

RIGHT FROM THE START: GUIDELINES FOR SEXUALITY ISSUES

Birth to Five Years

**Early Childhood
Sexuality Education Task Force**

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Goals: Guidelines for Sexuality Issues, Birth to Five Years

Information	To provide accurate developmentally appropriate information about human sexuality.
Attitudes, Values, and Insight	To provide an opportunity for young children to ask questions, explore new ideas, increase self-esteem, develop insights concerning relationships with members of both genders, and understand their obligations and responsibilities to others.
Relationships and Interpersonal Skills	To help young children develop interpersonal skills, including communication, decision-making, and problem-solving, as well as the ability to create positive relationships.
Responsibility	To help young children exercise responsibility regarding their hygiene relationships, and participation in their family, classroom, and community.

From the moment of birth, children begin to learn about love, touch, and relationships. Their experience, impressions, and observations form the foundation of their future sexual attitudes and decisions. *Right From the Start Guidelines for Sexuality Issues, Birth to Five Years* acknowledges and builds upon the fact that this learning process is already taking place in order to help teachers and caregivers make children's early learning a positive and productive experience.

Sexuality education for very young children is, of course, exceedingly different from such education for older children, teenagers, and young adults. As children grow, what they need to learn and what they are capable of understanding changes. All education must be developmentally appropriate with careful consideration of the role of individual differences between children. The importance of developmentally appropriate practice should encompass issues that concern class, race, ethnicity, and community. Adults communicate differently to young children, toddlers, preschoolers, second graders, and junior high students. But no child is too young to learn that it feels good to receive and give affection and that loving and trusting relationships are at the heart of joyful, productive lives.

In 1991, the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) published the *Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education Kindergarten-12th Grade* (K-12 Guidelines). This project was undertaken in response to a need for guidance concerning age-appropriate sexuality education in the schools. The K-12 Guidelines provide a framework for the development of sexuality-programs and have been used in communities throughout the country both to develop new programs and to evaluate existing programs. This publication, *Right From the Start: Guidelines for Sexuality Issues, Birth to Five Years* (which will be referred to in the text as the *RFS Guidelines*), emerged from a separate need for guidance concerning the sexual learning that takes place before a child enters kindergarten.

Newborn babies enter the world equipped with an acute ability to experience sensations and to react to them. Newborns and infants quickly learn a sense of self-awareness by the way in which they are held, cuddled, and cared for. These very experiences and reactions to the world comprise the earliest stages of childhood sexual learning. In addition, the types of touch they receive, the toys that children are given, and the interactions and relationships they observe around them, all serve to lay a foundation for future sexual learning and development.

Children develop very basic values about sexuality during the first few years of life. Before the age of five, children realize that boys are different from girls, they have questions about childbirth; they may engage in genital and sexual play; or they may experiment with and mimic sexual language. Any parent or guardian of a young child can testify to the seemingly endless barrage of questions which young children have about themselves and the ever-changing world around them. From a very early age, young children are curious about their bodies and their bodily functions. How their questions are responded to sends messages to children about themselves as sexual beings.

Many children are spending increasing amounts of time in non-family settings like preschool and childcare centers. As a result, caregivers other than family members have greater responsibilities in early childhood sexuality education, such as responding to the questions of young children and setting guidelines for appropriate behaviors outside the home.

In 1993, SIECUS received funding from the Dyson Charitable Fund to prepare guidelines concerning sexuality issues for children from birth to age five in childcare and preschool settings. There has long been consensus among educators that the foundation for healthy adolescent sexuality (and eventually healthy adult sexuality) begins during a child's earliest years. There are few resources available to guide caregivers in providing nurturing and supportive sexuality information to young children.

The *RFS Guidelines* provide a model for preschool sexuality education which:

- presents information on the psychological and sexual development of young children.
- provides a framework for developmentally appropriate sexual learning and instruction, which can be utilized in a variety of childcare settings.
- offers suggestions and strategies for promoting and fostering healthy attitudes and behaviors.

Development Process

In April, 1994, SIECUS convened a task force of professionals with expertise in education, health care, child development, and sexuality issues. The Early Childhood Sexuality Education Task Force members determined the appropriate developmental levels for each age group from infancy to preschool, as well as the topics to be addressed. Each member then reviewed relevant literature during the subsequent months. In November 1994, a second meeting was held to devote considerable time to specific topics and a potential format. The *RFS Guidelines* were reviewed by early childhood educators at three sites in July, 1995. These sites included a preschool in Eagle Vail, Colorado, a Head Start program in the Bronx, New York, and a childcare center in St. Paul, Minnesota.

The *RFS Guidelines* were developed as a resource for caregivers in childcare centers and preschools who are challenged with the many complicated issues concerning early childhood sexuality. Administrators will also find these guidelines useful in developing policies concerning sexual issues within the preschool setting. Although the *RFS Guidelines* may provide parents with insight into early childhood sexuality learning, they were not designed for parents to use at home with their children. Nonetheless, it is of the utmost importance that caregivers work in partnership with parents to provide a respectful and healthy environment for young children to learn about sexuality in the preschool or childcare setting.

Learning Partnerships with Families

Parents and guardians are the most important and primary sexuality educators of children in their care. This fact cannot be overemphasized. Ideally, communication with the families of children in childcare centers or preschools is clear, consistent, and complete. Honest and respectful communication is especially necessary when discussing matters concerning sexuality and parents should be involved prior to the introduction of the *RFS Guidelines* into their children's preschool learning. When considering sexuality programs and classroom practice, staff must take the responsibility to initiate formal discussion with families. For example, parents and guardians might be asked to join a planning group or to help organize parent-orientation meetings. Written information on new policies can and should be shared with important adult family members. Although many families may feel they have little control over television, music, music videos, movies and other common "sexuality education arenas", they have a great opportunity for input and control where their children's school is concerned. Thus staff can benefit from parental interest by involving them in every step of sexuality program development.

Values¹

The *RFS Guidelines* are based on specific values related to human sexuality and are consistent with the beliefs of most communities within our pluralistic society. Every preschool and childcare center should modify or adapt these values to that they are consistent with community norms.

- Sexuality is a natural and healthy part of living that begins at birth and continues throughout life.
- All children should be loved and cared for and feel safe and protected.
- All children should be respected and valued as unique individuals.
- Children experience their sexuality as a natural part of their development.
- Children begin learning about sexuality as soon as they are born, and continue to learn throughout their lives.
- Parents are their children's most important sexuality educators. The larger community of educators, early childhood staff, caregivers, and health professionals can also provide a positive influence in children's development toward sexual health.
- Children learn from how people touch them, talk with them, and expect them to behave as males and females. These messages children receive affect their future attitudes, values, and behaviors.

INTRODUCTION

- Children are naturally curious about how their bodies look and work, about how male and female bodies differ, and about where babies come from.
- Children need to be helped to develop an awareness and appreciation of the human body and how it works.
- Children’s understanding of sexuality is influenced by their parents, other family members, friends and neighbors, community, and school, as well as the media and other factors.
- Relationships should never be coercive or exploitative.
- Information about sex-related health risks and abuse should be presented to children within the context of positive information aimed at healthy personal and sexual development, such as human development and relationships, personal skills and health.
- In a pluralistic society like the United States, educators should respect the diversity of values and beliefs about sexuality that may exist to a community and among families.

How to Use These Guidelines

The *RFS Guidelines* are designed to help childcare centers and preschools lay the foundation for young children's sexual health. Some institutions may want to develop a new program for sexuality which is woven throughout an existing curriculum; others may wish to integrate only parts of these guidelines into ongoing efforts. In many cases, the guidelines can be easily integrated into classroom practices without designing formal new programming. They can also be used for staff training, parent education, workshops, and the formation of new policies. Each childcare center and preschool can decide how to adapt the guidelines for its own purposes. These guidelines will help answer such basic questions as:

- What key concepts should be taught to preschool-aged children?
- What components are important to include in each topic?
- What messages are developmentally appropriate for children in these age groups?
- What can caregivers do and say about sexuality to help children develop positively?

The Organization of the RFS Guidelines Developmental Levels

The *RFS Guidelines* provide an organizational framework for knowledge about sexuality and family living within three developmental levels. The developmental levels are:

Infancy (birth to age one)
Toddlers and Preschool Aged Children (ages 1-4)
Older Preschoolers (ages 4-5)

In the *RFS Guidelines* information about preschool and late preschool stages of development are presented together. The Early Childhood Sexuality Education Task Force spent a considerable amount of time discussing developmentally appropriate ways to instruct young children about sexuality. Originally, the group identified a much more complicated developmental breakdown. However, as the Task Force worked to identify messages appropriate for children at each stage of development, it was noted that important general messages for all children beyond the age of one naturally emerged, but that additional messages for older preschool children were also needed. Rather than incorporating information about infants into the main text of the *RFS Guidelines*, background information on development and suggestions for caregivers have been summarized in the section on infancy.

Key Concepts

The *RFS Guidelines* reflect a comprehensive approach to sexuality education and are organized into six key concepts, which are: human development; relationships; personal skills; behaviors; health; and society and culture. Each key concept includes specific related topics and age-appropriate developmental messages. The six key concepts represent the most general, current, and developmentally appropriate knowledge about sexuality and family living.

Key Concepts and Topics

Key Concept #1: Human Development

Children's development reflects the interrelationship of physical, emotional, social, and intellectual growth.

- Topic 1: How the Body Works
 - Topic 2: Where Babies Come From
 - Topic 3: The Five Senses
 - Topic 4: Appreciating One's Body
-

Key Concept #2: Relationships

Relationships with family members, caregivers, and friends are central to children's lives.

- Topic 5: Parents and Families
 - Topic 6: Friendships
 - Topic 7: Community
 - Topic 8: Love and Affection
-

Key Concept #3: Personal Skills

Children need to develop specific personal and interpersonal skills.

- Topic 9: Expressing Feelings
 - Topic 10: Communication
 - Topic 11: Decision-Making
 - Topic 12: Problem-Solving
-

Key Concept #4: Behaviors

Sexuality is central to being human.

- Topic 13: Masturbation and Self-Pleasuring
 - Topic 14: Sexual Curiosity
-

Key Concept #5: Health

Children need accurate information and supportive attitudes about health.

- Topic 15: Hygiene
 - Topic 16: Wellness and Disease Prevention
 - Topic 17: Sexual Abuse Prevention
-

Key Concept #6: Society and Culture

Social and cultural environment shape how children learn about and express their sexuality.

- Topic 18: Gender Roles
 - Topic 19: Diversity and Equity
-

Key Messages

“Key Messages for Children” are written in age-appropriate language after the discussion section which introduces each new topic. The key messages are suggestions for caregivers to use when discussing these topics with children. Caregivers will need to decide which topics to include and which messages are appropriate for the children in their care.

Immediately following is a section entitled “Key Messages for Older Preschoolers”. These messages are designed specifically to offer information that is a bit more advanced and developmentally appropriate for four to five-year olds. These messages should be considered for more mature preschoolers. Of course, the individual child will drive the appropriateness of the message, and so the developmental levels must be used only as a guide.

How Adults Can Help

This section lists suggestions for caregivers that can help them translate the key messages into educational activities. In some cases, examples of suggested dialogue are provided.

Implementation Issues

The *RFS Guidelines* provide a framework for the development of new sexuality education policies, practices, and programs and for the evaluation of existing ones. However, it is important to be mindful that these materials serve only as a “starting point” for programs, policies, and classroom activities.

The characteristics of each childcare center or preschool determine the content of the program. Parental and staff attitudes, developmental differences to children, local socio-economic influences, and religious and other cultural perspectives must be paramount in the design and implementation of each program.

Issues for Administrators and Caregivers

Caregivers and administrators need time to reflect on and discuss the ideas in the *RFS Guidelines*. Through reflection together as a staff and individually, caregivers need to take time to understand their personal values about sexuality. Preschool administrators can offer staff training and opportunities for discussing ways to present this information in a developmentally appropriate and positive manner.

