



Let's talk about it?!

Sex education and prevention  
of sexual violence against children

Information and tips for parents

We offer free webinars entitled "Talk about it?!".

All information and registration:



[www.selbstbewusst.at/portfolio/darueber-reden](http://www.selbstbewusst.at/portfolio/darueber-reden)

Imprint:

Fachstelle Selbstbewusst  
Sexual education and prevention of sexual abuse  
5020 Salzburg  
ZVR: 775751155  
3rd revised edition, 2025

**[www.selbstbewusst.at](http://www.selbstbewusst.at)**  
**[kontakt@selbstbewusst.at](mailto:kontakt@selbstbewusst.at)**

## FOREWORD

Dear parents/guardians,

You are holding this brochure because you are interested in the topics of sex education and the prevention of sexual violence against children. These are often difficult topics to talk about, yet they are extremely important for our children: protection only works if we talk (and learn) about difficult topics – rather than making them taboo.

You are the ones who know your child/children best. You are a trusted person, and your children come to you when they have questions or worries. Kindergarten and school are also important partners in the system of preventing violence and upholding children's rights.

This brochure aims to provide you with support for sex education and the prevention of sexualized violence. Our free webinars complement our offerings for parents and guardians. We encourage you to take advantage of them. Because: Child protection can only succeed if we work together!

Mag.a Gabriele Rothuber

Management Fachstelle Selbstbewusst

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| About us .....  | 5  |
| Psychosexual Development .....                                    | 6  |
| Tips for sex education .....                                      | 7  |
| Answering children's questions – but how? .....                   | 9  |
| Media and Sexuality .....   | 12 |
| Sexual violence against children .....                            | 14 |
| What to do if you suspect sexual violence against children? ..... | 16 |
| Prevention in education .....                                     | 17 |
| Book recommendations .....  | 19 |

## ABOUT US

**Our concern** is about protecting children and young people from sexual violence. This requires adults who take responsibility.

Sexual violence against children predominantly occurs within their social environment; therefore, warnings about "evil strangers" are not sufficient and missing the point. Age-appropriate sex education plays a key role in protection against sexual violence. Well-informed children can more easily recognize abuse, set boundaries, and seek help.

The situation is similar for teenagers: age-appropriate knowledge and critical engagement with the media-mediated image of sexuality make it easier to identify boundary violations and to have self-determined first experiences with sexuality.

Self-determination and the ability to act have therefore been goals of our work since 2004. In doing so, we are guided by the WHO standards for sexuality education in Europe, the sexual and reproductive human rights, and the fundamental decree on sexuality education in Austria.

### Our offers:

- **Workshops for children and young people:**  
Sex education, prevention of sexual violence
- **Continuing education courses:**  
Sex education, prevention of sexual violence, sexual abuse among children and adolescents, sexual and gender diversity, intercultural sex education, trauma-sensitive pedagogy, sexuality and disability, sexuality and abuse in everyday care settings, sexuality in old age
- **Advice for parents and educators:**  
Sex education, abuse among children and adolescents, prevention of sexual violence against children
- **Support in the development of protection concepts:**  
for educational institutions, associations and clubs in the sports sector, institutions

## PSYCHOSEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

During childhood, children's interest in sexuality and the focus of their sexual pleasure change several times. This development typically progresses in roughly the following phases. The times given only serve as a rough guide.

**1st year of life:** Physical contact is particularly important, which is why children cannot be "spoiled" by too much closeness. Sensations of pleasure arise through the mouth – through sucking, licking, and biting.

**2 to 3 years:** Children learn to control their bodily functions, experiencing pleasure through letting go and holding back. They develop their own will ("terrible twos") and particularly enjoy mud and slush games (sandbox, playdough, etc.).

**3 to 6 years:** The first questions about sexuality arise. Curiosity about one's own and others' bodies leads to exploratory games. These are perfectly fine as long as all participants are of the same age and developmental stage. Many children also discover pleasure through genital stimulation; some use masturbation intentionally to relieve tension. Often, gender-typical behaviors are tried out, such as applying makeup, styling hair, fighting, or roughhousing.

**Ages 6 to 9:** Feelings of shame develop and sexual activity becomes more hidden, but many questions about sexuality arise. This is a particularly good age for comprehensive sex education.

**Ages 9 and up:** Puberty begins, bringing physical changes and often accompanied by mood swings. Sexual identity becomes more clearly defined, and the peer group gains in importance.

