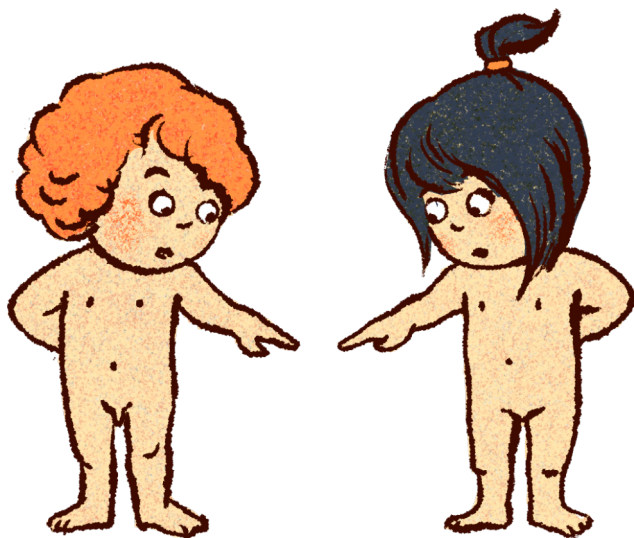


**MY BODY,**

**MY EMOTIONS**



**Sexual education  
made easy!**

Handbook for parents

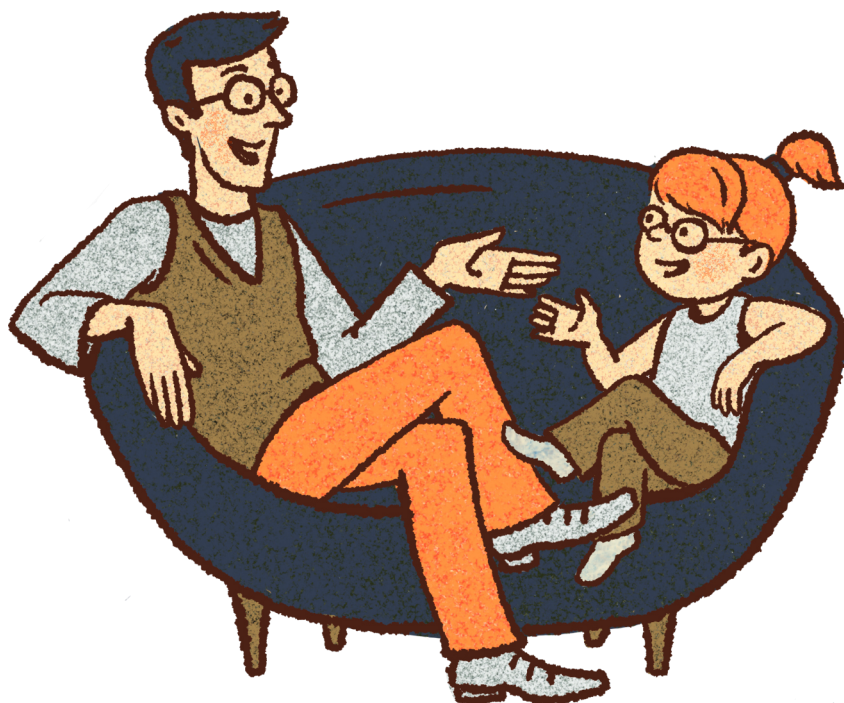
**4-6 YEARS OLD**







# Introduction



Dear parents and guardians, we are pleased that you have discovered our offer. This means that you are one of the adults who would like to accompany children safely and well on their way to adulthood, including in the area of sexual education. We would like to help you with this. Because: very few adults have learned to talk naturally about topics such as the body, love, sexuality and identity. Each person therefore has their own "sex education backpack" - well filled for some, but quite empty for others.

We want to help you fill the "individual compartments" of your backpack - so that you can answer all of the questions your children may have during their childhood and adolescence and are likely to ask you only when they realise that they will also get answers.

As adult family members, you are the first contact person(s) for your children - even if they have dedicated people in kindergarten and/or school who provide age-appropriate and sensitive sex education. You are the one who will name all parts of the body at the changing table or leave some out; who may answer questions about sexuality with "you are too young for that" or "interesting question, I have to think about how to answer it first".

The earlier you start to talk about the body, love, relationships, sexuality and identity as normal everyday topics, the easier it is for you - and also for your children. The older they get, the more embarrassing so-called "sex education talks" become. It is not uncommon for both sides to breathe a sigh of relief after these are over. It is better to guide your kids gently. Children who have learned that they can come to you with their questions and receive serious and accurate answers will also turn to you with their questions for a long time.

Parents want the best for their children. Therefore, it is even more important that you take any negative attitudes towards sexual education (be it through your own upbringing or media influences) seriously. We would like to offer you the opportunity to engage with this.

Sex education is an important part of abuse prevention because it makes things accessible to children by providing them with the words and information they need to express and communicate themselves in case of uncomfortable situations. You do not need to worry about overburdening your children with age-appropriate, loving sex education, or taking away their "innocence": You are taking away their ignorance. That is a big difference.

Children are sexual, because they are sexual beings, from the very beginning, not just from puberty. It is important not to compare children's sexuality with adult sexuality, but it is mainly characterised by playful, childlike curiosity. Observable behaviours include, for example, childlike exploration of the body, desire to look and show, and asking questions. Children are interested in differences between the sexes and how they themselves came to be from an early age.

Responding to questions sensitively and in an age-appropriate way does not "sexualise" children. It helps them to find a language. In this way, sexual education strengthens their self-confidence and protects them from assaults, as they can classify sexual acts better.



And for children who do not seem to have any questions? Maybe the questions were "overheard" or were considered "too early"... Children have very fine "antennas" and know who they can go to with their questions. If their thirst for knowledge is not satisfied by adult caregivers, they quickly find other ways (older siblings, media...). An educational book or a website is always a good introduction to the topic. It is important that you take your time beforehand and see whether the presentations, pictures, videos and also the language seem appropriate to you.

No adult can avoid "doing" sex education in some form: it begins with naming all the body parts at the changing table. How and if you answer a question later shows the child your attitude and values. Talking about the topics you encounter here is always linked to a value attitude that you pass on to your children. It therefore makes sense to think about these values at an early stage.

Pause for a moment: how, when, and where were you "enlightened" and by whom? Which topics came up? Which ones were left out (why)? How could it have been better? Did you have the education you would like your child to have? No? Then you belong to the vast majority. The good news: You can do better! And that is exactly what we would like to help you with.

