the primary caregiver, and reinforced gently across the household, so a child hears the same message no matter who is caring for them that day. You do not need everyone in the family to agree with every word of this guide; you only need your child to know that *you*, specifically, are always someone they can come to.

Answering Common Parent Objections

"My child is too young." There is no age too young for teaching correct body names, privacy, and consent in simple, non-sexual language. A two-year-old can learn "this is your body, it belongs to you" the same way they learn "this is hot, don't touch."

"Talking about it will put ideas into their head." Teaching a child the names of their body parts and the concept of boundaries does not introduce sexual ideas — it introduces safety concepts, similar to teaching them to look both ways before crossing a road.

"We didn't learn these things growing up." Many parents were raised in homes where these topics were never discussed. You are allowed to give your child something you did not receive yourself. It is common to feel awkward the first few times — this feeling fades with practice, and it is not a sign you are doing something wrong.

"My child knows better." Understanding right from wrong in general does not mean a child recognises manipulation, grooming, or pressure — these are specific skills that need to be taught, just like reading or swimming. A well-behaved, obedient child can still be targeted; good behaviour is not protection.

"Our family doesn't discuss these things." Cultural discretion around sexuality does not need to disappear —

but body safety, boundaries, and protection from abuse are different from teaching adult sexuality, and can be introduced in a way that respects your family's values and privacy norms.

"What will people say if my child starts asking questions in public?" You can teach your child *when and where* it is appropriate to ask certain questions ("that's a great question — let's talk about it at home") without teaching them that the question itself is shameful.

"I'm worried I'll say the wrong thing." There is no single perfect script. A calm, honest, age-appropriate answer — even an imperfect one — is far more protective than silence.

Parent Reflection

1. What did I learn about bodies and boundaries as a child, and how did that shape me?
2. What is my biggest fear about starting this conversation?
3. What words feel comfortable for me to use with my child right now?
4. Who did I trust as a child, and why?
5. What would I want my child to do if something confusing happened to them?
6. Which relatives, caregivers, or community members spend unsupervised time with my child, and do they share my approach to boundaries?
7. What is one small step I can take this week?
8. What do I want my child to feel after these conversations — informed, safe, ashamed, or afraid?

CHAPTER 2 — THE AGE-BY-AGE ROADMAP

Children develop at different rates. These age bands are a guide, not a rulebook — adjust based on your child's maturity, questions, environment, and needs. What matters most is that the conversation happens progressively, not all at once. For every age group, this chapter gives you what to teach, what not to overcomplicate, how to introduce it, several worked conversations for different everyday moments, common mistakes, a practical activity, and warning signs that may need closer attention.

AGES 2-4

What to teach: Correct names for all body parts, including private parts; the concept of "private" versus "public"; simple consent ("ask before you hug"); the right to say no to unwanted touch, even from relatives; identifying 2-3 trusted adults; basic safety words like "stop" and "no."

What not to overcomplicate: There is no need to explain sex, reproduction, or abuse in detail at this age. Keep language simple, factual, and tied to the child's own body and routine.

How to introduce it: During bath time or dressing, name body parts matter-of-factly, the same way you'd name an elbow or a knee. Repetition across many small moments works better than one long talk.

Worked conversation 1 — Bath time:

CHILD: (*during bath time*) "What's this?" **Parent:** "That's your vulva. It's a private part of your body, which means it's just for you — only you, or someone helping you get clean or feel better, like Mummy, Daddy, or the doctor, can touch it, and always gently."
Child: "Why is it private?" **Parent:** "Because it's a special part of your body, and special parts get extra care and privacy — just like how we keep your favourite toy safe."

Worked conversation 2 — A relative asks for a hug:

AUNTIE: "Come and give Auntie a big hug!" **Child:** (*hesitates*) **Parent:** "It's okay, you can ask her — would you like a hug, a high-five, or a wave today?" **Child:** "High-five!" **Parent (to Auntie, warmly):** "She's learning she gets to choose how she greets people — it helps her understand her body is hers."

Worked conversation 3 — Naming a trusted adult:

PARENT: "If you're ever confused or scared, who are the people you can go to?" **Child:** "You! And Grandma!" **Parent:** "Yes — me, Grandma, and your teacher, Mrs. Bello. That's your safe circle."

Common mistakes: Using only nicknames for private parts; reacting with alarm or laughter when a child touches or asks about their body; forcing hugs or kisses with relatives "to be polite"; assuming the child is too young to remember any of this.

Practical activity: Play a "body names" game pointing to different parts, ending naturally with private parts, without special emphasis or embarrassment. Repeat monthly.

Warning signs to watch for: Sudden fear of a specific person; unusual language about body parts that seems adult in origin; regression in toileting or sleep without another clear cause; new, unexplained physical discomfort.

AGES 5-7

What to teach: Body autonomy ("your body is yours"); privacy in bathrooms and changing rooms; the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch; safe versus unsafe situations; the difference between secrets and surprises; identifying and naming trusted adults; the idea that they can always come and tell you, no matter what, even if someone told them not to.

What not to overcomplicate: Avoid detailed discussion of sexual acts. Focus on rules, feelings, and recognising discomfort.

How to introduce it: Use everyday moments — a TV scene, a school safety talk, a question from a sibling — as natural openings. This age also benefits from a short, planned "body safety chat" once or twice a year.

Worked conversation 1 — After a school safety talk:

CHILD: "My teacher says nobody should touch our private parts." **Parent:** "That's right. Your private parts are yours, and no one should touch them except to help you stay clean or healthy, and even then, you can tell them to stop. If anyone ever tries, you tell me straight away — I will never be angry with you for telling me." **Child:** "What if it's someone I know?" **Parent:** "It doesn't matter who it is — even someone we love and trust. The rule stays the same, and telling me is always the right thing to do."

Worked conversation 2 — Changing rooms at the pool:

CHILD: "Why do I have to change in a separate stall now?" **Parent:** "As we grow, our bodies become more private, and changing alone helps you practice that privacy. It's a good habit, not a punishment."

