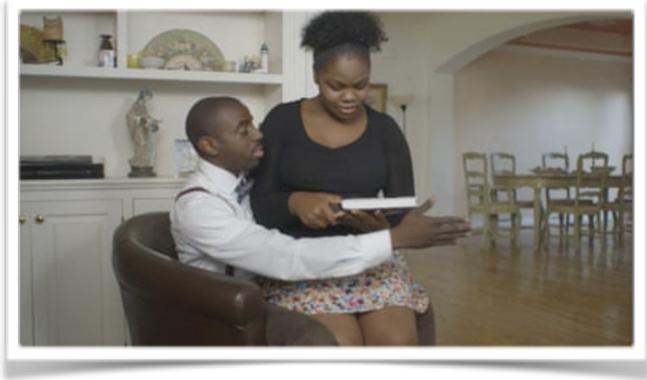


# GET RESULTS WITH BETTER CONVERSATIONS

## What do you do about sexually inappropriate behavior?



First, manage your expectations.

Don't be surprised when young people in your care act inappropriately. Children who have been sexually abused don't have good boundaries. They may be trying to show affection. They may think the inappropriate behavior is a way to earn approval. The good news is that when a young person within your influence behaves inappropriately, you have an opportunity to teach them the right way to be in relationship.

Here are some suggestions for healthy responses to inappropriate behavior:

- Calm yourself before you speak to the youth.** You may feel angry or betrayed by their behavior. If you exhibit your anger to the youth, you will trigger their flight or fight response and they will not process your message. **Pause and take a deep breath before you do or say anything.**
- Never shame the young person. Be careful your words are value natural when you are acting to diffuse the situation.** If you shame the youth

Kids who have been sexualized act in sexually provocative ways.

through your words or actions you will trigger their flight or fight response and they will not hear what you are saying. They will respond to you angrily and nothing will be achieved. As a first step, try to redirect their attention or behavior. If their actions are physical try to draw them away from the situation by asking for help somewhere else. **Although the youth's behavior may be overtly sexual, they may not realize it is inappropriate. Shaming them will only serve to hurt them and your message will not be processed.**

- ☑ **Create a space between the event and your interaction with the youth.** If either you or the youth cannot calm down or if you believe that a conversation at the time of discovery will cause flight or fight do not undertake the conversation. **This does not mean that you should leave the youth or any one else in a dangerous environment.**

**“Kids who have been sexually abused have distorted ideas about what is appropriate. They don't know what healthy boundaries are until we show them better options.”**

—RHONDA SCIORTINO

- ☑ **Never ask “Why” questions.**

Asking the youth, “Why they were breaking the rules,” or “Why they were taking acting sexually,” are hard questions to answer and may lead to them lying.

**Instead ask “How and What” questions.**

**For instance “How did the response you got from the other person make you feel? “What were you feeling that caused you to act that way?”**

- ☑ **Coach all your responses to their rule breaking in terms of your concern for their safety.** Explain how their inappropriate sexual behavior can lead to potential physical and/or psychological damage. Reactions from others to their behavior may cause them physical harm and their behavior may ultimately cause them to break one or

more laws. **Do not let yourself be goaded into punitive actions. Employ facts that prove your concerns about safety.**

 **Do Not Lecture. Listen.** Listen to what the youth has to say. Reflect back to them your understanding of their thoughts and needs in a value neutral or sympathetic fashion. Do not tell them you know how they feel. Tell them you hear what they are saying. Never use the word But. **Remember your job is to teach them how to be safe, NOT to judge their behavior.**

 **Empower The Youth To Create A Safer Way to Deal With Their Feelings.** Collaborate with the youth in exploring creative ideas to safely deal with the feelings, and needs that caused them to use or sell drugs. **If an idea is the youth's (even if you guided them to it) they will embrace it more strongly than if it came from you.**

 **Make sure the consequence for the youth's rule breaking is not larger than the size and scope of their offense and is directly related to their behavior and their safety.** If a particular place, person or article(s) of clothing triggers this behavior you will have to ask them to give it up until they can demonstrate to you they can handle the situation and their behavior safely. **Make sure they understand they are not being punished but that your actions are to help them remain safe.**

 **Understand that Traumatized Children may look and be chronologically one age but are psychologically a much younger age.** Many traumatized youth do not understand their sexuality and do not intend for their actions to be sexual, they think they are being friendly.

The best way to help heal the hurts of sexual abuse is to show love and concern for a child that is not conditioned on anything they are required to do. Remember that the only affection they may have ever experienced was conditioned on them complying with someone else's wrong desires.

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## **Ascertain what the youth knows about reproduction and**

**sexuality.** Traumatized youth who may have moved from home to home may not have had reproduction and sexuality accurately explained to them. Find out what they know, and then in simple factual terms without displaying discomfort or



awkwardness explain human sexuality to the youth. **If it is difficult for you to have this conversation find someone in your life who the youth gets along with to have it with them. Remember if you act embarrassed the youth will get the wrong message about their behavior and the facts.**



## **Realize that one interaction probably will not end the youth's**

**inappropriate behavior.** There are deeply rooted psychological reasons a youth acts out sexually. Some of these reasons may be tied to their feelings about or their experiences with their birth parents.

It will take time, patience, and a commitment to love and listening to heal the youth in your care. **They are worth it.**

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