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## **About Grow Engage Read Imagine (GERI)**

Grow Engage Read Imagine (GERI) is a program offered by Safe Haven and is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Safe Haven is a comprehensive domestic violence agency located in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Safe Haven believes violence is completely preventable. We believe that we can inspire our community and others to unite in ending violence. This reading initiative seeks to use books to heal, teach, and empower.

The goal of the GERI initiative is to prevent domestic and sexual violence using books and corresponding reading guides to help facilitate education and discussion around themes of the book. Additionally, the GERI seeks to:

- Prevent violence
- Be inclusive of marginalized voices
- Challenge social norms that accept violence
- Empower girls and young women to be leaders in their community
- Teach young people the power of their voices
- Give caregivers and parents tools and resources to help them have ongoing conversations with their child(ren), even when those conversations can be difficult

GERI's target audience is Pre-K through high school-aged youth. The selected books are age-appropriate and rooted in child development theory, best reading practices for children/teens, and best practice in violence prevention education. The books are also influenced by current social trends and narratives. The main themes that will be explored include:

- Boundaries
- Gender roles
- Toxic masculinity
- Youth leadership
- Consent
- Body image
- Girl empowerment
- Domestic/sexual violence.

Through exposure to content that models appropriate actions and attitudes around these topics, GERI will promote healthy social norms that protect against violence.

In addition to the printed Reading Guide that is provided, you can also find more books and resources on the GERI website: [www.GeriGR.org](http://www.GeriGR.org)

## **Content Warning**

We know that some of the books we include contain stories that show different types of harm. Our goal is not to show or promote violence simply for entertainment, but we also know that violence is a reality in our world. Many of our community members face violence day-to-day. GERI shares these stories to help readers handle and talk about the violence in their own lives. As part of Safe Haven Ministries, we want to help readers talk about hard topics like sexual assault, domestic violence, and other forms of violence. We know that these issues deeply impact our community.

When you're reading, remember your own self-care. When something you read is too much, stop reading, take a break, and reach out to someone you trust to talk about why you feel overwhelmed.

## **Handling Disclosures**

It is difficult to imagine that anyone would want to harm a child. But the truth is that there are many people who will. About 1 in 10 children are sexually abused before they turn 18. Sometimes, talking to children about topics addressed in the GERI books can lead to a child opening up about violence or abuse they have experienced. We call this "making a disclosure."

It's usually difficult to receive this disclosure, but it's important to remember that this is a result of your support. The child felt safe enough to tell you. This is important because, all too often, children and teens don't initially disclose abuse out of fear.

Below are three important steps you can take following a disclosure:

- 1) Thank them for trusting you and let them know you believe them.
- 2) Let them know that what was done to them was not their fault and that you're sorry they were harmed.
- 3) Keep them away from the person who harmed them
- 4) Seek professional help to support them

## **What I Just Read Has Triggered Me!**

Reading about any type of violence can be hard. If you have experienced violence or abuse, it can be especially difficult to talk to your child(ren) about topics that remind you of your abuse.

A trigger is a connection to a traumatic event that may cause a deep and emotional reaction. Triggers can be smells, colors, songs, touches, and even certain words. Triggers can be anything, and there is no way to fully prevent a potential trigger.

Reading these books with a child or discussing the books can bring up difficult feelings. These feelings are normal. To address these challenges, try building a system of support that helps you as you begin to explore more of these topics in depth with the children in your life. These additional supports will aid in processing those hurtful reminders and understanding the responses you may have to them.

Supports may look like:

- Calling hotlines that specialize in domestic and sexual violence
- Reaching out to advocates at local domestic and sexual violence agencies
- Having a friend, a family member, or a partner that you can speak with
- Putting a pause on the discussion until you're emotionally ready to continue

You aren't alone, and you don't have to go through it alone. On page 11 of this toolkit, you will find information on resources in your community.

## The Basics of Consent

Consent is permission or an agreement for something to happen. Consent needs to be clear. Talks about consent most commonly refer to engaging in sexual activity. But consent is more than that. Conversations around consent should be rooted in the idea that everyone has the right to own themselves.

For younger children, a good time to start conversations about consent is when you're on the topic of sharing. Empowering children to respect when a friend doesn't want to share something or engage in types of touching, like hugging, is a great way to work the basics of consent into your conversations.

