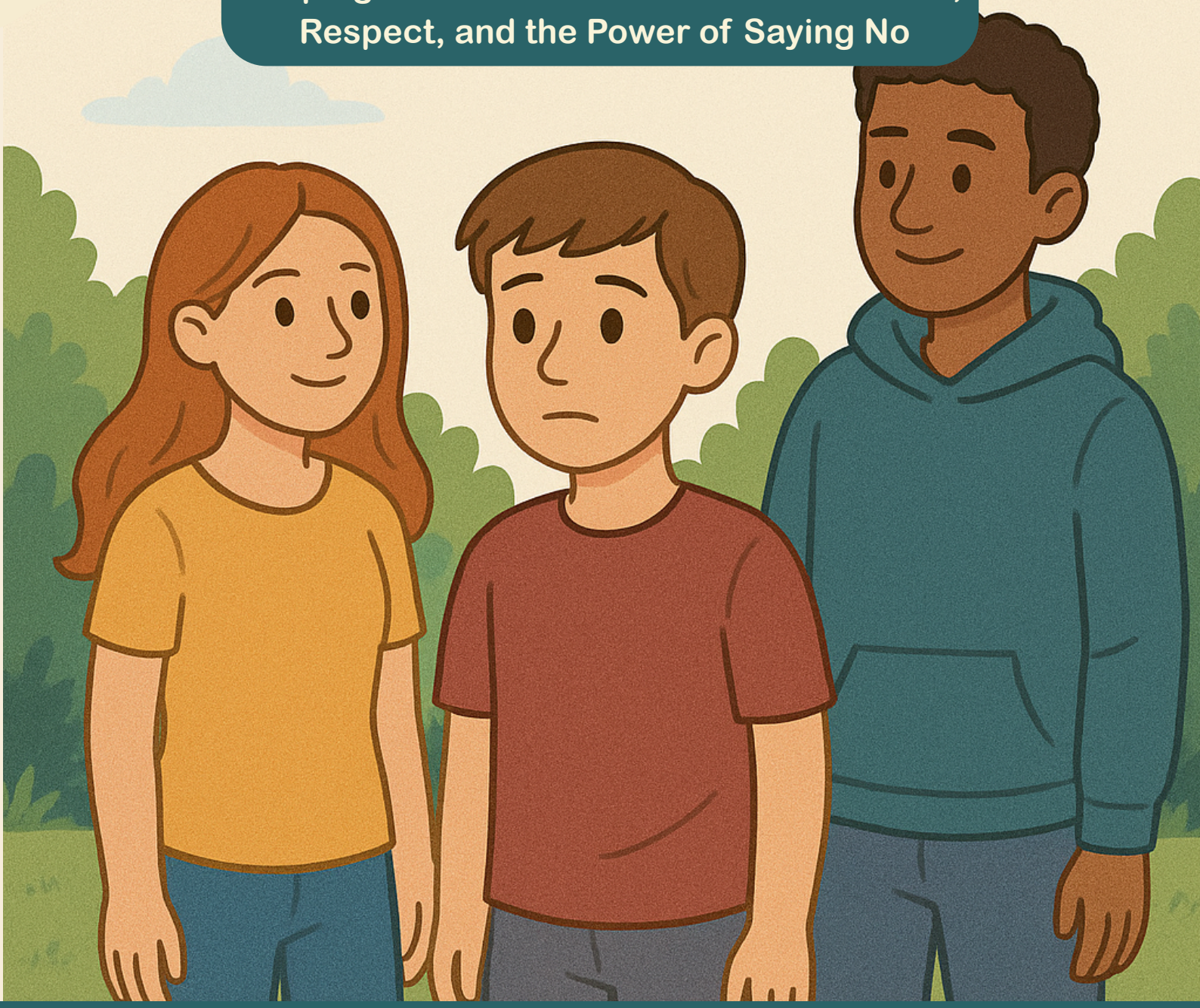
NESTLING MINDS

Tough Talks

# Teaching Consent Early (Ages 8-12)

## Helping Your Child Understand Boundaries, Respect, and the Power of Saying No



"Consent isn't just about big decisions later. It starts now with everyday choices, everyday respect."

# START HERE

This is Mini Guide 3 in an 8-part series to help parents raise pre-teens who understand sexual safety, boundaries, and emotional respect. This guide focuses on teaching the concept of consent early in relatable, age-appropriate ways for children aged 8 –12.

Consent is often discussed in the context of older teens  but the foundation starts here. This is the age when children begin:

- Exploring friendships and peer group dynamics
- Feeling the pressure to fit in or stay silent
- Experiencing early crushes and curiosity

That's why now is the right time to talk about what consent really means in words they understand and situations they're actually facing.

