

A Parent's Guide to

Body Safety, Privacy & Healthy Development

What we teach, when we teach it, and why it matters.

A Letter to Families

When parents hear the words “sex education,” many feel a wave of discomfort—especially when the child is young or has a disability. We understand. The goal of this guide is to make the topic less mysterious and more practical.

What we teach young children is not about sex. It is about bodies, privacy, safety, hygiene, consent, and relationships. These are the same things every child needs to learn. Children without disabilities often pick up this information through watching others, listening to peers, and asking casual questions. Children with disabilities often need explicit, careful teaching to learn the same skills.

Research is clear: children with disabilities are far more likely to experience abuse than other children. The strongest protective factors are knowing the correct words for their bodies, understanding what is private, being able to say “no,” and having trusted adults they know how to tell. Every skill in this guide is a building block for safety, dignity, and independence.

This curriculum is a partnership. Your BCBA will introduce skills at developmentally appropriate times, and your role at home is essential. Most of these skills are best learned within daily routines—bath time, dressing, toileting, and getting ready for bed. You don't need a special program. You need consistent language and consistent expectations.

If anything in this guide raises questions, concerns, or conflicts with your family's values, please let us know. We can adjust pacing, defer topics, or focus on what matters most to your family. This is your child, and you are the expert on your family.

How to Use This Guide

- Read through the age bands that apply to your child now and the next one ahead. You'll see what's coming.
- Notice that skills build on each other. We don't skip steps.
- Use the language we use at home in sessions. Consistency speeds learning.
- Keep this handout. We'll revisit it together every 6 to 12 months.
- Bring questions. There are no “silly” questions in this work.

Five Things to Know Before You Start

1. **We use real anatomical words.** Children who know the correct names for their body parts (penis, vulva, vagina, breasts) are safer. They can describe what happened if someone hurts them, and medical professionals and investigators take their words seriously. Nicknames can be confusing and can make a disclosure of abuse hard to understand.
2. **Teaching does not cause behavior.** Many parents worry that talking about bodies will plant ideas. Decades of research show the opposite: children who receive clear, age-appropriate body and safety education are safer, not more curious in concerning ways. Silence is what creates risk.

3. **Privacy is taught through routines.** Most of this teaching happens during bath time, getting dressed, and using the bathroom. You are already in these routines every day—we just add language and structure.
4. **“No” has to mean “no” in small things first.** If we want a child to refuse unwanted touch from a stranger, they have to learn that their “no” is honored when they don’t want a tickle, a hug, or a kiss from family. This is the hardest part for many adults.
5. **You decide the values.** We teach the skills (naming body parts, privacy, consent, safety). You teach the values (your family's beliefs about modesty, faith, and relationships). These two things work together.

What Children Learn, and When

A developmental roadmap from ages 2 through 6

Children develop at different paces, especially children with disabilities. Use these age bands as flexible guidelines rather than strict deadlines. Your BCBA will adjust the pacing to your child's needs.

Ages 2–3 Foundations — Bodies, Words, Routines		
Skill Area	What Your Child Will Learn	Why It Matters
Body Parts	- Names of basic body parts (head, hands, feet, etc.) - Beginning use of correct names for private parts - Pointing to body parts on oneself when asked	<i>Body awareness is the very first step. Knowing the words gives a child a way to communicate about their body.</i>
Privacy Basics	- The bathroom and bedroom are private places - Doors close for privacy - Diapers and clothing are changed in private spaces when possible	<i>The earliest version of the public versus private distinction. Children learn through where things happen.</i>
Hygiene	- Tolerating handwashing routines - Beginning toilet training (when ready) - Cooperating with bath time	<i>Independent self-care is a long-term goal. The fewer adults who must touch a child, the safer the child is.</i>
Feelings	- Labeling basic feelings: happy, sad, mad - Saying or signaling “ouch” or “hurt.”	<i>A child who can communicate discomfort can ask for help.</i>
Consent Seeds	- Adults ask before tickling, hugging, or picking up - Child’s “no” or “all done” is honored in play	<i>Consent is taught through what adults model first.</i>

Ages 3–4 Naming — Public, Private, and Trusted Adults		
Skill Area	What Your Child Will Learn	Why It Matters
Body Parts	- Correct names for all major external body parts - Correct names for private parts: penis, vulva, vagina, breasts, bottom - Pointing to private parts on a diagram or doll	<i>Using real names removes shame and supports clear communication if something is wrong.</i>

Ages 3–4 Naming — Public, Private, and Trusted Adults

Skill Area	What Your Child Will Learn	Why It Matters
Public vs. Private	• Sorting places: bedroom and bathroom = private; living room, store, park = public • Private parts are covered by clothes when others are around	<i>This is the rule that supports almost every later skill, from getting dressed to community outings.</i>
Privacy Routines	• Closing the bathroom door • Asking for privacy when changing clothes • Beginning to wipe and wash independently with support	<i>Children begin managing their own bodies. Independence equals safety.</i>
Trusted Adults	• Naming three to five trusted adults the child can tell • Practice telling a trusted adult about their day	<i>Knowing who to tell matters as much as knowing what to tell.</i>
Consent	• Choosing greetings: high-five, fist bump, wave, or hug • Adults consistently honor the child's greeting choice • Saying "stop" or signaling stop when uncomfortable	<i>The child learns their body is theirs and their voice is heard.</i>
Feelings	• More feeling words: scared, surprised, frustrated, yucky • Communicating "I don't like that"	<i>Discomfort is information. We want the child to share it freely.</i>