Worked conversation 3 — A confusing interaction with an older cousin:

CHILD: "Cousin Tunde said not to tell you we were wrestling in his room." **Parent:** "Thank you for telling me. Rough play that someone asks you to keep secret is exactly the kind of thing I always want to know about — you're not in trouble, and neither is he, necessarily. I just want to understand what happened so I can make sure you're comfortable."

Common mistakes: Only warning about "strangers"; assuming school covers everything; not explaining that trusted people can sometimes behave inappropriately too; treating a child's disclosure as an accusation rather than information.

Practical activity: Complete the "My Trusted Adults" worksheet (see Premium Printables) together, and revisit it every school term.

Warning signs: Reluctance to be around a specific person; new sexual knowledge or language beyond their age; sudden anxiety about a routine event like a visit or sleepover; physical complaints with no clear medical cause.

AGES 8-10

What to teach: Deeper understanding of boundaries and consent; early puberty preparation; recognising inappropriate jokes or comments; peer pressure basics; digital safety fundamentals; what to do if something feels wrong, even with someone they like or respect; the idea that their gut feeling of discomfort is worth listening to.

What not to overcomplicate: Full sexual-health detail is not necessary yet; focus on respect, boundaries, and early body-change awareness.

How to introduce it: Use a calm, planned conversation rather than waiting only for questions — this is a good age for a short, dedicated chat, ideally before puberty visibly begins.

Worked conversation 1 — Introducing puberty ahead of time:

PARENT: "Your body is going to start changing over the next few years — that's called puberty, and it's completely normal. I want you to know ahead of time what to expect, so nothing surprises or worries you." **Child:** "Will it hurt?" **Parent:** "Some parts might feel strange or a little uncomfortable at times, but it's not something to be scared of — it happens to everybody, and I'll walk you through each part as it comes."

Worked conversation 2 — An inappropriate joke at school:

CHILD: "A boy at school kept making jokes about girls' bodies. Everyone laughed." **Parent:** "How did that make you feel?" **Child:** "Uncomfortable, but I laughed too because everyone else did." **Parent:** "That makes sense — it's hard to be the only one who doesn't laugh. You can still feel uncomfortable and not know what to do in the moment; what matters is that you can tell me about it afterward, like you just did. Next time, you could also say, 'that's not funny' or just walk away — you don't have to laugh along."

Worked conversation 3 — A gut-feeling check-in:

PARENT: "Has anyone — a relative, a teacher, a family friend — ever made you feel uncomfortable, even a little, even if you're not sure why?" **Child:** "Sometimes Uncle Femi tickles me even when I say stop." **Parent:** "Thank you for telling me. That's not okay, even from someone in the family, and I'm going to speak with him about respecting your 'stop.' You did exactly the right thing."

Common mistakes: Waiting until puberty has already started; assuming the child will ask if confused; discussing only physical changes and ignoring emotional ones; dismissing "small" discomforts as not worth mentioning.

Practical activity: Read a simple, age-appropriate puberty book together and let the child ask questions afterward. Start a loose "questions notebook" they can add to privately.

Warning signs: Withdrawal from friends or family; secretive phone or tablet use; unexplained gifts or money; drop in school performance; new reluctance around a specific relative or family friend.

AGES 11-13

What to teach: Puberty specifics (menstruation, erections, body hair, voice changes, body odour, skin changes); hygiene; emotional changes and early attraction; peer pressure; social media risks; exposure to sexual content online; consent in friendships and early relationships; healthy communication; the concept that respect goes both ways.

What not to overcomplicate: Avoid overly clinical or overly explicit sexual detail; focus on what's happening to their body now and how to handle social pressure.

How to introduce it: Normalise ongoing, shorter conversations rather than one long talk; check in regularly, and let your child set some of the pace.

Worked conversation 1 — Menstruation preparation:

PARENT: "A lot of your friends might already be going through body changes, or talking about relationships online. I want you to know you can ask me anything — even the embarrassing stuff — and I won't make it weird." **Child:** "Priscilla started her period at school and didn't know what to do." **Parent:** "That's exactly why we're talking about this now. Let's make sure you have pads in your school bag, and you know exactly what to do if it happens to you, so you never feel caught off guard like that."

Worked conversation 2 — Social media pressure:

CHILD: "Everyone in my class has Instagram except me." **Parent:** "I hear you — that's a real pressure. Before I decide, let's talk about what worries me: strangers messaging you, and pressure to post certain kinds of photos. If we do this, we're doing it together with some agreed rules — can we look at those together?"

Worked conversation 3 — Noticing early attraction:

CHILD: "I think I like someone in my class." **Parent:** "Thank you for telling me — that's a completely normal feeling at your age. What do you like about them?" **Child:** (*shares*) **Parent:** "It's okay to have those feelings. Whatever happens, remember that a person who respects you will never pressure you to do anything you're not comfortable with, even something small like holding hands."

Common mistakes: Treating puberty as only a "mother-daughter" or "father-son" topic; avoiding the subject of online content; assuming maturity equals full understanding of consent; reacting with panic or teasing to a crush.

Practical activity: Create a "questions box" where the child can write anonymous questions for you to answer honestly later, even if you answer them together as a family.

Warning signs: Secretive online relationships; sudden changes in mood tied to phone use; reluctance to discuss friendships; signs of distress around a specific adult or older peer; unexplained new possessions.

AGES 14-16

What to teach: Relationships and consent in more depth; recognising pressure and coercion; respect within relationships; online relationships and sexting risks; pornography literacy (helping teens understand that pornography is not a realistic depiction of relationships or bodies); age-appropriate sexual-health information; decision-making; knowing when and how to seek trusted adult or professional support.

What not to overcomplicate: You do not need to cover every topic in one sitting — build on earlier conversations rather than starting from zero.

