

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Tips For Teaching Safety

Chances are you started to teach your children safety rules as soon as they could move about – rules like “don’t touch the hot stove,” and “don’t run into the street.” And every child learns about “not taking candy from a stranger.”

Here is another set of rules to help teach your child the difference between affection and abuse, between safe and unsafe touches. Your willingness to talk about sexuality and sexual abuse with your children can be the first important step in keeping them safe and healthy.

1. Teach your children that they are special and deserve good touches everyday.
2. Find out what your children know about safe and unsafe types of touching. By asking about it, you let them know it is okay to talk about these things.
3. Teach your children the correct names for all their body parts. If you are uncomfortable with the anatomically correct names for private parts, practice them before talking to your child.
4. Open communication about sexuality at home is important for healthy sexual development.
5. Keep an open line of communication about sexuality and safe and unsafe touching. It’s not enough to talk about it once and then never bring it up again.
6. Let your children know that you are open to any and all questions, and really listen to what they say. Encourage them to keep asking if they are confused.
7. Help your children to become aware of and trust their feelings. Let them know that it is always okay to say “NO” to anyone who touches them in an uncomfortable or confusing way.
8. Practice a “No Secrets” rule. Teach your children the difference between secrets and surprises. Surprises are okay (i.e. presents, parties, treats) because the fun is in the telling.
9. Make prevention information fun and interesting. Create “what if” situations that may be confusing or difficult and ask your children what they would do. (i.e. What would they do if someone asked them to play an undressing game?) Be sure to use situations that are examples of both safe and unsafe touching.
10. Teach your children that you will believe them when they come to you with problems about touching, and mean it! Many cases of child sexual abuse go unreported because the child is afraid they won’t be believed.
11. Make sure your children know that if unsafe touching happens it is not their fault, and that they will NOT get in trouble for telling – even if they weren’t following safety rules or were doing something that was against the rules when it happened.
12. Give children permission to make decisions about who touches them and how, even when the touch is a good touch. For example, instead of saying “Give Aunt Paula a kiss goodnight!” say, “Would you like to give Aunt Paula a kiss goodnight?” Be prepared to be okay with a “no” answer – you are teaching them to set healthy boundaries.