

ESPACE Gaspésie-les-îles
Illustrated by Valérie Desrochers

MY BODY, MY RIGHTS!





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Foreword

This book is a tool to help you have important conversations with young children about delicate, complex issues. In it, we talk about our bodies, our rights, the kinds of touches that we like and don't like, as well as strategies for setting limits and enforcing them. We also discuss the importance of talking about bad secrets, and the courage it takes to do so.

ESPACE Gaspésie-les-îles has created this book as a sexual education resource to help prevent sexual assault. Many parents, educators and health professionals have expressed to us their need for such a concrete awareness tool.

For over 30 years, ESPACE organizations have been visiting schools and childcare establishments to tell children about their rights, discuss what different forms of violence might look like and teach them strategies to protect themselves from violence or reduce its impacts. Empowering children and the adults around them is the foundation of all of our actions, and this book is a logical continuity of our preventive mission.



Reading tips

Here are some tips to help you use this tool:

- First, you will notice that the text is **dotted with red and green bubbles**. These will help you delve deeper into the subject, initiate dialogue and create links between the story and the young readers’ lives. They offer children a chance to express themselves with regard to different situations throughout the story. We recommend reading the book first without these bubbles, so that children understand what the story is about, and then integrating the bubbles at a second reading.
- You can also use the illustrations to highlight the **emotions experienced by the characters**. This will allow children to develop their empathy and help you clarify concepts such as consent. For example, you can ask: “How did he feel when...” or “Does she like that touch? How can you tell?”
- There are key phrases within the story that are **rhythmic and repetitive**. Do not hesitate to encourage children to say them with you, like a nursery rhyme, and even add gestures! The repetition of key phrases and the involvement of children during reading will help them retain information, gain confidence and assert themselves.
- Both boys and girls can experience sexual violence. Even though genders have been assigned to the characters, they have been deliberately portrayed in a non-stereotypical way. You can easily change **female characters** to **male characters** (and vice versa) by inventing new names for them. This will allow for a **greater diversity of role models** with which everyone can identify.

Good and bad touches

In this book, we use the terms **good touch** and **bad touch**. Here is a way you can explain it to children in a language that is easy for them to understand.

A **good touch** is a touch that you like, and that makes you feel good. You decide to give or receive this touch because you want to. You have made the choice.

A **bad touch** is one that makes you feel sad, confused, angry or unsafe. It’s a touch that another person forces you to give or to receive. You don’t feel free to decide, you feel like you have no choice.

Emphasis is not placed on the parts of the body, but rather on feelings and consent. In this way, the concepts remain clear and concise, and no possible situation of sexual violence is excluded.

We thank you for making an effort to prevent sexual violence. As an adult, you can empower children by giving them concrete and reassuring information. Your involvement is precious: you are helping children to develop a healthy relationship with their bodies, encouraging them to respect their own limits and those of others, and identifying yourself as a reassuring presence in their lives. At the end of the book, you will find a section on what to do if a child confides in you, as well as some helpful resources.

Thanks again and happy reading!

The Editing Committee

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Today, in Mister Joseph's class, there is a special activity.

Two grown-ups, William and Aisha, have come to talk to the children about their rights and their body.

William and Aisha explain that
**children have the right to always
 feel safe in their body, because their
 body belongs to them.**

?

Practice by asking
 "Who owns (name
 of student, teacher,
 parent)'s body?
 He/She does!"

Let your readers
 know that even if
 two people are in a
 relationship, each
 person still makes
 decisions about their
 own body.

It means that your body is yours.
Did you know that?



During the special activity, William and Aisha talk about **good touches**. These are touches that make us feel good in our heart and in our body.

Evelyne thinks of the big hugs she gives to her uncle.



Matéo thinks of the bedtime kisses his dad gives him.



Kim thinks of Grandma's massages, which calm her after school.



