

HomeLink for Parents/Caregivers

ORIENTATION

TEN TIPS ON BEING YOUR CHILD'S MOST IMPORTANT TEACHER ABOUT SEXUALITY

1. Recognize that it's not too early. Your child is old enough for you to begin to think about your parenting/caregiving related to sexuality topics.
2. Purchase or borrow and read a book or two about talking with children about sexuality topics.
3. Be thoughtful about children's ability to access pornography and other sexually explicit media in your home and at friends' homes. Our Whole Lives' stance is that sexually explicit images are not a healthy introduction to sexuality for children. Many children see porn—accidentally, through coercion, or as a result of their own curiosity—before they are teens. Make it your practice to keep an eye on what your children are watching and doing with screens (TV, computers, tablets, phones, etc.). Consider limiting screen use to shared space in your home, and not permitting screens in children's bedrooms. It is easier to set these expectations while children are young than to introduce new rules in the early adolescent and teen years.
4. Explore the wonderful videos at Amaze.org. Some are for parents/caregivers, others are for sharing with your children.
5. Be an askable grown-up. Never shut down, laugh at, or belittle your child's questions about sexuality. Make sure you understand what's being asked. Give short, honest answers, then ask, "Does that answer your question?" Provide more information as needed. *The Parent Guide to Our Whole Lives Grades K-1 and Grades 4-6*, 2nd ed. provides lots of lots of common questions and sample answers to them.
6. Don't be afraid to say, "I'm not sure, but I'll get back to you on that" or "I need some time to think about how to answer that question." Then take time to research or think about the topic, and follow up with your child as soon as possible.
7. While being an askable grown-up is important, some kids never ask. In that case, buy or borrow books to read together or leave for them to read on their own, and find opportunities to refer to the topics in the books.
8. Remember that a hundred one-minute conversations about sexuality topics will make more of an impact than one hundred-minute conversation. Everyday life presents constant opportunities to share your values, observations, and information with your child.
9. Seize opportunities while reading a book together, driving past a billboard, watching a video, people-watching, attending protests or rallies, or passing others' protests. Don't hesitate to bring up topics after the fact ("Today when I was [doing something] people were talking about [a sexuality topic] and it got me thinking"; "On the news today they were saying [something about sexuality] and it made me wonder if you've heard kids [saying something]"; "I was thinking about what you asked me yesterday and I realize I could probably give you a better answer," etc.).
10. It's better to talk imperfectly than to avoid talking. Even if you stumble at first, keep trying. It gets easier the more often you have these important conversations.



HomeLink for Parents/Caregivers

WORKSHOP 1

Our Wonderful Bodies

WHAT WE DID IN OUR WHOLE LIVES TODAY

Today we read stories, sang songs, and learned about body parts. These included the nose, ears, elbows, navel (belly button), nipples, vulva, vagina, penis, testicles, and many other body parts. We learned that everyone's genitals look different.

We also talked about the ways bodies can be the same or different (tall or short, skin of many

different shades, and many different abilities). We discussed how people do some things in different ways if they can't use their legs or they can't hear or see.

And we looked at some toys and cartoon characters and talked about how some of them have very unrealistic bodies!

WHAT YOU CAN DO THIS WEEK

1. Draw with your child

Ask your child to draw their own body on the My Body paper if they didn't do so in the workshop, including as many parts of the body as they can think of. Label the body parts on the paper as they name them. Bring this paper to the next workshop so it can be added to their Our Whole Lives journal!

2. Have conversations over meals

During a meal, look around the table and find things that are the same and different about your family's bodies: long hair/short hair, glasses/no glasses, big thumb/little thumb, and so on. Take turns naming something you're happy your body can do.

Think of people your family knows who look similar to or different from your own family, including people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds. Talk about these people and their differences in positive ways. Kindergarten and first grade children notice racial differences. These should be discussed and acknowledged, rather than treated as a taboo topic.

Think about people, yourself and/or others you know, who are disabled, and talk about what bodies can do that may be the same or different.

3. Read a book about bodies with your child

Borrow from the library, or buy for your family, a children's book about how bodies work. There are many excellent ones; some titles to get you started are below. Nearly any library or bookstore will have great options. Read at least one book together and talk about it with your child. There are also puzzles, 3-D models, games, YouTube videos, and apps that can be fun to explore together; ask a children's librarian for suggestions, search your favorite in-person or online toy store for "anatomy puzzle," or search your phone's app store for "anatomy kids" and similar terms.

4. Discuss public and private with your child

Children at this age are ready to learn about the concepts of public and private. It's a good time to start using words like "public" and "private" and make sure your children get lots of examples of what they mean. For instance, when your child is going to use the bathroom, you could ask, "Would you like me to come in with you, or would you like privacy?" When you go in yourself, you can say, "I need privacy right now because I'm going to the bathroom." In a store, you might caution them, "It's not safe to run around in a crowded public place like this—you might accidentally knock

someone over.” When you talk about private spaces (in which some behavior is okay that would not be okay in public), make clear to them that a

public bathroom is not private, but a bathroom at home is.