How to introduce it: Treat your teen as a capable decision-maker; ask their opinions before giving yours; use current events, shows, or music as natural conversation openers.

Worked conversation 1 — Talking about consent directly:

PARENT: "If you're ever in a relationship, real consent means both people feel free to say no at any point, without guilt or pressure. That applies online too — no one has the right to pressure you into sending or doing something you don't want to." **TEEN:** "What if I already said yes and then change my mind?" **PARENT:** "You're always allowed to change your mind, at any point, for any reason — and anyone who respects you will accept that immediately."

Worked conversation 2 — Discovering something concerning on their phone:

PARENT: "I noticed a message that worried me. I'm not here to punish you — I want to understand what's going on." **TEEN:** (*defensive*) "You went through my phone?" **PARENT:** "I did, because something felt off, and your safety matters more than your privacy in that moment. Let's talk about what happened, and then let's talk about how we handle phone privacy going forward."

Worked conversation 3 — Pornography literacy:

TEEN: "Everyone watches that stuff, it's not a big deal." **PARENT:** "It's more common than people think, so I'm not shocked. What I want you to know is that it's performance, not real life — real bodies, real relationships, and real consent look different from what's shown there. I'd rather you hear that from me than assume it's a manual."

Common mistakes: Lecturing instead of discussing; assuming a closed door means nothing is happening; reacting with panic to honest disclosures, which discourages future honesty; refusing to discuss pornography or sexting at all.

Practical activity: Discuss a relevant, age-appropriate news story or show storyline together and ask their perspective on the characters' choices.

Warning signs: A significantly older "friend" or partner; secrecy about a specific relationship; signs of controlling behaviour from a partner; sudden anxiety, depression, or self-harm signs; unexplained financial gifts from an older individual.

AGES 16+

What to teach: Healthy relationship values; consent as an ongoing, enthusiastic agreement; responsibility; sexual-health basics including contraception and STI prevention as age- and context-appropriate; emotional readiness; digital boundaries; recognising unhealthy or abusive relationship patterns; the kind of future relationships they want to build.

What not to overcomplicate: Avoid moralising; focus on equipping them to make informed, safe decisions, whatever their personal or family values around timing.

How to introduce it: Speak as a guide, not a gatekeeper — your goal now is to be a resource they still want to consult.

Worked conversation 1 — Opening the door without judgment:

PARENT: "Whatever choices you make, I want you to have accurate information so you can protect your health and know what a respectful relationship looks like. You can always come to me, even about the hard stuff." **Teen:** "Even if it's something you wouldn't approve of?" **Parent:** "Especially then. I'd rather know and help than not know and worry."

Worked conversation 2 — Recognising an unhealthy relationship:

PARENT: "I've noticed your partner gets upset when you spend time with friends. Has that felt normal to you?" **Teen:** "He just says it's because he cares." **Parent:** "Caring about someone doesn't usually come with control. A partner who trusts you doesn't need to limit who you see. I'm not trying to tell you what to do — I just want you to notice the pattern."

Worked conversation 3 — Health and readiness:

PARENT: "If you ever become sexually active, I want you to know how to protect your health, and I'd rather you have that information from me than guess. Would it help to talk to a doctor together, or would you prefer to go alone?"

Common mistakes: Assuming the conversation is "finished"; withdrawing just as your teen faces the most complex decisions; refusing to discuss sexual health out of discomfort; equating a teen's independence with no longer needing guidance.

Practical activity: Help them identify a trusted healthcare provider or clinic they could approach confidentially if needed.

Warning signs: Signs of controlling or abusive relationship dynamics; sudden secrecy about a partner; reluctance to introduce a partner to family; signs of pressure around sexual activity; withdrawal from previously close friends or family.

CHAPTER 3 — TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT THEIR BODIES WITHOUT SHAME

Correct anatomical language, used calmly and early, removes mystery and shame from the body. Children who grow up with matter-of-fact body language are generally more comfortable reporting problems, because nothing about their body feels forbidden to discuss.

Practical guidance:

- Use correct terms for all body parts, alongside any family-friendly nicknames you also want to use.
- Explain privacy simply: "Private means just for you, and people helping you stay healthy or clean."
- Encourage body autonomy: let your child decline hugs or tickling, and role-model asking before touching them yourself.
- Respond to curiosity calmly. Curiosity about bodies is a normal part of development, not a discipline issue.
- Use ordinary moments (bath time, doctor visits, getting dressed) rather than creating one dramatic "body talk."
- Model comfortable language yourself — children absorb your tone as much as your words.

"What Do I Say When My Child Asks...?"

"Why do boys and girls have different bodies?" "Bodies come in different types, and each one works a little differently — but every body deserves privacy and respect."

"Why can't I see you in the bathroom anymore?" "As we grow, our bodies become more private, and it's healthy for everyone — including grown-ups — to have privacy."

"Why did the doctor touch me there?" "Doctors sometimes need to check private parts to make sure you're healthy, and that's okay when I'm there and the doctor explains what they're doing. If a doctor ever wants to check you without me present or without explaining, that's something to tell me about."

"Why does my body feel funny sometimes when I touch myself?" "Bodies can feel different sensations, and that's normal. Touching your own body in private is something that happens sometimes, but it's a private activity, just like using the toilet — it's not something we do in front of others."

"What's a period? My friend said it's gross." "A period is a normal, healthy part of how some bodies work — it's not gross, it's just something not everyone talks about openly. I'll explain exactly what happens so it never surprises or worries you."

"Why do I have to wear a swimsuit at the beach?" "Swimsuits cover our private parts so we can be comfortable and enjoy the water while keeping those parts of our body just for us."

"Is it bad that I looked at my own body in the mirror?" "Not at all — it's healthy and normal to be curious about your own body. Looking at yourself in private is completely fine."

AVOID THIS: Reacting with shock, shame, or "we don't talk about that." This teaches a child the topic is forbidden — including the parts that keep them safe.

TRY THIS: A calm, brief, honest answer, followed by, "Do you have any other questions about that?"