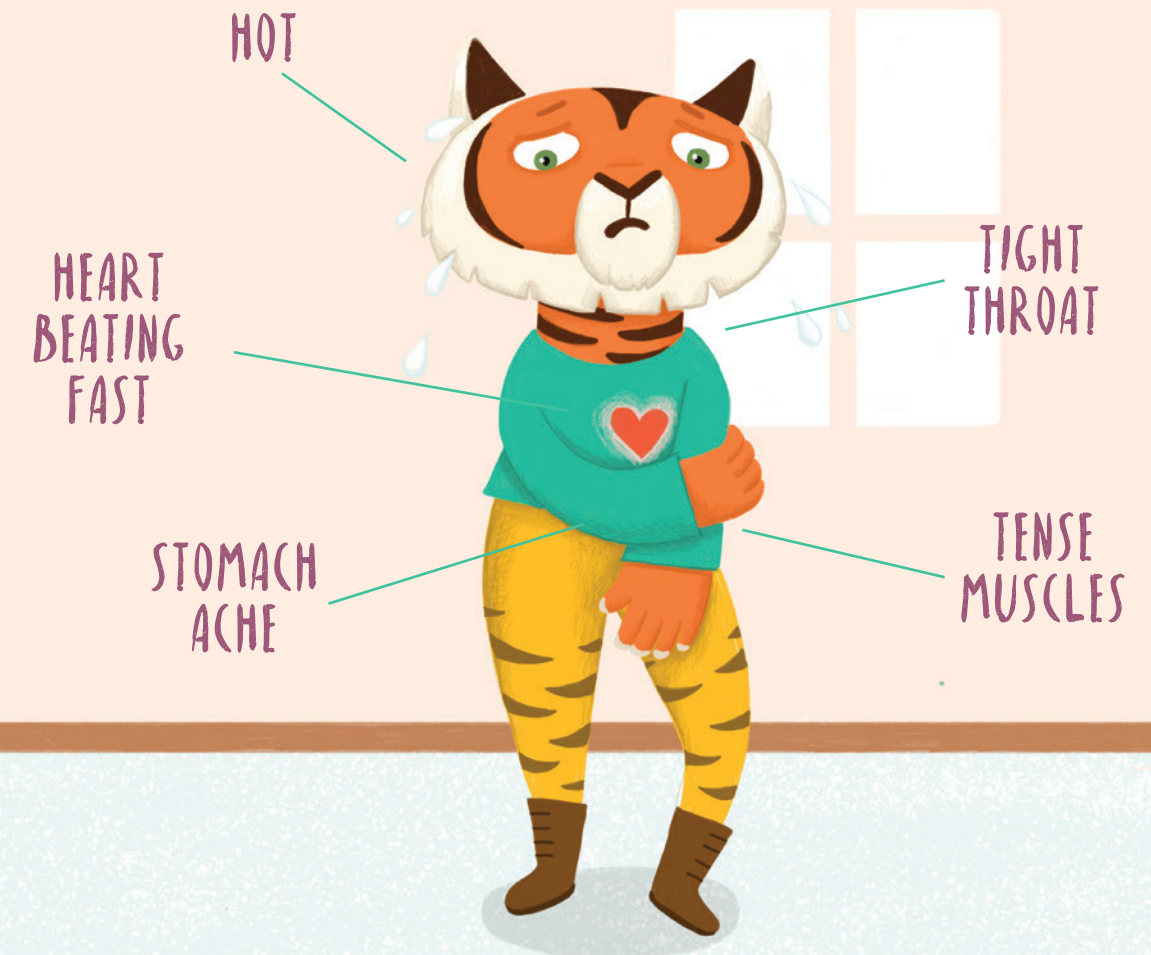
Charlie thinks of being tickled by her sister.

?

What are some examples of touches that you like?

The children also learn that sometimes people can try to take away our right to feel good and safe in our bodies.

Someone might ask us for bad touches or might do **bad touches** to us. These are touches that make us feel



It can also happen that people tell us things about our body or look at us in a way that might scare us or make us feel embarrassed or uncomfortable.

When that happens, our heart might beat fast, our throat might feel tight and our muscles get tense. Sometimes, we might feel hot, dizzy or sick. We might get a stomach ache. These are signals that our body sends us when it senses danger.

But during the special activity, the children learn that if a situation like this happens to them, they can say:

NO! Stop!
I don't like that.
My body
is **MINE!**



Children even have the right to **yell**, **hit** and **run for help**.

William and Aisha also remind us that if this happens to us, it is **VEEEEEERY** important to talk about it with adults that we trust, in order to make it stop.



Matéo and his big sister



Often, when Matéo gets out of the bath, his older sister Sofia chases him down the hallway and tries to grab his towel.