You are your child’s most important educator about bodies!

What you can do now and in the years ahead

- Use accurate names for body parts, including genitals. Increasing comfort and eliminating shame around these words help children be safer and healthier both now and as adults. It can help them be more comfortable with their bodies as they grow up. Research shows that children who know proper names for body parts are more able to accurately tell a caregiver or doctor when something doesn’t feel right. An ability to use the proper words may decrease the risk of sexual abuse, and it can help a child who attempts to disclose such abuse.
- When talking about your child’s body, emphasize what it can *do* rather than how it *looks*. Help your child develop positive body self-esteem. For instance, you could say, “Wow, you have some strong legs!” or “Look at how well your skin healed itself!” Recognize that all bodies can do some things and won’t be able to do other things, and this is normal and okay. Don’t criticize your child’s body.
- Eliminate negative body talk. Try not to criticize your own body out loud, especially in front of your children. (This may not be an easy habit to break.) Focus on physical activities you enjoy rather than on exercise as a duty, and on eating healthy food rather than on dieting.
- Make sure your family’s books, dolls, toys, videos, and other media reflect the identity markers (race, class, religion, gender, ability, and immigration status) of family members, and that they represent diversity as normal and natural. Try to find dolls with different abilities than your child’s.
- When your child has questions about someone with different abilities and disabilities than theirs, answer questions with, “That person’s brain (or body) works differently from yours.” Talk about differences rather than using words or phrases like “something wrong” or using the word “normal” for someone who is not disabled. Emphasize what each person can do, and how they do things in the same way as or differently from your child. Remind your child that people who are similar to each other are not better than people who are different. Model friendly, respectful interaction with everyone, disabled or not, by smiling, saying hello, or striking up conversation when appropriate.

BOOK AND MEDIA RECOMMENDATIONS

Our Whole Lives advises parents/caregivers to review books and videos before sharing them with children to ensure each is the right match for a given child and family.

Bodies

Her Body Can, by Katie Crenshaw and Ady Meschke

This body-positive book for girls celebrates bodies regardless of size.

Human Body Theater: A Non-Fiction Revue, by Maris Wicks

Information about what our bodies are made of and how they're put together is presented in a fun graphic novel format.

The Magic School Bus: Inside the Human Body, by Joanna Cole

Mrs. Frizzle, the teacher, takes students on a field trip through one child's body. The whole Magic School Bus series (which includes both books and videos) is beloved for making science topics kid-friendly.

Professor Astro Cat's Human Body Odyssey, by Dominic Walliman and Ben Newman

This cartoon-style book has bold illustrations and allows kids to see the big picture or dive into the details.

See Inside Your Body, by Katie Daynes and Colin King

Children can lift flaps to discover how parts of their body function. This book is targeted for older children, but younger kids can still learn from the illustrations.

"Help Kids Learn How Bodies Are Mostly Alike," by Amaze Parents

This short animated video on YouTube about body parts, including genitals, uses language like "most girls have" and "most boys have."

Skin Color and Hair Diversity

Shades of People, by Shelley Rotner and Sheila Kelly

This simple photo book depicts the many shades of skin colors.

Skin Like Mine, by LaTashia M. Perry

This short book celebrates the beauty of all shades of brown skin.

We're Different, We're the Same, by Bobbi Jane Kates
Sesame Street characters explain how people's skin, hair, and body parts can look different but have the same functions.

Hair Love, by Matthew Cherry and Karen Rupert Toliver

In this short animated film, an African American girl appreciates her own hair, and her dad learns to style it. matthewacherry.com/hair-love

Body Positivity

Bodies are Cool, by Tyler Feder

A groundbreaking picture book notable for its incredibly diverse portrayal of all types of bodies

Your Body Is Awesome: Body Respect for Children, by Sigrún Bjarkkadóttir

A picture book that is full of positive messages about body image, listening to your body, and celebrating all that bodies can do.

"You Are Beautiful! Body Positivity," by Queer Kid Stuff
Lindsay and their best friend, a stuffed bear named Teddy, help children feel good about their bodies. Although the descriptive text on some of the YouTube videos uses she/her pronouns for Lindsay, they currently identify as queer and trans nonbinary and use they/them.

Ability

Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You, by Sonia Sotomayor

Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor celebrates kids with diabetes, asthma, dyslexia, autism, a nut allergy, a guide dog, a wheelchair, and more.

"What's a Disability?" by Queer Kid Stuff

Lindsay and Teddy learn about disability from two friends: Ali and her wheelchair Twilight Flake. On YouTube.

There are many children's books about specific disabilities: children who use wheelchairs or braces, children who are blind or deaf, children with autism, children with limb differences, etc.

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WORKSHOP 2

Bodies and Gender

WHAT WE DID IN OUR WHOLE LIVES TODAY

Today we reviewed the parts of our body, including our genitals. We talked about how genitals can be used for urination and masturbation, and about the importance of privacy. We also discussed gender identity and read the book *Neither*,

by Airlie Anderson, about a world where everyone belongs and is accepted. And we talked about gender roles, including the idea that all toys are for everyone, not “only for boys” or “only for girls.”