The road toward greater comfort in these matters need not be terribly complicated issues concerning sexuality may be included in staff meetings or weekly supervision meetings, whichever is the norm at the childcare center or preschool, and caregivers should be encouraged to voice concerns and share information or resources. There are several resources available to offer assistance, back-up, and education for caregivers on these issues. These can be found on page 64 of this publication.

Childcare and preschool directors should make sure that the facility under their direction has clearly written policies on a range of sexuality issues including: how children can be touched; appropriate teacher responses to masturbation and sexual play; appropriate responses to exploitative sexual behavior between children; and reporting policies for suspected child abuse. Written policies will ensure that all employees know what is expected of them in a variety of situations and how to best take action.

HOW TO USE THESE GUIDELINES

It is extremely important for childcare center and school personnel to communicate openly with parents. Through individual and group meetings, parents should learn about the overall philosophy and approach that will be taken regarding sexuality issues. It is important to clearly communicate to parents that the agency and staff are secondary partners in this important educational endeavor and that parents are respected as the most important sexuality educators of their children.

Administrators should share with parents and guardians the agency's guidelines and policies for handling children's questions, concerns and normative, as well as problem behaviors. Policies regarding child abuse should be thoroughly discussed with staff and parent. At the same time, parents need to know the normal standards of the school. For example: Are children hugged? Are hands held? Do caregivers rub backs during nap time? Are parents welcome to visit the school during the day? While there has been much consciousness raising concerning child sexual abuse, the heightened awareness about touching has also made many caregivers feel unsure about how to interact with children and many have questions about whether or not to use touch in the same way they have in the past. Caregivers need clear guidelines concerning the school's values and guidelines concerning touch.

The Right From the Start Guidelines present a comprehensive approach to sexuality education. The presentation of these issues is based on a carefully constructed, scoped and sequenced approach to the delivery of comprehensive sexuality education. The specific content published in these pages has meaning only in the context of the complete guidelines, and should not be taken out of context to illustrate any portion or piece of the guidelines.

Infancy is a miraculous and inspiring stage of development when learning occurs at an accelerated pace. More than any other time in life, infants rely on their bodies for learning. The word “infant” is taken from Latin and means “without speech”.

Relationships begin to evolve between an infant and his or her caregiver immediately. Research has shown that infants can distinguish by smell the breast milk of their mother versus that of another lactating woman. Hearing is also a finely tuned sense that contributes to the sensory experience. Similarly, infants respond differently to the various voices in their world. They can distinguish their mother’s voice at three months.² It is widely accepted that even if a baby’s other physical needs are met without enough physical contact the infant will fail to thrive. Early sensory experiences lay the groundwork for the evolution of sexual health.

Adults are sometimes surprised to learn that children are born with the physical capacity for sexual responses. Sexuality researchers, Masters and Johnson, report that even newborn babies have erections or lubricate vaginally. From early infancy, human beings go through cycles of erection or lubrication during sleep, with or without dreams. In fact, infants have their own specific sexuality which continually evolves from the day they are born.

Attachment during infancy is an important process which deserves significant attention. During the first few years, the infant develops attachment to primary caregivers. Usually a parent is the central attachment figure, but a few others who are central in the child’s life may also become mutually attached with the infant. Thus, caregivers who provide loving care are in a position to nurture the attachment for babies in their charge who need to feel content, loved, and secure. Caregivers, just like parents, have a sense of how a baby is feeling from observing his or her movements, muscle and skin tone, and facial expressions.

Stages of Infancy

Newborns come into the world needing plentiful food, sleep, and touch. Although infants are dependent on adults for their continued care, they are nevertheless active participants in their own development. During the phenomenal physical and sensory changes that occur during the first few months, the developmental tasks include: growth; regular sleep patterns; self-quieting behavior; and a mutual attachment between infant and parents and other caregivers.³

During early infancy, the baby’s awareness of his or her senses is emerging. Babies not only require interaction with human beings and, but increasingly with objects, which offer a variety of smells, taste, textures, sounds, and appearances. As cognitive awareness increases, physical capabilities also increase. Such tasks as turning over, sitting up, and staying aware for longer periods of time are developmental markers as infancy progresses. Each of these ongoing accomplishments takes the child to a more sophisticated level of physical competency and social functioning. The most celebrated example is the transition from crawling to walking.

Crawling increases an infant’s sense of discovery and encourages a growing independence and ability to explore the surrounding world. Language skills parallel this physical transition. At birth, babies can ascertain speech. At one to three months, they coo and laugh. This stage makes way for experimentation with the building blocks of speech. Making consonant sounds and mimicking the sounds of others are examples of the developmental task, of a five-month-old.

Infants develop at varying rates. Infants born prematurely usually lag slightly behind those who are carried to full term. Usually, these children have caught up to their peers by the time they are three years old.

The RFS Guidelines and Infancy

Clearly infants are not presented with formal sexuality education lessons. Rather, they learn according to how they are cared for...and how they are treated. The key concepts, topics and messages may be adapted for infants as follows:

Key Concept #1:

Human Development - How Adults Can Help:

The Five Senses and Infancy

- Provide infants with a variety of safe toys and household objects with which to play by touching, smelling, shaking, and listening.
- Pay attention to and nurture the growing attachment between caregiver and child.
- Investigate ways to create a physical environment responsive to the infant's sensory needs.

Appreciating One's Body and Infancy

- Give babies floor time for stretching, precrawling, and crawling. Learning to walk in bare feet is easier than in shoes.
- Chat during diaper-changing time. "Your diaper is wet. I'll change it. You'll feel so much better with a clean diaper".
- Acknowledge the pleasure babies feel as they explore their own bodies: "What a wonderful body you have!"

Key Concept #2:

Relationships - How Adults Can Help:

Parents and Families and Infancy

- Get to know the parents and other significant family members of the infants at the childcare center.
- Work in partnership with parents in nurturing their children.

Love and Affection and Infancy

- Assure that an infant is nurtured and held as much as possible. Loving touch is very important to an infant's ability to thrive.
- Encourage interaction with infants and caregivers which will encourage a secure attachment.

Friendship and Infancy

- Give babies opportunities to be with other babies and young children.
- Show picture books about babies and the relationships they share.

Key Concept #3:

Personal Skills - How Adults Can Help

Communication and Infancy

- Observe infants for an understanding of who they are and what they may be feeling. Use the infant's cues to determine what they need and how you may best help.
- Pay attention to babies' feelings by responding to their needs.
- Speak in loving and warm tones.

Key Concepts #4:

Behaviors - How Adults Can Help:

Sexual Curiosity and Exploration

- Be aware that as children begin to discover their own bodies, it is as natural for them to touch and discover their genitals as it is for them to touch their fingers, nose, and toes.

Key Concept #5:

Health - How Adults Can Help:

Hygiene

- Keep children clean and safe.
- Wash you hands after changing each diaper.
- Keep sleeping and eating areas sale and clean.

Sexual Abuse Prevention

- Know that while it is natural for infants to touch themselves in order to explore sexual learning, it is never appropriate for anyone to touch a child sexually.
- Assure that all caregivers are aware of the infantile signs of possible sexual abuse.
- Assure that all caregivers know how to report suspected abuse and know that such reporting is expected of them.

Key Concept #6:

Society and Culture - How Adults Can Help:

Gender Roles and Infancy

- Treat girls and boys in a similar manner.
- Be aware of the ways in which girl and boy infants are treated based on their gender.

Diversity, Difference, and Equity

- Be respectful of the varying family structures of the infants in the center's care.
- Be aware that families of children at the center are likely to share many values. However, there may be differences which are based on ethnic and religious traditions; and other cultural or family-style situations and beliefs. Acknowledge that these differences exist and ensure that they are respected.
- Provide equal time and care for all children.

KEY CONCEPT 1: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Children's development reflects the interrelationship of physical, emotional, social, and intellectual growth.

TOPIC 1: HOW THE BODY WORKS

Discussion

As children grow, they become increasingly curious about their own and other people's bodies.

Infants discover their hands, turning them this way and that, mouth their fists, and experiment with claspings and unclaspings fingers.

Toddlers examine their toes, make faces in the mirror, turn in a circle until they get dizzy and collapse into giggles. Their curiosity and increasing awareness of their bodies give them valuable information and prepare them for important social skills.

Adults need to teach respect for privacy, but also support young natural curiosity. Children are fascinated to learn that the body processes air, water, and nourishment in order to live. They delight in learning that the body has many parts, each is important and each has a name: eye, elbow, spine, and chin, and also penis, scrotum, vulva.

Using euphemisms (privates, "down there") instead of accurate terminology (vulva, penis), or not mentioning such body parts at all, gives children the message that these parts of the body are unmentionable. They may feel ashamed of having genitals and later in life, many find it difficult to feel comfortable with sexual feelings. Yet every part of the body—from the head to the toes and everything in between—is important.

Key Messages for Children:

- It can feel good to be touched in a gentle, loving or fun way.
- Every part of the body has a name and its own important purpose.
- Boys' and girls' bodies have many of the same parts, and some that are different.
- Boys have a penis, girls have a vulva.

Additional Messages for Older Preschoolers:

- Boys also have a scrotum and testicles.
- Girls also have a clitoris and vagina.
- As children grow older, their bodies grow and change.

"How does my body work?"

How Adults Can Help:

- Talk with children about human bodies and how they work.
- Answer questions about differences between a girl's body and a boy's:

To boys: "You have a penis. All boys and men do. Girls and women have a vulva."

To girls: "You have a vulva. All girls and women do. Boys and men have a penis."

**TOPIC 1:
HOW THE BODY WORKS**

- Affirm that the body is a good and special thing. “It feels good to be held and touched. Let me give you a hug.”
- Explain gender differences in bathroom procedures: “Girls urinate by sitting on the toilet and the urine comes out through an opening near the vagina. Boys usually first learn to urinate by sitting on the toilet. When they are ready, most boys stand in front of the toilet. They hold their penis and the urine comes out through an opening in the penis.”
- Provide children with anatomically correct dolls to play with; these dolls confirm that in real life, genitals are part of every person’s body.

For Older Preschoolers

- Provide correct terminology to children who use other words for the vulva. “The name for the part of the body that is between a girl’s legs is the vulva.”
- Provide correct terminology to children who use other words for male genitals. “The name for that part of a boy’s body is the penis. The pouch of skin that hangs below a boy’s penis is called the scrotum.”
- Answer questions about erections in simple terms: “Sometimes when a boy first wakes up, or at some other time during the day, his penis gets hard. This is normal, doesn’t hurt, and soon stops being hard.”
- Explain rules about bodies.
 - “People wear clothes when they are outside of the house, like in the yard, in the alley, on the playground, at school, or at a friend’s home.”
 - “At home, some families feel it is fine to walk around without clothes on, while other families keep their bodies covered.”
- Read illustrated children’s books, which accurately name all of the parts of the body, including the genitals. Illustrations and text should be appropriate to the children’s age and stage of development. (See the reference list on page 64 for more information.)

**TOPIC 2:
WHERE BABIES COME FROM****Discussion**

Many adults wonder whether, how, and when to talk to their children about the “facts of life.” Children at a late preschool or early elementary age are likely to be exposed to information of misinformation about reproduction, so it is best for parents and other family members to take charge of the education in a developmentally appropriate, accurate way. Caregivers can support families by informing them of their children’s questions; providing educational materials about how to introduce this subject at home; and by correcting misinformation.

