

Body Safety Skills: A Guide for Parents and Carers

Note: these skills can be taught gradually and in daily conversations as your child grows.

- 1.** As soon as your child begins to talk and is aware of their body parts, begin to name them correctly, e.g. toes, nose, eyes, etc. Children should also know the correct names for their genitals from a young age. Try not to use 'pet names'. This way, if a child is touched inappropriately, they can clearly state to you or a trusted adult where they have been touched.
- 2.** Discuss body boundaries and personal space with your child. Teach them that they have a body boundary surrounding them and no one has the right to enter it if they don't wish them to. Let the children know they have the right to say, 'No!' or 'No! I don't like that!' if someone does enter their personal space/ boundary. Teach your child that people need to respect each other's body boundaries.
- 3.** Teach your child that their penis, testicles, vulva (outside), vagina (inside), bottom (buttocks), breasts and nipples are called their 'private parts' and that these are their body parts that go under their swimsuit.
Note: a child's mouth is also known as a 'private zone'.
- 4.** Teach your child that no one has the right to touch or ask to see their private parts and if someone does, they must tell you or a trusted adult straightaway. Reinforce that they must keep on telling until they are believed. (Statistics tell us that a child will need to tell 3 people before they are believed.) As your child becomes older (3+) help them to identify 3 to 5 trusted adults (one should not be a family member) they could tell. These adults are part of their 'Safety Network'.
- 5.** Teach your child that if someone (i.e. the perpetrator) asks them to touch the perpetrator's private parts, shows their private parts to the child or shows them images of private parts that this is wrong also, and that they must tell a trusted adult straightaway. Reinforce that they must keep on telling until they are believed.
- 6.** At the same time as you are discussing inappropriate touch, talk about feelings. Discuss what it feels like to be happy, sad, angry, excited, etc. Encourage your child in daily activities to talk about their feelings, e.g. 'I felt really sad when ... pushed me over.' This way your child will be more able to verbalise how they are feeling if someone does touch them inappropriately.
- 7.** Talk with your child about feeling 'safe' and 'unsafe'. Discuss times when your child might feel 'unsafe', e.g. being pushed down a steep slide; or 'safe', e.g. snuggled up on the couch reading a book with you. Children need to understand the different emotions that come with feeling 'safe' and 'unsafe'. For example, when feeling 'safe', they may feel happy and have a warm feeling inside; when feeling 'unsafe', they may feel scared and have a sick feeling in their tummy.
- 8.** Discuss with your child their Early Warning Signs when feeling unsafe, i.e. heart racing, feeling sick in the tummy, sweaty palms, feeling like crying. Let them come up with some ideas of their own. Tell your child that they must tell you if any of their Early Warning Signs happen in any situation. Reinforce that you will always believe them and that they can tell you anything.
- 9.** As your child grows, try as much as possible to discourage the keeping of secrets. (Perpetrators rely heavily on children keeping secrets.) Talk about happy surprises such as not telling Grandmother about her surprise birthday party and 'unsafe' secrets such as someone touching your private parts. Make sure your child knows that if someone does ask them to keep an unsafe secret that they must tell you or someone on their Safety Network straightaway.
- 10.** Discuss with your child when it is appropriate for someone to touch their private parts, e.g. a doctor if they are sick (but making sure they know you must be in the room). Discuss with your child that if someone does touch their private parts (without you there) they have the right to say: 'No!' or 'Stop!' and outstretch their arm and hand, and tell a trusted adult straightaway. Children (from a very young age) need to know their body is their body and no one has the right to touch it inappropriately.

Lastly, sexual abuse prevention and Body Safety Education are not only a parents' responsibility, they are also the community's responsibility. Ask your child's kinder or school if they are running a Body Safety Education program. If they are not, ask why not. And PLEASE lobby for it.

Note: the above points are a summary of the Body Safety skills your child needs to learn. For more information and resources go to www.e2publishing.info