WHAT YOU CAN DO THIS WEEK

- Encourage your child to reflect on the workshop by helping them write or dictate a story that will be added to their Our Whole Lives journal. The story can be about bodies and growing up, your child’s gender, some things your child really likes to do, or anything else your child wants to include. Invite your child to illustrate the story, and have them bring it to our next workshop.
- Borrow from the library, or buy for your family, a children’s book about gender roles and gender identity. Some good choices are listed below. Read the book and talk about it with your child.

You are your child’s most important teacher about genitals, gender identity, gender roles, and gender stereotypes!

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW AND IN THE YEARS AHEAD

- Remember that it is normal and healthy for children to play with gender by dressing up in clothes and accessories, both those that might be traditional for the gender they were assigned at birth and those that might not. Allow this play without making a big deal out of it.
- As much as possible, respect your young child’s choices regarding clothing and hair style and length. While some parents and caregivers worry about their child being teased in school for styles that don’t conform to gender norms—and certainly sometimes this does occur—many are surprised by how little negativity their child encounters. Support your child’s desire experiment and play with different styles as they grow into being their authentic self.
- Gender stereotyping often hits a peak when children are young and then fades as they grow and mature. Young children are learning what gender means and are sometimes concerned about mastering what it means to be a boy or a girl. They may make sweeping comments about what girls “always like” or boys “always do.” While this is normal and common, look for opportunities to point out exceptions or say, “Some boys do that, but not all boys,” etc.
- Make a conscious effort to provide children of all genders a range of toys and books. Seek out



toys that are marketed to another gender, especially ones you think your child would enjoy, and books whose characters defy stereotypes. Don't let yourself be limited by the false gender binaries in stores' toy and book sections.

- Know that some children whose play or clothing preferences are gender nonconforming grow up to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender, and others grow up to be heterosexual and/or cisgender (which means not transgender). There is no way to predict adult identity on the basis of childhood preferences. Research shows that trying to change or shape a child's gender identity or sexual orientation
 - is ineffective and psychologically damaging. To promote their long-term mental and emotional well-being, children need their parents and caregivers to love them unconditionally and accept them for who they are.
 - When the subject of masturbation comes up, communicate that touching oneself is fine but should be done in private (alone in one's bedroom or the bathroom). Discuss masturbation with all children, regardless of their gender and anatomy. Use the proper terms for body parts. In particular, teach and use the word *clitoris* in a matter-of-fact way with your young child the same way you would teach and use *penis*.
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BOOK AND MEDIA RECOMMENDATIONS

Our Whole Lives advises parents/caregivers to review books and videos before sharing them with children to ensure each is the right match for a given child and family.

Resources about Gender

Jamie Is Jamie: A Book about Being Yourself and Playing Your Way, by Afsaneh Moradian

Jamie (whose gender is never identified) enjoys playing with “girl toys” and “boy toys.” After Jamie goes home, the other kids argue briefly about whether Jamie is a boy or a girl—and ultimately conclude they can’t wait to play with Jamie again.

No Difference between Us, by Jayneen Sanders

A sister and brother compare the nongendered ways they are similar and different, celebrating both what they share and what makes them each unique.

Pink Is for Boys, by Robb Pearlman

A short, readable book making the point on every page that all colors, and all activities, are for both boys and girls. The text represents only boys and girls, without mentioning non-binary genders. Parents/caregivers reading it aloud may choose to add “and everyone!” to each page.

“Help Kids Learn about Gender,” by Amaze Jr.

A boy and girl say they were teased for liking gender-nonconforming clothes and toys in this short, cartoon-style video on YouTube. Mom teaches about stereotypes and encourages the kids to be their true selves.

“Gender,” by Queer Kid Stuff

Friendly host Lindsay and their best stuffed friend Teddy discuss gender in a way that young children can understand. On YouTube.

“Everyone Can Like,” by Elise Gravel

A free printable poster with cute illustrations of the wide range of things and activities that kids of any gender can enjoy, from dinosaurs to unicorns to science. There are lots of other great resources for kids on this site: elisegravel.com/en/blog/everybody-can-like

Resources about Gender Identity

Annie’s Plaid Shirt, by Stacy Davids

A girl’s mom wants her to wear a dress to attend a family wedding, but the girl hates dresses and wants to wear the plaid shirt she wears every day. The problem is solved on the last page when the girl wears her plaid shirt with a suit borrowed from her brother.

A House for Everyone, by Jo Hirst

Each page of this story celebrates a child who is gender diverse in their own way and contributes their own strengths to building a playhouse together.

Introducing Teddy: A Gentle Story about Gender and Friendship, by Jessica Walton

A boy’s teddy bear announces he is really “a girl teddy, not a boy teddy.” Although the bear worries the boy won’t be her friend anymore, the boy is immediately accepting.

It Feels Good to Be Yourself: A Book about Gender Identity, by Theresa Thorn

Explains the diverse gender identities of an appealing, multiracial group of kids and affirms children’s choices to be themselves.