Very young children tend to ask about pregnancy and birth very openly (often at the most inopportune times such as in the grocery check-out line). Ideally, children’s questions can guide the caregiver’s response. However, some children do not ask questions about sexuality because they have sensed that adults may be unwilling or uncomfortable about answering them. Other children feel no need to ask because they have reached their own conclusions. In fact, young children often have notions that babies are purchased in stores or hospitals, or descent from heaven, or spontaneously appear when parents are ready to have them. Beginning at age four, children are aware that babies aren’t just suddenly “there”, but must be “manufactured.” And children have many magical ideas about how this “manufacturing” occurs and how babies exit from the mother’s body.⁴ According to experts, even children who have been given explanations about reproduction do not always fully accept or believe what they have been told. If what they are told does not fit with their own ideas and conclusions, they adapt the information to what they think makes sense.⁵

Children are sometimes confused or worried by inaccurate stories, fantasies, and theories. Saying that “a baby grows in a woman’s stomach” may seem like an appropriate simplification for a young child, but it may actually cause confusion. The child may be bewildered and wonder, “What did she eat to get the baby in her stomach.” The child may be relieved to learn that a woman has a specific place called a uterus where the fetus grows.

Adults must remember that children are very literal. Telling children that a baby gets started when “a seed is planted” may conjure misleading images. They base their ideas on what they have already seen or experienced. They know that when seeds are planted, flowers or vegetables may grow. Therefore, babies must grow in the same way. Keep responses simple and remember the child’s perspective. The amount of detail to give depends on the child’s readiness and further curiosity as well as the parents’ beliefs and childcare center’s or preschool’s policy about what to divulge and when to do so. It is important to clarify what kind of information a child is seeking. A child who asks, “Where did I come from.” may be asking about geography, not biology.

Key Messages for Children:

- Living things (plants, animals, and people) reproduce by making other living things that are just like them. Dogs have puppies. Cat have kittens. People have babies.
- Both a man and a woman are needed to start a baby.
- Mothers may choose to feed their babies milk from their breasts or from a bottle.
- Once babies are born, both men and women can provide love, protection, and care.

KEY CONCEPT 1: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

TOPIC 2: WHERE BABIES COME FROM

Additional Messages for Older Preschoolers:

- When a woman is pregnant, the baby grows inside a part of her body called the uterus.
- Usually a woman has only one baby at a time, but sometimes she has two babies (twins), three babies (triplets), four babies (quadruplets), or even more!

“Where did I come from?”

How Adults Can Help:

- Share with parents and guardians their children’s questions about this issue.
- Acknowledge and support children’s natural curiosity about where they came from. Check out what they think and what want to know. “Where do you think babies come from? What ideas do you have?”
- Explain that the day a person is born is his or her birthday. Make a chart of all the children’s birthdays and have a celebration on each of those days.

For Older Preschoolers:

- Include a picture of a pregnant woman in collections of photographs and pictures depicting families.
- Acknowledge that some children are adopted and live with their adoptive parents.
- If the mother of a child in the class is pregnant, ask her if he will come and talk with the class. Perhaps she will allow children to touch her abdomen and feel the fetus move inside.
- Have mothers and fathers tell how they felt when their children were born. Show photos of the baby and family.
- Have pets in the classroom. Children enjoy seeing how animals behave and are delighted when the animals have babies.
- Help parents answer questions simply but honestly. For example, parents might want to adapt the following from *When Sex is the Subject*, by Pamela M. Wilson, M.S.W.:

Q “How does the baby get in the uterus?”

A “The baby starts from a tiny little egg that is already in the woman’s body. (Draw a dot with a pencil to show how small and make sure the child understands it is not an egg with a shell like that of a chicken, but a human egg.) The woman needs help from a man to make a baby. The man has sperm in his body that has to join with the egg inside the woman’s body. When the sperm joins the egg, the baby starts to grow.”⁶

**TOPIC 3:
THE FIVE SENSES****Discussion**

From birth, children experience their senses. They learn and survive by seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and feeling. They thrive upon loving, tender touches, and may fail to thrive if deprived of such contact. Through smell, sight, and sound, babies identify their parents or closet caregivers. Through sucking, infants receive nourishment and sensual satisfaction; through taste they enjoy breast-milk or formula and first foods. The sensual pleasure of infants is reflected in their smiles and cooing.

Children enjoy exploring with their five senses. When they smell flowers, dance while listening to music, touch velvet and burlap, observe the clouds, or taste an array of foods, they are gaining an appreciation of their body and of the rich variety of sensations in the world. Encouraging children to experience their senses fully helps them to feel good about their bodies and abilities and to find pleasure in the world around them.

Key Messages for Children:

- Children learn about their world through all of their senses: hearing, seeing, touching, smelling, and tasting.
- People often show feelings for one another with touch.
- Using one's senses can feel good or sometimes bad.
- Some children can't see. They depend on their other senses to help them.
- Some children can't hear. They learn to "talk" by using their hands.

Additional Messages for Older Preschoolers:

- Exploring different objects with the same sense can be fun.
- Exploring the same object with different senses can be fun.
- People do not always agree about what tastes, smells, looks, sounds or feels good.

"I like to feel the wind tickle my hair"

How Adults Can Help:

- Create a visually pleasing environment. Let children display objects they make or find: "What do you like about this hair bow? Yes, I see, it's shiny and very smooth, and it matches the strip in your shirt."
- Share books and audio tapes that describe a variety of sights, sounds, and smells. Look for books or crafts that give children opportunities to feel different textures.
- Place items of various sizes, shapes, textures, and smells into a paper bag. Have children reach into the bag with eyes closed, pull out an item, describe it, and try to identify it before opening their eyes. "It's bumpy and dusty...like a rock. Oh, it's a potato!"
- Ask children about their observations and sensory experiences. "What do you see?" "What does that feel like?" "How does that smell?" "What sounds do you hear?"

**TOPIC 3:
THE FIVE SENSES**

- During lunch and snack times, give labels for the different; sweet, bitter, sour, salty, and so on. Talk about the appearance and textures of foods.
-

For Older Preschoolers:

- Have children participate in decorating the classroom with pictures they create or select.
- Play a variety of music for children. Encourage them to move to the music or draw the way it makes them feel: “What’s the feeling of this music? Different people may have different feelings about it. Raquel says it’s wild music, and Gianni says it’s hurry-up music, and Vinnie says it’s happy, excited music. What do you think?”
- Explain that a person might enjoy the taste or smell of something sometimes, but not all the time. “Ice pops are good on hot days but may not be good on a cold day. A little smell of perfume may be nice, but a lot can smell too strong.”
- Use everyday opportunities to help children tune into their five senses. From time to time, describe what you are seeing, touching, feeling, hearing or smelling. Ask questions about what children observe, like, and dislike. Point out similarities and differences within the group.

**TOPIC 4:
APPRECIATING ONE'S BODY**

Discussion

Body image begins to develop as soon as young children realize that their bodies belong to them and that not all bodies are the same. Encouraging children to accept and be proud of their bodies helps them feel accepting and proud of themselves. The control children gain over their bodies as they learn complicated and simple motor skills can help increase their confidence.

Affirming that people's bodies grow in different ways helps children resist the notion of the "perfect body" that is so common in the media and advertising. It's helpful for children to understand that heredity, state of development, age, diet, exercise, posture, and other factors all affect how people's bodies look and function.

Key Messages for Children:

- Human bodies are different sizes, shapes, and skin color.
- Boys and girls have different bodies.
- No particular skin color, hair color, face, or body is better than another.
- Children are different in their physical abilities.
- Eating healthy foods and being active are important.
- It is healthy for children to like their own bodies.
- Children's bodies are growing all the time.

Additional Messages for Older Preschoolers:

- The way people's bodies look (skin color, hair, eye color, shape) often looks a lot like the way their birth parents' and grandparents' bodies looked.
- Learning to take care of one's body—eating the right food, bathing, exercising—is an important part of growing up.
- Some people can't walk. Some can't see. Some can't hear. But they can still do many of the same things people who can do all of these things can do!
- It is not nice or fair or kind to tease people about how they look or how their bodies work.
- All children want friends and want to be included in activities.

"I like the things my body can do."

How Adults Can Help:

- Encourage families to dress children for the greatest possible mobility and comfort for school or childcare. Appearance and style should be secondary to comfort and function.
- Talk about differences in bodies, skin color, and facial features openly and positively; "Everyone's body is different. Differences are okay."
- Give children opportunities to experience various types of movement like slow motion or freeze games, dancing, hopping, running; "I'm going to play several kinds of music. Move the way the music makes you feel."

**TOPIC 4:
APPRECIATING ONE'S BODY**

- Have an “I Am Special Time” (perhaps once a week) when a child is chosen and the “special” aspects of his or her appearance, personality, and talents are celebrated. Be sure each child gets a turn.
-

For Older Preschoolers:

- Post photos of the children at different ages and discuss what is similar and unique about each one. Note how they have changed; “When you were little, you didn’t have as much hair. Now look at your braids!”
- During mealtimes discuss how eating good food helps the body grow strong.
- Comment on changes in children’s physical development; “Jasmine, you are getting so tall!” “Benjamin has lost his first tooth.”
- Cut out magazine pictures of people at different ages with varying bodies and abilities. For example, show a ballet dancer, a deaf child signing with someone else, a child who uses a wheelchair, a foodcare worker, politician, baby-sitter. Post the pictures and discuss how each person’s body has unique characteristics; “This speed skater’s strong legs help her move fast in her races. This pianist’s long fingers help him reach all the keys on the keyboard.”
- Intervene when one child teases another about his or her physical appearance. Use these opportunities to encourage an appreciation for individual rates of development and individual uniqueness.
- Avoid perpetuating the idea that a thin body is the only ideal.
- Talk openly about physical disabilities. Help children avoid seeing it as a taboo topic. If you pass someone in the park who is physically disabled, speak to the person in a friendly manner in the same way that you might with any other community member. Teach children some sign language as a vehicle for talking about deafness and other disabilities.

KEY CONCEPT 2: RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships with family members, caregivers, and friends are central to children's lives

TOPIC 5: PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Discussion

The family is the first and most important social system in a child's life. Responsive parental figures enable children to form secure attachments and to see themselves as lovable and valuable people who can get care, affection, protection, and support from the significant others in their world. The family social system teaches children how to relate to others, share toys and responsibilities, set boundaries, settle arguments, display affection, and other important lessons.

Children with siblings may feel competitive with sisters and brothers for parental time and attention. Despite the resulting tensions, arguments, and fights, most children feel genuine affection and attachment for their siblings.

By age four, most children have moved beyond the identity of "my mother's or my father's child" to an expanded individual identity concerning others in their immediate world. However, preschool children still model themselves in ways that are directly related to the family. For instance, at play, they often imitate adult roles and relationships in their own families. In fact, often their play reveals family characteristics and styles of interacting.

Children thrive in many kinds of families, and there is great diversity in the types of families in our society. Today's families may include both the biological mother and father or a single parent or guardian, grandparents or other extended family, same-gender parents, or foster parents. Many children see one of their parents part of the time. Others have step-parents and step-siblings. Whatever the family structure, no child should be made to feel that his or her family is second-rate. Every child has the right to feel proud of his or her family.

Key Messages for Children:

- Children need adults who love and take care of them.
- There are different kinds of families.
- Mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins are family members.
- In some families, aunts, uncles, grandparents, older brothers and sisters, or family friends carry out some parenting jobs.
- Sometimes close friends are considered part of the family.
- Family members can have fun together.
- Family members need to help one another.
- Some children are part of more than one family.
- Family members who live in different places continue to be a family.
- Each family member can help take care of the family. As children get older, they can do more family jobs.
- Families have rules to help their members live together safely and happily.

TOPIC 5: PARENTS AND FAMILIES

- Sisters and brothers sometimes get along and sometimes they tease or get angry with each other.
- Family members sometimes disagree or get angry with each other.
- Even if someone in the family makes another person in the family angry, it is important to talk about it, instead of harming or ignoring them.
- Family members need to try to settle their fights.

