

Talking To Your Children About Body Safety

Talking to children about body safety can be difficult for parents. It seems that most parents think if they talk to their children about body safety, they have to talk to them about “sex.” This is not the case. Parents teach their children to look both ways before crossing the street, to wear their seat belt in a vehicle, and not to talk to strangers. In the same way, parents need to teach their children that they have private parts of their bodies and that it is not okay for others to touch these parts.

Parents should begin to teach their children about body safety between the ages of 3-5.

Teach children proper names for all body parts, including names such as penis, vagina, and private parts.

Teach children to bathe, toilet, and dress themselves starting at an early age.

Teach children that privacy, modesty, personal behaviors, and boundaries are important. Parents should model these concepts as well as talk about them.

Tips for Encouraging (and Modeling) Healthy Behaviors:

- Make sure the door is closed when people are using the bathroom or dressing and be certain others do not enter.
- Adults and children should not walk around without their clothes on.
- Children should dress age appropriately and parents should strongly discourage too sophisticated or sexual clothing.
- Avoid jokes about sex or the use of sexual remarks/innuendoes in front of children.
- Monitor television, movies, radio, internet, and video games for sexual content.

Teach children that it is not okay for anyone to invade their privacy or boundaries. Explain that it is not okay for others to look at or touch their private

parts. Explain that these parts are private and need to be kept private.

Give your child permission to say “NO” to people who want to touch his or her private parts. Let your child know that saying “NO” is okay and the right thing to do.

Do not force your child to give hugs or kisses to people. Respect their right to tell “grandma” or “grandpa” they do not want to give them a kiss or hug. Explain that a child may tell any person to stop touching them if any type of touching makes them feel uncomfortable or they do not like it (i.e. tickling, wrestling, ext.)

Let your child know that he or she should tell you right away if anyone attempts to look at or touch their private parts. Children need to know it is okay to tell if someone makes them uncomfortable or touches them in a way they do not like. Reassure them that you will listen to them, believe them, and keep them protected.

Reassure your child that most touches are OK touches but they can say “NO” and need to tell you about any touches that are confusing or scare them.

Remember to review and practice this information on a regular basis. Parents should talk to their children about personal safety during:

- Bath time: as you are teaching children to wash themselves
- Bed time: when they are focused on what you are saying
- New situations: before going to camp, starting school, going to daycare, going to a new house to play.

Play “what if” games with your children and let them practice saying “NO.” By role playing with your children you help them develop the skills they need in certain situations.