Building the Habit Over Time

A single well-handled question rarely closes the topic forever — it opens the door to more. Expect follow-up questions weeks or months later, sometimes at inconvenient moments (in the car, at a family gathering, in a shop). A simple bridging phrase works well in those moments: *"That's a great question — let's finish talking about it properly when we get home."* Always follow through on that promise; a broken promise to "talk later" teaches a child the opposite lesson from the one you intend.

CHAPTER 4 — THE BODY-SAFETY TOOLKIT

Teach these principles simply and repeat them often, in words a child can remember and use. Consider printing them out (see Premium Printables) and reviewing them together every few months, the same way you'd revisit a fire-safety plan.

- **My body belongs to me.**
- **I can say no** — even to someone older, even to a relative, even to someone I love.
- **I can move away** from a situation that feels wrong.
- **I can tell a trusted adult**, even if I'm scared or unsure.
- **I can keep telling** until someone listens and helps me.
- **I do not have to keep a body-related secret**, even if someone asks me to.
- **I can ask for help** even if someone tells me not to.
- **I will not be punished** for telling a trusted adult something that confused or frightened me.

Practising the Toolkit in Everyday Life

Principles work best when practised in low-stakes moments, not just explained in the abstract.

Worked practice — saying no to a relative:

PARENT: "If Grandpa asks for a kiss goodbye and you don't feel like it today, what can you say?" **Child:** "No thank you, I'll wave instead?" **Parent:** "Exactly. And if he seems upset about it, that's for the grown-ups to handle, not you."

Worked practice — moving away from discomfort:

PARENT: "If a game with a cousin starts to feel weird or uncomfortable, what could you do?" **Child:** "Say I need to use the bathroom and just leave?" **Parent:** "That works. You don't need a perfect reason — you're always allowed to just walk away."

Worked practice — telling even when scared:

PARENT: "What if someone told you something bad would happen if you told me a secret?" **Child:** "I'd be scared." **Parent:** "That's completely understandable. And even if you're scared, I want you to know: nothing bad will happen to you for telling me the truth. I will always be on your side."

The Trusted Adult Circle

Help your child name 3-5 trusted adults — not just one — across different settings (home, school, extended family, community). Explain that if one trusted adult doesn't believe them or is unavailable, they should try another, and keep trying until someone helps. A single "trusted adult" can become a single point of failure; a circle of several is safer.

Good candidates typically include: a parent, one other close relative the child names themselves, a teacher or school counsellor, and one adult outside the family (a coach, religious mentor, or family friend) whom the child feels comfortable with. Let the child have real input into this list — a trusted adult imposed entirely by the parent may not be who the child would actually turn to.

QUICK CHECK: Can your child name three adults, other than you, they could go to if something felt wrong? If not, that's this week's project.

CHAPTER 5 — HELPING CHILDREN RECOGNISE UNSAFE BEHAVIOUR

This section must be read carefully. Children should never be taught to judge safety by a person's appearance, gender, wealth, occupation, age, ethnicity, or religion. These are not reliable indicators, and teaching them creates false security around "safe-looking" people while creating unfair suspicion of others. Instead, children — and parents — should learn to recognise **behaviour patterns**.

Behavioural patterns worth noticing, in age-appropriate discussion with your child:

- Someone insisting on secrecy about a game, gift, or interaction.
- Someone trying to spend time alone with a child in ways that don't match the relationship.
- Someone repeatedly testing or pushing past a child's stated boundary "as a joke."
- Someone offering unusual gifts, money, or privileges tied to secrecy.
- Someone trying to move a conversation into private messages, calls, or spaces away from other adults.
- Someone using guilt, fear, flattery, or threats to keep a child compliant.
- Someone positioning themselves as the child's "only" understanding adult, subtly separating the child from parents or peers.
- Someone ignoring a child's "no" or discomfort, treating it as something to be overcome rather than respected.

Explain that grooming can happen gradually, in small steps that each seem minor on their own, and children may feel confused, flattered, or unsure whether anything is really "wrong." This is normal, and it does not mean the child did anything wrong.

How to Talk About This With Your Child, By Age

Ages 5-7: "If a grown-up or older kid ever asks you to keep a secret about touching, or makes you feel funny in your tummy, that's something to tell me right away, even if they said not to."

Ages 8-10: "Sometimes people slowly try to get a child to trust them by being extra nice, giving gifts, or asking to keep small secrets — and then it grows into something bigger. If anyone does this, even someone we know well, please tell me."

Ages 11-13: "Grooming is when someone builds trust with a child on purpose, so the child won't tell anyone if something inappropriate happens. It can happen online too — through games, chats, or social media. Watch for anyone who asks you to keep secrets, sends you gifts, or wants to talk to you privately away from other adults."

Ages 14+: "Manipulation in relationships or with adults you trust often starts subtly — isolating you from friends, making you feel special or 'chosen,' then slowly pushing boundaries. Trust your discomfort even before you can fully explain it."

REMEMBER: The responsibility for inappropriate behaviour always belongs to the adult or older person involved — never the child.

Parent Checklist: "Does This Situation Deserve Closer Attention?"

- Does this person ask for secrecy with your child?
- Does this person seek unsupervised time with your child beyond what's typical for the relationship?
- Has your child shown reluctance, fear, or a mood change around this person?
- Has this person given your child unusual gifts or privileges?
- Does this person dismiss or override your child's stated discomfort?
- Has your child said anything, even briefly or jokingly, that seemed out of place?
- Does this person seem to be positioning themselves as your child's "special" confidant?

If several of these apply, it is reasonable to ask calm, direct questions, limit unsupervised access, and, if concern

persists, consult a qualified child-protection or counselling professional.

CHAPTER 6 — WHAT TO TEACH CHILDREN ABOUT SECRETS, SURPRISES & TRUST

Surprises are temporary and positive — a birthday gift, a party — and everyone eventually finds out and is happy. **Secrets**, especially ones that make a child feel uneasy or that an adult insists must never be told, are different, and children should be taught that they never have to keep this second kind.

