

# ***HOW TO EMPOWER CHILDREN TO BE SAFE WITHOUT SCARING THEM***



When adults teach children guidelines for bike, water and street safety, children do not become fearful of bicycles, swimming pools and crosswalks as a result of this information. Personal safety can be approached in the same straight-forward, matter-of-fact manner. Children are safer and more secure when equipped with clear **information**, healthy **self-esteem**, and the **skills** of (1) decision-making, (2) communication and (3) use of community and inner resources.

## **SAFETY GUIDELINES**

1. ESTABLISH YOUR OWN SET OF FAMILY/CONGREGATION GUIDELINES.
  - “Do not let others know if you are home alone.”
  - “You can say ‘no’ to anyone who wants you to break one of our family/congregation agreements. I will back you up.”
  - “Your opinion about the baby-sitter/religious school teacher is important.”
  - “It is not okay to hurt anyone with aggressive words or actions.”
  - “You don't ALWAYS have to be nice.”
  - “Tell a parent, teacher, or other trusted adult if someone is touching you or makes you feel uncomfortable.”
2. INCLUDE TOUCHING SAFETY GUIDELINES WHEN YOU TALK ABOUT OTHER TYPES OF SAFETY.
  - “If you are touched by someone in a way that you don't feel right about, tell me or \_\_\_\_\_ about it. We will believe you and help you.”
  - “If someone touches you or tries to, it is okay to say, ‘Don’t touch me!’, ‘I don’t like that.’, ‘No, I won’t touch you.’, or yell, ‘He/she is not my father/mother.’”
3. REPEAT SIMPLE SAFETY GUIDELINES OFTEN.
  - “We don't keep secrets about touching in our family/church.”
  - “Never go away with or get in a car with someone you don't know, no matter what they tell you.”
  - “Trust your inner-voice (instincts, judgment) if it’s telling you something doesn’t seem right.”
4. TEACH CHILDREN THAT SAFETY GUIDELINES APPLY ALL THE TIME, not just with strangers or with baby-sitters.
5. TEACH CHILDREN THAT ADULTS ARE NOT ALWAYS RIGHT.
  - Teach them that there are certain things that adults or older children should not do.
  - “Most adults touch children in appropriate ways, but some adults are mixed up and do not make good decisions about touching children.”
  - “If you are not sure about something a grownup says or does, ask me to help explain it.”

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## **6. DO NOT PERPETUATE THE MYTH OF THE “DANGEROUS STRANGER.”**

Teach children to judge behavior rather than persons.

### **COMMUNICATION**

## **7. PRACTICE OPEN COMMUNICATION AND RESPECT CHILDREN’S FEELINGS AND INTUITIONS.**

Listen. Answer children’s questions about nightmares, television programs, real-life tragedies, and “what if’s” positively and creatively without ridiculing a child’s feelings or denying reality.

Intuitions can give reliable warnings when something is "wrong" with a particular person, place, or situation.

## **8. HELP CHILDREN DEVELOP VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL ASSERTIVENESS SKILLS.**

“I am not allowed to do that.”

“I do not want to be tickled. Could we take a walk instead?”

“NO!” . . .

or taking someone’s hand off them, moving away, standing tall, looking someone directly in the eye, shaking their heads, etc.

### **SEXUALITY**

## **9. ENCOURAGE CHILDREN’S OWNERSHIP OF THEIR BODIES.**

Respect their privacy and personal space.

Help them develop boundaries about touch, physical affection, space and nudity.

Don’t push them to hug or touch anyone, even you or their grandparents, otherwise they may become less likely to own their bodies enough to stop someone else who shows affection as grooming for abuse.

## **10. HELP CHILDREN DEVELOP A DIGNIFIED VOCABULARY FOR PARTS OF THE BODY.**

Children with no words other than slang ("dick") or family names (“pee-pee”) might be embarrassed to ask for help with a touching problem. The correct terms for body parts (breast, penis, vagina) are dignified and enable children to express themselves clearly.

Also teach children that it is okay to talk about their genitals as they do any other body part. By being secretive about genitals, children who are approached sexually by another person probably will not dare mention the incidents because they feel that private parts are bad and should never be talked about.

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## **11. DISCUSS APPROPRIATE SEXUAL EXPRESSION WITH YOUR CHILDREN.**

“Sex is a gift from God to be mutually and responsibly enjoyed in a committed relationship.”

Children who have received some sex education are less vulnerable to abuse than children who have received none.

## **12. GIVE YOUR CHILDREN PLENTY OF EXPERIENCE WITH POSITIVE, MUTUAL TOUCHES.**

### **PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY**

## **13. BE A TALKABLE PARENT!**

Know as much as possible about the people who associate with your children; talk with your child daily about her/his activities, needs, and concerns.

Respect your children’s feelings and opinions (even if you disagree).

Practice using “kyros” (i.e., use your power as a parent as a compassionate teacher, preparing your children for adulthood, instead of a controller insisting on their compliance with your will for them).

## **14. CHECK OUT ANYONE YOU LEAVE YOUR CHILDREN WITH**

Be aware and cautious of adults and older children who have a preference for socializing with young children.

Be selective when employing child care providers and babysitters. Interview candidates, request and verify references.

Insure you have the right to “drop in” and visit your children’s day care or school program at any time.