This does not mean that you need to be a professional in all these matters. When your child asks you a question and you do not have a child-friendly answer in mind, take the time to think about it. Be authentic by saying, for example, "my parents did not educate me very well, but I want to do better." Get books that are appropriate for the age group and/or take a look at our App.

### **And why so early?**

- ▶ Because children become interested in gender differences at a very early age. This is not just about boys or girls, but about the perception of multiple femininities and masculinities. In this handbook, we use gender-neutral language which also makes people visible who cannot or do not want to fit into the two-gender system.
- ▶ Because children want to know where they "come from".
- ▶ Because they pick up sexualised terms/words in kindergarten and school and do not know how to interpret them.
- ▶ Because they are exposed to sexualised content in the media (from billboards to TV commercials to porn in digital media) at a very early

age and porn in particular should not be the first introduction to the topic.

- ▶ Because knowledge empowers children when they encounter/perceive gender diversity in everyday life. Children can embrace diversity/diverse lifestyles when they know about it and this is important to be able to coexist effectively in our society.
- ▶ Because well-educated children tend to allow themselves much more time with their first time having sex later on as teenagers, because they know roughly what to expect and they will not give in to peer pressure so easily. Children become empowered and are more responsible in dealing with love, sexuality and relationships.
- ▶ Because well-educated children are better protected from sexual assault: they have names for all their body parts (so they can articulate earlier when someone has touched their genitals, for example) and they know where sexuality "belongs" - namely with older adolescents or adults, if that is what both of them want. And that you are not allowed to do that with children.
- ▶ Because sex education is one of the most important building blocks in the prevention of child sexual abuse. The majority of perpetrators come from the child's close social environment; warning against "bad strangers" falls well short of the mark.

It is perfectly fine, by the way, if children are embarrassed about the subject if they are not used to talking about it. It is okay to laugh! And they are also allowed to feel grossed out: Encourage your children to have these feelings by clearly telling them: "As a child, it might be hard to imagine that this might be something nice - but no one is allowed to do that to a child either!" In this way you have - without frightening the child - woven the prevention of child sexual abuse into an educational talk.



## What is the role of psychosexual development in this?

In general, every child will develop at their own pace. Some children are interested in topics earlier, others a little later. Just like with other topics in life. If you listen to your child and pay attention to what they are interested in, you will know when they are ready for what. With books or other children's play materials (for example, dolls with sexual parts or puzzles representing types of families), you can introduce the topics to your child in a casual way.

This manual is divided into three age groups, which are taken from the WHO standards for sex education in Europe: 4-6 years old, 7-9 years old and 10-12 years old. The borders are fluid and not all learning steps fall into the age groups mentioned.

The following table shows which developments and areas of interest are to be expected for each age group and what kind of parental guidance these are associated with. The ages are approximate, no child is a "normal" child.

### 0-4 years old

- ▶ Children should know the specific names of body parts, especially the sexual organs. It is important to use technical terms at an early stage. Examples in English are "penis" and "vulva".
- ▶ Children recognise the differences between the sexes, physically as well as socially.
- ▶ Children are able to perceive and express different feelings and express wishes and needs.
- ▶ They will discover and practise their own personal hygiene.
- ▶ They can develop a positive attitude towards their own bodies and express their own desires and limits, for example in body exploration games.
- ▶ They will develop basic ideas and conceptions about family models and different degrees of kinship.

#### 4-6 years old

- ▶ Children will learn about physical age differences: Children's bodies look different from adults' (for example, hair, body shapes, breasts).
- ▶ They will acquire concrete knowledge about fertility and reproduction.
- ▶ They will learn about pregnancy, birth and babies and the end of life.
- ▶ They will develop their own gender identity.
- ▶ They can sense and distinguish between emotions (for example, jealousy, anger, fear, disappointment).
- ▶ They will learn that not all people are "nice" to children and when they should/can seek support from a trusted person.
- ▶ Opportunities for privacy and the development of modesty must be created for them.

#### 7-9 years old

- ▶ Awareness of the body becomes more specific: menstruation, ejaculation, individual differences in long-term development. Biological and social differences between men and women, and knowledge about gender diversity.
- ▶ They will receive basic knowledge about sexually transmitted infections and a rough overview of contraception.
- ▶ They will learn about different relationships in terms of love, friendship, etc. They can make social contacts and form friendships, while having respect for others.
- ▶ This is followed by a strengthening of and confrontation with feelings.
- ▶ Embarrassment and privacy will play an increasingly important role.
- ▶ Children need to be familiar with children's rights.



- ▶ Children will explore their knowledge of the body, body images and body modifications (genital mutilation for girls, circumcision for boys, gender-altering measures for intersex children, eating disorders, tattoos/piercing). The perception of one's own body image is influenced by health, self-image and behaviour.
- ▶ They will learn about masturbation.
- ▶ They will broaden their awareness and understanding of their own and other people's feelings, such as jealousy.
- ▶ They will learn about the effects of pregnancy (parenthood, changes in relationships). They will deal with the issue of pregnancy in same-sex relationships and the issue of infertility.
- ▶ They will experience dating/flirting.
- ▶ It is important to have media literacy, which means being familiar with the internet and the possible dangers (for example, learning how to deal with photos/chats must be reinforced and deepened). They will have a basic knowledge of sexuality/internet/body images in the media.
- ▶ The topic of sexually transmitted infections will be discussed in greater detail.

# Thematic section

## Body

### "Sex markers" - biological classification of the sexes

Medicine and society use the following criteria for the body - people are divided into male and female by these so-called gender markers:

|                                       | Man                                | Woman  |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Genetics</b>                       | XY chromosome set                  | XX chromosome set  |
| <b>Gonads</b>                         | Testicles + Sperm                  | Ovaries + Egg cells  |
| <b>Internal sex organs</b>            | Prostate,<br>Vas deferens          | Fallopian tubes,<br>Uterus, Vagina,<br>Clitoris                          |
| <b>External sex organs (genitals)</b> | Penis, Scrotum +<br>Testicles      | Vulva = Tip of the<br>clitoris, Labia,<br>Mons pubis,<br>Vaginal opening |
| <b>Secondary sex characteristics</b>  | Beard, Voice,<br>Musculature, Hair | Breast,<br>esp. fat distribution   |
| <b>Hormones</b>                       | Increased<br>testosterone          | Increased oestrogen  |

