

# BODY POSITIVE

## A NWAC Fact Sheet For Parents and Caregivers of Indigenous Youth



**AS A PARENT OR CAREGIVER**, it's important to keep in mind that **our children hear and see the way we view our own bodies**. From this, they learn how to view their own bodies. They also learn from their other interactions with friends and other communities.

Many of us are **overly critical of our bodies** and make less than kind comments about ourselves, often without even noticing. Just as we should avoid doing this in general, it's especially important not to do this in front of our children and youth. We should also avoid commenting on our children's bodies. Instead, **we should speak about ourselves and our bodies in positive ways**—ways that we would want our kids to speak about themselves and their bodies. **Many Indigenous communities have teachings about how sacred our bodies are. This is the kind of messaging we should be modelling for our children.**

Everyone has their own insecurities about their body, and social media and society have added to these insecurities. **Remember that people come in different shapes, sizes, and colours, and that it's never ok to comment on the way someone looks.**

**Taking pride in your body is an important part of self-growth, self-love, and self-worth. We are more than how we appear.** We are made up of different pieces that make us a unique person. This is especially important during times where body and minds may be going through many changes.



### AVOID SAYING THINGS LIKE:

- ▲ I look bad today.
- ▲ I look too big; I look too small.
- ▲ Using words like skinny and fat.
- ▲ I hate this or that about my body.
- ▲ I wish I looked like that person.
- ▲ I could never wear that.
- ▲ I shouldn't eat this.



### INSTEAD, USE BODY-POSITIVE STATEMENTS:

- ♥ My body is allowed to change.
- ♥ I am so much more than my appearance.
- ♥ My body makes me unique.
- ♥ I am not a size or weight; I am a person.
- ♥ My body is strong.
- ♥ My body can rest; my body can move.
- ♥ My body takes care of me.

### AS A TEAM:

**Communicate** by having conversations about **self-confidence and self-worth** and how this does not come from appearance. **Understand** that people have lots of different kinds of insecurities that may affect how they see themselves and how they interact with other people. **Encourage** conversations as a way to **normalize insecurities and differences**, as well as **self-expression and individuality**. **Model positive reinforcements** and use kind words when talking about our bodies and insecurities.

## “WOMEN ARE THE LIFE-GIVERS,

but women are not going to be life-givers without men. So, that's a balance in life. Our Two-Spirited people bring that balance again, of masculine and femininity. Our lives are not about our sexuality or even our gender identity, it's about us being a human being. It's about us following those teachings that our ancestors put in place for us, those teachings of kindness and respect, truth, honesty, humility, love, wisdom, about living those ways of life. Trying to look at each other as a valuable portion of a community, what gifts does that person have to bring to the table, so that we can become a very rich table, right?”

(Elder Laureen Waters Gaudio, 2019)



Check out [www.stbbi.nwac.ca](http://www.stbbi.nwac.ca) for additional fact sheets and more!

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# CONSENT

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**You can never start talking about consent when a child may be too young. Honest, age-appropriate, and shame-free discussion around consent helps your child develop a well-rounded understanding of their rights, and their health overall.**

A good understanding of consent is just one piece of the puzzle in educating youth about **sexual and reproductive health**, but it can be a **tough conversation to start**. Some parents may not feel they have a good enough understanding of the topic to pass on to their kids. Some families might have their own trauma that makes it **difficult to broach this topic**. But such a **conversation is necessary**.



### TIPS FOR TALKING TO YOUNGER CHILDREN

**Use the proper terms for their body parts.** Anatomical terms like vagina, penis, breasts, etc., are not dirty words and knowing the right language will help them communicate clearly about their bodies. Avoiding a word creates shame, and we never want children to feel like they must hide something about their body.

**Promote bodily autonomy at home.** For example, if you're having a tickle fight and your child laughs and says "stop!", it's important to stop right away. This will teach them that their boundaries should always be respected and, as they grow, they will expect them to be.

**Teach them to not keep secrets.** This can be done by creating an environment at home where they feel safe and heard, and where their instincts are honoured. Children are protected when they know that an adult should never ask them to keep a secret.

**Teach children to trust themselves.** Especially for Indigenous kids, self-determination means that they have the right to decide what they are comfortable with. Empowering children to trust their instincts will help them develop a healthy and safe relationship with their body and sexuality as they age.



### TIPS FOR TALKING TO TWEENS AND TEENS

**Let them know that consent is an ongoing process.** Indigenous parents know that free, prior, and informed consent is essential and must be obtained without coercion or manipulation. Just because you might have said 'yes' before doesn't mean that you can't change your mind.



### TEACH THEM THE THREE STEPS TO CONSENT:

- 1) **ASK** – "Do you want me to kiss you?"; "How far do you want to go?"; "Is this okay?".
- 2) **LISTEN** – The absence of a no doesn't mean it's a yes.
- 3) **RESPECT** – If you don't receive a clear 'yes,' things should stop there.

**Talk about social media and technology.** Kids these days are online more than ever. Refer to our online safety fact sheet for tips on how to protect your tech-savvy kids.