Jack (Not Jackie), by Erica Silverman

An older sister is at first sad when her younger sibling, who was assigned female at birth, identifies as a boy. Parents support the child’s transition and eventually the older sister realizes she loves her brother.

Julián Is a Mermaid, by Jessica Love

A boy who loves imagining himself as a mermaid and dressing up as one has a grandmother who helps him celebrate who he is. This short book contains no meanness, negativity, or bullying. Many pages have only pictures, no words.

One of a Kind, Like Me / Único Como Yo, by Laurin Mayeno

In this bilingual book, each pair of pages has English on one side, Spanish on the other. With the help of his mom, a boy creates and wears a princess costume to the school parade. Peer negativity is mild and turned around quickly.

Phoenix Goes to School, by Michelle and Phoenix Finch

This is a true story of a child who was assigned male at birth but says, “I know I am really a girl.” Before starting school, she worries about being bullied, but the teacher and other children are supportive.

Red: A Crayon’s Story, by Michael Hall

A blue crayon has a red paper wrapper and is marked “Red.” He is judged a failure in his attempts to color things red but succeeds once he embraces his true (blue) self.

Sparkle Boy, by Lesléa Newman

Parents are supportive of their son, who likes to wear skirts and sparkly nail polish. When other children are mean to him at the library, his sister stands up for him.

When Aidan Became a Brother, by Kyle Lukoff

A child assigned female at birth transitions to identifying as a boy, with loving support from his parents. He worries about how to support the unknown identity of the new baby on the way.

Queer Kid Stuff’s YouTube channel and website Queer Kid Stuff offers lots of short videos about gender identity, including being transgender and nonbinary. It’s like Gender Studies 101 meets Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood.

Resource about Masturbation and Privacy

“Help Kids Learn Why It’s Important to Keep Private Parts Private,” by Amaze Jr.

A cartoon grandmother explains genitals, masturbation, and privacy to her grandchildren in this YouTube video.

The books listed here were some of Our Whole Lives’ favorites at the time this list was compiled. Wonderful new children’s books on these subjects are published every year, and many websites publish up-to-date lists of recommendations. Searching the phrase “children’s books” with any topic of interest (gender identity, gender stereotypes, etc.) will yield a treasure trove of books to check out.



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WORKSHOP 3

Body Boundaries

IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT THIS EDITION OF OUR WHOLE LIVES FOR GRADES K–1

Since *Our Whole Lives for Grades K–1* was first written, understandings of how to best protect children from sexual abuse have developed significantly, and this new edition has incorporated these new understandings. Research has helped professionals to understand that child sexual abuse prevention must be viewed primarily as the responsibility of adults, not children. It is often extremely difficult for children to identify abuse as it is happening, because abusers groom and manipulate them and because abuse often involves gentle touch or fun play that does not physically hurt.

We also now recognize that it is exceedingly difficult for children to stop abuse from happening or that is happening. Abuse is usually perpetrated by someone who is both older and stronger, and it is very common for victims to be under age six. Abuse is often perpetrated by a person the child loves or depends on, and a child may be afraid of getting an abuser in trouble or of losing their affection. Because of the immense power imbalance between child and abuser, children should not be expected to report an abuser. In fact, the message that children *should* tell is not trauma-informed. It leads many abuse survivors to carry lifelong guilt, feeling that they were responsible for the abuse because they were unable to say no, tell someone, or make the offender stop.

In addition, approximately 40 percent of child sexual abuse is committed by other children. These youth victimize children who are younger or less powerful than they are or who are disabled. An important part of preventing sexual abuse is teaching all children social-emotional skills that help them accept “no” for an answer and nurture empathy for others. This approach seeks to prevent child sexual abuse that is

perpetrated by youth; the focus cannot be solely on protecting children from adults.

This trauma-informed, research-based approach to preventing child sexual abuse has been pioneered by the organization Prevent Child Abuse Vermont, particularly in their curriculum *Care for Kids*. Workshop 3 of *Our Whole Lives* includes both activities and approaches from *Care for Kids*, and conversations with Prevent Child Abuse Vermont’s executive director, Linda E. Johnson, have profoundly shaped the understanding of this topic. We recommend *Care for Kids* as an additional curriculum and resource; it is available at pcavt.org.

Instead of attempting to teach children to say no to abuse and to report it—expectations that are unrealistic and often harmful to abuse survivors—this edition of *Our Whole Lives*

- teaches the correct names for body parts, which gives children anatomically correct language if they do disclose abuse. A potential abuser may be less likely to victimize a child who demonstrates self-awareness about their own body by accurately naming the genitals.
- discusses the difference between public and private.
- emphasizes that children have the right to say no and to define their own boundaries around being touched.
- helps children practice hearing and respecting “no” from others, which is an important part of preventing children from victimizing others.
- teaches that touching is never a secret.
- tells children they have the option of asking an adult for help if they are feeling confused. Children who are sexually abused often feel

Workshop 3

OWL Grades K–1 © 2023 by UUA & LCM

confused or mixed up. (Our Whole Lives emphasizes “asking for help” rather than “telling,” because some authority figures discourage “tattling,” and children may feel “telling” is a form of tattling. “Asking for help” is more widely acceptable.)