Matéo is embarrassed when his older sister sees him naked. It makes him angry. But when he gets mad, Sofia laughs at him and calls him a baby.



But tonight, when his older sister tried to take off his towel, Matéo said to her:

“NO! Stop! I don’t like that. My body is MINE!”

Sofia tried anyway, so Matéo ran to tell dad. Dad told Sofia she was not allowed to do this, because Matéo has the right to feel good and safe in his body.

Phew! It’s a good thing that Matéo knows his rights!

Evelyne and her aunt

Evelyne's aunt, Crystal, often comes for a visit. Evelyne loves her aunt very much, but she doesn't like the nickname she gives her at all.

Her aunt calls her
"Little Butt-Cheeks"!



Everyone laughs, but Evelyne doesn't find it funny. She doesn't want anyone to talk about her body like that.

So today, when Aunt Crystal came for a visit and said:

"Hello Little Butt-Cheeks!"



Evelyne gathered all her courage and told her clearly:

"NO! Stop! I don't like that. My body is MINE! I don't want you to call me that anymore."

Aunt Crystal got the message. Now she calls her "my sunshine" and Evelyne feels much better!

Phew! It's a good thing that Evelyne knows her rights!

Kim and the stranger

After school, Kim goes to the grocery store with her stepfather.

At one point, she really needs to pee. She heads for the bathroom at the back of the store, while her stepfather keeps shopping.

After, as Kim steps out of the bathroom, a man she doesn't know stops in front of her and whispers:

"Don't move, I want to show you something!"

The man begins to unbuckle his belt and pull down his pants. Kim doesn't want to see that **AT ALL!**

She says, **"NO! Stop!"**
but the man doesn't listen.

Kim is scared. Her heart is beating faster and harder, she feels hot and her stomach hurts. She wants to get out of the bathroom, but the stranger is blocking the door.

Kim is afraid, but she feels a wave of courage rising in her. She starts yelling as loud as she can. She kicks the stranger and pushes him hard.

Finally, she is free!





Kim runs out of the bathroom.

She sees a cashier and rushes towards her. Even though Kim doesn't know her, she can talk to her because she really needs help right now!

Kim tells the woman what just happened.
Impressed, the cashier says to her:

"You have been very brave! You did well to defend yourself. I'm going to call your stepfather right away."

But Kim hesitates:

"Don't you think he will be angry that I hurt that man?"

The cashier replies:

"When we're in danger, we have the right to hit and kick so that we can run away and get help, like you did. The important thing is that you are safe now!"



It is true! And Kim's stepfather was also very proud when he learned how she was able to defend herself.

Together, they called the police so that the stranger could never do that again.

Phew! It's a good thing that Kim knows her rights!



How would you describe the stranger to help the police find him?

Charlie and her grandfather



Since the special activity, Charlie has been thinking.

She realizes that her grandfather sometimes forces her to make touches that she doesn't like.



Charlie feels very **mixed up**, because the touches make her sad, but her grandfather often takes her to the park, and she loves it!



Charlie is also **afraid**, because her grandfather has told her that the touches are their secret, and that if she speaks about it, she would be punished.



But today, Charlie is thinking about what she learned during the special activity:

**"I have the right to feel safe in my body."
"It's VEEEEEEERY important to talk about it."**

Charlie is nervous, but she decides to tell Evelyne and Matéo about her problem.

"Your grandfather has no right to ask you for bad touches," says Evelyne. "Did you try to say No! Stop! I don't like that. My body is MINE?"

"No," admits Charlie. "I'm too shy. It scares me."

"It's normal to be scared,"
says Matéo. "Sometimes,
it's very difficult to say no.
Maybe you should tell an
adult who could help you?"

"But it's a secret!" exclaims
Charlie. "If I talk about
it, I'm going to get in
trouble!"

"No," says Evelyne.
"It's your grandfather
who will get in trouble,
HE's the one who did
something wrong."

"That's true," adds Matéo.
"Besides, if the secret makes you
sad, confused or angry, then it's
a bad secret. We must ALWAYS tell
someone if we have a bad secret."

Charlie takes a moment
to think. It feels good to
share her problem with
her friends. She begins
to feel like talking to a
grown-up about it.