A helpful acronym developed by Planned Parenthood is to think of consent like FRIES:

- F- Freely given
- R-Reversible
- I-Informed
- E-Enthusiastic
- S- Specific

### *Freely given*

A person does not feel forced or made to say yes.

- Example: "If you give Grandma a kiss we can get ice cream." That is not a consenting yes, because in order to get the ice cream you had to be coerced into doing something you maybe didn't want to do.

### *Reversible*

People have the right to change their minds at any point.

- Example: You agreed to a playdate with friends, but later decided you would rather stay home. You can change your mind at any point about the things you want and don't want.

### *Informed*

A person has to have all the information associated with a situation to decide if they want to do anything involving it.

- Example: You agreed to go to the park with your friend, but when you get there you realize the park is a splash pad and you don't like splash pads. You might not have agreed to play with your friend if you knew it involved playing in the water.

### *Enthusiastic*

For a yes to be a true yes, it has to be genuine. People may agree to do something, but are they happy to do it? Is there a hesitation in their reply?

- Example: “ Yes! I will try going down the slide by myself!” and “Ugh, I am really scared to go down the slide by myself...but I guess I will do it.”  
The first example is enthusiastic, while the second is not. The second example is also a good way to practice checking in with someone. In response to the second prompt, you could say, “Are you sure you want to go down the slide? If you do not want to, that's okay too.”

### *Specific*

A person can agree to say yes to one thing and say no to another.

- Example: I can say yes to a hug, but that doesn't mean that I want to be kissed on the cheek.

The way we talk to children and tweens or teens about consent is obviously going to be different. Throughout different stages of life, it is important to emphasize with children and teens that they are the masters of their bodies and experiences. Empower them to know that they have the right to say yes and no when feeling unsafe.

Just as important to the conversation of consent is teaching children and teens to respect the boundaries that others set. If someone says no to something or shows that they are uncomfortable with something, it is not an invitation to try to convince them or talk them into saying yes.

## Safe, Unsafe, and Unwanted Touches

Helping children recognize how to communicate their feelings is one of the many ways we can keep them safe. Often, it's easy to use words like "good" or "bad" because they are simple for young children to understand. You might have even heard of "good touch, bad touch" used to teach kids about sexual abuse. The problem with this phrase is that sometimes a bad touch can feel like a good one. Children can get confused by this. Because they aren't at the developmental stage to explain the nuances of what they go through, this isn't something we want to use.

Instead, use "safe and unsafe touch." These phrases can be used to describe an array of situations beyond sexual abuse, which helps to familiarize children with these words and how they might be used. For example, a parent or caregiver might redirect a child trying to touch a hot stove by saying "that is an unsafe touch."

Below are some examples and ways that you can explain safe and unsafe touch to children:

**Safe touches** are touches that make someone feel cared for or help keep them healthy and clean:

- Grandma giving you a goodnight hug (when you consent to this)
- Daddy giving you a forehead kiss before he leaves for work
- The doctor giving you a check up
- A trusted adult helping you take a bath

**Unsafe touches** are touches that hurt or make someone feel bad or sad:

- Being bit, slapped, punched, and pinched
- Someone touching your private parts
- Someone telling you to touch their private parts
- Someone telling you to keep an unsafe secret

Using correct and anatomically accurate names to describe body parts, including private parts is also an important part of this conversation. Instead of giving nicknames for body parts, use words like vulva, vagina, penis, testicles, and anus.

**Unwanted touches** are kinds of touches that are safe, but a child doesn't want. Just like adults, children don't want to be hugged, kissed, or touched all the time. Sometimes, they don't want a good night hug or a good morning kiss. Normalizing this choice and respecting the boundary they are setting is an important way to mirror

positive behavior. Teach children that they have the right to say no and determine who they want to receive affection from. This is an important part of helping them build strong and healthy boundaries.

### **Rules to Share with Kids About their Private Parts**

Once a child knows how to name their genitals and other parts of their body, here are some rules that can be shared for keeping them safe.

**PANTS** - an acronym thats easy for children to remember:

**P**- Privates are private

**A**- Always remember your body belongs to you

**N**- No means no

**T**- Talk about secrets that upset you

**S**- Speak up so someone can help you

## **Consent for Tweens**

Conversations about consent are going to look and feel a lot different for tweens and teens. Things like puberty, the beginning of dating relationships, and the normal challenges and struggles of growing up can cause stress or worry around having conversations with your kid. It is normal to experience this or to be unsure of where to begin.

