



Introducing Body Safety: The 10 Step Guide

By Michelle Derrig

Introducing body safety and protective behaviours to our young children can be daunting. Most parents feel ill-equipped; unsure of the information to impart and worried that they might frighten or alarm their child.

Throughout the SAFE Kids Series, I will be unpacking this challenging topic, providing you with the information you need and sharing my insights, as a mother and child protection educator.

In this article, I will provide you with an overview of the ten key steps to empowering and protecting your kids:

1. **The first step is to educate your child that their body is private and they have a right to protect their privacy.** Body Safety conversations should begin from at least 3 years of age. It is important that you don't just speak in general terms but instead provide specific examples of inappropriate behaviours and situations that a predator might use, during the grooming process. I recommend that you cover the following points:

- Using correct anatomical terms, teach your child what areas of their body are private. Include penis, testicles, nipples and anus for males. Include vulva, vagina, nipples and anus for females.
- Teach your child that nobody can look, touch or feel their private parts, either through their clothes or direct touch.
- Reinforce that they are also not allowed to look, touch or feel anyone else's private parts.
- Teach children that it is wrong for anyone to take a photograph of their private parts or show them any images of private parts on any sort of device.
- Teach children that it doesn't matter if someone tells them that it's a game, rewards them, or gives them treats, presents or gifts – it is still not ok.
- Highlight that these rules apply no matter the person's age, gender, status in the community, or their relationship to the child i.e. friend, family or stranger.
- Empower them with the knowledge that they can say 'no' at any point that someone's touch

doesn't feel right – including kissing, stroking, cuddling, snuggling or tickling.

- Identify that abusive behaviour is never a secret, even if someone threatens them, or if they think they are to blame;
- Remind children that no matter what, abusive behaviour is never their fault and that they won't be in trouble.

Refer to 'Only For Me' to see how these topics have been introduced in a gentle and age appropriate manner.

3. **Provide opportunity to practice responding to unsafe situations.** In order to build confidence, it is important that you get your children to practice their response out loud. It is also essential that you develop their response as they mature, providing them with different alternatives. See Article 04 for further information.
4. **Help your children establish the physical cues which may indicate an unsafe situation.** Teach them that butterflies in the tummy, sweaty palms, wobbly legs; heavy or stuck feet, racing heart; and an urgent need to go to the toilet are all signs that something might 'not be right'. See Article 05 for further information.
5. **Teach your children about Safe Secrets.** Children need to understand that a safe secret will never be about their body and secondly that safe secrets are only kept for a short time, not forever. **Ideally avoid using**

the term 'secrets' with your children. See Article 06 for further information.

5. **Establish and record five adults your children can trust and confide in.** Using the outline of a hand, write down the names of each of the people whom they can go to whenever they are upset or worried. For younger children who can't read you might like to include a photo. Make sure you revisit this list as situations change, particularly with the beginning of each new school year. Remind your children that:

- Nothing is ever so awful that they can't tell someone about it;
- That they must tell one of their trusted adults if someone does the wrong thing, or whenever they are concerned or worried about someone's behaviour;
- That abuse is never their fault and that they won't be in trouble;
- That they must tell someone even if the perpetrator has made threats;
- That if they tell someone and that person doesn't help, then they must keep on telling until someone helps.

See Article 07 for further information.

7. **Remember that in the busyness of modern-day life, the most important gifts you can give your child is your time and attention.** So make connecting with your child a top priority today and reassure them, that you are there for them no matter what and always ready to listen. See Article 08 for further information.

8. **Reinforce body safety messages with your behaviour.** Once you begin educating your children about body safety, it is very confusing for them if you do not reinforce the messages. For instance, if your child does not want to kiss or hug someone then it is important that you give them that authority to say 'no'. Perhaps suggest a high five or a handshake as alternative way of responding.
9. **Supervision is Key.** Whilst our kids need autonomy and independence to grow into healthy, functioning adults, it is also important to remember that you have a responsibility to

know where your kids are and with whom they are spending time. Try and keep an open-door policy and remember to trust your gut instinct if someone makes you feel uncomfortable.

10. **Don't assume that every organisation is compliant.** ChildSafe Australia have a fantastic FREE resource for parents which outlines five questions for parents to ask organisations about their child's safety. Download today: <https://www.childsafe.org.au/resources/fivesafetyquestions/>