



Safety Skills for Young Children

Along with having clear family rules about personal safety, children can be taught skills that may help them respond to risky or uncertain situations. Ways that parents can help their children develop these skills include the following:

- As soon as they are able, children should be able to give their full name, phone number, and address; they should be able to give their parent's name, and to dial 911 in an emergency.
- Include correct names for all body parts, including genitals, when young children are learning their basic vocabulary. If needed, the child should be able to clearly state his or her problem so that a non-family member (such as a physician) will understand.
- Be clear about when a child may (or should) refuse physical contact from other children or adults. In general, all social contact (hugs, tickling, roughhousing, etc.) should be voluntary, and a child's choice about participating should be recognized and accepted. Circumstances under which a child may be touched against his or her will (for instance, getting shots or being examined for medical reasons) need to be identified and discussed.
- Explain that your child may always tell you about someone looking at or touching their body parts, even if the person told the child it was a secret, or if the child promised not to tell.
- Be sure that your child can identify adults, both inside and outside of the family, that the child could go to for help if he or she were confused or frightened.
- Include "what if" stories, in which the parent presents a safety problem and the child thinks of possible solutions, in your social and/or quiet times with your child. This can help the child develop problem-solving skills and also provide information about how a child might react to a risky situation.
- Provide age-appropriate books about "safe touch" and other safety issues, and read them with your child.

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