

Assault Prevention

Parents teach their children to be safe in many ways each day. Just as we teach how to cross the street or how to handle a sharp object, we must teach our children about assault prevention. Here are some tips from the New Jersey Child Assault Prevention Project.

- Incorporate teaching prevention into everyday life. Look for teachable moments: TV shows, events at school, etc
- Chose words that are not threatening: “How to stay safe”
- Focus on what the *child* can do if faced with a dangerous or uncomfortable situation. Focusing on what *others* may do is frightening and less helpful. The child must believe in his or her ability to use safety skills, so let him or her know through words and actions that you believe in him or her.
- Practice and reinforce these skills regularly throughout childhood, including teenage years.
 - Play the “what if” game. Let your child come up with the ideas and then reinforce and give feedback. For example:
 - What would you do if your bike broke down and a stranger offered you a ride home?
 - What would you do if I weren’t home and the telephone man came to the door and wanted to fix the phone?
 - What would you do if a baby sitter did something to you and asked you to keep it a secret?
 - What would you do if someone touched you in a way you didn’t like or confused you?
 - What would you do if someone asked you to touch him or her inside the pants?
 - Storytelling. Tell stories about children who stayed safe. Always end with a successful child.
 - Talk about private parts. Being secretive about genitals teaches the child that they should not be mentioned. Use correct terms for body parts: breasts, penis, vagina, buttocks. Talk about boundaries. Phrases such as “under your bathing suit” or “down your pants” can be used.
 - Privacy. As children begin to want closed doors or private time, they learn that they also have the right to control their own body and personal space. If a child wants privacy for dressing, bathing or the bathroom, respect his or her wishes.
- Specific skills if faced with danger:
 - **Run away.** Run to school, home, neighbors. Review safe locations with your child
 - **Yell loudly and don’t stop yelling until you are safe.** We usually teach our children not to yell, so practice this with your child

- **Safe and unsafe secrets.** Safe secrets don't make a child feel afraid and are eventually told to someone. Unsafe secrets feel scary or uncomfortable and should be told to a trusted adult
- **List the names of safe adults.** Children need more than parents on this list. Examples include teacher, grandparent, friend, neighbor, etc
- **Permission to say NO.** Children are often taught not to say no to an adult. They need to understand and have permission to say no to any adult who frightens them.
- **Your body is your own;** the child should have permission to take care of it and know that you will help.
- Let your child know that you will listen, believe him or her, and always help whenever your child has a problem.
- Hug your child often; physical affection helps us to feel loved and to understand the difference between safe and unsafe touching.
- Don't spank your child. The message in spanking is that physical aggression is OK if you are mad. Be a model and use words instead of spanking.
- Remember that most children are abused by someone they know and trust. Do not focus only on strangers when talking unsafe secrets and reinforcing that the child has the right to determine how his or her body is treated.
- Communication is the most important tool parents have to insure their child's health. Talk to your child!

For further information:

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