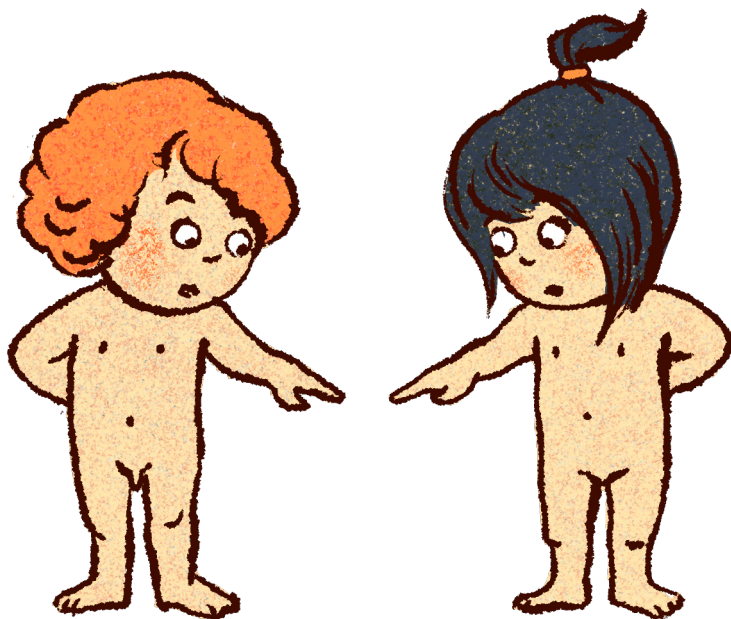


## Prenatal sex development

The development of the sexes is the same for all children during the first five weeks of pregnancy. Only then do male and female embryos begin to develop differently. In a girl, the bulge between the legs gradually matures into the external sex organs: clitoris, labia majora and labia minora. In order to complete sexual development, the gonads must now form - ovaries and testicles. From the fifth week onwards, tissues grow in the body of a female embryo, which turn into the uterus, fallopian tubes and the upper part of the vagina. It is similar in a male embryo: here the epididymis, vas deferens and seminal vesicles form, and superfluous tissue regresses.

### "What will it be?"

Even during pregnancy it is important for many parents to know "what it will be" - a girl or a boy. In about one to two out of 1000 children, they cannot be clearly assigned male or female due to their genitals (external sex organs) after birth. This is called intersexuality or variants of gender development.





*Intersexuality is a so-called "umbrella term" for variations in gender development: this can affect the genitals (external sex organs), the internal sex organs, the gonads, the hormone balance or also the chromosome set. In many countries, children who are born with intersex genitalia are still surgically/hormonally "adapted" to one of the two standard genders male/female, meaning that their genitalia and/or internal sex organs are operated on so that they are "unambiguous" in appearance. Since the children concerned cannot consent to the measures, Amnesty International, for example, speaks of human rights violations: physical integrity is "sacrificed" for the norm.*

Therefore, in reality, there are far more variations than the upper table in terms of sexual characteristics:

**Genetics**     XX, XY, XXY, XXYY, XXXY

**Gonads**     Testicles + Sperm, Ovaries + Egg cells

**Inner genitals**     Vas deferens / Fallopian tubes, Uterus, Vagina, Prostate

**External genitals**     Penis / Clitoris / Phallosclitoris, Labia / Scrotum

**Secondary sex characteristics**     Body fat distribution, Beard growth, Breast, Voice, Musculature, Body hair

**Hormones**     Testosterone, Oestrogen

## Young children and their bodies

Few people are aware that they are already engaged in "sexual education" during infancy - for example, by naming or not naming body parts. This is where the foundation is laid for a positive body image and a sensitive, positive approach to one's own later sexuality.

For most children with a penis, touching, tugging or rubbing it is completely natural. Children with vulvas often rub them on the edges of chairs or stuffed animals. This is age-appropriate. Children also like to use this kind of self-stimulation as a sleep aid/ritual. Many children in this age group stimulate themselves on their own genitals because this triggers "nice feelings". If a sense of shame has not yet set in, they may also do this in public - for example, in the morning circle of the kindergarten or at family celebrations.



*Parents or educators who react to this with the words "if you are comfortable with that, then please do it in the room/cuddle corner etc." show the child that they are of course allowed to touch their body everywhere - but that there are rules and limits. Also protect your child from the stares of adults when he or she explores his or her body. If your child does this excessively, it could be due to a lack of alternative ways to relax, it could have organic causes or it could also be a sign that the child is feeling some kind of stress. Ask an educator or counsellor who knows about children's sexuality for a professional opinion.*



## First questions arise

In the following, we have compiled examples of typical children's questions and possible answers to them. You are welcome to use the answers written in green when talking to your children. The sentences written in black are an explanation for adult readers.

*"What is the difference between girls and boys?"*

*"Most girls have a vulva, most boys have a penis and testicles."*

This takes into account the fact that genitalia look different and includes intersex children. Children recognise the differences between the sexes even in infancy. They find this very exciting and want to "check" this again and again, for example by going to the toilet with each other. Terms of endearment or family words for the genitals are okay, but the children should also know the correct terms. In this age group, this concerns the terms for the external, that is, visible, sexual organs.



*The vagina is the connection between the vulva and the uterus and is not visible. It is part of the internal sexual organs. Establishing the correct terms are important.*

*"Where do babies come out of?"*

*"When the baby is big enough, it comes out through the vagina after about 9 months."*

When asked if this hurts, you could answer:

*"It's very exhausting for the mother and the baby. But when it's there, you're so happy that it doesn't matter any more."*

If your child was born by caesarean section, explain this in child-friendly terms, such as:

*"Because you were not lying with your head down, I was given an anaesthetic, then my belly was opened up and you were lifted out. Afterwards, the stomach was sewn back up."*

*"How do babies get into your belly?"*

*"Most babies are made like this: when a man and a woman love each other very much, they kiss, they cuddle together, maybe naked, and the*

