

# Why use correct, anatomical names for body parts?

“It makes communication clearer because they can tell someone, ‘He put his penis in my vagina,’” said Sege, a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect. “More importantly, it communicates that the adults can hear about that part of the body” from a child, and that “it’s not something you have to hide.”

“A child should view their entire body as healthy and there’s no particular part of their body that’s shameful,” he said. “Everything has a name and they should use the correct name.”

Dr. Sandy Wurtele said “Knowing the terminology may make children less vulnerable to sexual abuse; prospective offenders may understand that children who are comfortable with the right names for body parts are children whose parents are willing to discuss these subjects, and children who probably will have been told about the kinds of touching that are not O.K.”

And if something disturbing does happen, knowing the names can help a child get help. “Without proper terminology, children have a very hard time telling someone about inappropriate touching,” Dr. Wurtele said. “If a child says someone touched her *cookie*, it would be very difficult for a listener to know.”

But while those safety issues can loom large for worried parents, she said, the most important reason to teach children the right words for body parts — their own and those of others — is more positive and more profound. “It helps children develop a healthy, more positive body image, instead of using nicknames that their genitals are something shameful or bad,” she said. “It also gives children the correct language for understanding their bodies and asking questions about sexual development.”