Additional Messages for Older Preschoolers:

- A parent's job is to love, care for, and teach their children.
- Being a parent is an adult job.
- People have to learn how to be good parents.
- Parents need help from their relatives, friends, community, and children.
- Different kinds of families include: married parents, single parents, and foster parents, two moms or two dads, and other combinations. Some children are raised by other members of their families such as their grandmother, grandfather, or aunts and uncles.
- Adults can become parents in different ways:
 - Most parents give birth to their own children.
 - Some people become parents by marrying or living with someone who already has children; these people are called step-parents.
 - Some people adopt children, raising as their own a child who was born to other people.
 - Some people help raise a child for a short period of time because the child's parents need some help. These people are called foster parents.
- Members of the same family may look very different from or very much the same as each other.
- Each family has its own traditions, celebrations, hobbies, and favorite meals.
- Many, but not all, adults want to be parents.
- Individuals and families can change over time. A relative may move in, a new baby is born, a family member gets sick, a parent moves out of the home or returns to the home.
- It is good for family members to talk with one another about their feelings.

How Adults Can Help:

- Be sensitive to the diversity of families when giving home assignments. "Bring in a picture of the family members who take care of you."
- Explain how children are related to other family members. "Aunt Marion is your aunt because she is Daddy's sister."

**TOPIC 5:
PARENTS AND FAMILIES**

- Read books about different kinds of families.
- Acknowledge that both males and females can nurture children. Don't always refer to "Mommy" as the nurturing figure; "What did Daddy put in your lunch-box today?"
- Acknowledge that both females and males give children guidance.
- Express the assumption that parents and other family members of both genders are interested in their children's activities.
- Have children draw or bring in photographs of their families. Talk about the different types of families. "Monica lives with her grandmother. Josie lives with her dad and mom and brother. Carlos lives with his mom."
- Create spaces for children to display family photographs and drawings on bulletin boards or by each child's cubby or coat hook.
- Make observations about differences and similarities among families in the community, on television, and in books. "All children are raised by adults, but not always by parents. The child in this story is raised by her grandmother, and the children in the story we read yesterday are raised their aunt and uncle."

For Older Preschoolers:

- Read a story about a family. Afterwards, have the students list all the responsibilities the parents had for their children; "What were some of the things these parents had to think about to make sure their children were happy and safe?"
- Help children overcome ideas about stereotyped family roles. Encourage dramatic play with dolls, puppets, and costumes to enable children to imagine all that women and men do, such as cook, care for children, teach school, fight fires, dance in ballets, or fly to the moon.
- Read developmentally appropriate stories that depict family life situations that children might be experiencing; dealing with divorce, getting a new sister or brother, a parent's remarriage, death of a family member or pet, not having a mother or a father.
- Have parents come in and show photos or videos of their families. Have them discuss the joys and responsibilities of being a parent.
- Have children list things that their parents have provided for them. Children may first mention toys, but encourage them to list essentials like meals, shelter, clothing, and nonmaterial things like encouragement, love, fun and caring.

**TOPIC 6:
FRIENDSHIPS****Discussion**

Young children gradually come to understand the concept of friendships. Babies enjoy children who play with them, and toddlers enjoy the presence of other children. The simple interactions of toddlers often focus on routines and ritual-like games., although their play becomes more complicated with friends whom they frequently see.⁷ By age three, children are able to play more interactively and often crave the companionship of other children.

Through social interactions and play, children begin to establish continuing relationships with each other. As these relationships endure and build over time, friendships emerge.

For the young child, a friend is a playmate, perhaps simply the other child he or she is playing with at any particular time. For preschoolers, friendship is the shared activities among children who play with and like each other. Children begin to learn that friendships can be enduring relationships in which people cooperate with and help each others. The child who leaves preschool to attend elementary school may miss the children with whom he or she had become friends.

There are often differences in how boys and girls approach friendship and play. Research on gender and playmate behavior reveals the following:

- Children commonly segregate themselves by gender in social situations which permit a choice of friends. These preferences begin as early as age three, are not closely linked to the children's involvement in sex-typed activities, and have been difficult to change when adults have made efforts to do so.
- Girls and boys can interact comfortably in situations such as an absorbing joint task when structures and roles are set up by adults.
- Boys and girls tend to engage in different kinds of activities. Boys play in larger groups, and their play is rougher and takes up more space. Girls tend to form close relationships with one or two other girls, and these friendships are marked by the sharing of confidences.
- Girls and boys tend to develop different interactive styles as they progress through childhood in their all-boy and all-girl play groups. Boys are more likely to contradict, boast, top a playmate's story or engage in other forms of self-display. Girls are more likely to acknowledge another's comments, express agreement, support whatever the playmate is doing, and keep the interaction going.⁸

Key Messages for Children:

- Friends have fun together.
- Friends help each other.
- Boys and girls can be friends with each other.
- Children can have many friends or a few.
- Children can be friends with various kinds of people; those who are older or younger, look different or live differently, or have different abilities.
- It is hurtful to tell someone that he or she cannot play with you.

TOPIC 6:
FRIENDSHIPS

Additional Messages for Older Preschoolers:

- Friends may sometimes feel angry with each other or hurt each other's feelings, but friends also forgive each other.
- Friends tell each other about their feelings.

“Want to be my friend?”

How Adults Can Help:

- Be realistic about young children's ability to socialize. Expect one and two-year-olds to be preoccupied with the notion of “mine”. They may have a hard time sharing and may have a better time playing when there are enough similar toys to go around, so that they do not have to compete with their playmates for play things.
- Provide opportunities for a young child to play alone and to have private time; “Sometimes it's nice to have time for yourself.” Alone time can provide reflection and can support a developing sense of self.
- Provide opportunities for children to have “one-on-one” time with adults; “Let's just the two of us build something with blocks.”
- Join in and play a game with several children. Your modeling and use of vocabulary will increase the children's socialization; “You are such fast runners!” Or, “Let's all cooperate and build the biggest snowball in the world.”
- Discuss the concept of friendship; “You and Jose are playing well together, it looks like you're friends. Friends like to play together and share their toys.” Or, “I'm happy that you made a new friend at the playground today.”
- Help children learn to play together without hurting each other; “I don't want you to hit when you're angry. I want you to use words to explain to people how you feel.”
- Set up an interesting and varied environment for play. When children have fun things to do, they are more likely to get along; “I've made an obstacle course for you. You have to crawl under the tables, leap over the pillows, and run zigzag between the buckets.”
- Provide children with opportunities to develop friendships with boys and girls from backgrounds that are different from their own; “Alba is new to our classroom, and new to our country. It's fun to meet people from different places. Will you show her where the toys are?”
- Acknowledge, praise, and reward “friendly” behavior among children; “I'm glad you shared your raisins with Paul.”
- Do not permit children to ostracize a child. Build a feeling of community by emphasizing the importance of including everyone and of working out disagreements: “We are all friends here at school.”

**TOPIC 6:
FRIENDSHIPS**

- Make an effort to include children with disabilities in children’s social groups. Model this inclusion so that young children are neither scared of nor mean to a child with a disability; “A child in a wheelchair may not be able to walk, but you can be friends and do things together, like put together a puzzle.”
-

For Older Preschoolers:

- Intervene to help children learn about another child’s perspective or feelings: “Aniko looks sad. How do you think it feels to be told that you can’t play? How would you feel if some children told you that you couldn’t play with them?”
- Read stories that deal with conflict and get children to discuss their reactions: “Have you ever had an argument with a friend? How did it feel? How can friends make up when they quarrel?”
- Have children draw a picture of one of their friends and then describe their friend to others. Why do they like this person?
- Role-play and discuss “friendly” and “unfriendly” ways to act.
- Help children understand that certain actions and reactions can help begin, nurture, or end a friendship; “If you keep pushing Sasha, how do you think she will feel toward you?”
- Explain that some people get along better than others; “If someone does not want to be your friend, that does not mean there is something wrong with you.”

**TOPICS 7:
COMMUNITY****Discussion**

Children are born not only into a family, but into a neighborhood and a community. Friends, neighbors, and others in the community influence children's lives, ideally by providing a support system for children and families within the community. The grocer who knows every family member by name, the neighbor who keeps an eye on children jumping rope, the mail carrier who always says hello, the elderly couple who tend to a small vegetable garden—all contribute to a child's feeling that he or she is part of the community, and exemplify a range of possibilities for the child's future.

But not all families have a supportive community. Many families live in isolation, having no one to call for baby-sitting, advice, or moral support when times are rough. Parents who are under stress—and parenting can be highly stressful—need breaks, relief from the constant vigilance that parenting requires, and a sense of perspective when their responsibilities feel overwhelming. It is easiest to be a caring parent if one feels cared about as an adult. Children as well as parents benefit from such support, for it can ease household tensions and reduce the possibility of verbal or physical abuse.

The childcare setting and preschool classroom are among a child's first community experiences and provide opportunities to learn how communities function. Adults in these settings have a role to play in helping children learn attitudes and behaviors that promote constructive membership in groups. Children need to learn rules and a sense of responsibility to the group and to the shared physical space. Adults can further children's ability to be responsible citizens by helping them to:

- respect others;
- see a situation from another person's viewpoint;
- negotiate conflict nonviolently;
- plan, work, and make decisions cooperatively;
- empathize with others who are hurting or in need of help; and
- get along constructively with people who are different from them.

Key Messages for Children:

- People usually live, work, or learn together in groups.
- Children can feel a sense of belonging in their family, school, or neighborhood.
- Group members can help one another and have fun together.
- These groups of people form a community.
- Members of a community have certain rules to help members get along safely, and happily.

Additional Messages for Older Preschoolers:

- A community can be a classroom, a school, a neighborhood, or a city.
- Children learn by observing and speaking with the people around them.
- Caregivers, friends, neighbors, teachers, and others in the community can be important people in parents' and children's' lives.

KEY CONCEPT 2: RELATIONSHIPS

TOPICS 7: COMMUNITY

- Many types of people may be in a community.
- It is best when all people work together to make the community a good place to live.

“I’m happy you’re my neighbor”

How Adults Can Help:

- Make statements about the neighborhood: “We live in (name of neighborhood or town). It is a (quiet neighborhood; busy neighborhood, crowded neighborhood, big town, pretty city), etc.”
- Provide opportunities for children to contribute to their community; “We must take care of our community. Let’s put all of our trash in the trash can. Don’t be a litterbug!”
- Establish clear expectations about rules: “This is your classroom. When you play with toys, you must take care of them. Put them away when you’ve finished playing so that other children can enjoy them too.”
- Give children practice in solving classroom problems: “How can we solve this problem? Who has an idea?”
- Recognize children who reach out to help others. Use words such as “cooperate, kind, polite, honest”, and hold these up as virtues for children; “It was kind of you to pick up Kyle’s jacket.”
- Teach and model such acceptable behavior as: respect for the rights of others; self-control; orderly conduct; sharing; caring; and cooperation. Use “teachable moments” when incidents arise; “That’s Rasheeda’s game. She brought it to school. Ask her if it is okay for you to play with it.”
- Ensure that children don’t hurt themselves or other people and that children can depend on the person in charge to apply rules fairly and consistently.

For Older Preschoolers:

- Provide opportunities for children to get to know one another in pairs and in small groups: “Everyone who pulled a red card out of the bag will help mix the muffin batter today. Everyone who pulled a yellow card will work on the window-box garden.”
- Look for daily opportunities for each individual to contribute to the larger group. Note who has a great sense of humor, who is musically or artistically talented, who is supportive of others, or who has other special abilities.
- Allow children opportunities to make suggestions regarding classroom procedures and rules. This can help instill a sense of ownership and belonging.

**TOPICS 7:
COMMUNITY**

- Assign and rotate age-appropriate jobs at school. Giving children a role in caring for their community helps them develop pride and responsibility: “This chore chart will make sure that everyone has a chance to take of our classroom.”
- Discuss and respond to what’s happening in the neighborhood or community, both good and bad. Let children express how they feel and how they can contribute.
- Create a climate that fosters friendships between boys and girls. Too often, children who would like to be friends are subjected to peer pressure, which tends to limit boy/girl friendships.