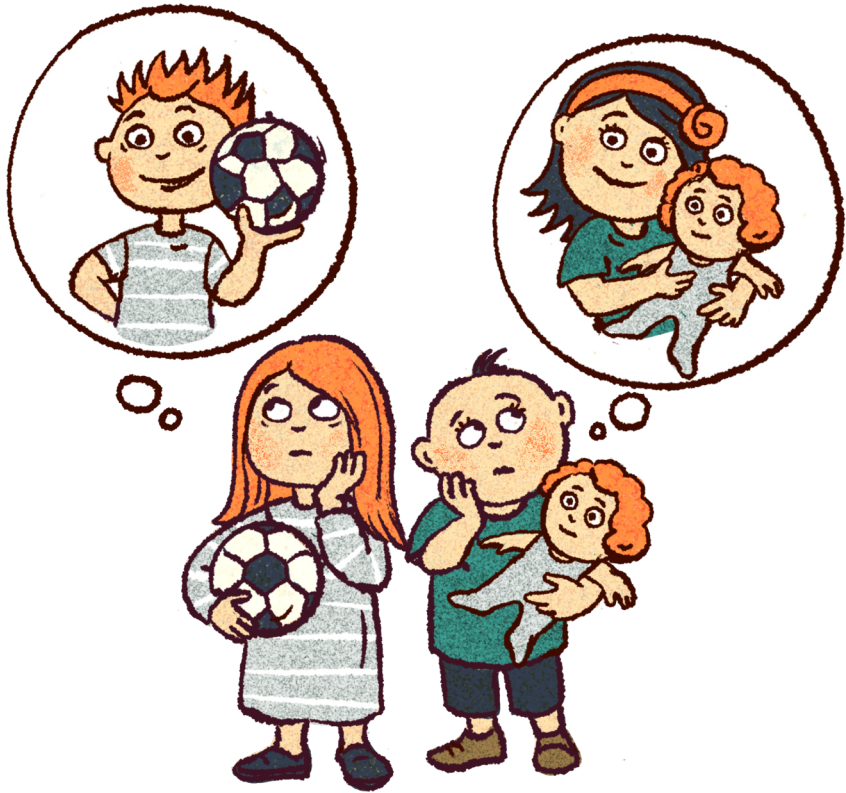


*closest you can cuddle is when the penis enters the vagina. Then when they continue to cuddle, a lot of sperm comes out of the penis and when it meets an egg, a baby can be born."*

EVERY question should be answered when it is asked. It does not have to be answered immediately, you can give yourself some time to think about it or read about it. But then you should approach the child and answer the question on your own.



## Identity



### **Every child has a sense of gender**

Children realise very early on that gender and the expectations associated with it play a central role in their lives. Even before the age of 4, children classify themselves according to gender. They thus consciously perceive differences in their interactions with girls and boys. This has an influence on the development of their ego identity, the child's behaviour and their understanding and self-classification as a "real" girl or "real" boy. In developmental psychology, the term gender identity is used in this context.

Even at preschool age, children notice that there are differences in the

behaviour and external characteristics of girls and boys. Parental affirmations and behaviours influence the development of gender identity and lead children to ask what makes a "real" boy or a "real" girl, what he/she plays with, what he/she wears, how he/she behaves. Girls, for example, notice when they are praised for their diligence and when they are asked about their appearance. Boys are similarly influenced when they are encouraged to act more wildly or are given the signal that crying is not masculine.

At around four years of age, this phase of observation is followed by a time when children begin to identify with their own gender. They begin to prefer persons from the same gender group, when playing, for example.

The idea of the "right" girl or boy changes throughout life in connection with one's own physical development and the information on the diversity of gender conveyed by the social environment.

### **Gender identity: My child is trans**

Gender identity, in other words one's own perceived gender affiliation, is closely related to self-perception. It is developed in the brain and is not a conscious decision. According to Stephanie Brill and Rachel Pepper in a guidebook for parents, "People do not choose to feel like a boy or a girl or both or neither. They simply are who they are."

In some children, their gender identity does not match their body sex, that is, their anatomy. These children are trans.

Gender identity develops at the same time as language ability. Therefore, it is possible that your child will also communicate with you accordingly. Sentences such as: "Mummy, I'm not a boy, my penis will fall off soon anyway" or "I want Santa to give me a penis" may be uttered. Such statements can vary greatly in their meaning and frequency, but it is important that they are heard.

The transgender network in Switzerland advises parents to take plenty of time, listen carefully and continue to give parental love if they suspect that their child is trans. Parents who have organised themselves in the association Trakine e.V. in Germany clearly state: "For us, the needs of our children are in the foreground, which they express in the here and now. This includes first and foremost the recognition of their designated gender, their chosen gender expression and, if desired by the young person, the alignment of their physical appearance with their gender perception."



*Take your child's expressions and appearance seriously and support them when meeting others. If you have questions about the topic, we recommend contacting Transgender Europe, as you can find information from the individual countries and contacts to initiatives in your country.*

*The children's book "I Am Jazz" was co-written by Jazz Jennings at the age of 14. She was born a biological boy and already knew at the age of two that she was trans. With the book, published in 2014, she wants to reassure children who feel the same way, as well as their parents (ISBN: 978-0803741072).*

## **Children learn about social gender**

Various studies show that we deal with girls and boys differently and often classify them stereotypically. This is not always a negative thing, but it should be questioned when dealing with preschool children. As a recent experiment by psychology professor Kristin Shutts in Madison shows, this age group is already influenced by gender perception. Three-year-old girls and boys saw on a monitor, one after the other, a girl and a boy who had an object with them that the children were not familiar with. The boy said: "My name is Ben. I like spudel. Spudel is my favourite food.", the girl: "My name is Betsy. I like Blickets. Blickets are my favourite food." Then the watching children were asked what they would prefer to eat. 65% of the boys chose spudel and 85% of the girls chose Blickets. They did not know the dishes and apparently based their decision on the gender of the children.

What does it actually mean to be a girl or a boy? Is the small difference innate or inherited? Research is not yet in agreement about this, but it is assumed that one half is determined by genetics and the other half by social influences. There is still a tendency for boys to be brought up differently than girls. Boys are thought to be tougher and stronger from an early age, to have scraped knees and not to complain about them. Girls are considered to be more communicative and therefore they are talked to earlier and more. This means that even preschool children are often unconsciously and quite naturally grouped and treated according to their gender. It would be better to treat children according to their preferences and talents, their abilities or their individual aptitudes. Even if you as a parent consciously try to offer girls and boys more diverse opportunities, you will probably experience that your daughters or sons behave in a gender stereotypical way. At the age of three to four, this is related to the development of the sense of gender and the self-discovery process associated with it. However, the older the children get, the more sensitively



they react to attributions, for instance in their choice of clothes and toys, and refrain from objects or colours that seem to "belong" to the opposite sex.