Ages 4–5 Safety — Touch, Telling, and “No Body Secrets”

Skill Area	What Your Child Will Learn	Why It Matters
Safe & Unsafe Touch	• “My private parts are mine” rule • Touches that are okay: hugs from family with consent, doctor visits with parent, hygiene help from designated caregivers • Touches that are not okay: anyone touching private parts without a clear reason; being asked to touch someone else’s private parts; touches that hurt	<i>Most abuse comes from someone the child knows. We teach the behavior to watch for, not “stranger danger.”</i>
Telling	• “If someone touches my private parts, I tell [trusted adult]” • Practicing telling with multiple trusted adults • Telling even if someone says not to	<i>Telling is a skill that has to be practiced repeatedly to be fluent under stress.</i>
Body Secrets	• Surprises (a birthday gift) are happy and short • Body secrets are never okay—“We don’t keep body secrets.” • Resisting bribes (“if you do this, I’ll give you...”)	<i>Secrecy is the most common tool for keeping abuse hidden.</i>
Privacy Routines	• More independent toileting and wiping • More independent bathing with parent support • Asking for privacy: “Close the door, please.”	<i>Each skill the child masters is a skill an adult no longer has to do for them.</i>
Relationships	• Family vs. friends vs. strangers vs. helpers • Different greetings for different people • Family members are not all the same—some are very close, some are visited rarely	<i>Indiscriminate affection puts children at risk. Differentiated relationships protect them.</i>
Consent (deeper)	• Asking before touching others • Honoring “no” and “stop” from peers and siblings • Tolerating necessary touches (medical, hygiene) with explanation	<i>Consent goes both ways: respecting others and being respected.</i>

Ages 5–6 Independence — Self-Care, Self-Advocacy, Community

Skill Area	What Your Child Will Learn	Why It Matters
Independence	• Independent toileting in public bathrooms with supervision nearby • Increasingly independent dressing • Independent handwashing and basic hygiene	<i>School-age skills support inclusion in classrooms and community settings.</i>
Self-Advocacy	• “I need help” across multiple adults • “I don’t want that,” or “Please stop.” • Asking for the bathroom, water, and a break	<i>A child who can ask for what they need is harder to exploit and easier to support.</i>
Community Privacy	• Using public bathrooms with appropriate privacy behavior • Keeping clothes on in public • Touching private parts only in private spaces	<i>Public masturbation, undressing, and similar behaviors are usually skill gaps, not problem behaviors.</i>
Bodies & Differences	• Boys and girls may have different bodies; that is normal • Bodies grow and change as we get older • All bodies deserve respect	<i>Foundational language for puberty teaching that comes later.</i>
Online Safety (early)	• Not all people online are who they say • Some pictures stay private (no pictures of private parts) • Tell a trusted adult if anything online feels weird	<i>Even young children are exposed to devices. Early rules prevent later problems.</i>
Relationships	• Friends are people we know, like, and feel safe with • Healthy friendships involve fairness and kindness • It’s okay to say no to a friend	<i>Relationship literacy starts here and continues through adulthood.</i>

What Comes After Age 6

Body and safety education is a long curriculum. Here is a brief look at what builds on the foundations above:

- Ages 7–9: Puberty preparation, menstruation education for those who menstruate, deeper conversations about online safety, peer relationships, and bullying.
- Ages 10–12: Puberty management, hygiene during menstruation, romantic feelings, more advanced consent and refusal skills, and social media literacy.
- Adolescence: Healthy relationships, dating, sexual health, decision-making, reproductive health, sexual orientation, and identity (paced with family values).
- Adulthood: Continued relationship skills, self-determination, sexual health, parenting (when relevant), and ongoing safety planning.

Each phase rests on the foundations laid in early childhood. That is why we start here.

Working With Your BCBA

Your BCBA will:

- Discuss each new skill area with you before introducing it.
- Provide visual supports, scripts, and home programs as needed.
- Coach you on the language to use during everyday routines.
- Track progress and share data with you.
- Adjust pacing, defer topics, or modify teaching based on your input.
- Connect you with additional resources or specialists when appropriate.

You will:

- Use the same language at home that we use in sessions.
- Honor your child's "no" in low-stakes situations.
- Tell us about events, changes, or concerns that affect teaching.
- Ask questions whenever something is unclear.
- Share your family's values so we can teach in alignment with them.

Questions Parents Often Ask

"Isn't my child too young for this?"

Most of what we teach at this age is body parts, privacy, hygiene, and consent—the same things every preschooler is learning. Starting young means the skills are well-established before they're truly needed.

"What if my child can't talk?"

Communication doesn't require speech. We teach using AAC, signs, picture exchange, gestures, or whatever your child uses to communicate. Every child can learn to indicate "no," "stop," or "help."

"My family's religion has specific values about this. Can we still participate?"

Yes. Tell us your values, and we'll align the teaching with them. Most faith traditions support body safety, privacy, and healthy relationships. We can defer value-based topics to you.

"What if my child doesn't understand something we're teaching?"

We adjust pacing and presentation as needed. Some skills are taught for years before they generalize. That's normal.

“What do I do if my child says something happened to them?”

Stay calm. Listen. Believe them. Don't ask leading questions. Tell your BCBA right away. We are mandated reporters and will help you navigate the next steps.

“Can we skip topics I'm not comfortable with?”

Yes. This is a partnership. Tell us what you want to defer, and we'll document your decision and revisit it later if you wish.

You are not alone in this.

Every question you ask, every conversation you have, and every routine you follow through on is helping your child grow into a safer, more confident person. Thank you for partnering with us.