One important recommendation is to avoid having the “The Talk” — a single conversation about topics like sex and consent. Instead, normalize these topics and lessen the tension by having multiple ongoing conversations with your child through their tween and teen years. Encourage and empower youth to speak to the adults in their lives about the hardships or questions they have.

## **Talking with Teens About Consent**

One effective strategy to talk to young adults about consent is to ask them what they already know. This demonstrates that you trust them and believe they are capable of having conversations on these topics. Ask questions like:

- Have you learned about consent?
- Do you know what it means?
- Where have you heard it used?
- What does it mean to people your age?
- What does it mean to you?

These last two questions are extremely important. Your teen can be an expert in their own experience. Allow them to own that expertise and teach you what they know. This gives you both insight to what they still need to learn and where they are emotionally and mentally with the subject.

Along with this, remind them that their body belongs to them. They get to decide who has permission to touch, kiss, and eventually have sex with them. We may not be ready for our teens to start having sex or even date, but it’s important for these conversations to happen now so they can form these boundaries with peers and partners in the future.

Ask questions like:

- How do you let people know when you are feeling uncomfortable?
- Do you feel it's easy to tell your friends/person you're dating no?
- What are some boundaries you have already established with people?
- Do you feel like you are prepared to tell someone no if they want to have sex with you?
- What would you do if you wanted to have sex with someone and they didn't?
- How do you respect the boundaries that someone has set?

These questions can help you work with a young adult to learn how they can form boundaries when someone is making them uncomfortable. This also can lead to other conversations about how young adults can respect others' feelings. Just as important as being able to set boundaries is acknowledging that their "no" is not the only "no" that matters. Other people also have boundaries that need to be respected.

### **Gender-Specific Conversations About Consent**

Conversations about consent may vary because of gender. Traditionally, much of the conversation around consent has emphasized that girls must do everything within their power to say no. They must be on high alert and do their very best to not become a victim of assault. On the other hand, conversations around consent that involve boys can sometimes lack accountability, and instead focus on ideas like "boys will be boys". In addressing this issue, the goal is not to vilify boys, but instead recognize that there are social norms at play that can sometimes impact the way different genders view their responsibility around consent.

It is important to teach boys that force is not an acceptable way to display emotion or wants from friends or dating partners. Young men and boys often experience a lot of social pressure to demonstrate their masculinity in very limiting ways. In addition, teens of all genders can experience pressure to act in a certain way. It is just as important to teach boys that they are allowed to be sad and upset as it is to teach girls that establishing a boundary does not make them mean or undesirable.

Our conversations about consent should be consistent and equal for all young people.

## Local Resources

This guide was created with the intent to give people who care for children and youth the tools to talk with them about tough subjects. Having these kinds of conversations are hard and rarely are they easy. Do your best and speak from a place of love and care.

And if you or someone that you know has or is experiencing violence, the following are local resources that can give you additional help for free:

Safe Haven Ministries

Website: [www.shmgr.org](http://www.shmgr.org)

24/7 Hotline: 616- 452- 6664

YWCA West Central Michigan

Website: [www.ywcawcmi.org](http://www.ywcawcmi.org)

24/7 Hotline: 616-454 -9922

Children's Advocacy Center of Kent County

Website: [www.cac-kent.org](http://www.cac-kent.org)

Number: 616-336-5160

Michigan Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence (MCEDSV)

Website: [www.mcedsv.org](http://www.mcedsv.org)

24/7 Hotline: 855-864- 2374 or text 866-238-1454

## National Resources

Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN)

Website: <https://www.rainn.org/>

24/7 Hotline: 800-656-4673

## Bibliography

[https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/sexual\\_development\\_and\\_behavior\\_in\\_c](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/sexual_development_and_behavior_in_c)

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/underwear-rule/>

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/child-trauma.pdf>

<https://www.cfchildren.org/blog/2017/08/activity-teaching-touching-safety-rules-safe-and-unsafe-touching/>

<https://sexpositivefamilies.com/when-adults-arent-respecting-childs-consent/>

<https://sexpositivefamilies.com/how-to-respond-to-genital-play-between-kids/>

<https://grownandflown.com/six-tips-teenage-son-consent/>

<https://parents.au.reachout.com/common-concerns/everyday-issues/things-to-try-sex/how-to-teach-your-teenager-about-consent>

<https://amaze.org/>