

It's time ... to discuss boundaries with your neighbors

Jane and Cherie

I love my neighborhood. We live on a small side street with lots of kids. The parents talk at the bus stop about what is going on, and we even have an annual block party to get to know our new neighbors. I feel really lucky that I truly like my neighbors. It is not something you even think about when buying a house, but it is so important to our family's quality of life.

Behind our house, our yard runs right into our neighbor's yard so it feels like there is a huge field for our kids to play in. When our kids are playing together, I often will go out back and talk with Cherie. This happens all of the time, and our kids feel comfortable playing at either of our houses.

Yesterday, my daughter Sarah Rose, 5, came home saying that Cherie's son, Jack, 4, made her feel creepy. It is her new favorite word. When I asked her about it, she said that he wanted to play house, lie in bed and pretend to sleep together. But when he touched her body, she did not like it.

I told her I was happy she could talk with me, and it was great that she knew what she liked and didn't like. Also, I let her know that she did not have to play anything that made her uncomfortable. She is a powerful little girl, so she was happy to march back outside to tell Jack what she wanted to play.

But I knew that this was not quite enough ...

Activity

- What Would You Do? Is there anything else that Jane should do?
 - Create a network map of WHO might be involved in this situation and WHAT they can do.
- Turn page over for answer key.

Answer Key

Directions

First, talk about what Jane could do and what concerns, if any, she would need to address. Then, brainstorm all of the options available to her. When that is done, take the time to brainstorm who else is in a position to act. Last, add in the question about what they might be able to do: (below are some examples and note that each person has a number of options open to them)

- Cherie
- Jane's or Cherie's spouses/partners

Sample of suggested responses

For Jane

- At a later time, talk with Sarah Rose about her body and let her know that she can talk with either of her parents anytime about things that make her feel good or make her feel "creepy."
- Talk with husband /partner about what happened and about the conversations with Sarah Rose so that both feel OK about talking with Sarah Rose.
- If there is any uncertainty about what is age appropriate behavior in a child, there are many resources available online, in the library and in bookstores. Take the time to learn this important information.
- Talk with Cherie about what happened and let her know what you told Sarah Rose to do. Let her know that you feel this is truly within age appropriate play and also presents a great learning opportunity for both children. Find out if there is some common ground here and a common conversation to have with both children.
- Check back in with Cherie to see if everything is OK in a few days. Since you have been able to talk about everything else in your children's development from breast

feeding to teething to diapers and so much more, this could easily become just be another developmental conversation.

For Cherie

- Talk with Jack about his body and about appropriate touch - in an age appropriate way, let him know that it is OK to touch his own body but it is not OK for others to touch his private parts or for him to touch others.
- Check back in with Jane to see if everything is OK in a few days.
- If there is any uncertainty about what is age appropriate behavior in a child, there are many resources available online, in libraries and bookstores. Take the time to learn this important information.
- Talk with husband /partner about what happened and about the conversations with Jack so that both feel OK about talking with Jack.

For Jane or Cherie's spouses/partners

- Listen to what happened and be sure to have casual conversations with son/daughter about bodies and the names for body parts.