Above all, she really
wants the bad touches
to stop! She wants to
feel safe!

?

Do you know
the difference
between good
and bad secrets?
Can you tell me an
example of a good
secret?

"Maybe I could talk to Mommy about it," whispers Charlie. "But I'm afraid she won't believe me..."

"If your mommy doesn't believe you, maybe you could talk to another adult?" offers Matéo.

Charlie concentrates very hard on the adults that she trusts and who make her feel good.

"I know! I could tell my auntie, or even Mister Joseph, at school!"





Good idea!
say her friends.

**It's VEEEEEEERY
important to
talk about it!**

But once at home, Charlie hesitates. She no longer feels like talking about the touches she doesn't like. She has thoughts that make her **sad** and **confused**. She says to herself:

*"I should have talked about it before, the first time it happened.
Maybe it's my fault that it's still happening..."*



Charlie feels as if her secret is a big mountain weighing down on her, keeping her from moving and even speaking.

Tonight, Charlie falls asleep without having told Mommy about her bad secret.



In the days that follow, Charlie goes through a whirlwind of emotions.

For a moment, she feels **strong** and **determined**. But the next moment, the heavy-as-a-mountain secret comes back to crush her and Charlie doesn't feel strong at all. She feels **angry**, and also **very tired**.



One morning at recess, Mister Joseph keeps Charlie in class to speak to her.

"You haven't been yourself lately, Charlie. You look sad, worried... Is there something wrong? If you want to tell me about it, I'll do my best to help you."



The words of Mister Joseph light a spark of courage in Charlie's heart.

Charlie tells Mister Joseph about the bad touches and the secret. She tells him about her sadness and her fear.

Mister Joseph listens carefully. Then he says sweet and beautiful things:

"Charlie, you are very brave. You did well to tell me about it."

"You know, what happened is not your fault. It's NEVER a child's fault if they're forced to give or receive touches that they don't like."

"Charlie, I'm proud of you. I will do everything I can to help you feel safe."



Hearing these words,
Charlie feels relieved,
as if the weight of the mountain has disappeared.



Now, it's Mommy who brings Charlie to the park to play. When she can, Charlie invites her friends Evelyne and Matéo, and the three of them have fun together. Charlie knows that she can count on her friends, because they really helped her talk about her bad secret.

Charlie doesn't see her grandfather anymore. She sometimes misses some of the moments she spent with him, but she feels much safer now.

Sometimes it's still difficult, when Charlie thinks about the touches she didn't like. But when she's upset or angry, she knows she can talk to Mommy about it.

Mommy comforts her and hugs her.

Charlie thinks that Mommy's hugs are the best touches in the entire world!





When a child wants to talk about sexual violence

When we talk openly about violence, children may identify with a situation and want to talk about it. This is something that takes a lot of courage. Here are some guidelines that can help you support a child who confides in you.

What to do if a child confides in you

Believe the child

This is essential! Even if the message is confusing, disjointed or mixed up with imaginary events, even if the timeline seems wrong or the identity of the aggressor is surprising, the child must be believed. Children can open up to you spontaneously, but they can close up just as quickly. They can also be emotionally detached from the violence they have experienced. Keep in mind that your role is not to ascertain whether the child's statements are true or not. Other people will be responsible for shedding light on the situation.

Use the child's words, do not correct their vocabulary

When a child talks to you, the important thing is to let them tell it at their own pace, to collect their story. Details and clarifications can be obtained by asking open-ended questions such as: "What do you mean by (what the child has said)", "What happens when... ", "Tell me more about ... "

Restore power to the child

A good way to involve the child in the next steps is to ask them how they would change their situation if they had a magic wand. Instinctively, the child will guide you towards a solution or a wish. If your subsequent actions are rooted in the child's desires, it will allow them to feel that they are regaining control over their life, and that they are at the heart of the change.

Decrease their guilt, increase their self-esteem

It is important to release the child from any feeling of responsibility for the violence that they are suffering by stating clearly that it is not their fault. Don't hesitate to repeat that they were right to come and talk to you about it, that they are very brave and that you are proud of them: these things can never be stressed enough. We also encourage you to validate the child's feelings: "It is normal that you feel afraid, sad, angry, etc."