- helps children identify adult helpers. Developing connections and open communication between children and trusted adults is a key part of sexual abuse prevention.
- lays the groundwork for children’s future learning about consent. Understanding the

importance of saying and respecting both “yes” and “no” is not only part of preventing children from victimizing others but is also critical to healthy childhood friendships and teen and adult sexual relationships.

We believe that this approach, in combination with steps that make adults responsible for preventing abuse (by creating appropriate organizational and institutional policies, educating parents and caregivers, training staff, etc.), is the best approach we can take to preventing child sexual abuse.

WHAT WE DID IN OUR WHOLE LIVES TODAY

Today’s topics were body boundaries and sexual abuse prevention. We talked about many nice ways to share touch (hugging someone you love, holding hands with a friend, etc.). We also discussed that sometimes we like touch and sometimes we don’t, and that both are okay. We learned that when we’re touching or being touched by another person, we both need to agree about the touching. We played a game that let us

practice asking permission, giving permission or not, and listening to the other person. We talked about how touching is never secret. We discussed and drew pictures of “helper people” we know, adults at home or school to whom we could talk if we felt confused or worried about something. We learned about the idea of “personal space.” And we celebrated that our bodies belong to us.

WHAT YOU CAN DO THIS WEEK

- Ask your child about their “helper people,” people whom they feel safe asking for help if they are ever confused or worried about something. Children who are sexually abused often feel confused or mixed up, so it can help them to know that it’s worth asking for help when they feel this way, and to know who they might ask. Never shame or question a child about their choice of helper people, including whether or not they included parents/caregivers.
- Help your child choose a photo of your family or draw a picture of them, to bring to Our Whole Lives next time.
- Borrow from the library, or buy for your family, a children’s book about body boundaries. Some good choices are listed below. Read the book and talk about it with your child.
- Be an alert parent/caregiver. Familiarize yourself with the warning signs of grooming behavior that often precedes sexual abuse; a good description of them is on the website of Prevent Child Abuse Vermont, at pcavt.org/grooming-overview. If you notice behaviors that seem suspicious or make you uncomfortable, there are suggestions for steps you can take at pcavt.org/boundary-violations.

You are your child’s most important teacher about body boundaries!

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW AND IN THE YEARS AHEAD

- Respect your child's wishes regarding being touched. For instance, if you notice they do not want a hug or kiss from a relative, suggest alternatives like high-fiving, shaking hands, fist bumping, blowing a kiss, or waving goodbye. Give your child as much bodily autonomy as possible, while recognizing there will be some exceptions, such as those involving health or safety.
- Teach children that if someone (a sibling, a friend, etc.) says "no" or "stop," whatever is being done needs to stop immediately. Children should expect the same if they are the ones saying "no" or "stop." Creating these expectations around consent is valuable in childhood play, and perhaps even more so when it comes to sexual abuse and sexual assault prevention as children grow up. Some families use this rhyme: "Hop, hop, hop on Pop, when someone says 'stop' you *have to stop*."
- Reinforce for your child that touching is never a secret. Make sure they understand they will have your support if they share information about touching with you or another one of their "helper people."
- From time to time, remind your child that they can tell you anything, and that it's never too late to tell.
- Teach children to notice and read body language, to practice understanding both verbal and nonverbal communication. Point out what you notice so your child can gain the same skills. For instance, you could say things like "Look at your baby brother's face, it doesn't look like he likes the way you're squeezing him," or "Did you notice our neighbor looked kind of sad?"
- Check out the prevention tools from Stop It Now! (stopitnow.org/help-guidance/prevention-tools) for tip sheets and guidebooks with detailed advice for parents and caregivers about protecting your kids from sexual abuse.

BOOK AND MEDIA RECOMMENDATIONS

Our Whole Lives advises parents/caregivers to review books before sharing them with children to ensure each is the right match for a given child and family.

An Exceptional Children's Guide to Touch: Teaching Social and Physical Boundaries to Kids, by Hunter Manasco

While this book is primarily meant for children with special needs, it could be useful and appropriate for any child. With simple illustrations and just a sentence or two on each page, it explains societal rules about accidental touch, friendly touch, hurtful touch, touching oneself, and more.

Let's Talk about Body Boundaries, Consent, and Respect, by Jayneen Sanders

This book helps children understand appropriate boundaries and their own and others' personal space. It is best suited for children with attention spans for slightly longer books.

No Means No!, by Jayneen Sanders

A girl chooses to say "no" to touch in a variety of situations, such as when an aunt wants to kiss her, a friend wants to hold her hand, etc. The book shows the other people respecting her choices and finding simple alternatives.

More Than Fluff, by Madeline Valentine

This book, which we read during today's OWL workshop, is about a bird who is soft and whom everyone wants to cuddle. Her mom supports her in figuring out how to say how she does and doesn't want to be touched.