## TIPS FOR SEX EDUCATION

Sex education is much more than passing on biological facts – it also always involves conveying values. Therefore, as parents, you should actively engage in sex education. If children and teenagers educate themselves or – as they are accustomed to – research online, they will very likely be confronted with unsuitable, age-inappropriate, or even false information.

**Talking about sexuality:** The earlier you start, the easier it is. For example, name all the body parts right from the beginning. Even children who don't ask questions on their own need information. Age-appropriate books are a good starting point.

**Providing age-appropriate information:** In kindergarten, the focus is on gender differences and the question of where babies come from; towards the end of primary school, preparation for puberty becomes important.

**Promoting relationship skills:** Living with their family teaches children a lot about relationships, such as appreciation, boundaries, and how to deal with conflict. They later take these experiences with them into relationships with friends and partners.

**Recognizing and expressing feelings and boundaries:** Help your children name and express their feelings, including "difficult" ones like anger, fear, or shame. Take the child's feelings seriously and avoid phrases like "You don't need to be angry/sad."

**Accepting and pleurably experiencing one's own body:** Roughhousing, cuddling, playful wrestling; all immediate and positive physical experiences help you feel at home in your own body. During puberty, many teenagers find it difficult to accept their own bodies – especially compared to the beauty ideals portrayed in (social) media. Try to be a role model and demonstrate self-acceptance.

**Gender roles and equality:** Parents best foster their children's development by giving them access to all interests, toys, hobbies, and educational opportunities – and by not imposing restrictions based on gender. Make children aware of different family models and role models.

**Sexual and gender diversity:** Children and young people who belong to a sexual or gender minority particularly need their parents' support. Let your child know that you accept and love them unconditionally, regardless of who they fall in love with or what gender they identify with.



**Homosexuality:** Approximately 10% of people fall in love predominantly or exclusively with people of the same sex. **More information:** [www.hosi.or.at](http://www.hosi.or.at)

**Intersexuality:** Approximately 1.7% of people show variations in sex characteristics, including internal/external sex organs, hormones, or chromosomes. **More information:** [www.vimoe.at](http://www.vimoe.at)

**Transgender:** In approximately 1% of people, gender identity does not correspond, or only partially corresponds, to the sex assigned to them at birth. **More information:** [www.hosi.or.at](http://www.hosi.or.at)

**Media literacy:** Many children are confronted with pornographic content as early as elementary school. Even with careful media education, parents cannot completely prevent this, but through early education, they can ensure that it isn't the first thing children learn about sexuality. Children need support from adults and clear rules when using digital media.

**Responsible approach to sexuality:** Respect when your children feel shame – for example, when they want to be alone in the bathroom or while getting dressed. Provide a safe and secure environment for exploratory play and masturbation.

**Prevention of sexual violence:** Children who know what sexuality is and where it belongs can more easily recognize sexual abuse and seek help. Education is therefore synonymous with child protection: the earlier children are educated, the sooner they are protected.

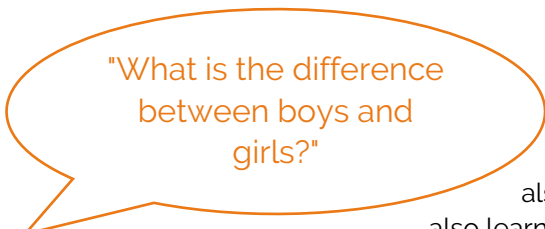
## ANSWERING CHILDREN'S QUESTIONS – BUT HOW?

When children ask questions about sexuality, parents often feel overwhelmed: due to their own sexual education history, many adults find it difficult to talk about this topic.

And what if children don't ask questions? They still need information about the body and sexuality – just as they need instructions on traffic rules, traffic lights and crosswalks, even if they never ask about it.

In any case, it is helpful to acquire a "language" for the topic of sexuality. Age-appropriate books are a great help in this regard.

Here are some examples of how you could answer common children's questions:



"What is the difference between boys and girls?"

"Most girls have a vulva, most boys have a penis."

Nicknames and "family words" for the genitals are also fine, but children should also learn the commonly used terms.



The **vulva** is the external, visible genitalia: mons pubis, clitoris, labia majora, and vaginal opening.

The **vagina** is the non-visible, internal connection between the vulva and the uterus.

"What is Sex?"

