



Resources for Parents

How to Talk to My Child About Touching Safety

Parents, teachers, and other caring adults often 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 instruction. Touching safety can be approached in the same straightforward, matter-of-fact manner. Ideas for talking with children about touching safety follow:

1. Include touch safety rules when you talk about other types of safety.

"If you are touched by an older adult in a way that you don't feel right, tell me or _____ about it. We will believe you and help you."

2. Repeat simple safety guidelines often.

- "We don't keep secrets about touching in our family."
- "Grownups don't usually need to touch children in private areas unless it's for health or hygiene reasons."
- "Never go away with or get in a car with a grownup 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."

3. Establish your own set of family rules.

- "Do not let others know if you are home alone."
- "Your opinion is important when we try a new babysitter or have a problem with a babysitter."
- "You can say 'no' to anyone who wants you to break one of our family rules. I will back you up."
- "You can ride in a car with _____ or _____, but not with anyone else without asking first."

4. Play "What ifs" to practice decision making.

- "What if you were playing (someplace you aren't supposed to play) and a man or woman tried to make you get in their car?"
- "What if you and I got separated at the shopping mall?"
- "What if someone we know really well touched you in a confusing way and asked you to keep it a secret?"
- "What if an older person offered you money (or something you really wanted) if you would break our family rules?"

"You can say, NO!"

Play "What ifs" with your child to practice decision making. Help them be prepared. Help know what to say. Help them develop assertiveness skills.

5. Help children develop assertiveness skills. Practice responding verbally:

- "I don't tell people that."
- "I don't want to be tickled. Could we take a walk instead?"
- "Leave me alone. I'll tell."
- "I'm not allowed to do that."
- "No."

Practice responding non-verbally:

- Taking someone's hand off of them.
- Running away or moving away,
- Being assertive by standing tall, shoulders back, and looking person in the eye, shaking head.

6. Teach children that adults aren't always right.

- "Most adults touch children in appropriate ways, but some adults are mixed up and don't make good decisions about touching children."
- "If you aren't sure about something a grownup says or does, ask me to help explain it."

7. Teach children that there are certain things that adults, older children and babysitters shouldn't do.

- "No one has the right to put their hand down your pants, force you to touch them, touch your body if you say 'no', or touch your private body parts."

8. Help children develop a dignified vocabulary for parts of the body.

- Most people learn names for body parts and body functions in this order: family words ("pee-pee"), slang ("piss"), neutral ("go to the bathroom") and finally, medical terminology ("urinate"). Children with no words other than slang or family names might be embarrassed to ask for help with a touching problem. The correct terms for body parts, breast, penis, and vagina, are dignified and enable children to express themselves clearly. A possible substitute for medical terminology might be "private body parts", or "the parts of a body that are covered by underwear or a bathing suit".

9. Teach children that touching safety rules apply all the time.

- Not just with strangers or with men or with babysitters. While rules about strangers are important in safety instruction, it is uncommon for a child to be sexually abused by a stranger.
- "Most adults touch children in appropriate ways, but some adults are mixed up and don't make good decisions about touching children."
- "If you aren't sure about something a grownup says or does, ask me to help explain it."