



‘Mom, Dad, what does rape mean?’

Authored By Protsahan India
Foundation

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India Foundation



‘Mom, Dad, what does rape mean?’

We live in cruel world, a world where rape culture is prevalent. Child victims are blamed for their abuse. Sexual violence against children and girls is normalized. Violence against anyone can never be normal and children need to know that. Let’s learn how!

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Protsahan's vision is that all girls living in situations of vulnerability, grow up empowered with access to education and healthcare in safe spaces, with greater freedom from all forms of abuse and violence; and those who experienced abuse or violence, benefit from greater access to healing, care, support, gender justice and other services needed to ensure physical, mental and social well-being.

The vision is achieved by using The HEART model which is a unique empathy-based model developed by Protsahan in 2010 of working with children and adolescents at-risk or who have experienced traumatic events. It strives to break the inter-generational cycle of violence and abuse against children and adolescents through Holistic healing (of abuse and trauma), Education, Art interventions for life skills training, Recovery and Technology.

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ABC of safety talk with children—“Always Be Careful”

When an 11 year old girl gets gang-raped by 22 men in Chennai , India for a period of seven months (2018) and when even the country’s government data from [National Crime Records Bureau](#) states that a child in India is molested every 15 minutes, you as an educator and/or parent know that keeping shhh’ed up about rape is not an option. Uncomfortable and life-altering as this news is going to be for children, intentionally raising your kids to understand consent, sexuality, rape, and safe and unsafe touch makes all the difference. Every day, when such news makes the headlines, your children are not hidden from hearing it. So, why not then, have a conversation with them that prepares them to take care of themselves. At Protsahan, we call it the **ABC of safety talk with children—Always Be Careful.**

It can be awkward to talk to your little ones about sex, let alone rape. After all, making them understand this grotesque side of the world means giving up on something you, as a parent, want to preserve for as long as you can—their innocence. More than anything, you don’t want to scare them off about bodily processes and anatomy as well. But as several reports globally indicate, the chances of our [child getting molested](#) are higher than getting hit by a car on the street, we know that having the “talk” is imperative. As a parent or educator, protecting our children comes first and if this talk is what will make them safer, then so be it.

An informed kid is an empowered kid

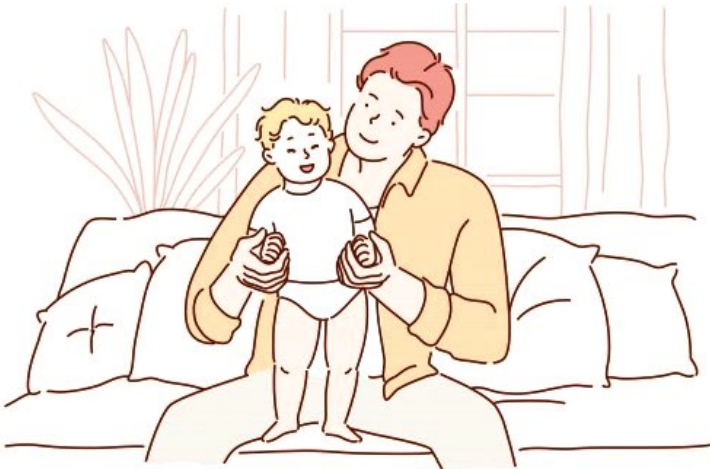
Don’t wait for your child to bring it up; chances are they won’t know how to gather their wits to ask you about this in the first

place. If your child does ask you about sexual assault and rape, either because they have heard it on the television or on social media, keep the conversation informative, positive and age-appropriate. When talking about rape and molestation, simplify it in a manner that they can easily comprehend. It's not rocket science once you simply understand that it all boils down to the idea of **consent**.



The more children know about sex and sexuality, the safer they are. Places in India today have become hubs of sexual violence and a living hell for children solely because kids lack the information they need to make sense of what is happening. This makes them believe that they are the culprits. So rather than changing the topic, when it comes up, talk to your kids about **boundaries and prevention**. Don't throw alarming statistics in their face; you are only going to leave them frightened. Harness the power of 'teaching moments' and be as truthful as you possibly can. Connect the different points in your conversation with fine threads of empathy and compassion as a parent or

educator. **Your awkwardness is not a reason justified enough to leave your child un-informed about the topic of sexual assault, rape and consent.**



