

Too Much Information

It's time to explain the importance of privacy to your pint-size security leak.

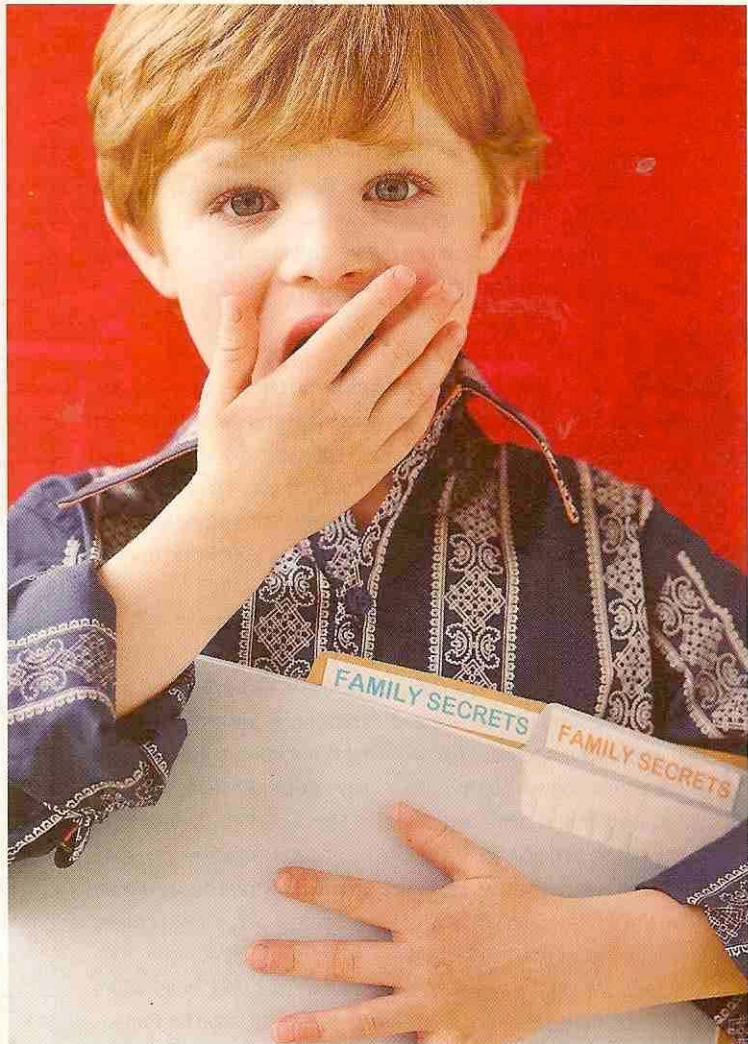
BY TAMEKIA REECE

The other day my 4-year-old nephew came to visit. Within minutes of walking through the door, I knew almost everything that had been going on between Daddy and his new girlfriend. My nephew told me about an argument they had—exactly what the fight was about, some of the things he heard them say, and how they kissed and made up. He also told me what they had for dinner the night before and how his dad had stomach problems afterward. He even gave me the lowdown on their most recent visitors and which ones stayed too long. Good memory? Yep! Too much information? For sure. Ordinary 4-year-old behavior? Absolutely!

While toddlers mainly express themselves using simple sentences—like “I’m hungry” or “I want a nap!”—preschoolers have the communication skills to describe what’s going on in their lives, says Silvana Clark, author of *301 Bright Ideas for Busy Kids*. “It’s a wonderful leap because your child can start to have real conversations with adults,” points out Clark. “But the downside is that your child will blab about practically anything and everything. Kids this age don’t understand what’s appropriate to share and what isn’t unless you specifically go over it with them.” So you’d better begin explaining now.

START FROM SCRATCH.

“Too many parents just tell their kids that something is private,” says Betsy Brown Braun, a child-development specialist in Pacific Palisades, California. “Half the time, the kids don’t even know what private means.” So discuss the concept in terms that your preschooler can understand, and be specific. See whether



this works: “Private is something just for our family to know. You shouldn’t tell anyone else about it.”

PLAY 20 QUESTIONS.

Once you’re certain that your child is clear about the concept of privacy, help him distinguish between what falls into that category and what he can freely share with others. “You can’t possibly go over every fact, so it’s best to help kids develop the skills to make their own judgments,” says Clark.

Her strategy: Make up silly scenarios and ask your child if she thinks it’s okay to tell someone else about them. Then reverse roles. “Our daughter would ask things like, ‘Mom, would it be okay to tell my teacher that you think her shoes are ugly and she should put them in the garbage disposal?’” says Clark. “My husband and I would answer her question and explain why it’s something she should or shouldn’t disclose.”

★ Many kids triple their vocabulary between ages 3 and 4, making it much easier for them to retell family stories.