**TOPIC 8:
LOVE AND AFFECTION**

Discussion

Feeling loved makes children feel lovable and helps them to be able to love. Within a loving atmosphere, children are more secure, self-confident, and responsive to adult guidance, for they know that the guidance stems from deep caring and concern.

Ideally, the family provides the baby's first loving experiences through hugging, kissing, bathing, feeding, dressing and other nurturing behaviors. These early intimate experiences provide the emotional foundation which children need to build the capacity to feel love and attachment later in life.

The love that children feel for their parents or primary caregivers sometimes may seem romantic. Young children may freely express their romantic desire to their parents. They may try to kiss a parent on the lips, or declare that they want to grow up to marry a parent or caretaker. Since these feelings are typical, the wise adult will acknowledge the child's romantic yearnings while clearly limiting the child's ability to fulfill those feelings. In other words, it is important to accept the child's affection without responding negatively to, or inappropriate, reciprocating, the romantic aspect of the child's expression.

Child development experts have carefully documented children's early romantic experiences and feelings. While children are encountering these developmental milestones, they are also being educated about the concept of romance from fairy tales, cartoons, and children's movies. These popular depictions of romantic relationships often feature a handsome prince who first rescues the beautiful princess, then marries her and the couple lives happily ever after. Cartoons and children's movies are filled with images of romantic glances, touches, kisses on the lips, courtship, and marriage. Girls, more than boys, seem susceptible to these messages, often growing up with the fantasy of marrying that handsome prince. Preschool teachers can attest to the fact that girls' storytelling and dramatic play often contain themes related to beautiful princesses, courtship, marriage, and family life. Their home life is, of course, central to all children, and it is appropriate that children's play reflect this. At the same time, children gradually learn that love is more complicated than a prince's magic kiss.

Children usually only see heterosexual love relationships. Parents of lesbian and gay children often lament the fact that they never considered that their child might be homosexual. Most parents, assuming that their children are heterosexual, never suspect that a child growing up in the midst of only heterosexual images may feel very different and strange. Certainly, preschoolers are not yet aware of their romantic attractions. However, many lesbians and gay adults report that they realized that they were somehow "different" during their elementary school years or even earlier. Feeling "different" becomes a secret that many children attracted to members of their own gender guard for fear of losing the love of family and friends. During adolescence, these children, guarding the secret of same-gender attractions, are two to three times more likely than other children to commit suicide—a harsh statistic, which might be lowered if adults communicated early on that there are different kinds of romantic love among human beings. Adult caregivers can contribute positively by simply understanding that not every single child grows up to be heterosexual and that one cannot predict which children will grow up to be homosexual or bisexual. Acknowledging diverse relationships among adults can provide an important foundation for the future learning of all children.

KEY CONCEPT 2: RELATIONSHIPS

TOPIC 8: LOVE AND AFFECTION

Key Messages for Children:

- Children need to grow up with people who love them.
 - People can give and receive love.
 - People should talk and listen to the people they love.
 - One way people show love is by hugging and kissing.
-

Additional Messages for Older Preschoolers:

- Being a friend takes time and caring.
- Children feel and show love differently to their parents, other family members, and friends.
- Some story books and movies show boys and girls growing up, marrying a prince or princess, and living happily ever after.
- Couples have happy times and sad times; they have fun, but they also have problems to work out.
- Most grown-ups marry someone of the other gender. Some people have romantic feelings toward people of the same gender and choose to live with him or her.
- Some grown-ups choose not to marry and are single.

“I love my mommy and my daddy and my grandma and my uncle and my cat and myself.”

How Adults Can Help:

- Demonstrate love and caring through hugs, smiles, and words: “I’m so happy to be your teacher.”
 - Use daily interactions with children such as playing, going on a walk, or zipping up a jacket as opportunities to show that they are cherished; “Let’s go for a walk and spend some time together.”
 - Make sure that individual children are not overtired, too hungry, or in unsafe conditions on the playground or in play areas.
 - As class projects, have children make gifts for parents, siblings, grandparents, and others.
 - Read books that portray relationships that balance those portrayed in fairy tales.
-

For Older Preschoolers:

- When a child creates a special drawing, ask whether he or she would like to give it as a gift to a family member or friend.
 - If a child is sick for a long time, have the other children make get-well cards.
 - Get children talking about what “happily-ever-after” means to them. Talk about this idea and ask the children what they think. Explain that relationships need time, attention, and care in order to work.
-

KEY CONCEPT 3: PERSONAL SKILLS

Children need to understand their own and other people's feelings, and develop specific personal and interpersonal skills to lay the groundwork for healthy relationships.

TOPIC 9: EXPRESSING FEELINGS

Discussion

The language of feelings begins at birth and develops in early infancy, which children's audible language consists of cries, grunts, and coos. Parents and caregivers strive to interpret meaning through a series of educated guesses, guided in part by the infant's body language. Both children and adults are excited and relieved when a child learns to verbalize his or her thoughts and feelings. Through language, children graduate from the "broad strokes" of early sounds to the more precise messages they can communicate with words. Language helps children understand themselves and others. When children learn to name their feelings, they can share them with others. *"I want....I feel....I like....I don't like....It makes me happy when you....I am angry when you...."* are statements which help people get to know each other.

Once children learn to talk and more clearly understand not only their own emotions, but also those of the people around them, they can learn to say "yes" or "no", and explain how and why they feel the way they do. They can learn to say, "Let's take turns on the swings," or "I'm angry that you won't let me use your jump rope; will you let me if I let you ride my bike?" These skills will prepare young children for more complicated negotiations later in life. Children need help to develop this understanding. Learning to express feelings in ways that are respectful of others—especially in school and childcare settings—is important in establishing a healthy atmosphere.

KEY CONCEPT 3: PERSONAL SKILLS

TOPIC 9: EXPRESSING FEELINGS

The following chart maps out the emotional characteristics of children from birth to age five. It is based on the child development research of Janet Kuebli, M.S., of Emory University.⁹

Some Characteristics of Young Children's Emotion, Language, and Understanding

Birth to 18 Months

Display emotions and respond to emotion in others at preverbal stage

Use emotion cues of others to guide own responses to new or ambiguous situations

Do not produce or comprehend emotion terms with a few exceptions

18 to 20 Months

Use first emotion words in vocabulary (e.g. cry, happy)

Begin to discuss emotions spontaneously in conversations with others

2 to 3 Years

Increase emotion vocabulary most rapidly

Correctly label simple emotions in self and others, and talk about past, present and future emotions

Talk about the causes and consequences of some emotions and identify emotions associated with certain situations

Use emotion language in pretend play

4 to 5 Years

Show increased capacity of verbally reflect on emotions and to consider more complex relations between emotions and situations

Understand that the same event may call forth different feelings in different people and that feelings sometimes persist long after the events that caused them

Demonstrate growing awareness about controlling and managing emotions in accord with social standards

Key Messages for Children:

- People have many feelings: they can be happy, sad, angry, excited, scared, lonely, hurt, confused, bored, and loving.
- Talk to adults about your feelings.
- Making other people feel happy can make you feel happy, too.
- It is okay to feel angry; there are safe ways to express anger, so as not to hurt anyone, such as talking or punching a pillow.

TOPIC 9:
EXPRESSING FEELINGS

- Everyone feels scared sometimes.
- Whenever children feel scared, they should tell a parent or another trusted adult.
- Being hungry, tired, or sick can cause a person to feel angry, upset, or unhappy.

Additional Messages for Older Preschoolers:

- Talking together about feelings can help people understand each other.
- It is important to listen carefully when people are talking about their feelings.
- Keeping feelings inside and not talking about them can make a person feel unhappy.
- It is okay to have feelings but not always okay to act on those feelings.
- Different people may have different feelings about the same thing.
- A person's feelings can change; sometimes this feels confusing.
- Sometimes several feelings can occur together.

"Sometimes I'm so-o-o-o happy"

How Adults Can Help:

- Create a safe atmosphere that encourages children to express their feelings. Take time to recognize and respond to children's feelings.
- Provide opportunities for dramatic play with puppets, dolls, and playhouses. Young children can act out their feelings through dramatic play.
- Choose books and/or videos that help children recognize and understand feelings. Discuss causes and consequences of a character's emotions and then link them to incidents in the children's own lives.
- "Tune in" to children's feelings, and help children identify them by using such phrases as:
 - "I think you're feeling _____ now; is that right?"
 - "I'll bet you felt happy when you ..."
 - "It was probably a little scary to get so angry."
- Observe children's cues: What needs or feelings are they expressing? For example, whining may indicate loneliness. Irritability may indicate that a child is tired or hungry.
- Apologize when necessary, so that children learn how to do so as well: "I'm sorry I lost my temper when you dropped the paint. Everybody gets angry sometimes."
- Help children learn to reflect on an incident or experience to determine how they were feeling at the time.

**TOPIC 9:
EXPRESSING FEELINGS**

- Explain the rationale behind your feelings: “I’m a little cranky today because we ran out of apples, the gerbil got out of the cage, and I bumped my head at the play center.”
 - Show pictures of people in various situations and have children describe how these adults/children might feel.
 - Have children make faces of different feelings: happy, sad, excited, angry. What would make them feel this way?
 - Interrupt aggressive or violent behavior and offer alternatives for expressing anger such as pounding on a pillow, or being quiet for a while.
-

For Older Preschoolers:

- Engage children in conversations about their drawings. Have them construct picture stories about a variety of topics. Discuss how people’s feelings can affect others by the way they act on those feelings.
- Use quarrels and disagreements as “teachable moments.” Get each child to explain what happened. Try to get children to understand one another’s feelings. Ask them what they could do differently the next time.
- Watch children’s programs that model positive relationships among the characters, such as shows in which people talk about their feelings, express love and forgiveness, have fun together, and include others in play.

**TOPIC 10:
COMMUNICATION**

Discussion

In every arena of life, people need to communicate. Ideally, their words and gestures clearly express their true thoughts and feelings. However, miscommunication is all too common. Misunderstandings, mixed messages, wrong impressions, and unintended slights damage countless relationships. Teaching children to communicate clearly and confidently about their feelings helps them develop skills that can initiate, nurture, and protect relationships throughout their lives.

During their first year and a half of life, babies are gaining the information they need to learn to communicate. To gain language facility, babies need caregivers who are familiar with their behaviors and can interpret their needs, gestures, and primitive sounds. As toddlers, children build their vocabularies by asking questions and playing naming games. By two years of age, many children ask, “What’s this?” or “What’s that?”. By age two to three, they move on to ask “why” questions and to speak in full sentences. Language development is enhanced by caring adults who understand children’s early attempts at verbal communication and who stimulate further development through enthusiastic interactions.

By three or four, children are actively acquiring language, especially as they increasingly interact with people outside the family who are less familiar with their words and gestures. Do words from others help solve problems or confuse? Do words contradict nonverbal signals?

Children learn by experimenting with words and language in a variety of contexts. During imaginative play, they mimic what parents and other people say and do. Adults have an important role to play in enhancing a child’s ability to use language as a tool for communicating and solving problems.

Children often find it confusing that acceptable ways to communicate may differ according to the individual, place, culture, time, and circumstance. Why is a question about how the body works welcomed at home, childcare, or school, but not in a crowded supermarket check-out line? When is honesty appreciated? How can you say things without hurting people’s feelings, but still make sure you are getting your point across? Why are certain topics off limits with certain people? Why do some words have more power than others? Why are some words acceptable at home or in school, but in another setting a child is scolded for using “bathroom words” or “street talk?”

And why isn’t it enough just to say what you want? Young children may think it should be O.K. to merely state, “I want to play with the truck now,” when feeling impatient about the work it takes to reach an agreement. Yet with consistent and patient teaching, children can learn that negotiation and compromise are often necessary and can make for better ways of getting along.

Teaching communication skills during the preschool years gives young children a foundation for the more complex discussions they will have when they are older.