By

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# WHAT IS CONSENT?

"Consent means **permission** to touch, to joke, to share, or to interact physically or emotionally. It must be:

- Freely given
- Clear and enthusiastic
- Informed (they understand what they're agreeing to)
- Ongoing (can be changed or withdrawn at any time)

**You can explain it simply like this:**

"Consent means checking in with someone before you do something that affects them or their body and stopping if they say no or look uncomfortable."

# WHAT YOU CAN TEACH YOUR CHILD

## Your Body, Your Rules

### Make sure your pre-teen knows:

- They don't owe anyone hugs, handshakes, or physical affection
- It's okay to say no, even to friends or people they like
- If someone makes them uncomfortable, they can walk away no explanation needed
- Ongoing (can be changed or withdrawn at any time)

**You can say:**

"If anyone touches you or teases you in away that feels off  even if they say it's a joke you're allowed to say, 'Stop. I don't like that.'"

## Teach Them to Ask, Too

It's equally important that your child learns to ask for permission before touching others  even playfully.

**For example:**

"If you want to tickle your cousin or give a friend a hug  first ask, 'Is this okay?' and wait for them to say yes."

Let them know that even if someone says yes at first, it's okay for them to change their mind  and that's something to always respect.

# Talk About What "No" Sounds Like And That It Should Be Respected

Sometimes, people don't say "no" directly. They might look uncomfortable, move away, or say "I guess..." in a hesitant voice. Help your child learn to notice these cues.

## You can say:

"If someone doesn't sound sure like they say 'maybe' or they look uncomfortable that's not a yes. And that's your sign to stop or ask again."

## For Your Daughter:

"If someone at school gives you a hug or touches your hair and you don't like it, you don't need a reason to say no. It's your body, and no one else gets to decide what feels okay."

## For Your Son:

"Some boys feel like they shouldn't say no even if they're uncomfortable because it's seen as 'uncool.' But your feelings matter. You have every right to speak up and ask for space."

## Everyday Phrases to Use with Your Child:

- “You can always say no if something doesn’t feel right.”
- “If you’re not sure, it’s okay to say, ‘I need to think about it.’”
- “No one  not even friends or family  has a right to touch you without your okay.”
- “If you ever feel unsure, you can walk away and tell someone you trust including me.”

## Teach the “Green, Yellow, Red” Rule for Consent:

- Green: Everyone is smiling, relaxed, and clearly says yes.
- Yellow: Someone looks unsure or says maybe  pause and check in.
- Red: Someone says no, moves away, looks upset  stop immediately.

**Use this language when talking about any situation  not just physical touch. It also works for conversations, jokes, and even online  messages.**

# LET'S TALK REAL LIFE CONVERSATION STARTERS

## Here are ways to bring consent into everyday chats:

"What would you do if someone kept calling you a nickname you didn't like?"

"How would you respond if a friend dared you to send a picture you're not comfortable with?"

"Have you ever felt like you had to join in on a joke even if it didn't feel right?"

## And moments to gently reinforce consent:

"You don't have to let anyone touch your stuff or your body even if they're joking."

"I'm proud of you for walking away when you felt weird about it."

# WHAT TO REINFORCE OFTEN

- You can say no  and you don't have to explain why
- If something makes you uncomfortable, speak up or walk away
- You can always talk to me  even if you're scared, unsure, or think I'll be upset
- You must also listen when someone else says stop, no, or "I don't like that"

**"Consent isn't about rules  it's about respect."**

# YOUR TAKEAWAY AS A PARENT

**You're already laying the foundation for consent when you:**

- Ask before entering their room.
- Let them decide how to greet relatives.
- Support them when they set a boundary with a peer.

**Every time you model respect for their space,words, or comfort you're teaching them that they deserve the same in return.**

**"Consent isn't one talk. It's a way of treating each other with care, every day."**

# ALSO IN THIS SERIES

This is just one part of the **Tough Talks** series from Nestling Minds. Look out for the other mini-guides:

## Coming up next:

- Mini Guide 1: Understanding Your Pre-Teen
- Mini Guide 2: Talking About the Body  Without Awkwardness
- Mini Guide 4: Recognizing Unsafe or Confusing Touch
- Mini Guide 5: Protecting Your Child from Sexual Abuse
- Mini Guide 6: Keeping Your Child Safe Online
- Mini Guide 7: What to Say When They Ask “That Question”
- Mini Guide 8: Your Safety Net as a Parent

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# Teaching Consent Early

Nestling Minds is an initiative dedicated to promoting emotional wellbeing, life skills, and safe conversations for children, parents, and educators. Through workshops, resources, and school partnerships, we help families navigate the real challenges of growing up together.

**Stay Joyful, Stay Curious,**

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