*Be a role model and do things with feminine and masculine connotations as a matter of course and without explanation (e.g. men can also iron and women can be good DIY enthusiasts). Provide guidance by answering questions early on, while keeping gender roles as open as possible. Let children experiment with gender roles. For example, when dressing up, avoid statements such as "girls/boys don't wear that" and distribute tasks according to the children's individual abilities and interests.*

## Feelings

With sexual education from the very beginning, children learn the value of physical contact, intimacy and closeness and the well-being that is associated with them. Children learn to distinguish between pleasant and unpleasant feelings and between familiar and unfamiliar persons. This ability continues to develop as they grow older. As parents, you consciously and unconsciously convey messages about feelings and emotions through the way you react, speak and pay attention to various things. In this way, you consciously but also unconsciously provide sex education.



*Children have the right to feelings. Children at this age make no distinction between a feeling in the gut or a rational thought that reflects that feeling. Thus, it is a holistic experience of a feeling. It is important to talk to children about feelings such as joy, sadness, fear and also anger. Have the courage to show your feelings to children, be it fear, sadness or joy. This makes it clear to children that feelings belong and may be expressed, also for boys and men. If you explain to children which feeling is in you at the moment, children will also learn to assign terms of different feelings to the sensation. In this way, children become able to perceive and express their feelings.*

Children's feelings should always be respected. Even if you think this is inappropriate. Children know exactly when they are happy, who they want to play with or who their new boyfriend or girlfriend is.





### **Bonding plays an important role**

Between the ages of four and six, many children also discover their love for the opposite-sex parent or for someone familiar of the opposite sex; this can also begin as early as the age of three. It is not uncommon for parents to hear sentences like "When I grow up, I'll marry you!". This shows the child how significant the parent is and expresses their love. This feeling can develop into jealousy in children and they claim the parent only for themselves. This can express itself in contact with other children by saying "Go away, that's my mummy!". These intense feelings can also be so strong that your child no longer wants to leave your side and, for example, wants to sleep in bed with you every night. This behaviour of children towards parents can be uncomfortable, but it is important to know that the child does not behave this way intentionally.

ment and belonging. Make it clear to the child, in a loving and understanding attitude, that the relationship between you and the child will not be affected by your other relationships (friendship, other children who are friends, relationship partners). It can also happen that children choose another familiar person for their deep affection instead of a parent and shower them with tokens of love. Always be sensitive to ensure that no misunderstandings arise. Especially in this phase, closeness is enormously important for children. It is also important that children learn to set limits and have the right to say "no". Children should be empowered and encouraged in the development of their autonomy. For example, you can lovingly encourage your child to sleep in their own bed or to spend some time with another familiar person.

### **Children experience boundaries and their sense of shame develops**

At this age, socialising with children of the same age becomes more and more relevant. Many children encounter new friends in kindergarten, on the playground or in the neighbourhood. In these groups of children, they increasingly learn how they should behave and which social rules should be observed. Most children take great pleasure in interacting with others, role plays have a special meaning. They can help to process experiences or reduce fears.

To satisfy their curiosity, children explore their own bodies or those of other children. In these games, there must be clear rules for all participants. This brings them into contact with the topic of "boundaries". Children learn to accept the limits of other children as well as to set their own.

Depending on the child, a sense of shame begins to develop at the age of three to four. It continues to develop during primary school, sometimes only shortly before puberty. As in other learning phases, the child discovers itself as an independent being. This is an important learning step. Shame is a protective function. It is used by people to defend the intimacy and privacy of their bodies. Make sure that privacy is private, but not taboo. Your child should know and be able to name their entire body. Children should also know that they are allowed to touch their own body anywhere. With an open attitude about it, your child also knows: "At home, I am allowed to ask questions - about all topics".

In their interactions with other children or in their dealings with caregivers, children learn about boundaries. This is also noticeable when children bring home words labelled as "dirty". Children notice that saying certain words triggers a certain reaction in adults. Often children do not





know the meaning behind these words. The child's focus is on the reaction elicited. This is seen as funny and above all exciting. Because the question that follows is "How do you think mummy or daddy will react to this? Will I get in trouble?". To test these limits, the words are repeated and used in special situations that make the parents uncomfortable, for example in the playground.



*For sexualised expressions, a three-step approach works well:*

- 1. Pronounce the word itself (this is often enough to "disenchant" the word)*
- 2. Explain the word in an age-appropriate manner*
- 3. Promote an alternative*

*Here you should stick to "I-messages" and put this, for example, like: "I don't like that word, find it hurtful - e.g. fuck: I would rather like we say sleep with each other for that".*



### **Children are curious**

Interest in procreation is increasing among children. This can be particularly strong when, for example, a sibling is expected or a baby is growing in the belly of someone familiar to the child. Then you may be overwhelmed with questions on the subject. The child will not differentiate between questions about the body and reproduction or questions about another area of interest. Therefore, it happens that these questions are asked in possibly very awkward situations, for example when shopping at the checkout. Here it is important that you signal to the child in a loving and appreciative way that it is okay to ask all questions. You can rest as-

sured that the answer does not have to be immediate. But come back to the question at another moment. For example, when you are at home and take time to talk with your child after putting away the groceries. You are "obliged to answer", do not wait until the child asks again - in the meantime, they might look for other sources to quench their thirst for knowledge. It is important to immediately convey the feeling to the child that "you can always ask me any questions, I will answer them for you". You should then also comply with this attitude.

### **Good and bad secrets**

Children need the opportunity to withdraw. Your child, too, may have already enthusiastically built caves out of blankets and chairs. In the same way, the child also needs secrets. These should be secrets that do not cause harm because they are the result of violence or a threat. Beautiful and good secrets in children represent something exciting and thrilling in their life world. These promote autonomy and detachment and are important for the formation of a distinct personality. Children express their feelings differently than adults, rarely through language. Children express themselves through their behaviour, drawing pictures or in play. Therefore, it is important that you pay attention to your child's behaviour. If something seems strange to you, listen to your gut feeling and follow it up.

### **No means no**

Children have the right and also the desire for privacy. This can be related to the body - "My body belongs to me!" This is connected to the desire to go to the toilet alone, to take a shower, to play in their own room or in the den they built themselves. As a parent, you should respect and honour this. Even if you think that your child does not clean up when taking a shower. Point this out lovingly without denying the child's own actions. It is important that you do not touch the child in any way, such as squeezing, kissing, cuddling or tickling, against the child's wishes. Instead, the child decides for itself whether it wants a hug. However, touching to avoid danger is necessary.



