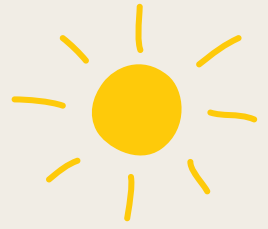


# My body belongs to me




Positive, protective messages  
for young children

You are your  
and most imp




# child's first important teacher



Children soak up messages all the time from the world around them. From a very young age, they learn about being a boy or girl, their body and rules about behaviour. If they learn about these topics from the trusted adults in their lives, they are more likely to learn accurate and helpful messages.

You will already be teaching your child protective messages every day - road safety, for example. This booklet is about how to use the same, everyday, approach to teach your child that their body belongs to them.



**Listening to children and welcoming their questions about these topics will encourage them to always come to you first and this puts you in a good position to be able to protect them.**

Many parents have told us they feel unsure about how to teach their young child (2-5yrs old) about appropriate touch in a way that isn't frightening. This booklet has come out of discussions with parents, carers and Early Years staff and aims to help you feel more confident about starting to talk with your child about these topics when they are young.

Parents, carers and staff shared lots of scenarios with us and this booklet includes the most common ones. Each one highlights behaviours that are considered normal for the age of the child and gives an example of how to handle it and teach positive, protective messages.

From age 2-3 years old it is normal for children to become very interested in their own and other peoples bodies, particularly once they start toilet training.

Children often want to look at their own genitals (penis, vulva) and show them to others and need to be taught that the parts of their body under their pants/nappy are private and you don't show them to other people.

## Nursery staff experience

In the 2-3 room most of the children are toilet training and they are really curious about each other's private parts and want to show them to each other.

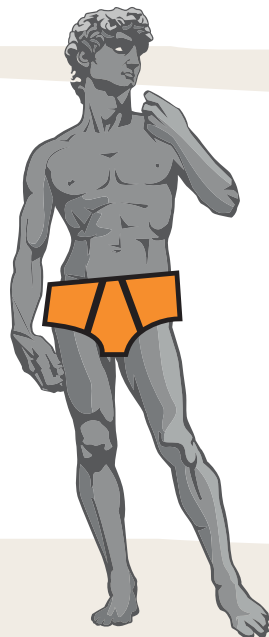
We tell them to pull up their pants and trousers before they leave the toilet we also say, "You don't show whats under your pants to other people because that's private."

We have to say it everyday though, because that's how they learn at that age.

## Nursery staff experience

We took a group of pre-school children to visit Glasgow City Centre and walked back through the Italian Centre.

When they saw the statue of David they stopped and pointed at his penis and said 'That's private! He should have his pants on!'



By age 3 years it is normal for children to touch their own penis or vulva. Most do so because it is a comforting feeling, rather than it being 'sexual' behaviour. To protect them, children need to be taught that they don't touch their penis/vulva when other people are around.

## Parents' experience

My daughter would rub herself, her flower, against a cushion and I was worried about why she did it. I felt embarrassed but eventually spoke to the nursery and they said she sometimes did it in the home corner of the playroom when she was tired. They said it was normal for her age.



They have been teaching the kids about what private means and now when my daughter does it they tell her that's something only to do in private, at home in her room, and they distract her with a toy or a story. I do the same at home now.



From age 3-4 years old children are learning social rules such as saying 'please/thank you', and about sharing and playing together. So, it is the natural stage for them to also learn rules about touching.

At this age children still like to sit on your knee and to have cuddles on a daily basis. You can use this everyday experience to teach them that being touched is their own choice, not another's:

## Parents' experience

I used to always say to my son to give his Gran a kiss and a cuddle when she was going home and I'd get annoyed with him when he didn't want to, because I was embarrassed. Now I don't do that; if he doesn't want to give her a kiss or cuddle he gives her a high five.



There's a book I'd got from the library called 'Your Body Belongs to You', which my son really liked. I showed it to his Gran to explain why I didn't want to make him give anyone a kiss or cuddle if he didn't want to.

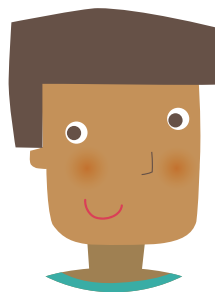


From age 3-4 years it is common for children to show their curiosity about other people's bodies by playing games – doctors and nurses, for example. However, it is still important that children are reminded of the rules about touching:

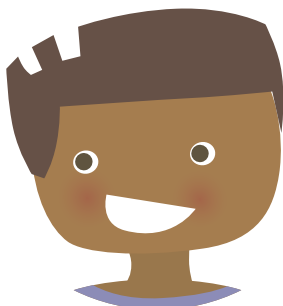
- No-one should touch your private body parts (penis/vulva and bottom) and you shouldn't touch someone else's private parts
- You don't keep secrets about touching

## Parents' experience

My daughter is only 2 and my son is 4 years old, so I bath them together. They were playing at splashing and tickling each other when my daughter flicked his penis. I told her 'No, don't touch his penis; you don't touch anyone else's penis, vulva or bottom.'



