



STOP child
abuse
Through
effective
training and
augmented
reality

Inappropriate touching

Inappropriate touching

Summary

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Inappropriate
Touching –
General
Information



Inappropriate or unwanted touches

Inappropriate or unwanted touches are those touches that can make a child feel **uncomfortable**; they usually pertain a **sexual context**. It is the inappropriate **exposure** or **subjecting** of a **child** to **sexual contact, activity** or **behaviour**. These touches might not hurt/be safe, but they are unwanted and make you feel uncomfortable.

Safe & unsafe touches

Safe touches have a **good purpose** and are **not aimed to hurt** the child physically, sexually or emotionally. On the contrary, they aim to keep the child clean and healthy, even if they might hurt. Unsafe touches are **inappropriate** and **aim to scare or hurt** the child and violate the safety rules. Such touches can hurt the child, physically or emotionally, such as shoving, hitting, punching, kicking, etc.

Characteristics of inappropriate touching

- Inappropriate touches might hurt the child;

- The person who touches the child inappropriately might ask them not to tell anyone or keep it a secret;

- Such touches make the child feel uncomfortable;

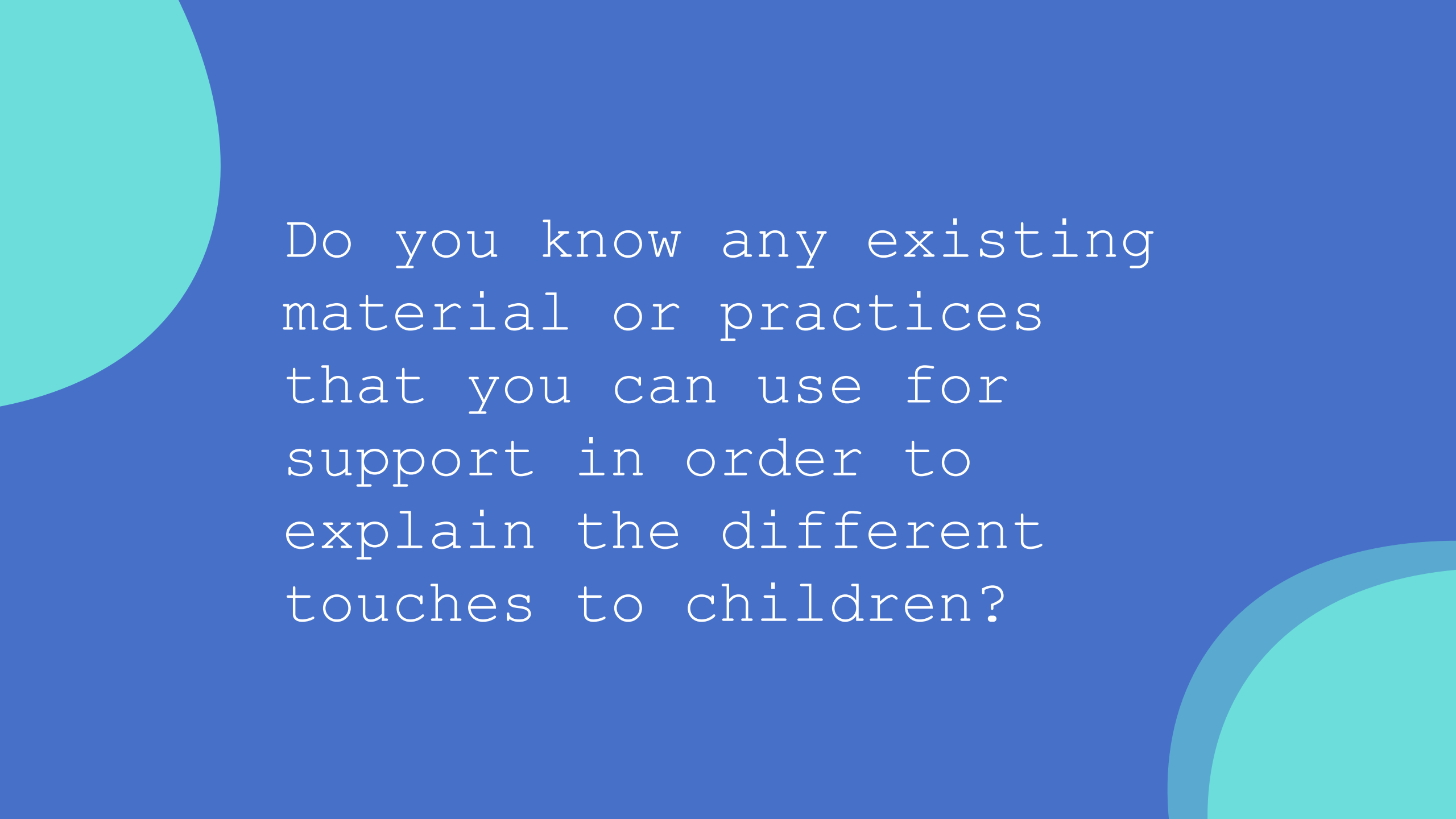
- Such touches make the child feel scared and/or nervous;

- It is an unsafe touch if a person forces the child to touch them;

- It is an inappropriate touch if a person threatens to hurt the child if they tell someone.