*Abuse does not come from strangers, 80-90% of cases take place in a familiar environment. For example, in families, among acquaintances or in institutions. In cases of sexual abuse, a child is powerless against an adult. Especially if your child speaks out and is not taken seriously or noticed. Children have to give signals up to eight times before an adult believes them. If something seems strange to you, follow up on that feeling. Pay close attention and stay alert.*

To develop a positive perception of the body and to encourage speaking skills, words are needed for the respective parts of the body. This gives the child the opportunity to name what it needs or does not need. Statements like "you can touch my arm, but not my belly" should be possible. This also includes the naming of the external genitals.

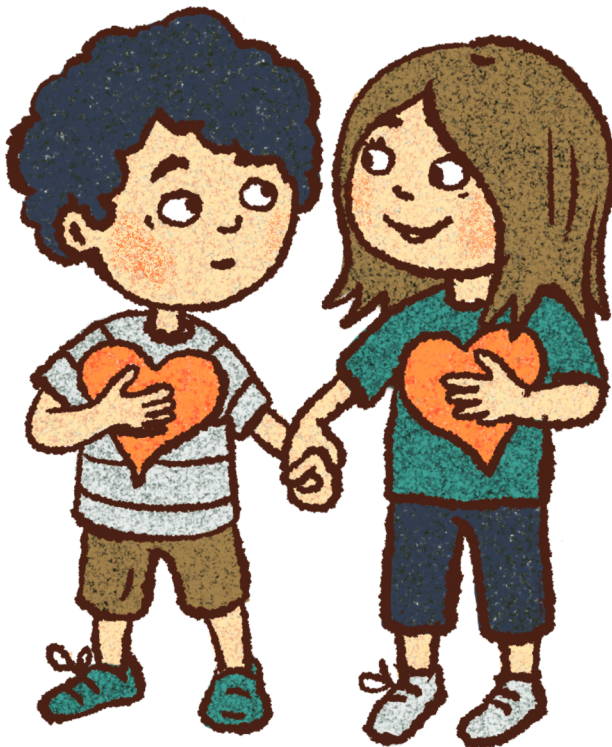
Children have a right to say no, even to people they trust. Saying no needs to be practised so that children can confidently defend their opinions even in emergency situations. Sentences like "I don't want that", "No, I'm not going" or "I don't like that" can be practised easily. In order to strengthen self-confidence, your child needs encouragement from you to be able to say these sentences when it feels like it. Even if you think it is inappropriate.

On the other hand, you can also appreciate the joy of how little children show off. They are proud of their bodies and feel comfortable in them. Be happy that the child is discovering its body. Gently and appreciatively guide nudity by setting rules about where and when nudity can take place. You can also make boundaries clear in a friendly way.



## Love

Children have a unique pace of physical and psychosexual development. As parents, you will guide and support this individual development. In doing so, you should always bear in mind that child and adult sexuality must be clearly distinguished. Children have similar physical reactions as adults, but children attach a completely different meaning to these experiences: they are part of the physical experience. As parents, you should be careful not to view children's sexual acts through the lens of adult sexuality. Sexual development takes place primarily in non-sexual areas - experiences of the satisfaction of basic needs and body perception are just as much a part of this development as relationships with other people and experiences of closeness and security.



At about the age of four, children are interested in the sexes and sexual organs. They want to try out how gender roles are shaped in everyday life and in social behaviour. Parents, friends and acquaintances are role models. Through role-playing, children get in touch with each other, learn to try things out and reach their limits. They learn the rules of coexistence and can try out these rules - an important step in understanding social interaction. From about the age of four, firm friendships form, usually in groups that tend to be of the same sex. Dealing respectfully with the friendships and feelings of children at this age is an important task. When children say that they love their boyfriend or girlfriend, this should not be laughed at or played down. Not taking the nice and pleasant feelings seriously can leave confusion and disappointment. For children, the feelings of jealousy and disappointment, dreams and affection are very serious.

The cognitive development of children progresses, children no longer comprehend the world only through their bodies and senses, but with cognitive comprehension. This is evident in the fact that adults are inundated with "why" questions. It is also possible that children will not ask any questions at all. Children develop differently. As parents, you have the responsibility to initiate conversations. In doing so, you should take into account the child's limits and needs.

The conversation and the trusting feeling are more important than perfectly formulated answers. The child should be made to understand that the questions and, above all, they themselves are taken seriously and respected. This builds trust and the confidence that your child can come to you with anything and ask you. This is especially important when children experience harassment or assault. If children cannot talk about questions, experiences or observations, they will develop an aversion to speaking over time. If the child is unwell for whatever reason, they may find it difficult or impossible to communicate.



*Questions about sexuality and reproduction often present parents with a great challenge, as they may not have the right answer immediately. The following tips can help you to educate your child:*

- *Do not give long lectures. Listen carefully to what your child wants to know, usually a simple answer is enough.*
- *Use books or other materials to help you. This will help you find the right words and your child can develop an idea of the topic being discussed.*
- *Be honest if you do not know or cannot explain something. Tell*

*your child that you are thinking about it and come back to the topic later.*

- *Stick to the truth and be precise. Embellishments or inaccurate statements confuse children and leave you with a lot of explaining to do later.*
- *Ask them questions and respond to them, so that they realise that they are equal partners in the conversation and that their opinion counts.*
- *Use opportunities to stimulate conversation. Sentences such as "You are too small for that" or "You do not understand that" should be avoided at all costs. In this way, you convey to the child that they are not yet ready and have a negative influence on their self-confidence. Your child will then no longer come to you with questions, but will seek answers from other people or through other channels.*