My son giggled and said it was tickly and he liked it. I said 'even if it feels nice, the rules are that no-one else touches your penis, vulva or bottom.'

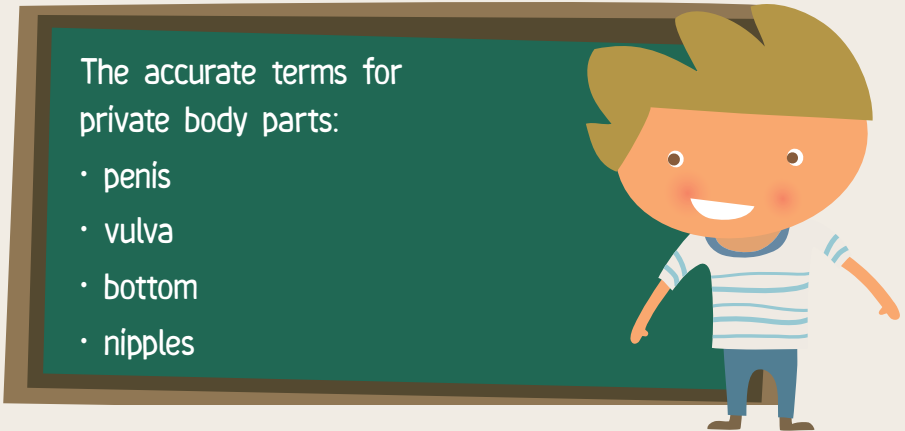


Children also need to be taught that no one should ask them to keep a secret about touching and that they should always tell you if anyone tries to touch their private parts. For children to be able to talk to you about this they need to be taught words for their private parts.

**There is a wide variety of words used by families to refer to the penis or vulva – flower, front bottom, winky, wee man, to name a few!**

No other part of the human body has been given so many different names. This can be confusing for children, particularly when they hear different words being used by other children at nursery.

All, non-denominational, schools now introduce the accurate terms for private body parts at Primary 1 – penis, vulva, bottom and nipples. They have done this because they need to have a common language in school that children have permission to use and that is accurate.



Many adults were not taught these words growing up and can feel uncomfortable using them as they can be thought of as 'sexual' words. Young children do not have these associations and usually consider these words to be as normal as 'hand', 'leg' etc.

If we want to be clear about what children mean when they talk to us about their body and touch, then we need to teach them accurate language.



## Nursery staff experience

We had some staff training that made us think again about the language we use with each other and with the children. We realised that we all used different 'family' words to refer to private body parts and that if we were confusing each other, how confusing must it be for the children?!



We now use the terms penis, vulva, and bottom. It took a wee while for us to get used to it, particularly 'vulva', but it is better because we can be really clear about what we mean, like 'so and so needs some cream on her vulva'; in the past we might have said 'bottom', 'flower', 'vagina' when really we meant vulva.

**When we use the words with the 3-5 year olds, they don't bat an eye, it's totally normal for them, it's us adults that struggle with it!**

You will already be teaching your child protective messages every day, hand washing, for example, and the same approach works well for this topic; use simple messages and repeat them often:

## Helpful messages for young children

- Being touched is your choice, not another's
- The parts of your body under your swimsuit/underwear are private and should be covered in public places
- The private parts of your body are called penis/vulva, nipples and bottom
- You only touch your own private body parts in private (at home in your room)
- No-one should touch your private body parts and you shouldn't touch someone else's private parts
- You don't keep secrets about touching



## What do I do if my child tells me that someone has touched or looked at their private body parts?

- Try to stay calm, children read a lot from your body language, and open up the discussion to find out more about what happened.

- If you have an immediate concern you should call the social work number for your area:

East Renfrewshire: 0141 577 8300

Glasgow: 0141 287 0555

Inverclyde: 01475 715365

Renfrewshire: 0141 618 2535

Out of hours number for all of the above areas: 0300 343 1505

East Dunbartonshire: 0141 7773000

West Dunbartonshire

Clydebank: 0141 562 8800

Alexandria: 01389 608 080

Out of hours number for the above areas: 0800 811 505

- If you have concerns that are not immediate, you should contact your child's health visitor.
- For advice and/or support, you can also call the free 24hr NSPCC helpline on 0808 800 5000.
- If the situation is not concerning, take the opportunity to go over some of the helpful messages with your child.



Check out our recommended books for each age and stage at [parents@sandyford](mailto:parents@sandyford)