

It's time ... to talk to your family

Elliot (32), Anne (31) and Samantha (4)

My husband, Elliot, and I have been in the military our entire lives. We grew up in military families and both have decided to have military careers as well. I am the highest ranking woman officer on the base and Elliot has just been given the security clearance he needs for his promotion.

Last night, when I got home, Elliot told me he needed to go out for the evening. That meant I had some "girl time" with our 4-year-old daughter, Samantha. We had a great evening - we ate our favorite dinner of mac and cheese and then went upstairs to take a bath.

During the bath, Samantha said that her dad was checking her vulva for glitter. I thought it was odd, but did not think much about it until Samantha said that Elliot had done that before.

I grew up in Holland and Germany, so I am very comfortable talking about our bodies and nudity around the house. But something about this just does not seem right. So, this morning I asked Elliot about it. I expected a deeper conversation, but he just laughed off the comment and told me that Samantha must be making this up.

I have not known Samantha to lie and did not see any reason for her to do it now. At this point, I'm not sure what to do. If I bring this to anyone else's attention, Elliot could lose his security clearance based on an allegation of any kind. But not looking into this deeper is something I could not live with either.

Activity

Create a network map of WHO might be involved in this situation and WHAT they can do. An answer key appears on the following two pages.

Answer Key

Directions

First, brainstorm the people who are in a position to say or do something.

Below, some examples:

- Anne
- Elliot
- Anne's parents
- Elliot's parents
- Anne's best friend

Then, brainstorm what they might be able to do.

- Each person has a number of options.
- If abuse is uncovered, there is a formal process for reporting that abuse.

Sample of suggested responses

For Anne

- Talk with Elliot again when they have more time with specifics about what Samantha said. Also discuss specific boundaries about touch as Samantha gets older
- Talk with Anne's parents who often take care of Samantha about what they might have seen or observed
- Talk again with Samantha - not asking leading questions but more about the circumstances and how often this has happened
- Call an outside agency or go online for more information
- Understanding that any allegation will have severe repercussions for Elliot and the family, talking with a professional on the base might be something to consider when there is more information

For Elliot

- Talk with Anne about what is going on
- If what Samantha said is true, reach out for help. Also agree to specific guidelines about healthy touch with Samantha

Anne's best friend

- Talk with Anne about anything they have seen or noticed when they care for Samantha
- Commit to checking in with Anne and assure her that she can talk anytime about this issue
- Offer to help look for information about healthy sexual development in children and confidential resources that may be available to Anne and her family

For Anne's parents

- Talk with Anne about anything they have seen or noticed when they care for Samantha
- Continue to love Samantha and provide a safe loving environment for Samantha to come to any time
- Commit to checking in with Anne and assure her that she can talk anytime about this issue

Elliot's parents

- Talk with Anne (and Elliot) about anything they have seen or noticed when they care for Samantha
- Talk with Elliot about any concerns that they may have about his behaviors and let him know they are talking with him because they love him and the entire family.
- Continue to love Samantha and provide a safe loving environment for Samantha

