

Ten Ways to Keep Children Safer

All parents deserve support in the important job of keeping children safe. Begin to teach your children basic safety skills as early as possible, in the same way that you would teach them traffic safety rules. We hope these tips are helpful, but they are only a first step. To make sure children remember and use safety skills, it is important that safety material is part of their school curriculum.

1. Be calm and reassuring.

A child should learn to be cautious, alert, and prepared - not fearful. Children feel less fearful when they are given the skills, information, and confidence they need to act on their own behalf.

2. Role-play with children.

Just as children don't learn to ride a bicycle by talking about it, they don't learn prevention skills without opportunities to practice. Children learn by doing. They need to role-play and see how it feels to say NO in difficult situations.

- Play the "What If" game and help the child think of several responses to a given situation such as "What if the babysitter" or "What if the school bus didn't arrive on time"
- Choose real life situations like confronting a stranger while walking to school, getting separated in a crowded store, or playing in the front yard.
- Have the child practice saying what they should say and do if they feel threatened. For instance, children should learn to yell in a loud voice, "This person is trying to take me. I need help."
- Have children practice staying an arm's length away from someone who approaches them.
- Have children practice not stopping if a stranger asks for directions.

3. Review and practice often.

Children do not learn well from one-time presentations. Research shows that safety skills need to be taught 5-10 times every year.

4. Set body boundaries

Set specific body boundaries and teach children to guard them. Tell them:

- Your private parts are the parts covered by a bathing suit. No one should touch your private parts.
- If someone touches your private parts, or makes you feel uncomfortable or confused, IT'S OKAY TO SAY NO and then to go and tell a trusted adult.

5. Give permission to say "NO" and go and tell.

Explain that there are different kinds of secrets - okay secrets and tell secrets. Tell children if they are asked to keep a special secret about touching, say "No, I'm going to tell." Tell them they have the right to say NO even to someone who threatens them or to someone they know. (Children are usually hurt by someone they know, not by a stranger.)

6. Teach them the buddy system.

Children should learn it is safer to be with a friend or trusted adult than alone.

7. Teach them to check with others first.

Teach children to check with others before changing plans or going anywhere - even with adults the child knows.

8. Help them identify trusted adults.

Talk openly about whom a child would go to in an emergency. Cite specific examples such as the person using a cash register at the mall, a mother with children, or a teacher.

9. Teach your children telephone skills.

Teach them their phone number, how to dial "0" and "911" for help, and how to use a payphone.

10. Insist on a child assault prevention program in their school.

School programs, such as [Talking About Touching](#), provide children with structured opportunities to practice skills, as well as additional information for parents. Make sure your child's school offers one.

Click [here](#) to view a printable training application and material order form for the Talking About Touching program.

To receive our 10 Ways to Keep Children Safer brochure by mail call us, toll-free in Massachusetts, 888-775-4KIDS.