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WORKSHOP 4

Families

WHAT WE DID IN OUR WHOLE LIVES TODAY

Today we learned about the many kinds of families children live in! We read the book *A Family Is a Family Is a Family*, by Sara O’Leary, played a game about lots of different types of families, and

worked together on a family mural. We learned that families are all different, and that families are for love and caring.

WHAT YOU CAN DO THIS WEEK

- Help your child write or dictate one thing they think is special about your family. Encourage your child to draw a picture to illustrate that special thing. Have your child bring their work to the next workshop.
 - Give your child a photo of themselves as a baby or toddler that they can bring to the next Our Whole Lives workshop.
 - Buy or borrow a children’s book about families. Some good choices are listed below. Reading about many types of families, including those similar to yours, can enhance your child’s understanding of diversity and can normalize differences.
 - Talk about who is in your family, both those who live in your household and any who live elsewhere. Guided by your child’s level of interest and attention span, look at family photos together and discuss who is related or connected and how. Children are often fascinated to realize that their parents were once big brothers or baby sisters, that grandparents were “mom” or “dad” to them, etc.
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You are your child’s most important teacher about family!

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW AND IN THE YEARS AHEAD

- After spending time with a child whose family is different from your own in some way, talk about the other family’s structure in an affirming, age-appropriate way.
 - Model inclusive definitions of family. You may already refer to many people as extended family, using terms such as “auntie” or “uncle,” regardless of whether the relationships are defined by blood, marriage, adoption, or just love.
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BOOK AND MEDIA RECOMMENDATIONS

Our Whole Lives advises parents/caregivers to review books and videos before sharing them with children to ensure each is the right match for a given child and family.

Family Diversity

Each of the books below shows many kinds of families.

A Family Is a Family Is a Family, by Sara O’Leary

My Family, Your Family, by Lisa Bullard

The Great Big Book of Families, by Mary Hoffman

Who’s in My Family? All about Our Families, by Robie Harris

“Family (Love Is Love),” by the Teeny Tiny Stevies
This short song and its animated video on YouTube describe many different kinds of families.

LGBTQ Families

And Tango Makes Three, by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell

The true story of two male penguins who want to raise a chick and are given an egg by the zookeeper. When it hatches, they parent little Tango together.

Heather Has Two Mommies, by Lesléa Newman
Heather’s favorite number is two. She has two arms, two legs, two pets, and two mommies. This classic book has been re-released with updates and a new look.

Stella Brings the Family, by Miriam Schiffer
A girl with two dads worries about who to bring to her class’s Mother’s Day celebration—and decides to bring her entire extended family.

Adoption

All about Adoption: How Families Are Made and How Kids Feel about It, by Marc Nemiroff and Jane Annunziata

This book describes many types of adoption.

Happy Adoption Day, by John McCutcheon
Based on McCutcheon’s song of the same title, this book shows a father and mother adopting an infant from East Asia.

My New Mom and Me, by Renata Galindo

In this story of the adoption of a child old enough to be aware of it, a puppy is adopted by a cat. He’s nervous at first, because his new mom is different from him, but she reassures him.

Wonderful You: An Adoption Story, by Lauren McLaughlin

A birth mother chooses adoptive parents (mom and dad) for her infant.

Single-Parent Families

Love Is a Family, by Roma Downey

A young girl worries about what other kids will think when they learn that her family is only her and her mother. But the other kids have lots of different kinds of families too.

Two Is Enough, by Janna Matthies

This book shows many kinds of single-parent families.

Divorced or Separated Parents

In each of these books, the parents are a mom and a dad.

Living with Mom and Living with Dad, by Melanie Wals

Standing on My Own Two Feet: A Child’s Affirmation of Love in the Midst of Divorce, by Tamara Schmitz

Two Homes, by Claire Masurel

Children in Foster Families

Kids Need to Be Safe, by Julie Nelson

Maybe Days: A Book for Children in Foster Care, by Jennifer Wilgocki and Marcia Kahn Wright

Speranza’s Sweater, by Marcy Pusey

A girl is adopted by her foster family.

Other Kinds of Families and Situations

Families Change: A Book for Children Experiencing Termination of Parental Rights, by Julie Nelson

Sometimes It's Grandmas and Grandpas, Not Mom-mies and Daddies, by Gayle Bryne

Sun Kisses, Moon Hugs, by Susan Schaefer
Bernardo

Suggests ways children can stay connected to those they love when they are apart from each other.



HomeLink for Parents/Caregivers

WORKSHOP 5

How Babies Begin

WHAT WE DID IN OUR WHOLE LIVES TODAY

Today we learned about the three elements that are always present when a baby begins: an egg, a sperm, and a uterus. We read a story that affirms there are different ways that these can come together so that babies can start and become part of families.

Reminder: You are invited to come to the final workshop on this day: _____ at this time: _____ to celebrate what the children have learned and the final workshop of the Our Whole Lives program.