Examples of inappropriate touching

- *It is not okay for someone to touch your private parts.*
- *It is not okay for someone to ask to see your private parts.*
- *It is not okay for someone to show you their private parts.*
- *It is not okay for someone to touch their private parts while you are present.*
- *It is not okay for someone to show you pictures or videos of someone else's private parts.*
- *It is not okay for someone to ask you to take your clothes off.*

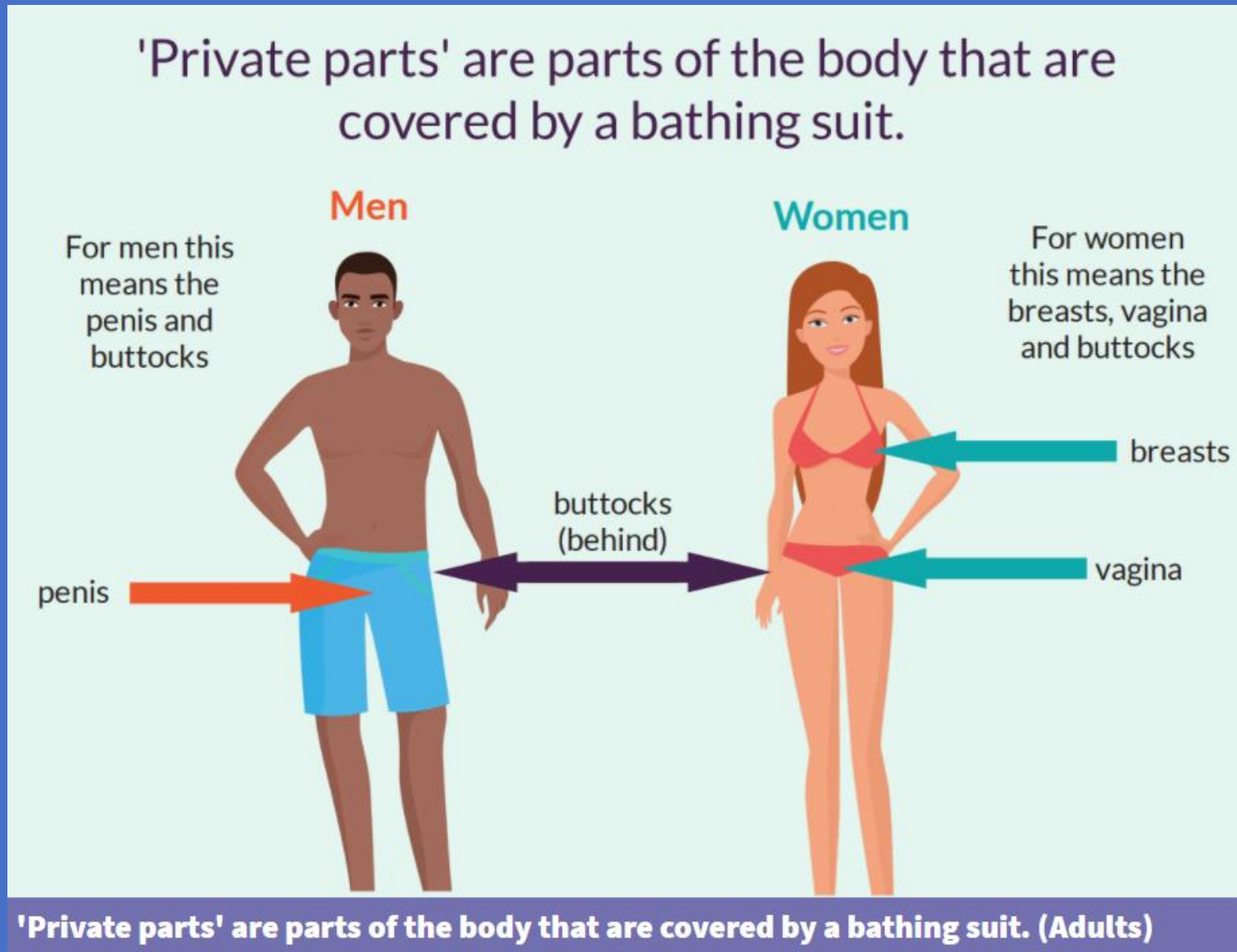


Do you know any existing material or practices that you can use for support in order to explain the different touches to children?