Simple language: *"If someone tells you to keep something secret from Mummy and Daddy forever, especially about your body, that's a secret you should always tell us, even if you promised not to."*

Worked Conversation — Teaching the Difference

PARENT: "Do you know the difference between a surprise and a secret?" **Child:** "A surprise is like a present?" **Parent:** "Exactly — a surprise makes everyone happy once it's revealed, and it's only for a little while. A secret that someone tells you to keep forever, especially about touching or your body, is different — that kind you should always tell me, right away." **Child:** "Even if I promised not to?" **Parent:** "Even then. A promise like that was never a fair one to ask of you."

Why children may hesitate to tell you:

- Fear of getting in trouble, even when they've done nothing wrong.
- Fear of upsetting or disappointing you.
- Embarrassment about the topic.
- Belief they won't be believed.
- Direct threats from the person involved.
- Confusion about what actually happened.
- Affection or loyalty toward the person involved, especially if it's a relative or family friend.

How to make disclosure easier: Respond to small disclosures calmly so your child learns big ones are safe to share too. Avoid saying "I told you so" or "why didn't you tell me sooner." Thank your child for telling you, every time, regardless of the content.

Worked Conversation — Responding to a Small Disclosure Well

CHILD: "I ate the sweets you said I couldn't have, and I hid the wrapper." **Parent:** "Thank you for telling me the truth, even though you were scared to. That matters more to me than the sweets. Next time, come tell me right away — you won't be in bigger trouble for being honest."

This kind of small, low-stakes practice builds the habit that makes a bigger disclosure possible later.

CHAPTER 7 — ONLINE SAFETY & THE DIGITAL WORLD

Smartphones and social media have changed childhood, and taking away a device entirely is rarely realistic or sustainable long-term. A better approach is an ongoing digital-safety partnership.

Cover with your child, at an age-appropriate level:

- Not everyone online is who they claim to be.
- Never share passwords, home address, school name, or location with online contacts.
- Private messages from unknown or unusually friendly adults/older teens are a red flag, even if they seem kind at first.
- Sexual images or content sent by anyone, including peers, should be reported to a trusted adult, not hidden out of embarrassment.
- Once something is shared online, it can be nearly impossible to fully remove.
- Blocking and reporting are always allowed, and never something to feel guilty about.
- Parents may check devices periodically — this is about safety, not punishment or distrust.

Worked Conversation — Introducing a First Phone

PARENT: "Getting your own phone is exciting, and it also comes with some responsibility. Let's agree on a few ground rules together before we set it up." **Teen:** "Like what?" **Parent:** "Like: I'll know your passwords, the phone stays out of your room at night, and if anything online ever confuses or worries you, you tell me without fear of losing the phone." **Teen:** "What if I mess up?" **Parent:** "Then we talk about it and adjust — this isn't a one-strike system."

Worked Conversation — Discovering an Inappropriate Message

PARENT: "I saw a message from someone you don't know sent something inappropriate. I'm not angry with you — I need you to walk me through how this started." **Child:** "I didn't do anything, they just started messaging me." **Parent:** "Okay. Thank you for not deleting it. We're going to block and report this account together, and I want you to know: this happens to a lot of kids, and you did nothing wrong by being messaged."

Worked Conversation — A Peer Sends a Sexual Image

CHILD: "A boy from school sent me a photo. I don't know what to do." **Parent:** "I'm really glad you told me instead of hiding it. You're not in trouble. We're going to keep it as evidence rather than forward it further, and I'll help you report it and, if needed, speak to the school."

How Parents Can Monitor Without Destroying Trust

Explain monitoring openly rather than doing it secretly; frame it as a family safety habit, not surveillance of a "suspect"; revisit and loosen rules as your child demonstrates responsibility; keep communication as the primary safety tool, with monitoring as a backup rather than the whole plan.

Family Digital Safety Rules (see also Premium Printables for a fillable version)

1. Devices stay in shared family spaces, not bedrooms, especially at night.
2. New online contacts are only accepted if a parent knows who they are.
3. No sharing of full name, address, school, or location publicly.
4. No sharing of private photos, of yourself or anyone else, with anyone.
5. If something online feels confusing, scary, or "off," tell a trusted adult immediately — you will not be in trouble.
6. Passwords are shared with a parent, not with friends.
7. Video calls with unknown people are not allowed.
8. Screen time has agreed daily limits, set together as a family.

9. Games and apps are approved by a parent before downloading.
10. If someone asks you to keep an online conversation secret from your parents, tell a parent right away.
1. Never agree to meet an online contact in person without a parent present.
2. Cyberbullying — sending or receiving — should always be reported, not hidden.
3. Location-sharing settings are reviewed together regularly.
4. If you receive an inappropriate image or message, don't delete it — show a trusted adult first.
5. Family devices are checked periodically, and everyone knows this in advance.

CHAPTER 8 — PUBERTY: PREPARE THEM BEFORE IT HAPPENS

Children who understand puberty before it begins experience less fear, shame, and confusion when changes start. Waiting for a first period or first nocturnal emission to explain what's happening leaves a child to interpret a significant, sometimes frightening, physical event without context.

Cover, factually and calmly, well before onset (generally beginning around ages 8-10):

- Growth spurts, body hair, skin and body-odour changes.
- Menstruation: what it is, why it happens, and practical hygiene management.
- Erections and nocturnal emissions: normal, involuntary, and not shameful.
- Emotional changes: mood shifts are a normal part of hormonal change, not a personal failing.
- Privacy and hygiene routines appropriate to their changing body.

Avoid rigid gender-based assumptions — some children benefit from understanding both sets of changes, since they will encounter peers of all backgrounds going through puberty, and this builds empathy alongside self-knowledge.

