

# TALKING ABOUT SEXUAL BULLYING & SHAMING



**4**

## RULES OF THUMB

Tender's Guide for  
Parents & Carers

# TALKING ABOUT SEXUAL BULLYING & SHAMING

Today's widespread accessibility to the media means young people are becoming aware of and influenced by sexualised content at an increasingly younger age. However, with limited knowledge and experience of sex and relationships, young people's reliance on the media or their peers to help them navigate these waters can lead to unhealthy perceptions about sexuality: both their own and others'. These perceptions can in turn encourage a specific form of bullying: sexual bullying.

## DEFINITION

Sexual bullying refers to any bullying behaviour, physical or non-physical, which refers to a person's gender or sexuality: be it their sexual activity, orientation or preferences.

For many parents, the thought of speaking to their child about sexually related topics is at best uncomfortable and at worst terrifying. If you find yourself unsure of where to start, this booklet hopes to help by suggesting four themes you could weave into conversations with your child.

# TIPS FOR APPROACHING THE TOPIC

- Be patient and don't force a discussion
- Allow your child to go at their own pace
- Keep an open mind
- As much as possible try and incorporate the following into every-day conversations, rather than allocating a specific time to approach the subject. Starting conversations with your child about their peers, celebrities and/or gender-related topics in the media can be a great way in
- The language young people use around the topic is constantly changing - it could be helpful for you to ask them to define the words they use in a non-critical way, unless you sense that they are being used negatively, or to put down other people

# 1

## REMIND YOUR CHILD THAT EVERYONE IS DIFFERENT...

...and this is a positive thing! As children enter adolescence, their differences as individuals can become more obvious, causing many young people to become self-conscious and more subject to peer pressure.

- Reassure your child that the most important thing is that they feel confident about who they are and what they feel comfortable doing, and they shouldn't be penalised for this – nor should anyone else. Some people are ready for sexual experiences earlier than others, some people will have lower sex drives and some people will enjoy activities which others don't.
- This could be a good chat to tie in with discussion around gender, race, sexuality and disability, and how none of these factors should make someone the target of bullying and shaming, sexual or otherwise.

## CREATE EMPATHY

It can be all too easy for teenagers to condone sexual bullying due to the fear of becoming bullied themselves, or simply not intervening when they see it happening.

- Encourage them to consider times when they may have felt targeted or unsupported by those around them, as well as positive memories of when someone showed them kindness and support. Your child may be different to one of their peers, but they can still empathise with how they may be feeling. Can they relate to feeling pressured to do something to be liked or accepted?
- Reject the “blame and shame” attitude they may encounter or show towards incidents such as someone's (or their own) explicit pictures or “selfies” being shared between their peers. Blaming the person who is exposed is both unfair and unrealistic – this is known as “victim-blaming”.
- Try to help your child recognise the pressures someone may feel to take an explicit picture for another person, and that trusting someone to keep it private is not the crime: sharing it without someone's consent is.
- **Fact:** Sharing, posting or possessing explicit pictures of someone under the age of 18 is classed as child pornography and is a criminal offence - even if the person sharing the images is also under 18.

# 2

# 3

## PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY

Much sexual bullying and shaming is born from and promotes unhealthy opinions regarding “acceptable” sexual activity for both men and women.

