

BODY SAFETY

Body safety means knowing how to keep our bodies safe and recognizing what “safe” feels like within ourselves. Our bodies constantly scan the environment for danger, and children can be empowered to notice and trust the signals their bodies give them. Body safety can be taught and modelled from birth, and it’s never too late to start.

Why It Matters

Body safety helps create environments (in families, classrooms, and communities) where abuse is less likely to occur. When children learn to communicate clearly, listen to their bodies’ wants and needs, and identify trusted adults they can talk to, they develop skills that act as safeguards against abuse.

For many adults, talking about abuse can feel uncomfortable or triggering because of personal experiences or shame. If this feels true for you, consider reaching out to a safe, supportive person, like a close friend or a counsellor. Teaching body safety and upholding children’s rights can be both healing for adults and protective for the children in their lives.

Supporting Children to Keep Their Bodies Safe

- Have time for intentional conversation. Make sure you've carved out the time for deep conversation and that you're in the right headspace. Don't avoid talking about these topics. You can do it.
- Use clear and simple language and use medical terms for body parts. Not slang or cutesy words.
- Explain safe and unsafe touches. “Safe touches” are welcomed, gentle touches like hugs, snuggles, hand holding, etc. “Unsafe touches” refer to hitting, pinching, pushing, trapping, etc. These categories can help give children language to describe interactions that will happen to them throughout their lives.
- Outline which parts of the body are the private parts of our body. Explain who and why someone may need to touch the private parts of our bodies, like a doctor's visit with a parent in attendance, a parent during bathing time, or an educator during diaper changes.
- Explain the difference between secrets and surprises.
 - Surprises are fun and eventually shared with everyone (like a birthday party).
 - Secrets are meant to be kept hidden and can feel confusing or upsetting.
 - Teach children: “We don't keep secrets, especially if they make us feel bad or scared.”
 - This is important because the use of secret keeping is a common tactic used by abusers with children to ensure that they do not tell anyone about the abuse that is going on
- Don't make assumptions. If a child brings a topic up for the first time, ask clarifying questions like:
 - “What do you know about X?”
 - “Tell me more about X.”
 - “Where did you learn about X?”
 - This will help you ensure that you and the child are talking about the same topic and that you aren't jumping to conclusions about what X means.

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Supporting Children to Keep Their Bodies Safe Continued

- Support children in learning about "safe" and "unsafe" body cues. Early warning signals are physical signals from the body that tell us something doesn't feel right, like sweaty palms, butterflies in our stomach, or our hair standing on end. Being able to recognize unsafe situations they have experienced and be able to find an adult they trust to talk about it is an important skill.

Teach body cues by modelling and verbalizing feelings.

- For example: "I feel so safe snuggling you. My body feels calm and relaxed. My breathing is slow. My heart is beating slowly. I feel happy and smiley" (feeling safe).
- "Wow. That was really scary! My heart is beating so fast. I feel all sweaty and my throat feels all tight, like I'm going to cry. I don't feel safe right now" (feeling unsafe).
- Bring language and attention to the child's subtle body signals you notice, too. Narrating what you see is also important: "I can see your tears. You got hit by that stick. You are saying 'ouch.' Your body is hurt. I think you must not feel safe." Prompt them to notice themselves as well: "How does your body feel right now? Your stomach, face, fingers, arms, etc."

This modelling and practising helps them hone the skill of interoception (noticing the cues of our body), even when our body is feeling stressed.

- Teach children about having a personal safety network. Every child should have at least five trusted adults they can talk to if they feel scared, confused, or have experienced something unsafe. These should be adults who they feel will always believe them and take action on their behalf. At least one person should be outside the family, as abuse often occurs within families, and someone outside may have more power and emotional freedom to help take steps to protect that child than someone within the family.

Supporting Yourself

- Do your research about topics on your own. Learn privately first to avoid exposing children to adult-focused content accidentally, and so you have time to think about how you want the conversation to go.
- Get support. Unpack your own experiences, fears, or discomfort with a counsellor or trusted person.

Recommended Literature for Adults, Educators, and Parents

- Body Safety Education – A Parent's Guide to Protecting Kids from Sexual Abuse by Jayneen Sanders



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Need More Support?

Local Resources:

- [Relationship and Health Educator](#)
- [Let's Talk about Touching \(Professional Development\)](#) – Connect with your local CCRR about local offerings
- Family Physicians, Pediatricians, or Nurse Practitioners
- Public Health Nurse
- Counsellors

Resources Found in the WKCCRR Library:

- Bodies Are Cool by Tyler Feder
- Being You: A First Conversation about Gender by Megan Madison
- Yes! No!: A First Conversation about Consent by Megan Madison
- My Body! What I Say Goes! by Jayneen Sanders
- Raising Anti-Racist Children: A Practical Parenting Guide by Britt Hawthorne

Videos:

- [Consent for Kids Video](#)
- [The Boundaries Song](#)

Online Resources:

- [A Caregiver's Guide to Teaching ABCs of Consent](#)
- [Amaze Jr. - Age-Appropriate Videos for Talking to Kids Ages 4-9](#)
- [Sex Positive Families Resources](#)
- [Jayneen Sanders' Website - Free Resources for Printing, and Supports for Teaching Body Safety](#)
- [Additional List of Learning Resources to Explore](#)