

How to Talk wit -1205 -2658 -1061 -

Get Comfy

Bring a sense of warmth, comfort, and normalcy to personal safety conversations so your child feels comfortable coming to you with questions and concerns.

Anytime is the right time to talk with your child, but it helps to feel calm and relaxed.

Look for opportunities in your daily routine that allow some privacy, like bedtime or in the car, because your child may not want to open up about a sensitive topic in a public place.

Be ready to respond appropriately if your child tells you about any inappropriate behavior.

Best Practice

Listen actively and watch for signs of abuse, such as physical discomfort or behavior. If your child discloses abuse, stay calm. Then with care, not denial or anger, assure them that you believe them and that you'll keep them safe. Don't rush them or insist on details. What you can say:

"It took a lot of courage to tell me about this. I believe you."

"Everything will be okay. I can help keep you safe because you told me."

"Tell me more. What happened next?"

What the Research Says

- ➔ Children who are informed about their bodies and who feel comfortable talking openly with a caring adult are **less likely to be abused** and more likely to disclose abuse if it happens.²
- ➔ Many parents are reluctant to educate their children about sexual abuse because they view it as an **uncomfortable topic to discuss**.¹
- ➔ In about **90 percent of sexual abuse cases**, children know their offender. Often, it's someone the family knows and likes, which is why many children are afraid to tell.³
- ➔ If your child discloses abuse, stay calm and believe them; **children rarely lie about abuse**.⁴

Start Talking

If you're not sure what to say or when to talk with your child about personal safety, try using the following tips and conversation starters. If your child isn't receptive right away, that's okay. Try again another time. The most important aspect of these talks is to create an open line of communication.

Leaving the House When your child is getting ready to go somewhere, whether to school, an activity, or a friend's house, this can be your cue to remind them about personal safety rules.

"Let's have a quick chat before you leave. I want to go over a few safety rules."

"Just in case you need me for anything, I want to make sure you know the safety plan and have all of our emergency contact information."

Talking Tips by Age

Having regular talks about personal safety is important for raising a confident, resourceful child who can make safe choices.

0-5

Keep conversations short and simple with toddlers and young children. Focus on teaching basic personal safety rules, the correct names for all the body parts, and how to refuse unwanted touches.

“A bigger person should NEVER touch your private parts.”

“You can always say ‘No’ or ‘Stop’ if you don’t like something.”

“Never keep secrets about touching. The only safe secrets are those that eventually can be shared, like birthday surprises.”

6-8

Be more specific with the rules and continue to regularly remind your child of the personal safety rules. It should feel just as normal to say, “Look both ways before crossing the street” as it would to say, “Remember: No one should ever touch your private body parts except to keep you healthy.”

“Safe touches make you feel well-cared for and loved, like a hug from a parent. They’re good for you. Unsafe touches make you feel uncomfortable and might even hurt.”

“Pay attention to different feelings in your body, like butterflies in your tummy, sweaty palms, or a fast heartbeat. That might mean a situation is not okay.”

9-10

Review family safety rules and go into more detail about privacy, different types of touches, and how to recognize behavior that makes them uncomfortable. At this age, your child may spend more time away from you at friends’ homes or activities, and they may also spend more time online without your supervision. Know who your child spends time with, including coaches, music instructors, and friends’ older siblings.

“Not all abuse involves touching. It’s not okay for someone to show you their private body parts or ask to see yours, in person or online.”

“No one should take photos of your private body parts or show you photos of other people’s private parts.”

