



The Problem With Keeping Secrets

By Michelle Derrig

For many of us, sharing a secret with a friend or family member was a normal part of our childhood. The idea of being entrusted with a secret would conjure up feelings of delight as you furtively promised ‘never to tell a living soul’ with a pinkie promise.

But sadly, there is a much darker side to secrets for the thousands of victims of childhood abuse. For these children and young people, their secret can be devastating – compounding the fear and terror of their abuse and isolating them from those with the power to help them. In fact, one of the most powerful tools a predator has at their disposal is to coerce, threaten or bribe their young victims into silence and into carrying what for some, can be a lifetime secret.

In light of this sad reality, child protection experts recommend that you **avoid using the term ‘secrets’ with your children**. Instead, you might tell your children that they need to keep a ‘surprise’ about a birthday gift or present, or you might use the term ‘private information’ or ‘family business’ for personal circumstances that you

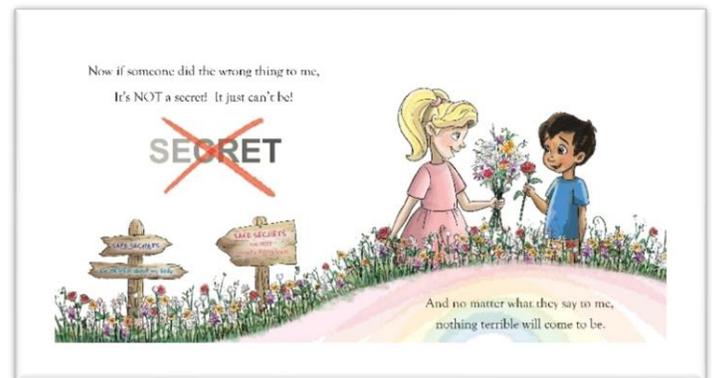
don’t want broadcast just yet – *for instance it might be a new pregnancy or plans to move house.*

Of course, even if we limit or ban the use of secrets in our own households, our children will still be exposed to the concept by others, so it’s essential that we also teach them what constitutes a ‘safe secret’.

So what is a safe secret?

A safe secret is:

1. NEVER about their BODY; and
2. NEVER a secret forever.



Whilst there is never a fool proof way of completely protecting your children, teaching them about safe secrets is an important step in the empowerment process.