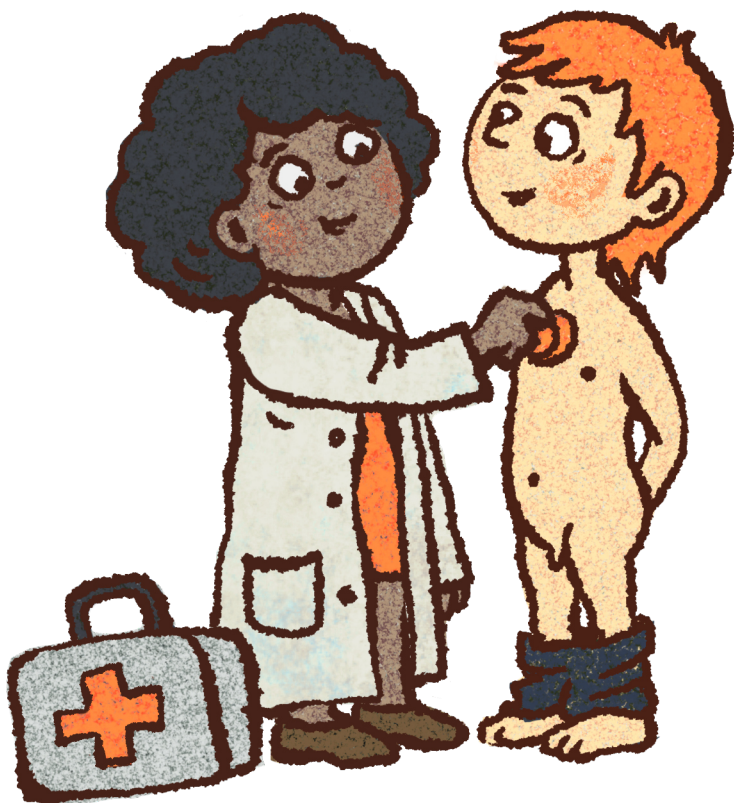
## **Exploration games**

Children can pursue their curiosity about the body in exploration games, so-called doctor games. This satisfies their need for tenderness and allows them to try out different roles. For children, this is a game like other games. They try out what they have observed and find exciting. In this way, the behaviour of adults, for example kissing and cuddling or even role-playing for marriage, is imitated.

Adults' reactions can cause negative feelings of guilt or shame, so that children try to hide their doctor games. An open approach to sexuality and successful sex education enable children not to feel they have to hide anything. They can then try out experiences and fantasies in play.

It is important that the children have learned to know their own limits and to accept the limits of others. Once children have satisfied their curiosity, other games usually come to the fore again - exploration games lose their fascination.

In principle, you should allow body exploration games. You can also deliberately offer children the opportunity to play undisturbed and unobserved. As with any game, some rules should be set:



- ▶ The game is voluntary for everyone.
- ▶ No child should be persuaded or forced. Blackmail ("Then I won't be your friend any more.") is also forbidden.
- ▶ No means no and everyone has to accept it.
- ▶ The game may be interrupted or stopped at any time.
- ▶ Everyone is careful with each other, nothing is allowed to hurt and nothing should be put into a body orifice.
- ▶ The children should have a similar age or power ratio, meaning approximately the same age, the same development or the same height.

Adults should only intervene if children play along against their will or are persuaded to play by older children, if the games go beyond the childish, for example putting their penis in their mouth.

### **Sexual assault among children**

Sexual assaults can also occur among children. There are four categories: over-exuberance; unbalanced situation; deliberate assault and assault by a child who has been abused. An assault in over-exuberance is not sexual violence - but a violation of boundaries. The reason for this is often that one's own sexual interest, one's own curiosity is so strong that the boundaries of the other child are crossed. Such boundary violations can occur when playing together, for example during exploratory games. One child wants to stop or not go any further, the other child wants to go further because the situation is just so exciting - and therefore does not stop. Such situations also require adult intervention.

Pay particular attention to power and unwillingness as central features of sexual assault among children. Unwillingness seems to be an easily recognisable feature. Where sexual assaults take place with force, under loud protest or with complaints to adults, it is usually easy to recognise. However, it may also happen that children are pressured to join in a "game". During the activity, their willingness may also disappear and the activity may be continued against the child's will. A power imbalance or hierarchy between children is influenced by various factors and is usually normal. If this power imbalance is exploited to deliberately cross other children's boundaries and make resistance and rejection ineffective, adult intervention is needed.

When intervening, you should talk to the children about the rules and their motives. You should expand the children's competences and possibilities for action, for example with games on the topics of setting limits or feelings. If the exploration games take on a coercive character, this can be an indication of experienced assaults. It is also possible that children are processing an experience, for example if they have had contact with pornography or have observed sexual intercourse. Watch this more closely and seek help in counselling centres.

The rule is: the affected child takes precedence. Their right to self-determination, their feelings and perhaps their body have been violated. The child now needs to feel that he or she is not to blame. Sentences like "It takes two to tango!" or "And what did YOU do?" are inappropriate, precisely because the power imbalance was exploited. The affected child needs emotional attention and the space to express their feelings. They need to

feel that they are believed. This is the only way the child can get over the incident.

The abusive child must be stopped and confronted about the behaviour. This is the only way it can learn that their power comes to an end as soon as adults intervene. They must learn that the abusive behaviour was wrong. Make sure that at the beginning of the conversation, you recount what happened just as the child concerned described it. Do not start by asking "What happened earlier?" - in most cases you will not get any clarifying answers and the child will immediately be in a denying and defensive position. Give the child who has been assaulted the space to add to or describe what happened from their point of view. Make sure that the child clearly feels that you do not doubt the credibility of the child concerned. Questions about the motivation, the why, also tend to lead to justifications, because the child usually cannot answer this question themselves. You must be clear that such behaviour is not right and must be refrained from. Make it clear that the behaviour and not the child itself is being rejected.

## **Sexual violence**



*Sexual violence is any sexual act performed on or in front of children against their will, to which they cannot knowingly consent. The perpetrator uses a position of power to satisfy their own needs at the expense of the child. The acts are varied; they include verbal harassment, voyeuristic behaviour, touching their genital area or breasts, and even serious assaults such as rape.*

Sexual abuse begins where contact with children is sought or continued because or even although the adult is sexually aroused by it. It is the adults who make the assessment of their own arousal - not the children. This responsibility cannot be shifted to the children, as they are often unable to assess the consequences of their actions. The task of the adults is to protect them from harmful consequences.