Key Messages for Children:

- People may not know what we want or need unless we tell them.
 - Asking questions is a good way to learn.
 - When someone is talking, it’s important to listen.
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TOPIC 10:
COMMUNICATION

- Some words and gestures are friendly and some are not.
- People communicate in many ways. They speak, write, sign, or understand how people feel by watching their faces.

Additional Messages for Older Preschoolers:

- Talking and listening get easier with practice.
- If people say something that is not clear, ask them to explain again.
- People choose the words they use. They can learn to use words that tell just how they feel.

How Adults Can Help:

- Read to children, even infants and early toddlers.
- At every age, your affirming responses reward children's attempts to communicate. Children's sounds, actions, and words are opportunities to verify that the child's feelings and ideas are important and worthy of response.
- Reinforce dramatic play in which children mimic appropriate communication. Play games that cast the child as teacher or parent.
- Be as patient as possible in answering children's questions.
- Pay attention to your nonverbal communication as you talk with young children. Does your facial expression match your words?
- Response to the child's verbal and nonverbal communication:
 - In response to a child's crying; "Are you sad because your teddy bear's arm got torn? Let's fix it."
 - In response to a child's laughter; "It's fun to throw that teddy bear high in the air, isn't it?"
 - In response to a child's singing to a teddy bear; "You are so loving with your teddy bear."
- Recognize that children often echo what you say and how you say it; "We don't say, 'Shut up' in our school."
- Whenever possible, teach by asking, not telling, by guiding, not directing; "What do you think is a good way to let Kara know that you want to help feed the fish today?"
- Respond to children honestly, simply, and with accurate and specific language; "Thank you for telling me about Maria's nosebleed. When a friend has a nosebleed, it's important to go to a grown-up for help."
- If you are unable to respond fully to a child at a given moment, acknowledge the child and promise to respond later: "I'm glad you want to tell me a story. I need to finish making sandwiches now, but we can talk while we eat our lunch."

**TOPIC 10:
COMMUNICATION**

For Older Preschoolers:

- Help children verbalize difficult feelings: “I notice that you pull away when Lee tries to hug you. How could you tell Lee that you don’t want to be hugged?”
- Affirm the value of children’s feelings: “You seem to be feeling sad because you miss your mom and dad. I understand.”
- Give the child guidelines for word use. Respond when a child uses “put downs”. Make sure that he or she knows what the words mean: “Some words hurt people’s feelings.”
- Recognize children when they exhibit good listening skills. Take that opportunity to explain the benefits of listening.
- Enjoy quiet time with children as well as talking. Words aren’t always needed to let people know that you like their company.

TOPIC 11:
DECISION-MAKING

Discussion

Decision making is a fundamental aspect of group up. Young children need to know that there are some choices that they have the ability and the right to make, and that the decision they make can affect both themselves and others. Learning how to make decisions is a skill, which children must learn and practice. Adults can promote this skill by giving children developmentally appropriate opportunities to make decisions and to face the consequences of their actions. Children need to learn that they are responsible for the results of the choices they make. If Ann lends Patrick her ball for the weekend, she doesn't get to play with it herself, but she's making her friend happy. If Mike doesn't eat his lunch, he's hungry later in the afternoon. Adults can help make these connections for children.

Children are more likely to develop confidence in their decision-making abilities when adults tell children through words and deeds that they believe children can make good decisions. Caregivers can be supportive by giving children freedom to make some little mistakes and helping them to learn from those mistakes. The child who becomes adept at identifying and evaluating choices will be better able to communicate, empathize, and be assertive with others.

Key Messages for Children:

- Making a choice (such as choosing between two toys is called making a decision.
- Children make choices all the time.
- Some decisions must be made by adults.

Additional Messages for Older Preschoolers:

- Every decision has a result, or something that happens because of the decision.
- Some decisions are easier to make than others.
- Making decisions gets easier with practice.
- Children need to learn how to make good decisions.
- Children need help from adults to make some decisions.
- We do not always get our way or have choices.
- Some decisions children can make at school are; whom to play with, what book to look at, what to bring from home for show and tell.

"I don't know what to choose!"

How Adults Can Help:

- Give children opportunities to make decisions. Present children with alternatives that are acceptable: "What do you want to do during play-time? Who would you like to choose as your partner for our walk today?"
- Pace discussions about decision making so that the child doesn't have to make many decisions at once.

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For Older Preschoolers:

- As children get older, give them increased responsibility for certain decisions. Show them how to break seemingly overwhelming decisions into manageable parts. Complicated decisions require more time and reflection.
- Express confidence in children's ability to make good decisions. If a child regrets a decision, help the child figure out what he or she learns from the regret: "What do you wish you had done instead?"
- Model decision-making methods. For example: "I have one apple to eat today. I'll save it for lunch; that's when I'm most hungry."

TOPIC 12:
PROBLEM-SOLVING

Discussion

Children can find it comforting to know that nobody's life is problem-free. Problems happen; they are an inevitable part of life. And they are not always bad; solving problems can be challenging, interesting, and fun.

Children should not expect to know how to handle most situations by themselves. Indeed, one of the most important skills in problem-solving is knowing when and how to find help, and what kinds of help are available—from information and suggestions, to brainstorming and emotional support. Children's abilities to solve problems and cope are limited. They should not be expected to solve or even share in solving serious problems. But preschoolers can help solve some problems, such as finding a missing shoe, or figuring out how to reduce excessive noise in the room.

Key Messages for Children:

- Everybody has problems sometimes.
- Children can learn how to solve problems.
- Finding a way to solve a problem can be fun.
- Problems do not have to be faced alone.
- It is important to ask for help.
- Children need help to fix some problems.

Additional Messages for Older Preschoolers:

- Solving a problem together with others can help everyone feel closer.
- Parents and other family members and friends usually try to help one another solve problems.
- Other trusted adults, such as a friend's parent, a teacher, a member of the clergy, or a neighbor can sometimes help.
- Children may be able to help someone who has a problem.

"Can you help me?"

How Adults Can Help:

- Acknowledge frustration or difficulty, then model good problem-solving. Allow children to watch and hear your work out problems by finding resources by suggesting various solutions and thinking through each one by seeking help from others, and by staying calm and avoiding panic.
- Model and encourage patience and perseverance. Teach children to calm their feelings of frustration by remembering the motto. *If you stick to it, you can do it.* "I know that learning to put on your jacket is hard at first. The more you do it, the easier it will get."
- When possible, enlist children in working out small problems: "Everyone wants to help water the plants, but we have to make sure they don't get too much water. What do you think we could do?"

KEY CONCEPT 3: PERSONAL SKILLS

TOPIC 12: PROBLEM-SOLVING

For Older Preschoolers:

- Involve children in “sharing time” or “class meetings.” Give everyone a chance to bring up issues for discussion which there are problems, address them as a group: “It has been taking too long to clean up after free play, so we haven’t had time to keep up with our weather and birthday charts. What can we do?”

**TOPIC 13:
MASTURBATION AND SELF-PLEASURING**

Discussion

It is widely accepted by pediatricians, psychologists, psychiatrists, child development specialists and educators that masturbation is a part of childhood development. Due to the natural exploration of their bodies, children discover that touching feels good. Just as children delight in learning about their nose, eyes, and feet, they also experience pleasure as they discover more about their penis or vulva. For children, self stimulation does not carry the anxiety that it does for adults. For children, it is pure and simple discovery, pleasure, and satisfaction of curiosity. For example, many children find such touch calming, a way to help them get to sleep at naptime.

While it is developmentally typical for children to masturbate, young children need to learn society's rules about this behavior. Children need to know that masturbation is a natural part of being human, they also need to know that it is private, just as using the bathroom is private. Children should learn that other people may feel upset to see them touching their genitals in public.

It is very important for adults to be aware of the unspoken messages that often accompany adult response toward childhood masturbation. If adults are harsh in the way they deal with genital touching, children often get the message that their genitals are bad or "dirty." In order for children to develop into sexually healthy adolescents, and then adults, their education about all aspects of sexuality and their bodies should be supportive even if not accepting.

Early childhood educators need guidance for dealing with childhood masturbation. Each caregiver brings her or his own individual, family and cultural thoughts, personal history, beliefs, and emotions into the school or childcare center. Caregivers need training to help them understand and support healthy sexual development in children, while being alert to any signs of problematic behaviors that need intervention.

It is critical that every early childhood program develop a policy to guide staff in responding to children's sexual behaviors. There are many questions that each program must address to ascertain what is in the best interest of the children: How should staff react to a child who is masturbating quietly during naptime? What should be done if a child repeatedly masturbates in public situations? When and how should parents be made aware of the behavior? These questions should be answered in a clearly written policy statement so that staff feel confident about what is expected from them. Many programs advocate ignoring a young child's masturbation if it is private. If the behavior is public, effective strategies suggest that the adult: 1) make sure the child is aware of the behavior, 2) acknowledge that it feels good but is to be done in private, and 3) help the child identify "public" and "private" spaces.

If a child continues to masturbate publicly, aggressively, or compulsively after being asked to stop, the child may be responding to stress in his or her life, such as adjusting to a newborn sibling, a divorce, death, or other tensions at home. Such behavior, however, may also be indicate child sexual abuse, a serious subject, which must be addressed as indicated in policies and teacher or caregiver workshops. Maintaining a partnership that supports frequent, open communication with parents about all of a child's daily experiences makes it possible to discuss a problem such as frequent public genital touching, should it arise.

KEY CONCEPT 4: BEHAVIORS

TOPIC 13: MASTURBATION AND SELF-PLEASURING

If caregivers have any reason to suspect sexual abuse by a family member, they must report it using the guidelines set up by their agency.

Key Messages for Children:

- Bodies can feel good when touched.
 - It feels good to touch parts of the body.
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Additional Messages for Older Preschoolers:

- Many boys and girls discover that it feels good to touch their bodies, including their penis or vulva.
- The vulva and penis are private parts of the body and should not be touched in public places.

“I like the way my body feels.”

How Adults Can Help:

- Seek training to explore individual attitudes about masturbation and other childhood sexual behaviors.
- Take off “adult glasses” when confronted with childhood masturbation. Consider what the behavior means to the child and what the impact of your response may be.
- Respond to children’s questions or comments about their genitals using accurate terms and a comfortable tone of voice.
- If a child is touching his or her genitals in private, ignore the behavior. If the behavior is public, 1) make sure the child is aware of the behavior, 2) acknowledge that it feels good but is to be done in private, and 3) help the child identify “public” and “private” spaces.
- If sexual abuse is suspected, follow the sexual abuse guidelines outlined by the preschool or childcare center, which should be posted or otherwise made easily available.
- Talk and consult with experts in the field—pediatricians, nurses, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, those in your community who also deal with these issues.

TOPIC 14:
SEXUAL CURIOSITY

Discussion

By age three, most children are talkative and curious about everything they see and feel and come in contact with, including their bodies and other people's bodies. Three-year-old children peek under one another's clothing, undress their dolls, and ask questions about their own bodies. Children who "play house" or "play doctor" are using their imaginations to explore and mimic adult roles and behaviors. Much of childhood play, involving bodies and sexuality among children of the same age and development is generally considered by most early childhood experts to be developmentally typical behavior.

A child who looks at or touches another child's genitals may be trying to figure out and examine differences or similarities, or may be mimicking adult behavior. This childhood behavior is not be confused with adult sexual behavior. In many cases, any lasting negative impact on the child results not from the childhood behaviors themselves but from adult reactions to these behaviors. Often adults report having had a parent or other caregiver who reacted in extremely negative ways to finding them undressed with a playmate of the same age. When a child is shamed for being curious or for discovering that touching feels good, those feelings of shame may become connected to later sexual arousal and pleasure. Many adults who were shamed as children can recall those experiences and the accompanying feelings of guilt, just as if they had happened yesterday.