Worked Conversation — Preparing a Daughter for Menstruation

PARENT: "In the next couple of years, your body will start having periods. I want to explain it now, before it happens, so you're never caught by surprise." **Daughter:** "Does it hurt?" **Parent:** "Some people feel cramping, a bit like a stomach ache, and some don't feel much at all. We'll keep pads in your school bag from now on, just in case it starts sooner than we expect, and I'll show you exactly how to use them."

Worked Conversation — Preparing a Son for Physical Changes

PARENT: "Your body is going to change over the next few years — your voice will get deeper, you'll grow hair in new places, and you might notice your body reacting on its own sometimes, like waking up to a wet patch. That's called a nocturnal emission, and it's completely normal — it's not something to be embarrassed about." **Son:** "Does that happen to everyone?" **Parent:** "Yes, to nearly every boy at some point. It's just your body adjusting, nothing is wrong."

Worked Conversation — Managing Body Odour and Hygiene

PARENT: "You might notice you need to shower more often now, and deodorant will become part of your daily routine. This isn't because anything is wrong with you — everyone's body starts producing more sweat during puberty."

Worked Conversation — Emotional Ups and Downs

CHILD: "I don't know why I feel like crying for no reason." **Parent:** "Puberty affects your hormones, and that can make emotions feel bigger or more sudden than before. It doesn't mean anything is wrong with you — it usually settles down, but I'm always here if you want to talk it through."

PARENT TIP: "Don't wait for the first period." Girls should generally understand menstruation before it begins, not while it's happening for the first time, often at school. The same principle applies to boys and physical changes like erections.

CHAPTER 9 — THE CONVERSATIONS PARENTS ARE AFRAID TO HAVE

For each scenario below: what you may feel, what not to say, what to say instead, a worked example, and next steps.

"Where do babies come from?" *You may feel:* caught off guard. *Avoid:* "You'll understand when you're older" (repeatedly, with no follow-up). *Instead:* Give a simple, age-matched, truthful answer. *Example:* "A baby grows when a special cell from a mum and a special cell from a dad join together, usually inside the mum's body, and grows there until it's ready to be born." *Next step:* Invite more questions; answer only what's asked.

"Why does my body look different from my friend's?" *Avoid:* Comparing bodies or implying one type is "better" or "more normal." *Instead:* "Every body is a little different, and that's completely normal — bodies come in all shapes, sizes, and stages." *Example:* "Some kids develop earlier and some later — it's not a race, and there's no 'right' timeline." *Next step:* Reassure without dismissing; revisit if teasing at school is involved.

"What is puberty?" *Avoid:* Overloading with clinical detail all at once. *Instead:* "It's the time when your body changes from a child's body into a grown-up body — it happens gradually, over a few years." *Next step:* Introduce specific changes over time, not all in one sitting (see Chapter 8).

"Why are some body parts private?" *Avoid:* "Because it's rude to talk about them." *Instead:* "Because they're special parts of your body that deserve extra privacy and respect, the same way we keep some information about ourselves just for people we trust." *Next step:* Reinforce the Body-Safety Toolkit language (Chapter 4).

"What if someone touches me and tells me not to tell?" *Avoid:* Panic or interrogation. *Instead:* "You did the right thing telling me. That should never have happened, and it's not your fault. I'm going to help keep you safe." *Next step:* See Chapter 10 for full response guidance.

"What if someone I know makes me uncomfortable?" *Avoid:* "Are you sure? They're family." *Instead:* "Thank you for telling me. It doesn't matter who it is — your comfort and safety come first, and I'll take this seriously." *Next step:* Apply the Chapter 5 checklist; limit unsupervised contact while you assess.

"What if I see something sexual online?" *Avoid:* Shaming the child for having seen it. *Instead:* "Thank you for telling me. A lot of kids come across things like that by accident — you're not in trouble. Let's talk about what you saw and how you felt about it." *Next step:* Review device settings together; keep the conversation ongoing rather than a one-time scolding.

"What does dating mean?" *Avoid:* Dismissing it as "too young to think about that." *Instead:* "Dating usually means two people spending time together to get to know each other better, with mutual respect and honesty." *Next step:* Use it as a natural entry point into a consent conversation.

"What is consent?" *Instead:* "Consent means someone freely agrees to something, without being pressured, tricked, or forced — and they can always change their mind, even partway through." *Next step:* Give concrete, everyday examples (sharing toys, hugging, physical affection) before applying it to relationships.

"Why do people kiss?" *Instead:* "Kissing is one way people show affection when both people want to. Like most physical affection, it should only happen when everyone involved agrees."

"What if my friends pressure me?" *Instead:* "It's okay to say no, even if it feels awkward in the moment. A real friend won't punish you for having boundaries. You can also blame me — say your parent will kill you if you do it, and walk away."

"What if I already saw something I shouldn't have seen?" *Avoid:* "Why were you even looking at that?" *Instead:* "I'm glad you told me instead of carrying it alone. Let's talk about what you saw, and I'll help you make sense of it." *Next step:* Assess whether it was accidental exposure or a pattern needing a bigger conversation about content filters and habits.

CHAPTER 10 — IF YOUR CHILD TELLS YOU SOMETHING CONCERNING

How you respond in the first moments shapes whether your child ever tells you anything again.

What to do:

- Stay as calm as you can, even if you feel panic internally.
- Listen fully before reacting.
- Believe your child; investigations and professionals can determine facts later, but your first job is to make your child feel heard.
- Reassure them: "You did the right thing telling me. This is not your fault."
- Avoid repeatedly asking your child to recount details — this can be distressing and, in some legal contexts, complicate later formal interviews. Let trained professionals lead detailed questioning.
- Prioritise your child's immediate physical and emotional safety.
- Seek appropriate professional, medical, or child-protection support promptly, following the safeguarding and legal procedures applicable in your country.

What to Say

- "Thank you for telling me."
- "This is not your fault."
- "I believe you."
- "You are safe now. I'm going to help you."

