

Institutional Norms Exercise

For agencies serving young children

The following questions can be used to start discussions among staff in child serving institutions as a tool for management to communicate the policies and procedures in place to promote appropriate boundaries. These answers will change with the age of the children being served, the formality of the institution and the experience of the staff.

Detail on these and related topics can be found in *The Sex-Wise Parent*, (Skyhorse, 2012) Chapter 6.

What terms will we use with kids about all body parts? How and when will you use them?

Discussion point: Children need words for genitalia easily understood by others.

Will we have a dress code for both staff and students?

Discussion point: Privacy, modesty, self-respect

When will we let a child toilet by himself?

Discussion points: Privacy, modesty, safety.

How will we react to hugging and kissing?

Discussion points: Control over their own body, choice, respect.

What will we do when a child's curiosity leads him to touch your body?

Discussion points: Privacy, role-modeling setting boundaries gently but firmly.

How will we react when we see a child touching his or her genitalia?

Discussion points: Autonomic arousal, avoid associating sexual pleasure with fear/guilt/shame.

How can we support a child's enjoyment of all her senses: the taste of food, the smell of a beloved person, the feel of fabric, the warmth of human touch?

Discussion points: Healthy sexuality is positive, wonderful and life affirming; too many parents only discuss the dangers and kids deserve a balanced perspective.

Once a child serving agency has clarified their values on these issues, these positions should be codified into policies and procedures and shared with all staff and parents.

Like any policy, it should be reviewed annually.