"When two people want to be very close, they sometimes cuddle naked. They can touch and kiss each other all over their bodies, however it feels good for both of them (e.g., on the buttocks, breasts, vulva, or penis). During sex, they cuddle so closely that the vagina can accommodate the penis. If it's particularly pleasurable, the vagina contracts slightly internally, and sperm cells are released from the penis."

Many children find the idea disgusting, which is perfectly normal for their age. It's best to address this and turn it into a preventative message: "Exactly, children find it disgusting. But when two adults love each other very much, it's something very beautiful. You just mustn't do that with children."

"How do babies get into the womb?"

"For a baby to be conceived, an egg cell (from the ovaries) and a sperm cell (from the testicles) are needed. When two people have sex, sperm cells can make their way to an egg cell, and this is how a baby can develop."

"What is fucking?"

"Fucking is another word for having sex."

When dealing with sexualized language, it is advisable to say the word itself, explain it, offer alternatives and demand alternatives ("I don't like that word, I would like us to use ...").

"What does gay/lesbian mean?"

"When two men are in love with each other, it's called gay. When two women are in love with each other, it's called lesbian."

"What is menstruation?"

"From puberty onwards, blood comes out of the vagina once a month. This is because a kind of nest for a baby is prepared in the uterus every month. And if no baby develops, the nest is flushed away with blood through the vagina. A new nest is then prepared the following month."

"What is a tampon?"

"A tampon consists of compressed cotton wool. During menstruation, it can be inserted into the vagina, where it collects the blood so that it doesn't drip into the underwear."

"What is a condom?"

"A condom is a rubber sheath that can be pulled over the penis if you don't want to make babies during sex."

Condoms are often found in playgrounds or parks, where children might pick them up out of curiosity. Therefore, they should know what a condom is and that it could contain pathogens.



Take advantage of our consultation service if you have further questions: [kontakt@selbstbewusst.at](mailto:kontakt@selbstbewusst.at)

## MEDIA AND SEXUALITY

Children are usually very quick and very skilled at using smartphones and other digital items– but that doesn't mean that parents can or should opt out of their children's digital world.

Studies show that children and young people generally want more support and rules in their use of digital media.

### What should parents and caregivers pay attention to?

- **Online games and platforms** (e.g. Minecraft, Twitch, Discord or Reddit): Behind the profiles of supposedly same-age chat partners, there may also be adults.
- **Video apps** (e.g., TikTok): Who should be able to see and comment on the videos? Pay attention to the privacy settings.
- **How you handle your own images:** Which photos are posted on social networks? Are beauty filters used to conform to prevailing beauty ideals?
- **Influence of influencers:** Some people present a very one-sided view of gender roles – for example, that men should be strong and dominant, while women should be beautiful and pleasing. Such content can promote gender stereotypes and even a propensity for violence. Talk to your child about such content: True strength is shown through respect, empathy, and equality.
- **Sexting** : This refers to the exchange of one's own erotic pictures or videos. In the context of self-determined sexuality, consensual sharing is permitted for young people aged 14 and older in Austria. However, forwarding such images to other people is always a criminal offense and frequently relevant in cases of bullying.
- **Chain letters/chain messages with sexualized and/or disturbing content:** The chain letter robot from saferinternet.at can help here, reachable via the WhatsApp number +43 681 108 094 49. The chatbot recognizes chain letters and gives children reassuring answers.

- **Pornography** : Even elementary school children are frequently confronted with pornographic content. Children who are not yet sufficiently informed about sex cannot categorize what they see and mistake it for "real" sexuality.

### What can parents/caregivers do?

- **Keep an eye on online activities:** Supervision is especially important for younger children. Parental control programs with filters and time limits can be helpful in this regard.
- **Be a role model:** Don't photograph children without asking and decide together which photos are sent or posted.
- **Provide age-appropriate sex education:** so that the internet is not the first (or only) source of information on sexuality.
- **Establish a good basis for conversation:** Don't speak negatively about media or only talk about dangers – otherwise, children won't come to you if they've had an unpleasant experience in the digital world. A positive approach is more helpful: Let the child show you what they enjoy.
- **Agree on clear rules:** If rules are developed together, they provide a framework that everyone can follow. Ideas for content and design: mediennutzungsvertrag.de.
- **If an assault has actually occurred:** Even if children or teenagers (from a parent's perspective) may have behaved clumsily or riskily, they are never to blame for an assault. Due to their developmental stage, children and teenagers cannot plan that far into the future and assess the consequences.

