

HOW TO TEACH PERSONAL SAFETY TO YOUR CHILD

Why should I teach personal safety to my child?

- When sexual abuse occurs within a family, it is likely to continue for a period of time, even years until it is discovered and stopped
- Children who are well informed and empowered to act and who have someone who will listen to them can, in many cases, prevent or stop sexual abuse. Offenders do not usually choose victims who are likely to resist or tell

What should I teach my child?

Four elements are important to a child's ability to protect themselves from sexual abuse.

- Knowledge and ability to identify sexual abuse
- A sense of being able to control their own bodies in exchanges of physical attention
- Assertive techniques for telling someone not to touch them
- Confidence in an adult who will believe them when told about an incident

Tell your child...

- Your body is your own. You have a right to privacy in dressing, bathing, and sleeping.
- People touch each other in many ways. Most touches are pleasant and okay. Some touches, like tickling, might be confusing because they start out okay, but become not okay when the person won't stop. Some touches are hurtful and not okay. If you wonder whether a touch is okay or not, ask someone you trust
- If anyone touches you in a way you do not like or understand or asks you to touch them in a "not okay" way, take action
- You have our permission to say "NO" or "Don't touch me that way"
- You have the right to move away
- You have our permission to tell a trusted adult – tell Mom or Dad, Grandma or Grandpa, your friend's mother, your teacher, your counselor, nurse, principal, police, or any other adult you think of. If you tell someone and they don't believe you, tell someone else. Tell me! I will believe you and help make you safe
- No adults should touch your private body parts – your penis, vagina, breasts, and buttocks – except for health reasons. If an adult touches you and says, "This is our secret" we want you to tell anyway. That kind of secret is not okay
- You are NOT to blame if an adult touches you on the private parts of your body. The adult should know better. IT IS NOT YOUR FAULT
- We will believe what you tell us. We will protect you

What else should I do to protect my child?

- Define family rules or boundaries, such as all family members must wear some clothing, must respect individual rights to privacy in dressing, bathing, or sleeping
- Teach proper names for body parts from earliest years on. This gives your child language for understanding and telling
- Periodically review personal safety as a total family. Remind the children they have your permission to tell if abuse happens to them. If the first person they tell does not seem to believe them, they should tell another, until someone takes action
- Check to see if your children understand your teaching by asking “what if” questions. Listen closely to their answers
- If abuse should happen to your child, respond in a calm, matter-of-fact way, and reassure the child he/she has done nothing wrong and was right to tell
- Always believe your child and follow up on any disclosures of abuse

THE BIRDS AND THE BEES

One of the most difficult times in a parent’s life has to do with telling his or her child about sex. We often skip the vital part of parenting because we are too uncomfortable to give our children the information they are requesting or need. An incarcerated sex offender was asked how he picks his victims and he said “Show me a child who knows nothing about sex and I’ll show you my next victim.” You do not need to tell a three year old about sexual intercourse but when a child expresses interest in understanding where they come from and what sex is, it is important to give your child age appropriate information, and to update that information as your child gets older and gains new cognitive abilities and skills. Children are naturally curious and need to have their questions answered. Providing your child with information will not cause him or her to go out and have sex but rather will help your child better understand his or her body and also help your child not to be a target for sex offenders.

NAME THOSE BODY PARTS

When you play that age old game with your child of asking him or her to tell you where his or her nose is, it is important to remember the body parts no one names. When we fail to name a child’s genitalia or give pet names to their genitalia, we create a secrecy and mystery about parts of their bodies. This secrecy can create shame and embarrassment and make it difficult to discuss their bodies with their parents. From the time children are small and learning about fingers, toes and noses, they should also be learning about penises and vaginas. If you treat all their body parts as matter-of-fact, then your child will too and will have no problem telling you when something hurts or someone is touching them where they should not be touched.