

Factsheet 2: How can I prepare for conversations about problematic and harmful sexual behaviour?

- Think about what words you might use when talking to the child or young person (see Factsheet 3 for tips and examples) and what you want to cover.
- Remember that conversations about sexual behaviours (and sex and sexuality) should be ongoing (not 'once-off') to help children and young people make good decisions as they grow and develop. This means you don't have to talk about everything in the one conversation.
- Keep in mind that children and young people are likely to need breaks during conversations, such as if they are losing focus or are feeling too overwhelmed.¹
- Make sure the environment is supportive. For example:²
 - ▶ Meet in a private and quiet area
 - ▶ Reduce possible interruptions (e.g., turn devices on silent)
 - ▶ Allow plenty of time for the conversation
- Think about whether there is a shared activity you can do together during the conversation to help them feel more comfortable, such as having a warm drink. But make sure the shared activity isn't something that will act as a distraction.
- Try asking the child or young person themselves what would make them feel more comfortable to have the conversation.
- Support a sense of safety by letting them know they can have a break (such as if they experience strong negative emotions). Talk together beforehand to come up with a timeframe for when you would come back to the conversation if a break was needed (e.g., tomorrow).
- Reflect on your own feelings about the problematic and harmful sexual behaviour—and give yourself time to feel calm before starting conversations. This could involve accessing support for yourself or doing 'self-care' activities (see Box below for more information).³

Where can I find out more about looking after myself (sometimes called 'self-care')?

Looking after yourself by LINKS (NSW Government): This carer factsheet has strategies for looking after yourself when caring for a child or young person with problematic and harmful sexual behaviours.

What can I do next if the child or young person won't have the conversation?

Difficult conversations with pre-teens and teenagers by the Raising Children Network has ideas for caregivers of things to try when a child or young person won't have a difficult conversation with you.

Speak to your caseworker/agency for more guidance and ideas. If appropriate, they might also help work out if there are others who can try talking with the child or young person about their behaviour (e.g. professionals, other adults in the child or young person's life).

1 Raising Children Network (2021a)

2 Lucy Faithfull Foundation (2020)

3 Life Without Barriers (2022); NSW Government, Department of Communities and Justice (2010)