

Tips for Teaching Children Personal Safety Skills

Children need to be taught that their bodies are their own, and that they have the right to say ‘No’ when it comes to who touches them and whom they touch.

The key to effective training is repetition and active rehearsal. Children need to practice responses to specific and general situations. They also need to practice telling someone.

The following are tips that can help you teach effective personal body safety to children:

- Teach personal body safety when you talk about other personal issues. For example, when you teach children how to brush their teeth, also teach them not to get into a car with someone they don’t know or not to leave the play area without permission.
- Teach children the correct names for body parts. Just as they have arms and legs, they have a penis or vagina. Children can’t tell you if they’ve received a NOT OK touch if they don’t have the words to describe the touch. If something does happen to them, they sound more credible and believable if they use proper names instead of slang terms.
- Teach children how to use body language. Have them practice standing tall and saying “No” in a loud, strong voice. Help them develop good eye contact.
- Play ‘what if’ games with children. For example, ask them, “What if you are outside playing and a neighbor says ‘come to my house for cookies’. What would you do?” Create role-play scenarios that fit with the activities of your family and life. (i.e. if you are campers create scenarios that could happen while camping etc.) One of the purposes of ‘what if’ games is to stress the importance of always getting parent or guardian’s permission before going anywhere or doing anything they might think is suspect.
- Have a ‘no secrets’ rule! Explain the difference between secrets and surprises. Let them know that anytime someone tells them to keep a secret from parents/guardians that they should tell anyway or not do it in the first place (if possible).
- Be sure to let children know that it is never ok for *them* to ask someone else to touch or see their private parts.
- Assure children that most touches are OK touches and most people are good people. Equate ‘good’ touches with feelings of warmth, caring, love, safety and security. ‘Bad’ touches are the kind that physically hurt you and ‘secret’ touches are ones not allowed, not their fault, and should be reported to parents or guardians. Assure them they will not be in trouble if anything like that happens.
- Make sure you use scenarios involving (not naming specifically) friends, relatives, neighbors, etc. as those are the persons more likely to sexually abuse than strangers.