

How do I talk to my child about Protective Behaviours?

Talking to your children about feeling safe and unsafe and understanding their feelings is a very effective factor in keeping them safe from child abuse. Children as young as 3 years can say when they do not like something, and when they are feeling scared or sad. As soon as children are old enough to begin to understand and name their feelings; and name their body parts, they are old enough to have conversations about keeping safe. As they grow older, the Protective Behaviours conversations become more detailed; appropriate to their age level and understanding.

There are two themes that should always be emphasised with children regardless of their age:

- 1) **We all have the right to feel safe all of the time; and**
- 2) **Nothing is so awful that we can't talk about it with someone we trust.**

The following are the basic steps in teaching your child protective behaviours:

<p>1 Ensure your child knows what 'safe' means. Perhaps start with easy conversations around physical safety such as road safety and bike safety. What situations does your child feel safe and unsafe in?</p>	<p>5 Discuss Good Touches and Bad Touches. – You can use pets or a subject such as tickling to demonstrate this topic.</p>
<p>2 Teach your child to Name and Trust their feelings when they do not feel safe. Different situations and how they feel physically i.e. on a rollercoaster, in a scary movie, if someone teases them etc. They may say things like- they have sweaty palms, butterflies in their tummy, shaky knees or hands. Help them identify the 'not nice' physical feelings from the nice ones, such as when they get a hug from Mum or Dad.</p>	<p>6 Discuss Good Secrets and Bad Secrets.</p> <p>7 Tell your child to keep on telling until they feel safe again.</p>
<p>3 Make a Safety Network. With young children we often use their hand. You can do this verbally or visually by drawing around their hand. Your child chooses five adults they trust to talk to when they feel unsafe. It is best if the adults come from a variety of environments to maximise access for your child. If they are ever feeling unsafe – no matter how small they think it is – they tell someone in their network.</p>	<p>8 Play 'What-if' games Especially if they are going away on overnight trips or being cared for by others.</p> <p>9 Don't panic if your child discloses any threat to their safety to you. Your child needs to know they have done the right thing by talking to you and be reassured that everything will be alright – you can do this by keeping calm and reassuring them they have done nothing wrong. If your child has disclosed something to you and you need to talk to someone, you can contact the Department for Child Protection and Family Support or your local police for further advice.</p>
<p>4 Teach your child about their bodies. Children need to know the appropriate names for their body parts, and that they are the only ones in charge of their bodies from their head to their toes. This includes speaking up if they don't wish to hug relatives. If anyone ever touches any part of them and they feel uncomfortable, then they move away and use their network.</p>	<p>10 Above all, ensure that your child knows that you will listen, and that they are never to blame.</p> <p>Educate yourself or seek support if you need it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protective Behaviours WA: 0409 071 068 • Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 • DCPFS Family Helpline: (08) 9223 1100