



TIP SHEET:

5 Safety Messages for Children

1. Body Safety

Unlike physical abuse, sexual abuse doesn't always feel bad. Instead of talking about "good touch" or "bad touch," provide rules such as "The areas covered by your bathing suit are private. They should not be touched by or shown to others, except for health reasons (e.g., doctor's visits) or when you need help getting clean (e.g., bathtime)." Avoid euphemisms or nicknames when referencing genitals, which promote stigma and shame of the body. Instead, teach your child about their body, using anatomically correct terms for body parts, to promote openness and clarity of communication.

2. Bodily Autonomy

Children and teens are in charge of the physical affection they give and receive. Teach affirmative consent — an actual yes rather than the absence of a no — applied to all types of interactions, and model respect for boundaries so children and teens know they are in charge: "Would you like a hug?" Normalize your child's right to decline affection: "I'm not tickling you now because you asked me to stop. I'll start again when you're ready." Reinforce your child's right to say no to adults who may be pressuring your child. "He doesn't love hugs but seems very interested in a fist bump" or, more directly, "We've been talking about respecting our children's right to decide what kind of physical affection they receive. She loves you very much and just might want to express it in a different way right now."

3. No Secrets

Adults should never ask children to keep a secret from their parents. Teach older children the difference between a surprise (something kept quiet temporarily and then shared, which would bring joy) and a secret (something always kept quiet, which would make people feel unhappy or unsafe).

4. Internet Safety

The internet is a vast and ever-changing world. The key to navigating the internet safely is open and ongoing communication. Say to your children: "It's my job to help you learn how to use the internet safely." Help them understand that the internet is not the right place for all things. "If you are curious and want information about bodies or sex, please come to me, and we can discuss those topics or I can find materials you can read or people you can talk to. The internet is not the right place for these conversations, and adults you meet on the internet who want to discuss this with you are not engaging in safe behavior."

5. Getting Help

Remind children and teens that they have the right to get help. "You can always come to me with anything, and I will help you." Together, you can make a list of 5 trusted adults your child can turn to with a problem. Remind children to tell and keep telling until they get the help they need. "If you get tricked, confused, or scared, it's okay and not your fault. If someone convinces you to break your safety rules, or if an adult gets you to do something wrong, you will not be in trouble."