Prepare the child for what lies ahead

Talking about it may relieve the child from the weight of their secret, but several stages are still to come. In order to ensure the security of the child while maintaining their trust, tell them that you intend to talk to someone about it and seek help. "I'm going to call people whose job it is to protect children, so they can help us. I don't know exactly what's going to happen, but you can count on me, I will continue to be there for you."

Be careful not to make promises that are difficult to keep. For example, do not say: "I will protect you, it will never happen again."



And after?

During a disclosure of this kind, you may be shaken by the nature of the violence or the identity of the perpetrator. Violence can affect anyone and is more widespread than we think. So what happens now?

→ Report the situation

If a child admits to having been the victim of sexual violence, you have the obligation to report the situation to Youth Protection immediately.

“Any person [...] is required to report physical abuse or sexual abuse under section [and] must do so regardless of any steps taken by the parents to put an end to the situation¹.”

Reporting a situation of violence is certainly not easy and requires a lot of courage, even on the part of adults. However, it's very important to do so. In addition to giving the child access to professional help, your report can protect other children in your community.

1. QUEBEC. Youth Protection Act, chapter P-34.1, current to Mars 1st 2020, [Quebec], Québec Official Publisher, 2020.

Resources

It is normal for you to feel the need to talk to someone following a disclosure or a report. Your wish to discuss the situation with loved ones is entirely legitimate, but remember to maintain the child's privacy. For additional information or support, don't hesitate to contact these references.

- The Director of Youth Protection (DPJ) in your region
- The ESPACE organization in your region: www.espacesansviolence.org
- The Provincial Helpline for Victims of Sexual Assault: 1-888-933-9007
- The LigneParents: 1-800-361-5085
- The Sexual Assault Help Centre (CALACS) in your region, for victims of assault aged 14 or over
- The Crime Victims Assistance Centre (CAVAC): 1-866-532-2822
- The Fondation Marie-Vincent support line for professionals: 514-285-0505





A word from the illustrator

“For all those little ones who are so precious to us!”

I have always drawn. Today, I have the immense privilege of being able to do what I love and to participate in projects that can make a difference in the lives of many children. Thank you to the ESPACE Gaspésie-les-îles team for this great collaboration.

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Our thanks

Valérie Desrochers, illustrator and graphic designer

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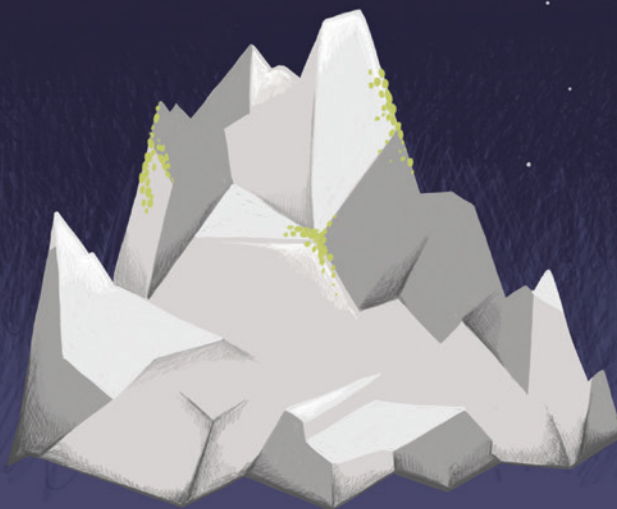
All ESPACE organizations in Quebec

Regroupement des Organismes ESPACE du Québec (ROEQ)

Vision Gaspé-Percé Now

Special thanks to all adults involved in combatting sexual violence.





During a special school activity, Charlie, Kim, Matéo and Evelyne learn that their bodies belong to them and that they have the right to always feel good and safe in their bodies. Sometimes, people can try to take these rights away from them, but luckily, the children also learn what to do if this happens!

And it does happen. Matéo's sister always tries to take away his bath towel.

Evelyne's aunt calls her by a nickname she doesn't like. A stranger at the grocery store gives Kim a big scare. And Charlie's grandfather asks her to keep a bad secret.

One after the other, the children will find the strength to assert themselves and to talk about it. It will sometimes be very difficult, but each of them will be able to feel safe again.

**Phew! It's a good thing that Charlie,
Kim, Matéo and Evelyne know their rights!**

This book is intended for children aged 3 to 9
www.espacesansviolence.org