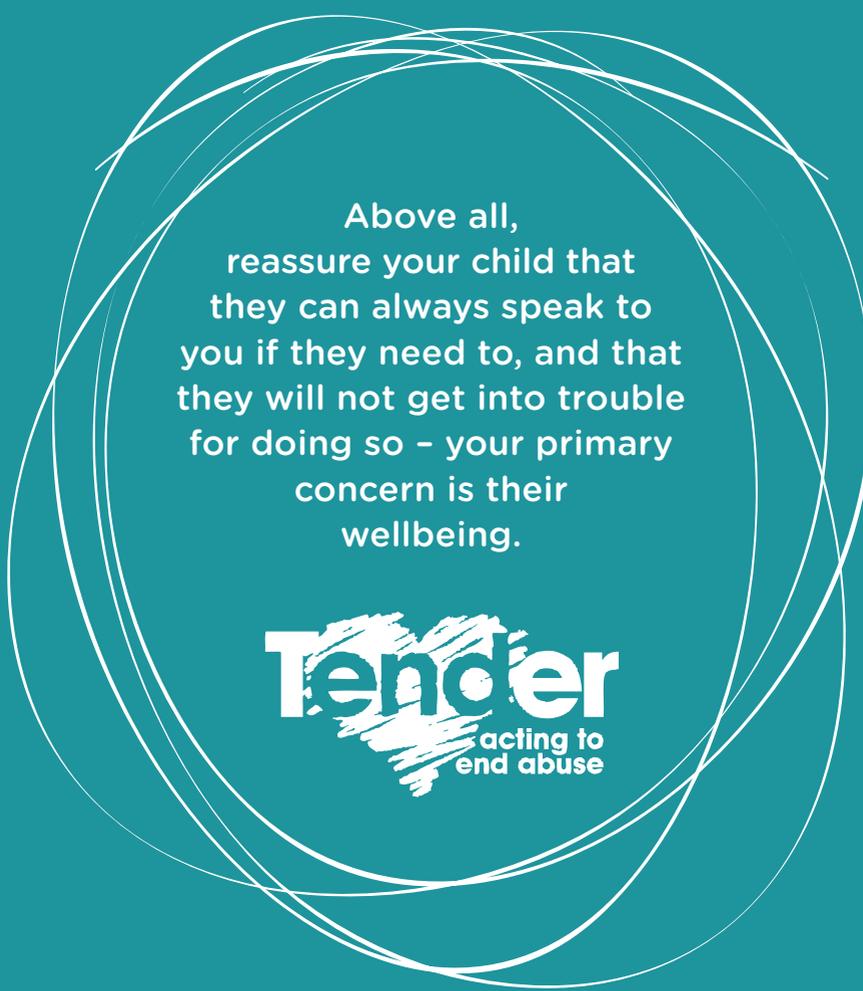
- Remind them that both genders have much more to offer than just sexual and physical attributes, and that neither of these should form someone’s sole opinion of them.
- Discuss the influence the media has on our opinions of men and women and what is considered “acceptable” sexual activity for both genders, and don’t feel limited to only discussing your own child’s gender.
- Boys and young men can find themselves under pressure to have sexual experiences before they are ready, to appear “laddish” or “hard”, or to have had multiple sexual partners/experiences.
- Girls can find themselves pressured by potential or current partners to have sex or be labelled “frigid”, or fear being considered promiscuous or a “slag/sket” if they engage in “too much” or indeed any sexual activity.
- This can all be linked back to **Rule 1** – someone’s gender should not dictate their sexual preferences or activity.

## RECOGNISE THE CYBER ASPECT

Despite the many positive impacts technology can have on a young person’s life, it can sadly also provide multiple outlets for bullies to target their victims in a way which is public to their peers, yet often invisible to parents, carers and teachers.

- Remind your child that written words or posts can be just as harmful as physical harm or insults traded in person and are no less “real” just because they happen behind the perceived safety of a screen.
- The lack of face-to-face contact in cyber interactions can cause many people to do or say more hurtful things than they would in person, as they cannot see the immediate emotional effect it has on their victim. Young people may also use social media to cherry-pick their strengths or target other people’s qualities which they disapprove of.
- Try to research and highlight the regulating/privacy tools for social media outlets your children use so that they are aware of how to protect their profiles from unwanted attention. Showing an interest in and understanding of the sites or apps they use can also help alleviate a young person’s worry that you disapprove of their online activity entirely, and make them more likely to tell you if a problem does occur.

# 4



Above all,  
reassure your child that  
they can always speak to  
you if they need to, and that  
they will not get into trouble  
for doing so – your primary  
concern is their  
wellbeing.

**Tender**  
acting to  
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