

## Protective Behaviours – How Do I Talk To My Child About It?

Talking to your child about feeling safe and unsafe and understanding their feelings is perhaps the most effective factors in preventing child abuse. A child as young as 3 years old is able to say when they do not like something and when they are feeling scared or sad. As soon as a child is old enough to begin to understand their feelings and name some of them 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**
- 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:

- 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/unsafe in?
- 2) **Teach your child to Name and Trust their feelings when they do not feel safe.** – Again, different situations and how they feel physically ie; 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.
- 3) **Teach your child about their bodies.** – Your child needs 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 (see below).
- 4) **Discuss Good Touches and Bad Touches.** – You can use pets or a subject such as tickling to demonstrate this topic.
- 5) **Discuss Good Secrets and Bad Secrets.**
- 6) **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.
- 7) **Tell your child to keep on telling until they feel safe again.**
- 8) **Play “What-if games** – especially if they are going away on overnight trips or being cared for by others.

- 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 of Child Safety or your local police for further advice.
- 10) **Educate yourself or seek support if you need it.** – The websites and numbers listed below are just a few sources of information and support in protective behaviours and general parenting support.

**\*Above all, ensure that your child knows that you will listen, and that they are never to blame.**

### **Protective Behaviours**

<http://napcan.org.au>

<http://pb.australia.com>

[www.protectingkids.com.au](http://www.protectingkids.com.au)

[www.nt.gov.au/health/facs/sevensteps.shtml](http://www.nt.gov.au/health/facs/sevensteps.shtml)

### **General Support**

[www.familyrelationships.gov.au](http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au)

[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

[www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)

[www.parentline.com.au](http://www.parentline.com.au)

[www.kidsmatter.edu.au](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au)

Department of Child Safety – 1800 811 810

Kids Help Line – 1800 551 800

Parentline – 1300 301 300

Centacare – 4688 3100

Lifeline – 4632 9299

