

Fact Sheet

Talking personal safety



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It is the responsibility of adults to keep children safe, this includes helping them develop personal safety skills. It is not about scaring or frightening children but increasing communication and learning new skills. Our job as safe adults is to listen, believe and support.

Keep communication open

- Remind your child that it is always ok to talk to you, no matter what the issue, you care about them and want to help them to stay safe
- Discuss safe grownups to talk with if they felt unsafe
- Reinforce basic safety messages and ensure children know the phone numbers of people they can call on for help or to talk to
- Practice using stories and scenarios to problem solve. Do not always make these about strangers
- Explain that it is ok to say no to an adult or child if they are doing something that is not ok or makes the child feel unsafe. Let the child know they will not get into trouble if they tell you about an unsafe secret someone has asked them to keep

Listen and learn

- Have an awareness of the day to day life of your child
 - Who are their friends?
 - Where are they spending most time?
 - What are they doing online and who are they communicating with?
 - How can they contact you if there is a problem?
- Listen when a child tells you they don't want to see a particular person or go to a particular place. Most perpetrators are already known to a child and may include a family member or known adult or adolescent. Try and discuss in an open way
- Don't force children to kiss or hug people

Talk often, talk early and keep talking

- Regularly practice describing feelings and identifying body clues that might mean a person is scared, worried or unsafe. Develop a simple, clear and easy to follow action plan for these times
- Explain body boundaries and that it is not ok for anyone to look at or touch the private parts of another child or adult. It is also not ok to ask other children or adults to touch their private parts (you can talk about exceptions like if someone was hurt and the Doctor needed to help or if a child needs support with personal care)
- Early in a child's life teach them the anatomical names for their private parts – nipples, penis, vagina, vulva, anus
- Explain the difference between safe and unsafe secrets (ie a surprise birthday party for a family member is a safe secret. An unsafe secret might be if someone showed you rude pictures at school and told you not to tell because you would get into trouble)
- Teach children to Recognise, React and Report when they don't feel safe and use developmentally appropriate resources and games to reinforce safety messages

What should I be talking about and when?

As children and young people get older they go through a variety of developmental stages. Conversations about personal safety should match their age and experiences. This includes children and young people with a disability or learning need. As a child gets older the information they learn can be built upon. It is the responsibility of caring adults to teach relevant personal safety skills as children grow up and progress through the stages.

0-4 years	5-9 years	10-13 years	14-17 years
<p>Recognising basic emotions (happy, sad, angry)</p> <p>My body belongs to me</p> <p>Anatomical names for private body parts</p> <p>Public and private body parts</p> <p>Safe and unsafe secrets</p> <p>Identifying grown up safety helpers</p>	<p>Understanding feelings</p> <p>Body clues (If I'm not feeling safe what does my body do?)</p> <p>Public and private places and behaviours</p> <p>Rules for touch (it is not ok for anyone to touch your private parts or for you to touch theirs)</p> <p>Recognise, React and Report</p> <p>Keep talking to all your safety helpers till you get help to feel safe</p>	<p>Understanding puberty including physical and emotional changes</p> <p>Healthy relationships</p> <p>Sexual feelings</p> <p>Online competence (rules and responsibilities about safe gaming, sharing of images, talking to people online, bullying or pornography)</p> <p>What to do if you someone you know tells you they are unsafe</p> <p>How to get in touch with safety helpers via phone, online message</p>	<p>Respectful relationships (identifying healthy and abusive relationships)</p> <p>Making healthy and safe decisions about sexual activity (ie consent)</p> <p>Pornography ≠ Reality</p> <p>Online competence (dating, sexting, socialising)</p> <p>Peer to peer safety helpers and expanding the safety helper concept to support services such as KidsHelpline or ReachOut.</p>
Expert tip:	Expert tip:	Expert tip:	Expert tip:
<p>Promote body ownership and teach the proper names for private body parts all while changing a nappy</p> <p>"I'm going to wipe your bottom because I need to make sure it's clean before I put your nappy back on. One day when you are old enough you will be able to look after your own private parts."</p>	<p>It is normal for young children to be curious about bodies and occasionally play games like 'I'll show you mine, if you show me yours'. This is ok if it is mutual, easily distracted and between children of the same age and developmental ability</p> <p>It provides a good opportunity for you to talk about the rules for touch.</p> <p>"What would you do if a child at school asked to see or touch your private parts? It's not ok for grownups or other kids to look at or touch your private parts or for you to see or touch theirs."</p>	<p>Develop safety rules for being online in partnership with your child. Do this before they are regularly using social media or viewing online content. Keep reminding and reinforcing as required</p> <p>"I know being online is such an important part of the way you will be learning and connecting with others. Let's work out together how we can make it fun and safe at the same time."</p>	<p>Talking about sex does not make young people go out and do it. Not talking about healthy relationships and sex can lead to harm</p> <p>"I want to make sure you are surrounding yourself with people who respect you. I'd like to talk to you about healthy relationships and what they look and feel like. If you don't want to talk to me who could you chat with?"</p>

Where to get help

- In an emergency call triple zero 000
- If you suspect that a child has experienced abuse or is at risk of harm you should contact the relevant state or territory child protection agency. The Australian Institute of Family Studies has an up to date contact list <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/reporting-abuse-and-neglect>
- [Parentline](https://parentline.org.au/) 1800 30 1300 provide free telephone counselling and advice to parents and carers. Resources are available to support parents and carers to understand a wide range of issues related to raising children and young people
- [Kids Helpline](https://kidsline.org.au/) 1800 55 1800 provide free, confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25
- Find the right service for you <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/cfca-resource-sheet/helplines-and-telephone-counselling-services-children-young-people> the Australian Institute of Family Studies, helplines and telephone counselling services for children, young people, parents and carers
- Information for parents and carers to support conversations with your child about respectful relationships is available from ReachOut <https://parents.au.reachout.com/skills-to-build/wellbeing/things-to-try-romantic-relationships/help-teenagers-have-respectful-relationships>
- To learn more about healthy, concerning or problematic sexual behaviours in children and young people refer to True Relationships and Reproductive Health's Traffic Light framework <https://www.true.org.au/ArticleDocuments/337/Traffic%20LightsBrochure.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y>
- [Bravehearts](https://bravehearts.org.au/) Information and Support Line is available to anyone wanting information, advice, referrals and support regarding child sexual assault. 1800 272 831
- [Resources](https://resources.danielmorcombe.com.au/) to teach child safety skills to children and young people are available from the Daniel Morcombe Foundation