What Not to Say

- "Are you sure that really happened?"
- "Why didn't you tell me sooner?"
- "Don't tell anyone else about this."
- Any reaction of anger directed at the child.

A Worked Example of a First Response

CHILD: "Something happened with [name] and I don't know how to say it." **Parent:** (*sits down, keeps voice steady*) "Take your time. I'm right here, and I'm listening. Whatever it is, I'm glad you're telling me." **Child:** (*discloses something concerning*) **Parent:** "Thank you for trusting me with this. You didn't do anything wrong. I'm going to help you, and we're going to figure out the next steps together. You're safe right now."

Afterward, avoid pressing for more detail in that same moment beyond what the child offers freely. Write down what was said, in the child's own words, as soon as you can, without asking leading questions — this record can be useful for professionals later.

CHILD-SAFETY NOTE: Follow the child-protection reporting procedures and legal requirements of your own country. If you are unsure who to contact, a paediatrician, school counsellor, or local child-protection agency can typically guide you to the appropriate next step.

CHAPTER 11 — BUILDING A HOME WHERE CHILDREN TALK

- Listen without overreacting, even to surprising statements.
- Ask open-ended questions: "How did that make you feel?" rather than yes/no questions.
- Never laugh at an embarrassing question, even affectionately.
- Say "I don't know, let's find out together" when you don't have an answer.
- Revisit important topics periodically rather than treating them as "done."
- Balance respecting your child's growing privacy with maintaining safety check-ins.
- Apologise when you overreact — it teaches your child that honesty is safe even when a parent's first reaction isn't perfect.

The 10-Minute Conversation Habit

Set aside ten unhurried minutes, once a week, with no phones, where your child can talk about anything — school, friends, feelings, or nothing at all. This habit, sustained over years, is what actually keeps communication open; it does not need to be about "the topic" every time.

Worked Example — Repairing After an Overreaction

PARENT: *(earlier that day, reacted with alarm to a question)* "I want to go back to what you asked me earlier. I reacted too strongly, and I'm sorry — that wasn't about you doing anything wrong. Can we try that question again?"

This kind of repair matters more than getting every first reaction right.

CHAPTER 12 — COMMON PARENTING MISTAKES

Mistake	Why It Doesn't Work	What to Do Instead
Waiting for the "perfect age"	The perfect moment rarely arrives; children's questions and exposure don't wait	Start small, start now, adjust as they grow
Using shame	Shame closes communication and increases secrecy	Use calm, factual, non-judgmental language
Threatening children	Threats create fear of you, not safety awareness	Teach principles, not punishments
Teaching only "stranger danger"	Most concerning behaviour comes from known people	Teach behaviour-based recognition (Chapter 5)
Assuming family members are automatically safe	Trust should be based on behaviour, not relationship alone	Apply the same boundaries and awareness universally
Giving rules without explanation	Children follow understood rules better than blind ones	Explain the "why" behind every rule
One giant awkward "sex talk"	Overwhelming and rarely retained	Use ongoing, shorter conversations
Avoiding puberty conversations	Leaves children frightened by their own bodies	Prepare well before onset
Ignoring online safety	Digital risks are now a primary exposure point	Build an ongoing digital-safety partnership
Reacting with anger to disclosures	Discourages future honesty	Respond calmly, thank them for telling you
Assuming silence means everything is fine	Children often don't disclose unprompted	Maintain regular, low-pressure check-ins
Treating one conversation as "done forever"	Children's understanding needs reinforcement as they mature	Revisit topics at each new age band
Letting embarrassment override honesty	Vague or evasive answers erode trust in you as a source	Give a true, simplified answer every time

A Closer Look at the Three Costliest Mistakes

- 1. Teaching only "stranger danger."** Most children who experience inappropriate behaviour know the person involved. A safety framework built entirely around unfamiliar people leaves the far more common risk unaddressed.
- 2. The one-time "big talk."** A single conversation, however well-delivered, cannot carry a child through a decade of development. Treat this guide as a companion you return to, not a task you complete once.
- 3. Panic in response to disclosure.** However a parent reacts in the first sixty seconds after a child discloses something concerning tends to determine whether that child discloses anything again in the future. Calm, believing, non-blaming responses protect not just this disclosure, but every one that might come after it.

CHAPTER 13 — THE PARENT'S ACTION PLAN

Turn the entire guide into a practical implementation system. Each week includes 2–3 small, realistic tasks — not homework, just habit-building.

Week 1 — Body Awareness

- Use correct anatomical names during normal routines (bath, dressing).
- Answer one body-related question fully and calmly this week.
- Notice your own reactions — where do you feel awkward, and why?

Week 2 — Boundaries

- Practice letting your child decline hugs/tickling.
- Model asking permission before touching them yourself.
- Praise your child once this week for saying "no" appropriately.

Week 3 — Trusted Adults

- Complete the Trusted Adult Circle worksheet together.
- Introduce or confirm your child's list with the actual adults involved, where appropriate.

Week 4 — Safety & Secrets

- Teach the Body-Safety Toolkit phrases (Chapter 4), one per day.
- Explain the difference between secrets and surprises (Chapter 6).

Week 5 — Digital Safety

- Set up the Family Digital Safety Agreement together (Chapter 7 / Printables).
- Review current apps, contacts, and privacy settings on any devices your child uses.

Week 6 — Puberty Preparation

- Read an age-appropriate puberty resource together.
- Answer at least one puberty-related question fully and factually.

Week 7 — Communication

- Start the 10-Minute Conversation Habit (Chapter 11).
- Identify one topic from this guide you still feel nervous about, and practice your opening line out loud.

Week 8 — Review & Reinforcement

- Revisit each topic briefly with your child.
- Celebrate progress — name one thing that's easier now than eight weeks ago.
- Schedule your next full review for three months from now, and put it in your calendar.

PREMIUM PRINTABLES

The following worksheets are designed to be printed and filled in by hand. Each includes real writing space, checkboxes, and fill-in fields rather than plain lists, so they function as living documents you revisit as your child grows.