Caregivers need to try to understand these behaviors from the child's point of view and provide caring guidance about what is appropriate behavior and what is not. Preschools and childcare centers need to develop policies on how to calmly handle childhood sexual play.

There are child-to-child sexual behaviors that are clearly inappropriate. According to the Final Report of the 1993 Symposium on "Child-to-Child Sexual Behavior in Childcare Settings," the following behaviors are problematic and warrant action.¹⁰

- Initiating or complying with intrusive and/or painful activity by another child.
- Engaging in self-inflicted painful sexual activity.
- Engaging in oral-genital contact with another child.
- Engaging in simulated/attempted/completed intercourse while undressed. Forced penetration with an object or a finger of any orifice of a child.

Children engaging in the about behaviors have often been victims of sexual abuse. Many of these children are simply doing to others what has been done to them. They may not know that it is wrong to invade another's privacy or to coerce or force another child because they have experienced such behavior, often by someone about whom they care. This cycle of abuse can be interrupted if adults are trained to recognize and respond appropriately to inappropriate behaviors.

TOPIC 14: SEXUAL CURIOSITY

In the case when a child displays behaviors that suggest a problem, caregivers should respond in the following ways:

- Gather additional information from teachers and others who have been involved with the child.
- Call the parents or guardians of the children involved in the behavior to discuss and coordinate a plan on how to deal with the problem.
- Increase supervision of the child who is a concern.
- If the agency or school does not feel that it can protect the other children, meet with the staff and work out a way to meet with the family. Refer the family to a more appropriate program or counseling for the child.
- Respond to the needs of the children who may have been affected by the child's sexual behaviors. For example, provide emotional support for a child who has been physically assaulted.
- Provide classroom intervention by way of discussion, behavior management, and activities that teach children about appropriate and inappropriate behaviors.
- Institute prevention programs to help children learn about their body rights and responsibilities.

Key Messages for Children:

- Children often kiss, hug, and touch one another in ways which feel good.
- Children are often curious about each other's bodies.
- It is not okay to hug or touch someone if they don't want you to.
- Children should not hurt each other.
- Your body belongs to you.
- You have the right to decide if another child may touch your body during a game or any time.
- When playing at school, children keep their clothes on.

Additional Messages for Older Preschoolers:

- It is important to speak up and tell a friend or older child if you don't like what they are doing to you or your body.
- It is important to tell a teacher, your mom or dad or another family member if another child tries to get you to do anything you don't want to do.

**TOPIC 14:
SEXUAL CURIOSITY**

How Adults Can Help:

- Resist viewing children’s sexual behaviors through “adult glasses.” What appears “sexual” to an adult may be just “discovery” to a child. Find out what the behavior means from the child’s perspective; “Tell me what you’re playing.”
 - Seek training, read, and take any other steps to increase your own comfort in responding appropriately to developmentally typical childhood sexual play.
-

When Observing Sexual Play:

- Do not assume the behavior has the same meaning for the children that it does for adults.
- Acknowledge the children’s curiosity and suggest more appropriate ways to learn about their bodies.
- Create or investigate agency policy on how to respond to child-to-child sexual behavior.

KEY CONCEPT 5: HEALTH

Children need accurate information and supportive attitudes about health.

TOPIC 15: HYGIENE

Discussion

Children learn at a young age about hygiene (ways to keep the body clean and healthy). When parents or caregivers change diapers, give baths, wipe noses, or wash hands before and after meals, they are teaching children that there are basic “body care tasks” to do. Adult attitudes affect children’s feelings about their bodies. Wiping a child bottom while averting one’s face and muttering; “Whew! This is smelly” is quite different from wiping the child while smiling and saying “You’ll feel more comfortable with a nice, dry diaper.” The first approach conveys disgust, as though the process of elimination were repulsive, rather than simply a normal body function that is necessary to good health and comfort. Toilet and bathroom use are important opportunities to learn how the body works. They are also times to impart important health information, such as the need for girls to wipe from front to back after a bowel movement, so that none of the feces makes contact with the vagina and causes infection.

In the toddler stage, children become more independent and are eager to learn to do things for themselves. Rituals and routines help children establish positive health habits early in their lives. Good hygiene reflects self-esteem and pride in appearance. It also indicates an understanding of the relationship between cleanliness and health, and a level of comfort with one’s body. An aim of hygiene education is to make health “habit-forming” so that such things as washing hands before meals become second nature to a child. Developing good health habits in early childhood lays the groundwork for developing good sexual-health habits later in life.

Key Messages for Children:

- Adults need to help girls and boys learn how to take care of their own bodies so they will feel clean, healthy and comfortable.
- All parts of the body must be kept clean.
- Urinating and having bowel movements are normal ways a healthy body works.
- Teach girls to wipe from front to back: “Be sure to wipe your vulva with toilet tissue from front to back. Use a separate piece of toilet tissue to wipe your buttocks from front to back.”
- Children need to wash their hands after using the toilet, after any dirty play, before helping to prepare food, and before eating meals in order to get rid of germs.
- Certain germs, such as cold germs, can be spread by sharing other people’s toothbrushes, forks and spoons, and drinking cups.

TOPIC 15:
HYGIENE

“I brush my teeth myself!”

How Adults Can Help:

- Wash your hands after each diaper change.
- Avoid pressuring or bribing a child to use a toilet. Instead, use praise; “You used the potty! You must feel proud of yourself. That’s a big girl/big boy thing to do.” But remember not to overdo the praise so the child does not worry that you will feel terribly let down if she or he does not “succeed.”
- Clean up “accidents” in a non-chastising manner; “These things happen. It’s okay. We’ll just clean it up and change your clothes and then you can go and play.”
- When a child shows readiness to learn toilet skills, encourage a child with reminders: “I’d like you to always use the toilet before naptime” and “Let’s use the bathroom before we go to the park.”

For Older Preschoolers:

- Praise a child’s initiative in using good hygiene habits: “Wonderful! I used to have to remind you to wash your hands before eating, and now you remember to do it on your own.”

**TOPIC 16:
WELLNESS AND DISEASE PREVENTION**

Discussion

Most children take feeling well for granted. They hardly think about their health at all unless they need to see a doctor or take medicine. Yet, adults understand that wellness does not just happen but that it results from a combination of factors, including environment, nutrition, rest, emotions, and physical safety.

By age four, most children are knowledgeable about family and school rules for self-care and self-protection, although they still need adult supervision. Health and illness tend to be fairly irrelevant issues for young children, unless they are personally affected. Preschoolers are very concerned, however, when they cut or hurt themselves. They love getting bandages and giving adults progress reports on their healing wounds. Children this age also learn by overhearing adult conversations and snippets of news programs. They may hear about illnesses such as AIDS in this manner and ask questions.

Early lessons in wellness help children now and in the future. Understanding how diseases are transmitted and avoided is helpful when learning about diseases later in life.

Key Messages for Children:

- When people feel healthy, they are more likely to feel energetic and good about themselves.
 - When people are sick or feeling ill they often cannot do the things they usually do, such as play or help around the house.
 - Positive health habits include washing hands, eating good foods, exercising, sleeping, and brushing teeth.
-

Additional Messages for Older Preschoolers:

- There are many illnesses that make people feel sick.
 - Some illnesses or diseases can be spread from person to person.
 - Any time something is happening to children's bodies that worries them, they should talk to a parent or other trusted grown-up.
 - A germ is a kind of living thing, which is so tiny it cannot be seen. Most germs don't hurt people, but others can make people sick. For example, a cold is caused by germs. People can spread some germs to other people.
 - Many germs can be washed off with soap and water. Washing your hands after using the bathroom, before eating, and after play can help prevent the spread of germs.
 - It is important not to touch certain things such as garbage that might carry harmful germs.
 - AIDS is a disease that causes some people to get very sick.
 - The germ that causes AIDS is very hard to get. People cannot get it just by playing with or touching someone who has it.
 - If you or one of the other children is bleeding, don't touch the blood. Tell a teacher right away.
-

TOPIC 16:
WELLNESS AND DISEASE PREVENTION

“I hate being sick”

How Adults Can Help:

- Set an example of making healthy choices, and point out your choices to children: “I like to jog every day. It’s fun and it gives me energy, and it’s good exercise for my heart and lungs and muscles.”
- Make exercise a part of children’s daily activities: “We’ll walk to the playground instead of driving the van. That way we can have some exercise and enjoy the sunshine and fresh air.”
- Do stretching and breathing exercises to help children become aware of their bodies feeling good.
- Serve healthy foods and have children help prepare them: “After I cut the apples, you can arrange the slices on a plate.”

For Older Preschoolers:

- Explain why certain foods and beverages are healthy: “Yogurt has calcium, which helps keep our teeth and bones strong.”
- Commend children for their awareness of safety: “When your ball rolled into the street, you didn’t run to get it. Instead, you did just the right thing by telling me about the ball so I could get it for you.”
- Show older preschoolers the updated food pyramid to teach the value of a varied diet: “Let’s see which food groups we have in our lunch. Which food is a fruit? Are there any vegetables in your lunch?”
- Be aware that some children may have food allergies.

TOPIC 17:
SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION

Discussion

Sexual abuse must be prevented and stopped. Adults need to learn that they have a responsibility to protect children, and children must learn about the possibility of abuse.

The goals of abuse prevention are to inform children of the potential of abuse without scaring them, to assure them that abuse is never a child's fault; to emphasize that adults are responsible for keeping children safe and must be alert and responsive if any abuse is attempted or if a child says he or she has been touched sexually, and to give children specific prevention tools, such as "No/Go/Tell" (i.e., if someone attempts abuse, the child should say "no", the child should get away from the person, if possible, and the child should tell a trusted adult).

While these messages are important, it is equally important that children understand the gentle and loving touch is a wonderful part of life. Additionally, sometimes the two kinds of touching become confused, since perpetrators of child sexual abuse often use situations where there is a general lack of gentle and loving touches in a child's life (or where there are adults who are unwilling to talk about such things with children) to lure a child by saying such things as, "You like to be touched softly there, everyone does." Or, "You like it when I touch you this way because I am showing you that I like (love) you." Nonetheless, a child who knows loving touches from trusted adults may be less likely to be confused about other kinds of touch and more likely to tell a trusted adult when sexual abuse has occurred or been attempted.

Key Messages for Children:

- A child's body belongs to him or her.
 - There are good reasons for some adults to look at or touch children's bodies, such as a parent giving a child a bath or a doctor or nurse examining a child.
 - You can always come to me about anything that makes you feel bad or funny or that makes you think "uh-oh."
-

Additional Messages for Older Preschoolers:

- Children have the right to tell others not to touch their bodies when they don't want to be touched.
 - It's okay for an adult to help wipe a child's penis or vulva after you use the toilet.
 - It's wrong for an older, stronger, or bigger person to look at or touch a child's penis, vulva, or bottom without good cause.
 - If someone touches you and tells you to keep it a secret, tell an adult anyway.
 - Tell an adult if you feel mixed up about how someone has touched you.
 - Children are not wrong or bad if an older person touches or looks at them in a way that is wrong or uncomfortable.
 - Most adults would never abuse children.
 - Both boys and girls can be sexually abused.
-

TOPIC 17:
SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION

- Someone who touches you in a way that makes you feel mixed up, might be a stranger or someone you know or even someone you love.
- If a child feels uncomfortable, she or he should say “no”, get away, and tell a trusted adult who will help and understand.
- If something scary or strange happens, remember: “No, Go, Tell.”

“I don’t have to kiss or hug anybody if I don’t want to.”

How Adults Can Help:

Provide nurturing touch through hugs, hand-holding, and shoulder squeezes.