Have discussions **free from shame and embarrassment about preventing and testing for sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs)**. It's important to **remove the shame** from these discussions, so youth know they can talk to their parents if something is wrong. If someone is sexually active, regular **STBBI testing** is an essential part of **protecting their sexual and reproductive health**.

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# HAVING TOUGH CHATS WITH YOUR CHILDREN

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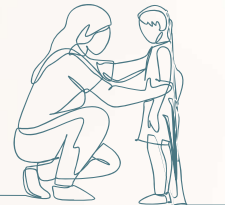


**CHILDREN AND YOUTH are constantly learning and exploring.** They learn from a variety of different environments. As a parent or caregiver, it's important to be **non-judgmental, compassionate, and open-minded.** Children and youth are forming ideas about themselves and how they fit into the world around them. **They look to their parents or caregivers for acceptance and love.** Who they are consists of many different pieces. Tough conversations can be about topics like **gender, sexuality, relationships, culture, school, work, mental health, sports, arts, body boundaries, body image, social media, consent, self harm**—or anything else that your child or youth may be experiencing or find important.

**When your child comes to you to talk about something that's important to them, they are coming from a place of LOVE AND TRUST.**

### When they do:

1. Let them lead the conversation.
2. Let them know that you care for them **no matter what** they have to say.
3. Let them take the time they need to speak.
4. Do not use judgmental and critical words like "don't say that!"; "ew!"; "that's weird!"
5. Give your **full** attention to the conversation. Listen more and speak less.
6. If you do not understand what they mean (which is ok), ask them to explain more. Parents and caregivers have to unlearn what they know sometimes in order to create a more open space for youth and their knowledge.
7. Use open-ended questions like "how do you feel about that?"; "why do you think that?"; "what does that mean for you?"
8. Share your values.
9. Silence is ok. Take a moment to process and think.
10. Let them know that **whatever** they are feeling matters.



**"It is widely believed that a child will reveal who they are to the parents. The parents do not need to impose a specific identity onto their child."**

(National Aboriginal Council of Midwives, 2017)

**Some conversations will always be easier than others** and some conversations might not have the same meaning or importance to you as it does to your child or youth. **Listening with compassion and empathy is important in creating a strong relationship** with your child and youth. If your child or youth is coming to you to have a conversation that makes them feel anxious, worried, or scared, they are coming to you because **they trust you.** It is ok to not give solutions to a conversation. Your child may just want to feel heard and validated that it's ok for them to feel that way. **Remember that your child may still be hesitant to share some things with you—and that's ok. It might take some more time.**

By having these **tough conversations with your child or youth, you are strengthening your relationship.** Staying connected can be hard with everyone's schedules and interests but these conversations **will** happen and are necessary. View any conflict as an **opportunity to learn** more about each other and resume a calmer conversation another time. **We are all learning.**

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# ONLINE SAFETY

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**THE INTERNET** can be a **valuable resource for young people**, but it also comes with **risks**. **Online predators** infiltrate social media platforms that children use like **TikTok and Facebook** for manipulative and dangerous purposes. There is also a lot of readily available **misinformation** that can prevent your child from developing well-informed understandings around their health.

**It's important to monitor your child's internet use**, but we also know that parents today are busier than ever and it is not always possible to keep a close eye 24/7. Depending on the child's age, it's **also important to respect their privacy and build healthy and trusting relationships** where they can share with you if they are confused or concerned about something happening to them online.

**Indigenous kids**, especially those living in rural or remote areas, **may be more vulnerable to online manipulation** due to their desire to connect and find community where they can. No matter what their age, **it's always important to keep the conversation about online safety open and to be non-judgmental!**



### BASIC ONLINE SAFETY GUIDELINES TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR CHILD:

- Turn your location settings off.
- Never share personal information (e.g., address, phone number, school name).
- Never share passwords with anyone except with parents/guardians.
- Never agree to meet someone you've met online without your parents' knowledge and approval.
- Never respond to a threatening email, post, or message.
- Always tell a parent or trusted adult about any communication that has upset you.

### BASIC PARENTAL SUPERVISION GUIDELINES:

- Spend time online together to teach your child appropriate online behaviour.
- Stay up to date on the newest apps and trends in kids' lives.
- Monitor time spent on tablets or smartphones (e.g., only allowing computer use in a common room).
- Be aware of any unfamiliar account charges on your credit card or phone bills.
- Take your children seriously if they mention an uncomfortable online exchange.

### WARNING SIGNS THAT YOUR CHILD IS BEING TARGETED:

- Withdraws or seems distant while spending long hours online, particularly at night or when there is no supervision.
- Receives phone calls from individuals you don't know.
- Has new clothes or gifts that you don't recognize.
- Shuts off the computer or phone when you walk in.

### WARNING SIGNS THAT YOUR CHILD IS BEING TARGETED:

- 1) Be aware that online child sexual exploitation is a problem.
- 2) Talk to your kids openly and regularly. Help them feel comfortable turning to you if they experience issues online.
- 3) Look for warning signs.
- 4) Get help if needed by visiting [cybertip.ca](http://cybertip.ca).

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Funding for this document is provided by Indigenous Services Canada. The opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official views of Indigenous Services Canada.