#### Further links:



[www.saferinternet.at](http://www.saferinternet.at)  
[www.rataufdraht.at](http://www.rataufdraht.at)  
[www.innocenceindanger.de](http://www.innocenceindanger.de)  
[www.mediennutzungsvertrag.de](http://www.mediennutzungsvertrag.de)

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Sexual violence has many faces, and different terms are used for it. Educationalist Dirk Bange proposes the following distinction:

**Sexual boundary violations** These include unintentional touching and comments, such as accidentally brushing against breasts when getting off the bus. In this case, the boundaries of decency are unintentionally crossed.

**Sexual assaults** are deliberate and intentional violations of boundaries of decency, such as intentional touching of the buttocks or breasts, sexist remarks or jokes. The goal is to satisfy one's own needs.

**Sexual abuse** Sexual abuse, as defined by criminal law, refers to any sexual act performed on or in front of children, or that children are made to perform on themselves (e.g., touching of the genital area, exhibitionism, showing or producing sexual content).

The key factor here is the exercise of power: sexuality is merely a means to an end. It is not primarily about sexual needs, but about the need to experience power.

From the perspective of those affected, it does not matter which category the act falls into—the boundaries of shame and the experience of the situation can vary greatly from person to person.

### Some data and facts:

- One in four girls and one in eight boys are affected by sexual violence. Children between the ages of 6 and 12 are most at risk.
- 90 to 95% of the perpetrators come from the victim's social environment.
- Perpetrators exist in all social classes. According to current research, approximately 80% are men and approximately 20% are women.
- Perpetrators deliberately seek out professions and voluntary activities that provide access to children.
- Half of the perpetrators begin committing offenses as children or teenagers.

## Symptoms: How can you recognize sexual violence against children?

Most affected children send out signals ("silent cries"), which, however, can vary greatly.

You should pay attention and react to the following signs:

- **Noticeable changes in behavior:**  
e.g., withdrawal, aggression, decline in performance, clinginess
- **Psychosomatic illnesses:**  
e.g., pain without a cause
- **Developmental regressions:**  
e.g., bedwetting/soiling, language regression
- **Self-harming behavior:**  
e.g., hair pulling, cutting, nail biting, addiction, eating disorders
- **Sexualized behavior:**  
compulsive and/or not age-appropriate
- **Signs of trauma:**  
overexcited or "as if beamed away"
- **Injuries to the genital area, sexually transmitted diseases**

All of these symptoms can be related to sexual violence, but they can also have totally different causes. In any case, it's helpful to take a closer look and to let the child or young person know that you are there to listen, even to difficult topics.

### Further links:



[www.kinderschutzzentrum.at](http://www.kinderschutzzentrum.at)

[www.kija-salzburg.at](http://www.kija-salzburg.at)

[www.gewaltinfo.at](http://www.gewaltinfo.at)

## WHAT TO DO IF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IS SUSPECTED?

### Stay calm.

Avoid acting on impulse and making hasty decisions. Let the child know that you are there for them and can handle even difficult situations.

### Seek help.

Talk to professionals about your suspicions. The first point of contact in Salzburg is the Child Protection Center (0662/44911).

### Believe the child.

Children don't make up stories about sexual violence; they lack the necessary understanding of adult sexuality. Even if there are inconsistencies or contradictions, you must take seriously what they tell you. Sometimes children need up to seven attempts before someone believes them—and helps them.

### Praise and encourage the child.

Tell the child that it is brave and right to seek help. That other children have experienced similar things and that adults are not allowed to do that. This message is very reassuring for children.

### Prioritize the child's needs.

The relationship between the perpetrator and the child was built up over a long period – the goal now is not to end it as quickly as possible, but to do so in the best possible way: in a way that does not further traumatize the child. To achieve this, you absolutely need the help of a specialist agency.

## PREVENTION IN EDUCATION

The responsibility for child protection lies with adults. Parents can do a lot to raise their children to be strong, self-confident individuals. The following parenting guidelines will help you do just that:

### Strengthen self-esteem

Accept your child as they are – with all their strengths, weaknesses, and quirks. Show and tell your child how much you love them and how wonderful it is to have them in your life – unconditionally and without any expectation of achievement. This unconditional love is the most important gift you can give your child.

Additionally, you can give your child praise and recognition for things they do well, things that are particularly close to their heart, or that they have worked hard for.

