

Talking to Children About Personal Safety

Ages 8-12

Educating children that their body belongs to them can start early, and continue through teenage years, to help raise empowered young adults who have a clear understanding of healthy consent. Boundaries are important for all ages! It is important to allow children to have choices in how they are touched by other people to show that their boundaries are respected and help grow self-esteem.

Here are some education tips for elementary-aged children:

Teach your kids that “no” and “stop” are important words that should be honored.

Both when someone else says stop (e.g., “Sarah said ‘no’, and when we hear ‘no’ we always stop what we’re doing immediately, no matter what.”) and when your child says no (e.g., “If a friend doesn’t stop when we say “no,” then we need to think about whether or not we feel happy and safe playing with them. If not, it’s okay to choose other friends.”)

If your kids like to create pretend worlds or put on plays together, it may be helpful to create a safe word with friends. At this age, saying “no” may be part of a game or play, so they need to have one word that will stop all activity (perhaps something silly like “peanut butter” or something serious like “I really mean it!”). Choose what works for their group of friends.

Teach children to check in with friends during play to make sure they are respecting other people’s boundaries.

Encourage kids to watch each other’s facial expressions during play to be sure everyone’s happy and on the same page, and teach them to take a time out every so often to check in with each other and make sure everyone’s feeling okay. This reinforces that it’s important to respect others’ feelings and boundaries! Talk with your child about how to talk to their friends or peers if your child is uncomfortable with how someone is acting or what they are saying. Practice using phrases like “please don’t say that around me” so kids will be comfortable standing up for themselves and others.

Give children options for greeting and saying goodbye to adults and friends.

Instead of a hug, a child could give a high five, a fist-bump, a wave, or even a handshake. Kids may not always feel comfortable around people they just met or even relatives who live far away, and it is important to allow kids to listen to their “gut feelings” about what feels safe, unsafe, or confusing. Giving a child the choice in greetings shows that manners—treating people politely and with respect and care—is different than demanding physical affection.

Never force a child to hug, touch, or kiss anybody.

Explain to relatives why you are giving your child the choice in how they are touched by others (e.g., hug, high five, wave, etc.), even if it might make that relative upset. The most important thing is to give each child the tools to be safe and happy and empower them by respecting their control over their body! It’s important not to teach kids that it’s their job to use their bodies to make others happy.

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How to Talk to Kids

- Create a comfortable environment so it's easy for a child to talk to you.
- Use a calm voice.
- Practice what you want to say.
- Talk to your child everyday—do check-ins over dinner, at bedtime, or after school—listen to your kids!

Personal Safety Tips

- Educate children on personal rights—their bodies are their own and no one has a right to touch or hurt them.
- Move from talking about safe and unsafe touches to talking about concepts of abuse and unhealthy relationships.
- Explain to children that most people aren't abusive, but if anyone, even other kids, makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe, they need to tell an adult right away. Talk about why it might be hard for someone to ask for help if they are being hurt, especially by someone they know.
- Review safe and unsafe secrets and the importance of telling unsafe secrets even if a friend asked them not to tell.
- Teach your child about online safety rules and privacy.
- Talk with your child about healthy sexual development and personal boundaries with adults and with other kids. Use anatomically correct terms and start discussing the physical, social, and emotional changes that will happen during puberty to normalize the new needs and emotions children will experience. Promote an accurate understanding of gender and gender identity.
- Help children build media literacy skills to see fact from fiction in images around sexuality and relationships.
- Talk about rights and responsibilities in friendships and relationships. Encourage characteristics of healthy relationships with peers and adults.
- Help create a support system for your child—make a list of people they can talk to and trust, besides you, if they feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Remind them it's never too late to tell.
- Remember: abuse and bullying, in person or online, is never a child's fault!

Help your children plan ahead with the following scenarios!

What would you do if:

- A friend asked you to keep a secret about someone hurting them?
- Someone started sending you inappropriate messages or pictures?

Additional Resources

Any school counselor or children's advocate can help adults understand how to talk to children about personal safety. If you have any questions, feel free to contact:

- Baranof Counseling Office: 966-1521
- Keet Gooshi Heen Counseling Office: 966-1733
- Blatchley Counseling Office: 966-6312
- Sitka High School Counseling Office: 966-6527 or 966-6525
- Pacific High School: 747-0525
- SAFV: 747-6511
- Office of Children's Services: 747-2802

**To report suspected abuse:
1-800-478-4444**

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Every child deserves to be safe. It's important to think about different ways to stay safe and people you can talk to if you every have a problem. Please talk through this paper with your family and add in your safe ideas before you sign!

- Before I go somewhere or change my plans, I always check with someone in my family or with the person in charge. I let them know where I'm going, how I will get there, who is going with me and when I'll be back.
- I trust my feelings and can talk to someone I trust about problems that are too big for me to handle on my own.
- I am in charge of my body. No one has the right to touch at or look at my private parts unless they are keeping me healthy. I can say yes or no to any touch.
- If someone tries to touch me or makes me feel frightened, uncomfortable, or confused, I will tell them to stop, go to a safe place, and tell someone I trust what happened.
- I know it's not my fault if someone touches me or treats me in a way that is not right. I know that surprises are the only safe secrets to keep. Any other secrets, especially about touches, actions, or words that make me uncomfortable, I should tell an adult I trust.
- It's never too late to ask for help. I should keep asking until I get the help I need.
- Here are three safe people I can talk to and three safe places I can go:



- I am a special person. I DESERVE TO FEEL SAFE!

My Signature

Caregiver

Date