



When Something Doesn't Feel Right

By Michelle Derrig

When it comes to having effective body safety conversations, it is essential that we help our young children to identify inappropriate behaviour. However, it is also important to teach them to trust their own intuition when 'something just doesn't feel right'.

Just like adults, children's bodies will react when they are faced with a situation that makes them feel scared, worried or uncomfortable. So, it's important that we educate our children and explain to them the different ways that their body might warn them, that something is wrong.

These physical warning signs include:

- Butterflies in their tummy
- Urgent need to go to the toilet
- Sweaty or sticky palms
- Wobbly or jelly legs
- Stuck or heavy feet
- Feeling sick
- Racing heart

It is also critical that we help our children understand that they can say 'no' at any point that someone's touch doesn't feel right.

Some parents simply tell their children that *no one can touch their 'private parts' or 'anything under their underpants*. Whilst, of course, this information is correct, the problem is that at that point, the abuse is already taking place.

To better protect your children, teach them that they have the right to say 'no' to any physical contact that triggers these physical warning signs, or makes them feel uncomfortable.

Be specific with your children and tell them that they have the right to say 'no' to any touch, including kissing, cuddling, snuggling, tickling, stroking or massage, whether it be through their clothes or from direct touch. Remind them that they are the boss of their body and that they can say 'no' to anyone, no matter the person's gender, age, relationship or status in the community.

And of course, as a parent or carer, trust your own gut instinct. A predator will often groom the parents, as well as the child, in an attempt to gain their trust. So be alert, if someone is showing your child an unusual amount of attention. If someone makes you feel uncomfortable, or you sense that something 'just doesn't feel right' then stay vigilant and don't allow your child to spend time alone with that person.