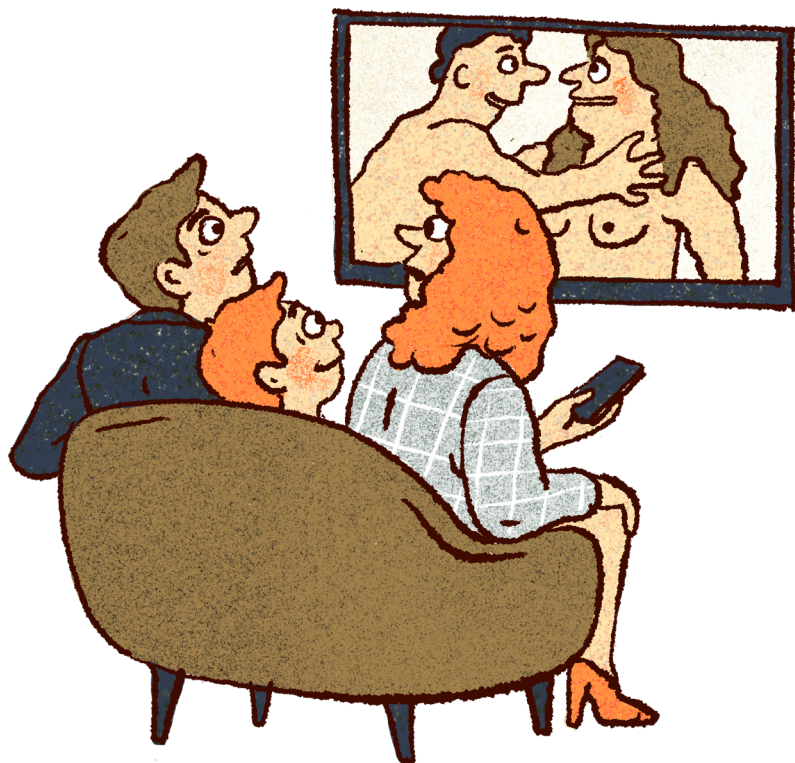
Early sex education is very effective in preventing sexual violence. Children who know their own bodies, are well informed, can distinguish between nice and bad feelings and have learned language about sexual content are best protected from sexual assault and can tell others or get help.

## **Children experience sexuality in the media**

Children are confronted with depictions of eroticism and sexuality, espe-



cially outside the family, which they can perceive but not yet understand. Parents need to be media literate and talk to their children. This can help to ensure that children's experiences with sexuality, gender roles and lifestyles are not only fed by public discussion. A healthy self-confidence is the basis for warding off possible dangers.



*Support your child with the following messages:*

*"I am important, lovable and good the way I am." A child who is loved for who they are, not because of ability or achievement, who knows their strengths and weaknesses, can freely express their own opinion and say no.*

*"I'm allowed to say no. I decide which touches I like and which I don't." Encourage your child to recognise and defend their own boundaries.*

*"I know my feelings and trust them." Children should learn to know, distinguish and express their feelings.*

*"I know what secrets are good and bad, talking can help and keeping silent doesn't change anything." Children should learn which secrets may be told, that getting help is a sign of strength and that there are people who will listen, believe and help them.*

*"I know what we are talking about, I am allowed to ask questions and talk about everything." Enlightened children know where sexuality belongs - with big teenagers and adults. It is clear to them that sexual acts must not be done with children. They know rules and boundaries, can call a spade a spade and are not easily fooled..*

Children should learn to listen to their gut feeling. They need to know that there are people who want to do them harm, for example, touch children's penises or vulvas, show children their private parts or pornographic material. Be sure to convey that your child has skills to decide who can touch them and that they can defend themselves. Most sexual assaults take place in the immediate family, so be aware of this. Therefore, children also need contact persons outside the family whom they can trust and who can provide assistance. It is the responsibility of parents and trusted persons to recognise the distress of children and to act. Seek professional and expert help through local help options and offers.

The behaviour of children who have experienced sexual violence varies greatly depending on their age and personality. Only a few children will say outright when they have experienced sexual violence, they tend to make hints because they lack the right words for what has happened. This is precisely why the hints are often not understood correctly. Be aware that children do not invent sexual abuse on their own. Some children do not notice anything, others change and show conspicuous features such as sleeping disorders, stomach aches without cause, wetting (again), language regression, fears, withdrawal or aggression, reenactment of sexual acts or sexualised language. These signs can also have other causes.



*If you suspect that your child has experienced abuse, you should take this feeling seriously and follow it up.*

*Find a trusted person that you can talk to.*

*Show your child that they can talk to you.*

*Say that you are worried because you have noticed changes.*

*Stay calm and give your child permission to talk about good and bad secrets. Communicate that getting help is not tattling or a betrayal. Make your child feel that you believe him or her.*

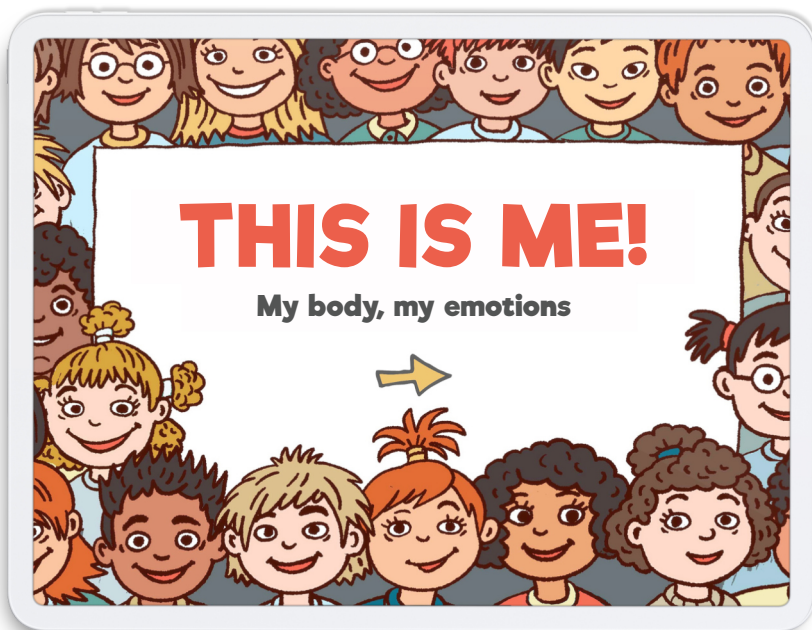
*Do not pressure your child.*

*Let them know that you know about stressful situations and that you are resilient.*

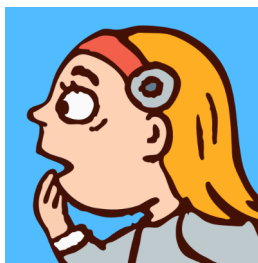
*Never confront the possible perpetrator.*

*Seek help and support from counselling centres and help lines. Determine if the kindergarten management or similar persons need to be informed.*

App for children



With our app, children can discover important issues around the body, emotions and respect in a fun, playful and age-appropriate way.



**Download the app  
for free and try it  
out now!**

# About the project

## Partners



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



All contents of this website, in particular texts, pictures and graphics, are protected by copyright. Unless expressly stated otherwise, copyright is held by sexedu.eduskills.plus and is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-commercial - Distribution under the same conditions 4.0 International license. They may be subject to the terms of the license.

© 2022 sexedu.eduskills.plus