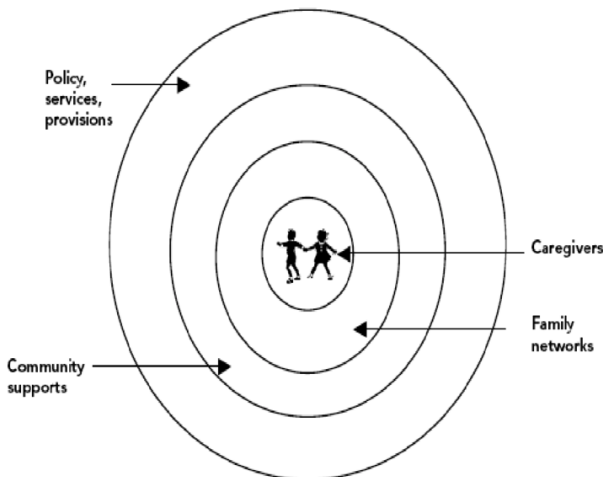
How you can broach the subject

Openly mentioning sex and as a result sexual abuse is taboo even in today's times but if your child's safety is on the line, it is critical to have these talks, both with girls as well as boys. Having this discussion in college is too late. Begin as early as when your kids are in kindergarten, with age specific information of safe and unsafe touches.

- * Initially, teach your kids about **consent** without bringing any sexual angle to it. Talk to your kids as early as when they are three years old.
- * For slightly older children, between ages five to eight and above, ask open-ended questions, without the connotation of sexuality first, such as "Do you understand what consent

(Hindi: *sehmati*) is?”, “Do you know what it means when everyone involved, consents to a situation?” By the way, if a person threatens someone or bribes someone into doing something, that’s not consent.

- * Teach both genders the importance of “Saying No” to something they don’t approve of. Equally importantly, tell them the importance of “Accepting No” gracefully, as well as its opposing ideas. Tell them when they say no, it has to be clear.
- * Never **force** your child “to receive affection” from anyone, even if it’s a family member. Societal manners is one thing, forcing them to be in an uncomfortable hug with an annoying uncle or grandfather, another. You should be aware enough as a parent too, to know the difference.
- * Gradually move towards consent with regards to body privacy and permission, the importance of safe and unsafe touch.
- * Ask them to do a simple activity of ‘circle of safety’ or ‘suraksha ghera’ (click for YouTube video tutorial) where the child draws and mentions 2-3 adults that can be trusted and to know their contact numbers by heart at all times.



- * Teach the child, about the **Child Helpline number in India, 1098** and how the child can call on this toll free number to report a case of child abuse.



- * Ask your child how s/he is going to react if someone steps over his/her boundary. Teach them how to deal with the situation by referring to people in the 'circle of safety' or '*suraksha ghera*'.
- * Talk about trust and being confident enough to step away if a situation seems fishy. Tell them that someone you like or who seems nice can still force you to have sex. **Girls need to learn that it's alright not to be polite all the time.** It's okay for girls to be angry, it's equally okay for boys to cry. Handling emotions, is what you as a parent or caregiver, need to effectively teach a child.
- * If a child tells you something (disclosures of abuse), listen. Trust. Investigate. Don't ever operate from a fixated standpoint, right from the beginning itself, that your child is lying. If a child loses hope and trust in you, to disclose sensitive matters, it's a parent's failure, not of the child.
- * **Understand how to identify signs of abuse, depression, sadness in your child.** The first step to understanding is,

spending enough time with your child. Never underestimate the importance of a family meal, some playtime, book reading times with your child. Times spent on video games, television, laptop and iPad has the child distracted way too much anyway to have a sensible conversation.



Sit and talk to them about how their day has been. They'll themselves talk to you. A child almost always understands compassion and care of an elder, whether or not they choose to mention it.

Slowly, as they continue growing, talk to them about date rapes and rapes in teenage years and how it is wrong. **Teach them about gender, society's view on it, gender specific roles and how it has the power to walk over consent.** Sex education shouldn't only be about getting pregnant or 'family planning' and protecting oneself against STDs, it also needs to delve into a person's ability to consent to or refuse sex, maintain boundaries and condom use.

We live in cruel world, a world where rape culture is prevalent. Victims are blamed for sexual abuse. **Violence against anyone can never be normal and children need to know that.**

Sexual abuse is a sinister type of trauma, evil because of the simple fact that children are too young to express what they are going through. The pain, trauma, and fear a child goes through are frightening to even fathom. So when your child asks you “What does rape mean?” don’t freak out as a parent or caregiver. It is better to prepare them for their safety rather than ‘hope’ they will never go through it. **‘Hope’ alone is never the best strategy for child’s safety.**