1. Age-by-Age Teaching Checklist

Child's name: _____ Current age: _____ Date completed: _____

Topic	Introduced?	Date	Notes
Correct body-part names	☐		
Private vs. public	☐		
Consent basics ("ask before you hug")	☐		
Trusted adults identified	☐		
Secrets vs. surprises	☐		
Body-Safety Toolkit phrases	☐		
Online safety basics	☐		
Puberty preparation	☐		
Consent in relationships	☐		
Recognising unsafe behaviour	☐		

2. My Trusted Adults Worksheet

To be filled in together with your child, in the child's own words where possible.

- 1. At home, I can talk to: _____
- 2. At school, I can talk to: _____
- 3. In our family, I can talk to: _____
- 4. In our community, I can talk to: _____
- 5. If no one above is available, I can also try: _____

Why I trust this person:

3. Family Body-Safety Rules

Read aloud together, then sign below.

- ☐ My body belongs to me.
- ☐ I can say no, even to someone I love.
- ☐ I can move away from anything that feels wrong.
- ☐ I can tell a trusted adult, even if I'm scared.
- ☐ I can keep telling until someone listens.
- ☐ I never have to keep a body-related secret.
- ☐ I can ask for help even if someone tells me not to.
- ☐ I will never be punished for telling the truth about this.

Child's signature: _____ Parent's signature: _____ Date: _____

4. Digital Safety Agreement

Fill in together and post near the family device charging station.

- ☐ Devices stay in shared family spaces at night.
- ☐ New contacts are approved by a parent first.
- ☐ No sharing of full name, address, school, or location.
- ☐ No sharing of private photos, of yourself or anyone else.
- ☐ Anything confusing or scary online gets reported, no punishment.
- ☐ Passwords are shared with: _____
- ☐ Daily screen-time limit agreed: _____
- ☐ Devices are checked periodically, on: _____

Child's signature: _____ Parent's signature: _____ Date: _____

5. Parent Conversation Planner

[illegible]

6. Puberty Preparation Checklist

Topic	Covered?	Age covered	Notes
Growth spurts & body hair	☐		
Menstruation	☐		
Erections / nocturnal emissions	☐		
Body odour & hygiene routines	☐		
Emotional changes	☐		
Privacy needs	☐		

7. Warning-Sign Reflection Checklist

Person of concern (initials only, for your private notes): _____

- ☐ Asks for secrecy with my child
- ☐ Seeks unsupervised time beyond what's typical
- ☐ My child shows reluctance or mood change around them
- ☐ Gives unusual gifts or privileges
- ☐ Dismisses my child's stated discomfort
- ☐ My child has said something that seemed out of place

What I plan to do next:

8. "What My Child Knows" Assessment

Can my child name their private body parts correctly? ☐ Yes ☐ Not yet

Can my child name 3+ trusted adults? ☐ Yes ☐ Not yet

Does my child know the difference between a secret and a surprise? ☐ Yes ☐ Not yet

Does my child know they can say no to unwanted touch? ☐ Yes ☐ Not yet

Does my child know what to do if something online worries them? ☐ Yes ☐ Not yet

Does my child know puberty basics appropriate to their age? ☐ Yes ☐ Not yet

Areas to revisit this term:

9. Monthly Parent-Child Check-In

One good thing that happened this month:

Something that felt hard or confusing this month:

Anyone who made me feel uncomfortable this month:

A question I've been wanting to ask:

Parent's note to self after this check-in:

10. Emergency / Important Contacts Page

Fill in with your own verified local information — do not rely on preprinted numbers, which vary by country and change over time.

Local emergency number: _____

Family doctor / paediatrician: _____

Child's school main office: _____

School counsellor: _____

Local child-protection agency: _____

Trusted family member (primary): _____

Trusted family member (secondary): _____

Religious or community leader (if applicable): _____

BONUS: THE PARENT'S WORD-FOR-WORD CONVERSATION SCRIPTBOOK

Starting body-safety conversations: "I want us to talk about your body sometimes, so you always know what's normal and what's not. You can ask me anything." "There are some things every child should know about their body to stay safe — can we talk about a few of them today?"

Starting puberty conversations: "Your body is going to go through some big changes over the next few years. I want to tell you about them now, so nothing surprises you." "I remember feeling nervous about these changes myself — I want to make it easier for you than it was for me."

Answering difficult questions: "That's a really good question. Let me give you an honest answer." "I'm not sure how to say this perfectly, but I want to try, because your question matters."

Talking about online content: "If you ever see something online that confuses or worries you, you won't be in trouble for telling me. I just want to help you understand it." "Phones and apps are wonderful, but they also need some ground rules, the same way crossing the road does."

Talking about boundaries: "You never have to hug or touch anyone if you don't want to, even people we love. Your comfort matters." "If your body says 'no' even when your mouth is too shy to say it, that's still your answer — and it's enough."

Talking about peer pressure: "If a friend ever pressures you to do something you're not comfortable with, you can blame me — tell them your parent will kill you, and walk away." "A real friend respects a 'no' the first time, without needing to be convinced."

Talking about relationships: "A good relationship is one where you both feel free to be honest, say no, and be yourselves." "Respect isn't something you have to earn in a relationship — it's the starting point."

Checking in after a worrying situation: "I've noticed you seem quieter around [person/situation] lately. I'm not upset — I just want to understand and help if something's wrong." "You don't have to explain everything right now. I just want you to know I've noticed, and I'm here whenever you're ready."

REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

- UNESCO, *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* (revised edition)
- WHO, *Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe* and related child-development guidance
- UNICEF, guidance on child protection and online safety for families
- Darkness to Light, *5 Steps to Protecting Our Children*
- NSPCC (UK), guidance on talking to children about abuse, grooming, and online safety
- Stop It Now, resources on recognising grooming behaviour

Parents are encouraged to consult these organisations' current websites for the most up-to-date guidance, as recommendations are periodically revised.