- Forbid inappropriate touching of children by other children. Gently interrupt such touch and calmly explain guidelines for touching others.
- Forbid inappropriate touching of children by caregivers and other adults. However, make sure people do not misinterpret this to mean that they should steer clear of all touching children. It is important for children to be cuddled, hugged, and held by caring adults.
- Never force a child to kiss, hug, or sit on the lap of an adult if the child doesn’t want to. Respect the child’s feelings.
- Caregivers should be trained about the mandatory reporting of known or suspected sexual abuse or potentially abusive circumstances, and understand the procedures for such reporting. They should learn to identify potential child sexual abuse. Reporting procedures should be posted on the employee bulletin board and discussed at staff meetings.
- Be aware of sex-related behavior that may indicate possible sexual abuse:

A behavior that is compulsive, repetitive, chronic, or that preoccupies a child such as constant masturbation, that interferes with the child engaging in other activities.

The child consistently seems intense, anxious, secretive, confused, brooding, or angry instead of playful.

The child’s behavior seems sexually precocious as compared with the child’s community / cultural / peer group / family norms.

The child consistently engages in violent behavior.

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For Older Preschoolers:

- Don't use the phrases "good touch" and "bad touch" to explain sexual abuse. Children are liable to misinterpret them, or to get the idea that any touching is bad, or that the breasts, genitals, buttocks are "bad" places of the body. It is more helpful to help children recognize potentially abusive situations. One way to do so is to teach them these four "clues" for recognizing a potentially abusive situation, adapted from *When Sex Is The Subject*, by Pamela M. Wilson, M.S.W.¹¹

(1) Someone wants to look at or touch the sexual parts of their bodies without a good reason. Examples of good reasons include a doctor giving a physical exam, a parent gently bathing a young child, or a parent checking out an injury.

(2) Someone bigger and stronger, typically an older child or an adult, tries to get them to do something they do not really want to do. Also, in some cases a child of the same age or even a younger age can be bigger, stronger and, therefore, intimidating. The important thing here is to clarify the power difference in an abusive situation.

(3) They sense that there is something strange about the situation. It just doesn't feel comfortable or they feel a funny (uh-oh) feeling inside. Whenever children feel that a situation just isn't right, they should talk to an adult about it.

(4) A person tells them to keep their behavior secret. Or maybe they just sense that the behavior would not take place if another adult was around.

KEY CONCEPT 6: SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Social and cultural environments shape how children learn about and express their sexuality.

TOPIC 18: GENDER ROLES

Discussion

Gender is a complex topic, which has many components including a biology, self-identity, and social roles. When a child is born often the first question asked is, “Is the baby a boy or a girl?” The answer depends on biology; females and males have different genitalia, hormones and chromosomes. Between the ages of eighteen months and three years, children develop a permanent sense of “gender identity,” which is the internal belief that one is either female or male.

Gender roles are ways of behaving and expressing maleness or femaleness. Culturally defined verbal and nonverbal messages are often rigid and confining. Girls often learn to be sweet, flirtatious, and accommodating. Boys often learn to be tough, unemotional and to avoid anything “feminine.” *Male* and *female* thus become labels that limit: “Girls may cry but boys must be tough. Boys can climb high but girls must be careful. Girls play with dolls. Boys play with action figures.”

Girls exhibiting behaviors traditionally labeled masculine are sometimes called “tomboys”. Boys choosing behaviors labeled feminine are sometimes called “sissies.” Girls who are identified as tomboys aren’t usually taunted until the onset of puberty. However, the term “sissy” is used *only* to taunt, regardless of the male child’s age. This phenomenon suggests that masculine qualities are more valued than traditional female qualities. This attitude is oppressive to both boys and girls.

Some parents fear that allowing a child to engage in activities associated with the other gender will cause the child to be gay, lesbian or bisexual. In fact, gay men and lesbians are not confused about their gender identity. Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals are comfortable being female or male, while at the same time being romantically and sexually attracted to people of the same gender or of both genders. Sexual orientation refers to a person’s internal feelings, instead they discover whether they are primarily attracted to members of the same, the other, or of both genders. Some individuals are exclusively or predominantly attracted to members of the same gender. Confusion about these issues and fear of homosexuality (homophobia) has caused many parents and other adults to limit how girls and boys express themselves.

Children have traditionally grown up to experience their gender as a dominant factor in determining their relationships, abilities, careers, and status in society. Within the last few decades, people have become more aware of the benefits of opening greater possibilities to both males and females, and the messages children receive about gender have been more carefully considered.

Yet gender stereotypes persist, as Vivian Gussin Paley describes in *Boys & Girls: Superheroes in the Doll Corner*.¹²

Domestic play looks remarkably alike for both sexes at age three. Costumes representing male and female roles are casually exchanged. Everyone cooks and eats pretend food together. Mother, father, and baby are the primary actors.... If asked, a boy will likely say he’s the father,

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GENDER ROLES**

but if he were to say mother, it would cause little concern. By the age of four...the girls prefer one mother, one father, and one baby per household.... They would like the boys to be plumbers, carpenters, and firemen, but some boys would rather be monsters or superheroes. The four-year-old boy is less comfortable in the doll corner than he was the year before; he may occasionally dress up in women's clothes or agree to be Daddy, but the superhero clique has formed and the doll corner is becoming a (girl's) room.... (Among) five- and six-year-old children...the superhero dominates boys' fantasy play and the girls turn to dramatic plots that eliminate boys and bring in more sisters and princesses.

Popular culture for children, such as cartoons, toys, toy commercials, and other media phenomena often reinforce gender stereotypes. Weekday afternoon and Saturday children's television programming are packed with cartoons aimed at either girls or boys accompanied by commercials marketing specific toys. Children watch the shows and crave the latest new toy.

The gender of the children featured in these commercials also affects young viewers. If commercials for baby dolls always feature girls playing with them, then boys will be less likely to want to "play daddy." If commercials for basketball games feature only boys, then girls will be less likely to play ball.

Children are limited when they learn that gender—a matter that is out of their control—restricts the games they play, the friends they make, the clothes they wear, the future they contemplate, even their feelings. A boy who hears "Boys don't cry" may feel he must repress his emotions. A girl who is trained not to speak up for herself because she is told "Girls shouldn't be pushy" may suppress her own talents and interests.

Adults consistently need to advocate for both boys and girls to enjoy the full spectrum of human feeling and activity. Children, and all people, should be defined according to individual attributes, not gender.

Key Messages for Children:

- Girls and boys are equally important.
- Girls and boys like to do many of the same things.
- All girls are not alike and all boys are not alike.
- Girls and boys can play together with the same games and toys.
- Boys and girls can be friends with each other.
- Girls and boys grow up to be women and men.
- Both men and women can take care of children.

Additional Messages for Older Preschoolers:

- Sometimes children are treated unfairly because they are boys or girls.
- No toys, colors, hobbies, or choices are just for girls or just for boys.
- No jobs are just for women or just for men.

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“I have lots of friends. I like Helen! I like Rafael, too!”

How Adults Can Help:

- Encourage boys and girls to use every resource in the classroom (books, toys, equipment, games, dolls, dress-ups): “Let’s give these dolls a bath. Someday you might be mommies and daddies, and you’ll give your own baby a bath.” Or, “Let’s all play with the toy cars.”
- Respond to behaviors, emotions, and language in the same way regardless of the child’s gender: “Your knee must hurt a lot from that fall! It’s okay to cry when you are hurt.”
- Use gender-inclusive language, for instance, “mail carrier” instead of mailman or “police officer” instead of policeman.
- Use posters, books, songs, pictures, and toys that provide an equally strong and positive portrayal of males and females in a variety of roles: heroes, helpers, creative thinkers, good friends, adventurers, and parents.
- Provide girls and boys with equal time, attention, praise, and constructive criticism.
- Give girls and boys equal opportunities to participate in all activities (helping tasks, team recreation, groupings for activities, active and quiet play).
- Do not use gender as a basis for grouping children. If children group themselves almost exclusively by gender, encourage them to integrate their play/work groupings: “Let’s see who’s wearing something red today. Everyone with red, come over here and form the ‘red group’.”

For Older Preschoolers:

- Emphasize the potential for any person to fulfill any occupational role: “Both men and women can be nurses. It’s an important job.”
- Encourage children to talk about how they feel about being a boy or a girl. Provide positive feedback and helpful suggestions for both genders’ accomplishments.
- Be sure field trips to community sites demonstrate men and women in a variety of roles.
- Do not limit any activities by gender, and do not assign any projects by gender.
- Talk about new outcomes for books and videos that include stereotyped images: “What if Sleeping Beauty woke up and became ruler of the kingdom? What if Cinderella decided she wanted to be a doctor instead of a princess—or wanted to be both?”

**TOPIC 19:
DIVERSITY AND EQUITY**

Discussion

While all human beings share much in common, the term *diversity* refers to the many differences among individuals and groups in our society. Children start life without prejudice or bias, and are innocently curious about other humans. Young children often observe the people around them, noting similarities and differences. When they observe someone who appears to be different from themselves or those they know, children usually have no problem asking about it, sometimes even in a loud voice: “Why is Lamika’s skin so dark?” “What happened to Uncle Jamie’s arm?” Adults who are uncomfortable discussing differences openly, often respond with “Shhh!” The child learns over time that it is impolite to ask about human differences and gets the subtle message that “different” means bad.

The following research findings are important to keep in mind:¹³

- By two years of age, children are learning the appropriate use of gender labels and learning color names, which they begin to apply to skin color.
- During their third year of life, children begin to notice gender and racial differences.
- By three years of age, children may exhibit “pre-prejudice” toward others on the basis of gender, race, or disability.
- By four or five years of age, children not only engage in gender-appropriate behavior defined by socially prevailing norms, they also reinforce it among themselves without adult intervention. They use racial reasons for refusing to interact with children different from themselves and exhibit discomfort and rejection of people with disabilities.

Adults interacting with young children have a major opportunity to both prevent and counter prejudices, which develop early and often last a lifetime. It is important to teach children that differences exist, that differences are okay, and that they can be discussed openly and honestly.

Another important issue in the discussion of diversity is the fact that people are sometimes treated unfairly because of a difference they have. Some adults think that children under five are too young to learn about discrimination, yet children have a keen sense of fairness. For example, children often say, “It’s not fair. She gets to ride the bike longer than I do!” Adults can point out unfair treatment when it happens to children and insist on an educational and social environment that treats all people fairly.

Key Messages for Children:

- People are not all the same.
 - It is okay to ask and talk about how people are different from one another.
 - All people should be respected.
 - All people should be treated fairly.
-

**TOPIC 19:
DIVERSITY AND EQUITY**

Additional Messages for Preschoolers:

- There are differences in the ways people look, speak, think, act, and live.
- All people have families and feelings and want friends, and want to feel good about themselves.
- Talking about how they are different and alike can help people understand each other.
- Thinking that all members of a group are the same is unfair.
- Some people are treated unfairly because of their differences.

“We are different but the same, too!”

How Adults Can Help:

- Talk with children about how people are alike and different. Encourage them to talk about what they see and express what they feel. It is better to bring any bias into the open than to stay silent and leave children to wonder about it alone.
- Provide an assortment of dolls, toys, and books that portray people of various backgrounds: “Look at all the different people on the bus in this picture!”
- Answer children’s questions about disability candidly: “Yes, that person uses a wheelchair because he can’t walk.”

For Older Preschoolers:

- Make sure children understand that people with disabilities have a wide range of feelings and thoughts, and that children can converse with them just as they do with people who do not have disabilities.
- Introduce children to a variety of people, music, foods, art, dance, books, and other cultural riches. Invite guests to class, read books or stories by a wide array of writers, and watch TV shows or videos that feature people of varied backgrounds.
- Explain why discrimination is wrong and unfair: “It’s sad, but some people don’t want to have neighbors who are different from themselves. It’s not right to treat people unfairly because they have a different skin color, religion, or language, or because they have a disability, or because of with whom they choose to live.”
- Affirm the value of people who are aging: “I know that your Grandma sometimes has a hard time hearing you. I hope her new hearing aid will help. She has a lot to tell you about, and she wants to know what you have to say, too. Just imagine how much we will know when we are her age.”

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