Kiko and the Hand – Council of Europe



Be Safe: What are Private Parts - ASERT



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My private
parts/
privacy




Private parts

The private parts are defined as the **external genital** and **excretory organs**. A useful way to teach children about the private parts is the swimsuit/underwear rule; according to the rule no one can touch or see the parts of your body that are covered by a swimsuit/underwear or ask you to touch their body parts that are covered by a swimsuit or an underwear.

Private parts



Children should be taught that '**they are the bosses of their bodies**' – no one has the right to touch them without their permission. Everyone should respect their privacy and in case this is not respected, they should inform someone they trust.



Private

parts

Children should be taught the **official/formal names** of their **body parts**, so as to be able to describe an incident and set their boundaries.

The correct anatomical words for their body parts, will make children understand that it is ok to talk about these parts and will help them talk about sexual harassment and/or abuse, in case it happens. Older children can be provided more information.

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Perpetrators
of
inappropriate
touching



Perpetrators

Although it is hard for children to understand that someone close to them could hurt or abuse them, it is important that they understand that a person from their close environment could be a perpetrator as well. However, it should be clear that the rules usually set for the communication with strangers still apply.

Perpetrators

Perpetrators usually try to **earn the trust** of the child and **remove them from their safe environment** . Some of the common practices can be efforts to spend time alone with the child, photographing the child, befriending the child in social media, constant gestures of excessive affection such as constant kisses, hugs and tickling, buying treats and gifts for the child.

Methods followed

- Perpetrators work patiently to gain the trust and friendship of the child and, often, the people close to them; they try to engage the child in a gradual process of sexualising the relationship.
- They pay special attention to the child's habits, likes and dislikes, finding ways to interact.
- They might also try to 'test' whether the child is able to protect themselves, by engaging in physical touches, such as hugs, kisses, back rubs and other gestures involving touching.
- Finally, they take advantage of the child's curiosity; if they identify that the child seems comfortable and/or curious about touching, they slowly increase the sexual contact.

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Indicators of
psychological
pain caused
by
inappropriate
touching



Impact

Although there are **no absolute diagnostic indicators** of harassment/abuse, it is common for children that have had relevant experiences to feel **shame, guilt, anxiety** and **fear**, as they frequently take personal responsibility for the abuse when the perpetrator is someone they trust. Childhood harassment and abuse have been correlated with **higher levels of depression, guilt, shame, eating disorders, self-blame, somatic concerns, sexual problems, dissociative patterns, repression, anxiety, denial,** and **relationship problems.**

Impact

Some signs of such incidents can be the **change in mood and appetite**, the **withdrawal from family and friends** and the **avoidance of specific people**.

Children that have experienced inappropriate touching can have **sexual knowledge** that does **not correspond to their age**, **bed-wetting** and **nightmares**.

Adolescents might develop fear of intimacy or closeness, depression, anxiety, drug or alcohol abuse, self-injury or run away from home.

Sexualised behaviours

- Incidents have a greater frequency or take place during a much earlier developmental stage than what considered appropriate
- Sexual behaviours interfering with the child's development
- Sexual behaviours that are accompanied by the use of coercion, intimidation or force
- Sexual behaviours that are associated with emotional distress
- Sexual behaviours that reoccur in secrecy upon the intervention of a caregiver

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How to react
when informed
about a case
of
inappropriate
touching



Trusted adults

Children need to have a network of people they trust and be able to confide in them relevant matters. They should be encouraged to select a number of **trusted adults**, out of which only one should live with them. Children should have all the information of how to reach these adults.

How do we react?

- Talk privately with the child, pay close attention and be a good listener.
- Do not interrupt the child or bombard them with questions.
- Do not try to examine the credibility of the facts as expressed by the child; try to get all necessary data you need to report the incident to the police.
- Remain calm and try not to show any signs of shock or disgust.
- In case the child confides that the perpetrator was one of the parents do not try to accuse them, but try to show your understanding and support to the child.
- Reassure the child that they are doing the right thing and it is not their fault.

How do we react?

- Bear in mind that the child might not remember all the details of an incident at once.
- Be patient and alert on triggers that might rake up memories that can cause a cluster of emotions and, in case of a traumatic incident, can lead the person to a fragile psychological state.

In case this happens, one can use stress relief techniques, such as concentrated breathing and progressive muscle relaxation, as an emergency measure, before referring the child to counselling or other relevant interventions.

How do we react?

It is not uncommon for a child who has suffered sexual harassment and/or abuse to delay to confide to someone, maybe because they do not want to upset their family, or because they do not feel safe to do so. Children might decide not to confide the incident until the perpetrator is no longer in their life or might talk about it in an indirect manner; you should be alert on hints stated by the child, for example 'I don't want to play this game with aunt Cloe anymore'.



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