

2010 Child Protection Week

5th –12th September 2010



Feeling Safe - promoting self protection

Many parents and carers are concerned about children's safety. This is a valid concern as statistics on sexual assault show the issue is very real. Sexual assault is against the law. It includes any sexual contact with a child and showing a child sexual acts or material. Sexual assault can happen to any child. Some children have a higher risk of being sexually assaulted. These may include children with a disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, refugee children, children of sole parent families and children of parents who have alcohol abuse, substance abuse or psychiatric problems.

It is important for every child and family to learn self protection skills. Avoid talking only about "stranger danger" to prevent sexual assault occurring with children. Perpetrators of sexual assault are most commonly people who are known to the victim/survivor because of their relationships or employment. Giving children information and skills about self protection can help. Learning about self protection includes:

- self esteem
- assertiveness
- body awareness
- understanding feelings
- understanding relationships
- identifying the rules about touch
- knowing what to do if the rules are broken

When to start

Children are never too young to learn about being safe. Children with learning difficulties and disabilities can and should learn from an early age.

This material has been produced by the Sunshine Coast Regional Child Protection Week Committee to assist in the promotion of 2010 CPW.

Document Author: Holly Brennan, Family Planning Queensland.

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2010 Child Protection Week: "Protecting Children is Everybody's Business".

How to help

- make time to talk
- make time to listen
- acknowledge feelings
- believe in and respect your child
- remind them that you are always there if they need you
- teach self protection skills
- celebrate your child and let them know you love them

What to teach

There are many resources available for teaching self protection skills for example, parents can use the FPQ booklet, *I have the right to be safe*, to help teach the following topics.

- Feelings
- Help children to understand and recognise different feelings and how to talk about these feelings with someone they trust.
- Bodies

Talk to children about names and functions of public and private body parts. It is important that a child feels good about their body and knows their body belongs to them.

Types of touch

Children need to know about the many different types of touch in their lives and recognise whether a touch is loving, friendly, helping, sexy or a NO touch. This can help them to know when they need to tell someone they trust about confusing touch.

Rules about touch

Teach children the rules about sexy touching. Knowing the rules helps children to be aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Warning signs

Teach children to know when their body tells them something is wrong. Help children to know how their body reacts at times of stress including scary, confusing and sad situations. The body reacts to stress with warning signs such as the heart beating fast, sweating, crying and shaking.

What to do

Practice 'NO GO TELL' with children. Teach them to be clear, loud and assertive when saying 'NO'. Encourage them to 'GO' to a safe place. Sometimes children are unable to say no or go to a safe place. Remind them that they can always 'TELL' someone if something has happened.

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Who to tell

Make a list of the people they can talk to and how they can contact them. Encourage them to keep telling until they feel safe.

Scenarios

Practice safety techniques using make-believe situations, TV shows or children's stories. Ask them to say what they would do and how they would get help.

Assertiveness

Support children to stand up for themselves. It is important that they learn how to make decisions and have real choices. Remember you are their best role model.

Giving information

Do not worry about giving too much information. Children only take in as much information as they can understand. Remember to be positive, factual and brief:

- Be positive by talking about their ability to be safe and focus on strategies rather than consequences.
- Be factual. Children do not need to be fearful of monsters and all strangers.
- Keep it brief. Short, regular talks about self protection are better than just a one-off talk. Teach safety skills in every day situations to reinforce information.

What to do if a child talks about sexual assault

You can help by:

- not panicking or expressing shock or outrage as this may make the child think that they have done something wrong
- listening
- telling them you believe them
- thanking them for telling you and saying it was the right thing to do
- emphasising that whatever has happened was not their fault
- telling them that some people do wrong things
- talking in private
- acknowledging that it is hard to talk about such things
- not giving promises that cannot be kept, for example, that you will not tell anyone or that you will stop it happening again
- contacting the appropriate support services

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Not all children can or will tell you if something has happened. Often there are other signs or behaviours that may indicate abuse. Talk to support services if you suspect something has happened. Remember to trust your own warning signs and seek help. If a child is assaulting others take it seriously. Be supportive and find out how you can best help them and stop abuse from happening again. Abuse is rarely a one off situation.

Where to get more help:

- **Parent Line: 1300 30 1300**
- **Department of Child Safety Services: 1800 811 810**
- **Lifeline: 13 11 14 (24 hour crisis counselling line)**

Or visit the Family Planning Queensland’s website: www.fpq.com.au

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