WHAT YOU CAN DO THIS WEEK

- Please talk to your child about what they have been learning. Your child may have questions that they are not comfortable asking in class.
- Help your child write or draw their thoughts and ideas about what they have learned. Don't push your child for specifics. Just let them express whatever interests them about the topic. If your child does not want to write or draw, let it go at this time. The topics of birth and conception will surely come up again.
- Buy or borrow a children's book about how babies begin. Some choices are listed below. Read the book and talk about it with your child.

You are your child's most important teacher about conception and birth!

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW AND IN THE YEARS AHEAD

- Be an askable parent/caregiver. Be open to answering your child's questions about where babies come from in general. When in doubt, keep your answers simple by focusing on what the child actually asked. Answer that question and then ask, "Does that answer your question?"
- Don't be overwhelmed by "where babies come from" conversations. Most young children aren't interested in much detail about sexual activity. Often it's enough to know that many times, a person with a penis provides the sperm, while a person with a uterus provides the egg. Children take away different details and have different questions at different ages.
- Share your own memories of how your child joined your family, including pregnancy and/or birth if they were part of your family's experience of meeting your child for the first time. Some families like to make this part of a child's annual birthday ritual, starting or ending the child's day with these memories.

BOOK AND MEDIA RECOMMENDATIONS

Our Whole Lives advises parents/caregivers to review books and videos before sharing them with children to ensure each is the right match for a given child and family.

General Information on Conception, Pregnancy, and Birth

A Child Is Born, by Lennart Nilsson

Nilsson's incredible photos of fetuses in utero are classics. While this book is not intended for children, the photos can be fascinating to study together.

It's Not the Stork: A Book about Girls, Boys, Babies, Bodies, Families, and Friends, by Robie Harris

This fairly long but kid-friendly book (you can read just a few pages at a time) explains pregnancy, sexual intercourse, alternative insemination, multiples, adoption, home and hospital birth, and same-sex parents. It does not include transgender identities.

The Pea That Was Me...and Me...and Me! (How All Kinds of Babies Are Made), by Kim Kluger-Bell

With friendly cartoons, a mom explains that four things are needed to make a baby: love, "an egg (from a woman), some sperm (from a man) and a tummy." The book then gives a fast-moving tour of a wide array of the ways babies are made, including in vitro fertilization, sperm donation, egg donation, embryo donation, and surrogates and gestational carriers. Includes stories of two-mom, two-dad, mom-and-dad, and single-parent families.

What Makes a Baby, by Cory Silverberg

An extremely inclusive, colorful book about how babies are made, which opens the door for more detailed conversations in which parents/caregivers can share how the children in their own family came to be. Designed to be relevant to all types of families.

The Science of Babies, by Deborah Roffman

An inclusive, colorful board book about how babies are made, with factual information that is age-appropriate for young children.

What's in There? All about Before You Were Born, by Robie Harris

A good introduction to the subject of conception. It discusses only heterosexual and cisgender identities, and only hospital birth, and it explains sperm and egg but not sexual intercourse.

"Help Kids Learn How Babies Are Made," by Amaze Jr.

A short cartoon video showing a mom explaining conception to some kids and their animal friends. It discusses sperm, egg, and sexual intercourse. [youtube.com/watch?v=4uLqoSh55M8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uLqoSh55M8)

Sperm Donation

For Mommy So Loved You, by Leigh James

A single mom uses a sperm bank.

It Takes Love (and Some Other Stuff) to Make a Baby, by L. L. Bird

Explains known donors and sperm banks, using the story of a two-mom family.

Your Family: A Donor Kid's Story, by Wendy Kramer

Focuses on donor siblings.

Zak's Safari: A Story about Donor-Conceived Kids of Two-Mom Families, by Christy Tyner

Two moms use a sperm bank.

Egg Donation

Happy Together: An Egg Donation Story, by Julie Marie

A simple, short story about mommy and daddy bears.

Phoebe's Family: A Story about Egg Donation, by Linda Stamm

A longer story involving an anonymous donor.

Embryo Donation

Training Wheels: How Did I Get Here?, by Chris Barrett and Sally Hunter

Surrogacy

The Kangaroo Pouch: A Story about Surrogacy for Young Children, by Sarah Phillips Pellet

Told from the perspective of a kangaroo child whose mother is a gestational surrogate.

The Very Kind Koala: A Surrogacy Story for Children, by Kimberly Kluger-Bell

A koala surrogate grows a baby koala in her pouch.

Xander's Story, by Alejandro Garcia-Halenar and Christopher Garcia-Halenar

Two dads work with an egg donor and a gestational surrogate.



HomeLink for Parents/Caregivers

WORKSHOP 6

Pregnancy and Birth

WHAT WE DID IN OUR WHOLE LIVES TODAY

Today we read the book *Nine Months: Before a Baby Is Born*, by Miranda Paul, which shows how a fetus grows inside a uterus. We also looked at photos of a developing baby in utero and mentioned briefly how babies are born: in vaginal and cesarean births. We talked about how all babies are born, and that some babies are loved and cared for by the same people whose egg and

sperm started them, while other babies are loved and cared for by different people (as in adoption, foster care, etc.). We said that however a family comes together, the grown-ups in a family and community feel joy and excitement when they welcome a new baby or child. We also made peg doll babies of our own!

