

Parent Resource

Talking with children about body safety: why it's important

Talking to children openly and honestly about their bodies and bodily autonomy helps to keep them safe and teaches them from the early years what is ok and what is not ok when it comes to their bodies and others.

Just as we prepare children with staying safe on the road, water and at home, we need to prepare them to be safe with others.

Having conversations about body safety sends the message that your child can always talk to you and that you'll listen no matter what. Children have the right to be safe and talking about body safety helps to create safe environments that help children grow and thrive.



What to talk about

- The correct terms for the private parts so they know they can use them respectfully and appropriately; use the terms penis, scrotum, vulva and vagina so your child has language to talk about their body clearly
- Difference between private and public parts and private and public places
- Their body belongs to them and no one has the right to touch it without their permission
- Explain what to do if someone did try to touch their private parts, or talk about them or take pictures of them so they are pre-armed
- Who to go to and who to talk to if feeling unsafe or someone touches them inappropriately
- Setting boundaries; if they do not want to be hugged or kissed by certain people, even family, they have the right to decline the touch
- The body's warning signs and how it feels if we don't feel safe around someone e.g. racing heart, sick tummy, hard to talk
- Difference between unsafe secrets and surprises/ safe secrets; there should never be

Books are a great way to start conversations. Here are some suggestions:

- Everyone's got a bottom by Tess Rowley
- My body belongs to me by Jill Starishevsky and Angela Padron
- Some secrets should never be kept by Jayneen Sanders and Craig Smith
- Let's talk about body boundaries, consent & respect by Jayneen Sanders and Sarah Jennings
- Someone should have told me by Holly-ann Martin and Marilyn Fahie



How to talk about body safety

Listen

Sometimes when you're talking, your child might tell you things or share concerns. There are a couple of steps to take when this happens:

- Repeat what your child has said to check you understand. For example, 'You don't like it when Taylor gives you a hug' or 'You think Mrs S is acting weird'.
- Respond by talking about what to do if it happens again. For example, 'It's OK to say no or move away when Taylor tries to give you a hug and you don't like it. Telling me about it is the right thing to do. I can help if you want me to.' 'You don't have to be alone with Mrs S.'

Teach them they're allowed to say 'no'

- If they don't want a hug or a kiss from someone then support them in setting their boundaries
- It's ok to say no if someone asks them to do something that is unsafe, scary or they don't feel good about
- They should never be threatened or bribed or told to not tell anyone about a situation
- It's also important for your child to accept it when other people say no to them.





Words you can say to support their bodily autonomy

"Your body belongs to you. No one can touch it, talk about it, take pictures of it without your consent"

Tell them explicitly, *"It is wrong for other people to touch their body in front of you or show you their body or videos or pictures of their body or somebody else's."*

For younger children, you can be specific with words like, *"If a grown-up or other child wants to see or touch your penis/ vulva without good reason* that is not ok. You need to tell me right away. You would never be in trouble. No one should ask you to keep that a secret either." **

*Explain a good reason is like the doctor needing to see your body and I would be there as well

Practise how they could respond in these situations. Practise saying *"Stop it!"* and *standing tall to say, "No. I don't want you to do that."* Or just *"No."*



Surprises and unsafe secrets: Help children understand the difference

People who sexually abuse children need the abuse to be a secret. You can help your child or the child you're caring for stay safe by helping them understand the difference between surprises and unsafe secrets.

Some of the differences to explain:

- Surprises or safe secrets make you feel good, not yucky
- Surprises or safe secrets only stay secret for a little while, like to wait to give a birthday present or a surprise visitor
- Unsafe secrets can make you feel worried or someone might ask you not to tell me and that is unsafe
- If you're ever not sure, then talk to me, it will always be ok and I will always believe you and take care of you

Some practice questions for situations

- 'What would you do if I wasn't at school at pick-up time?'
- 'What would you do if someone you didn't know, wanted you to help them look for their dog?'
- 'What would you do if you felt uncomfortable in a public toilet?'
- 'What would you do if an adult or another child you knew and liked did something that made you feel yucky or scared?'
- 'What would you do if someone you didn't know started messaging you on social media, even if they said they were a child?'
- 'What would you do if someone on the internet asked you to send naked photos of yourself and said they would hurt you if you didn't?'



Internet safety links

Raising Children

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/safety/online-safety/internet-safety-2-5-years>

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/media-technology/online-safety/grooming-signs>

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/entertainment-technology/pornography-sexting/pornography-talking-with-children-9-11>



Helpful websites

Raising Children Network

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/>

Better Health Channel

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/servicesandsupport/child-family-and-relationship-services>

Safe4Kids Protective Education videos

<https://www.youtube.com/c/Safe4KidsChannel>