

'We all have the right to feel safe all the time'.

'Nothing is so awful that you can't talk with someone about it'.



Protective Behaviours



HOW DOES CHILD ABUSE HAPPEN?

Child abuse happens when a person uses their power or authority to take advantage of a child's trust, and involve them in an activity that is harmful to them. This may be physical or emotional harm, or it may involve sexual activity. Irrespective of the type of harm, it is important that children are protected. You can help protect your child by teaching them protective behaviours, or in other words, how to keep safe.

HOW DO I TALK TO MY CHILD ABOUT PROTECTIVE BEHAVIOURS?

You may wish to introduce the subject by reading an appropriate picture book and story with them, even at pre-school or primary school age. Day to day situations with your child also provide many opportunities for teaching new skills, such as when there is something relevant on TV or in a story, or during bath time or dressing. Discussing road and water safety can be a good starting point to talk about other types of safety, such as personal safety.

There are also many general conversations in which to do this, such as when talking about body parts or sexuality issues, other adults in a supervisory role, or any problem involving new experiences or a degree of risk - for example bullying, teasing, situations that provoke anxiety or fear, or staying over at a friend's house.



1 Children need to know what it means to feel safe.

Talk to your child about what it means to feel safe. What does your child think of when they say the word "safe"? Ask your child what sorts of situations they feel safe in and what sorts of situations would they feel scared in. Your child might say that they feel safe curled up in bed with Mummy or Daddy reading a story. They might say that they feel scared at the zoo when the lion growls. Discussing road and water safety can be a good starting point to talk about other types of safety, such as personal safety, and a child's right to be safe.

Use the word "safe" as part of everyday conversation, so that children become familiar with the idea and what it means. When does your child feel safe? Where does your child feel safe? Think back to your own childhood and think of examples of times that you felt safe and unsafe. Give age appropriate examples to your child about these kinds of situations.



2 Children need to be able to name and trust their feelings.

Help your child to name their feelings - for instance, when they feel happy, sad, angry and so on. Sadness is often expressed by the body as tears, and fear is often expressed by the body as butterflies in the tummy or shaking knees. When your child has a feeling, encourage them to describe what is happening to their body at that time.

How does your child feel safe? Discuss with your child what is happening to their five senses when they feel safe i.e. their sense of touch, smell, sight, taste, sound. Explain that their own bodies will tell them when they are in danger. For example, they might feel funny in the tummy, or their knees might shake, they might get a headache or start to perspire on the forehead, or they might feel like running away. Ask them to tell you how their body feels when they are frightened.

To help children identify their feelings, parents and carers can talk through situations where:

1. It is fun to feel a little scared - such as during a scary movie or on a ride at the park.
2. Feeling scared is uncomfortable and is not okay - such as when somebody hurts, bullies or teases them, or if a stranger follows them down the street or if someone stares at them for a long time.
3. The child feels safe and comfortable - such as when they are having a cuddle with mum or dad, singing songs or watching a funny show.