WHAT YOU CAN DO THIS WEEK

- Talk to your child about what they have been learning. Your child may have questions about pregnancy and birth that they are not comfortable asking in class.
- If your child was born into your family, share some stories of what your child was like before they were born (movements, hiccups, reactions, songs sung to them). If not, share the story of how the child came to be a part of your family and some special memories about that time.
- If possible, help them choose a doll (ideally a baby doll) to bring to the next workshop. A stuffed animal will also work. Don't choose a beloved or irreplaceable doll, in case of accidents. Extra dolls or stuffed animals will be available for any child who does not bring one.
- Borrow from the library, or buy for your family, a children's book about pregnancy and child-birth. Some good choices are listed below. Read the book and talk about it with your child.

You are your child's most important teacher about pregnancy and birth!

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW AND IN THE YEARS AHEAD

- When appropriate, point out to your child a pregnant person you see or meet. Children sometimes miss what seems obvious to adults. Let them experience the excitement and anticipation of knowing someone who has a baby on the way.
- Don't be overwhelmed by questions about childbirth. Give a simple response, then ask, "Did that answer what you wanted to know?"
- Do your best to create positive narratives of births in your family. Children often remember the stories they have heard (of strength and confidence and happy excitement, or of fear and pain) and expect to experience the same things themselves when they bear children or experience supporting a birth.

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

Our Whole Lives advises parents/caregivers to review books before sharing them with children to ensure each is the right match for a given child and family.

A Child Is Born, by Lennart Nilsson, and/or *The Science of Pregnancy: The Complete Illustrated Guide from Conception to Birth*, by Sarah Brewer et al.

Nilsson's incredible photos of fetuses in utero are classics. *The Science of Pregnancy* was originally published under the title *The Pregnant Body Book* and you can use either version. Both versions offer a combination of photos and ultra-realistic 3D illustrations. While these books are not intended for children, the pictures can be fascinating to study together.

Nine Months: Before a Baby Is Born, by Miranda Paul

The poetically told story of a family (mom, dad, daughter) expecting a baby sister. Each spread contains detailed drawings of the fetus developing month by month. There is no mention of conception, and it's implied that the baby will be born in a hospital.

The previous HomeLink, *How Babies Begin*, includes many book recommendations that address pregnancy and childbirth as well as conception.

HomeLink for Parents/Caregivers

WORKSHOP 7

Babies

WHAT WE DID IN OUR WHOLE LIVES TODAY

Today we learned all about babies: how families care for babies, how babies communicate, and why babies cry sometimes. We sang songs about

babies and used dolls and stuffed animals to practice taking care of babies.

WHAT YOU CAN DO THIS WEEK

- If your child has been part of your life since they were a baby, share some memories of what they were like as a baby: funny things they did, things you began to appreciate about them from their earliest months, etc. Show them photos of themselves as a baby.
- If your child was not in your life when they were a baby, share any positive or neutral information that you have about their babyhood: where they were, who held them and fed them, etc. If you have little or no information, you can also tell them your guesses based on their current personality and appearance: for instance, “I bet you were such a cute baby! You had your beautiful big dark eyes and I bet you expressed what you wanted very clearly, just like you do now!”
- Buy or borrow for your family a children’s book about babies. Some good choices are listed below. Read the book and talk about it with your child.
- Mark your calendar to join us for the final workshop of the Our Whole Lives program to celebrate all your child has learned.

You are your child’s most important teacher about babies!

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW AND IN THE YEARS AHEAD

- If your child does not already own a doll, consider getting one. It’s appropriate for children of all genders to play with dolls. Children may prefer a doll that reflects their own gender identity, skin color, and style.
- When you and your child see a baby (whether in your family, on public transportation, etc.), take the opportunity to point out to them interesting things about babies.
- When you are with someone who has a baby, and if the baby’s parent/caregiver is comfortable with this, encourage your child to try sitting and holding the baby in their lap. Make a point of encouraging baby-holding when opportunities present themselves. As your child grows, teach them to calm a baby (bouncing, changing position, etc.). Experience in comfortably holding and quieting a baby is often invaluable for teens and adults, whether they are babysitters, new parents, aunts or uncles, or friends of people with babies.

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

Our Whole Lives advises parents/caregivers to review books before sharing them with children to ensure each is the right match for a given child and family.

Baby on the Way and *What Baby Needs*, both by William Sears, Martha Sears, and Christie Watts Kelly

Written for children whose families are expecting (or recently had) a baby, these books focus on the sibling-to-be's perspective on pregnancy, birth, and newborns. Both books show breast-feeding, and the second also shows co-sleeping and babywearing.

Babies Don't Eat Pizza: A Big Kids' Book about Baby Brothers and Baby Sisters, by Dianne Danzig

A long but engaging book about many aspects of having a baby in the house.

Hello, Benny! What It's Like to Be a Baby, by Robie Harris

A detailed picture book about how babies grow and develop.

You Are New, by Lucy Knisley

A short, positive, rhyming book about babies. This book is not specifically about having a new baby in the family.