Non-violent parenting is absolutely essential: Any form of violence (withholding affection, insults, shouting, slapping, hitting...) massively impairs the development of self-esteem and is prohibited by law.

### Sex education

Well-informed children know what sex is and where it belongs – with adults or older teenagers, but not between adults and children. They have names for all their body parts and can say when an assault has occurred. They know that they are allowed to talk about sexuality and ask questions.

### Respect boundaries

#### ➤ Body

Children should be able to have a say when it comes to their bodies as early and as much as possible. This includes things like food, clothing, and hairstyle: children can't decide everything on their own, but they can have a say – and more and more so as they get older.

Children are allowed to refuse any touch that makes them uncomfortable – even a kiss from Grandma. Support your child in this: How can they show Grandma that they still love her? What other greetings could you

agree on? Kindness and politeness are not dependent on physical touch.

### ➤ Feelings

Help your child develop a vocabulary for feelings and moods. Take children's feelings seriously; avoid phrases like "You don't need to be angry/sad." When children's feelings are frequently ignored, they lose touch with their own needs.

Be a role model and talk about your own feelings, even "difficult" feelings like anger, shame, and sadness: People who can perceive and express such feelings are better able to cope with stress and develop empathy for others. Explain and show your children how you deal with these feelings and what helps you.

### ➤ To be heard

Children are allowed to express their opinions, question things, and say no. Of course, a "no" can't always be accepted, but it can be heard and respected. Children should learn to question things – even if that's sometimes challenging in everyday family life.

### ➤ Get help

You can't protect your child from all difficult situations, but you can give them the skills to act by discussing situations beforehand: "What could you do if we get lost here in the shopping center?"

Let your child know they can always turn to you: "I'm here for you. You can come to me with anything. Nothing is too bad for you to tell me." If a child comes to you with a bad secret, praise their courage and don't scold them.

## BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

### Sex Education:

**Vom Liebhaben und Kinderkriegen: Mein erstes Aufklärungsbuch.** Sanderijn Van der Doef/Marian Latour

**Woher die kleinen Kinder kommen. (Woher? Weshalb? Warum?)** Doris Rübél

**Das bin ich – von Kopf bis Fuß: Selbstvertrauen und Aufklärung für Kinder ab 7.** Dagmar Geisler

**Klär mich auf! 101 echte Kinderfragen rund um ein aufregendes Thema.** Katharina von der Gathen/Anke Kuhl

**Wie ist das mit der Liebe? Fragen und Antworten zur Aufklärung für Kinder ab 9.** Sanderijn Van der Doef

**Wachsen und erwachsen werden.** Sabine Thor-Wiedemann/Birgit Rieder

**Ganz schön aufgeklärt! Alles, was man über Aufklärung wissen muss.** Jörg Müller/Dagmar Geisler

**Kriegen das eigentlich alle? Die besten Antworten zum Erwachsenwerden.** Jan von Holleben/Antje Helms

### Prevention:

**Mein Körper gehört mir! Schutz vor Missbrauch für Kinder ab 5.** Dagmar Geisler/Pro Familia

**Das große und das kleine NEIN.** Gisela Braun/Dorothee Wolters

### Love, family, feelings:

**Ein Dino zeigt Gefühle.** Christa Manske/Heike Löffel

**Alles Familie! Vom Kind der neuen Freundin vom Bruder von Papas früherer Frau und anderen Verwandten.** Alexandra Maxeiner/Anke Kuhl

**Du gehörst dazu. Das große Buch der Familien.** Mary Hoffman/Ros Asquith

**Zwei Papas für Tango.** Edith Schreiber-Wicke/Carola Holland

For all books: Make sure you feel comfortable with the language and images.

## Donations to Selbstbewusst are tax deductible!

IBAN: AT77 4501 0000 0011 1351

### Fachstelle Selbstbewusst

#### Sexual education and prevention of sexual abuse

Reichenhaller Straße 6, 5020 Salzburg

ZVR: 775751155

T: 0650/23 33 240

[www.selbstbewusst.at](http://www.selbstbewusst.at)

[kontakt@selbstbewusst.at](mailto:kontakt@selbstbewusst.at)

Our workshops at Salzburg schools  
are supported by:



**LAND  
SALZBURG**



**Frauen Büro  
Stadt Salzburg**

**LICHT INS DUNKEL ORF 5**