



Help...

**I want to teach my
child personal safety**

**Helping Children Protect
Themselves from Abuse**

CHURCHES'

Child Protection

ADVISORY SERVICE

What comes to mind when you think about the personal safety skills you acquired as a child...

...to be wary of strangers perhaps? It is possible this was all you were taught and now, as an adult, you've faithfully passed the message on. Unfortunately this falls far short of what children need to grasp in order to stay safe. Children are most likely to be abused by someone they know well. The most important lesson a child can learn is how to protect themselves from anyone who might hurt them. If we did this fewer children would be abused and those that are would be more likely to tell.

We take it as 'given' that children will be taught road safety. If it didn't happen a national emergency would be declared! Issues of personal safety are as important and simple to teach.

In this booklet we present positive and practical skills that when taught appropriately, can provide a child with a balanced and healthy perspective of right and wrong. A child can learn to recognise what is good and wholesome but also what isn't, and be given the confidence to speak out and seek help without fear of recrimination.

Let's start by looking at some of the facts:

- Both men and women abuse children. Children and young people also abuse and bully.
- Most children who are abused are not hurt by strangers, but more often by a family member, friend or acquaintance like a neighbour, babysitter, someone in a position of trust etc.
- 'Stranger danger', the term that seems to have become the byword for keeping children safe must be seen in proportion with reality. A child is far more likely to be involved in a serious road accident than be abducted by or coerced to go off with someone they don't know.
- Some children are at greater risk of being abused. These include children with disabilities who have a greater dependence on adults and may not be able to communicate easily. Also, those who have been abused in the past are more vulnerable to being abused again.

What can be done?

Just as children are taught safety in the home and on the roads, children can be helped to avoid potentially dangerous situations, resist inappropriate touching, refuse to keep secrets and seek adult help when needed. Giving a child confidence in these areas will not be any more daunting for them than any of the other things they need to learn.



When and how to start

As shocking as it seems, even babies and young children are sexually abused. It is never too early for children to learn to start taking care of themselves, just as they are taught how to wash or clean their teeth.

We need to be balanced when talking with children about personal safety, making them aware of the dangers without destroying their underlying trust in adults. Never use scare tactics.

As adults our behaviour towards a child must be limited to what the child feels comfortable with. This may mean asking someone not to tickle the child, or insist on a goodnight kiss. Supporting children in being able to

say 'no' where non-abusive behaviour is involved will help them resist abusive advances.

Parents and workers may be apprehensive about actively teaching a child to say 'no', fearing it could encourage disobedience. However, children can be made to feel secure in the care of adults and understand that most will not make wrong demands of them.

When helping a child to develop personal safety skills, the use of language appropriate to the child's age, understanding and back ground is all important.

Self esteem

Parents who cultivate a positive relationship with their child(ren) help them to build a healthy self esteem. In other words making them feel loved, wanted and important, not only by what is said but through physical contact such as cuddles and hugs.

Children who feel good about themselves are more confident than those with a poor self-image and are far more able to resist inappropriate advances. It is therefore important to affirm children in all areas of their lives, involving them, wherever possible, in everyday decisions and giving positive feedback.

Children can also be helped to appreciate the rights they enjoy as well as the responsibilities they have towards others, i.e. a right not to be hurt but a responsibility not to hurt others.

Children

Parents can make sure their children are and that they are safe and no-one is in the swimwear or the car has been included to children is to drink, medic

Of course parents should be applying their own rules and be kept secret in these places

It is important to be perfectly aware of the bathroom, to

Children with their own personal care

Secrets and surprises

Children can be taught to differentiate between surprises and unsafe secrets. Surprises on birthdays, for example, which everyone eventually finds out about, are fun. But secrets that involve someone being hurt or being told to keep silent about something they are frightened of or don't understand is never OK. Children should be taught to tell a parent or another grown-up if this happens; they could make a list of safe adults they could tell if worried about anything. It is also important for children to know that if the first safe grown-up they talk to doesn't take any notice, they should go to the next until they find someone who listens and acts!

Helping

Babysitting

Take care in choosing a babysitter. Ensure that you establish clear rules. You can repeat the rules to the child, along the lines of 'Go to bed and has had his bath in bed by 7.00 o'clock'. The possibility of abuse or mistreatment by a babysitter. If your child is particularly attached to a particular person then you should change the babysitter.

Don't forget to also teach your child practical things like safe use of the telephone, answering the door, playing outside etc. Things

'Real Life'

Children can understand the difference between good and bad secrets. Six year old Luke, when asked about a birthday present, told grandpa 'it's a secret but it's not one I have to tell mummy about'.

Children and their bodies

It is important to make a point of emphasising to children that they are valued and accepted just as they are, and that their bodies belong to them, not anyone else. Some parts of their bodies are private and are not allowed to be looked at or touched just for fun. The private areas are those covered by their underclothes (breasts, buttocks, anus and genitals) but also the mouth. (The mouth is included because some children are abused through oral sex.) One way of conveying this is to make it clear that with the exception of a doctor or dentist, their mouth is for food, medicine and the toothbrush!

Parents need to explain to young children they may need help with things like washing or treatment to sore places but anyone else touching them on the private parts should never be allowed. Again, it will need to be explained that a doctor or nurse might need to have a look at them but a parent will normally be present if this happens.

Young children don't develop hang-ups about their bodies, so they should be told it is acceptable and normal for them to touch their own private parts in places like the toilet or bedroom.

Children with disabilities may have particular needs that require establishing different boundaries of consent, but their rights over their own bodies remain the same.

a child

babysitter and
the ground rules.
in front of the
Samuel is ready for
a. He needs to be
his minimises the
manipulation of the
is unhappy about
don't hesitate to

a children the more
practice in using
g the door and
ok safe and act safe.

Being assertive

All children should be empowered to say 'no' if someone is touching them in a way that frightens or confuses them. Children can practise saying 'no' in the everyday scenarios such as when asked to do something they know is wrong like lying, in which case they can also be encouraged to tell one of their 'safe' grown-ups what has happened.

In a serious situation, children need to realise they can say 'no' repeatedly, run away, and go to a safe adult. They could be taught the phrase 'No! Go! Yell! Tell!' to help them remember what to do.

'Real Life'

Liz told her five year old 'If there's anything you're not sure is OK, you can always whisper it in my ear. I'll never be cross with you for asking about that kind of thing'.

Feelings

It is important that children are encouraged to appropriately express all their feelings – good and bad. One way to help a child do this is to make a feelings cube (see opposite). Even if the child can't say what they are feeling they can point to the appropriate face on the cube. Making a game of it, you can talk about expressing 'nice' and 'yucky' feelings and what to do with them. For example, if a child feels scared, angry, upset or confused they can talk to a grown up.

Touching

Touching is an essential part of everyday life, but it's also a way of communicating affection, warmth and reassurance. Children can be taught the difference between good and bad touches. Bad touches are ones that hurt, are rude or make the child feel uncomfortable or scared. Assertiveness can be encouraged when it comes to touch – a child is entitled to say 'no' to any that aren't good or they don't like. As we have said already, this includes touches that aren't necessarily abusive but some children really don't enjoy, like tickling.

Touching boundaries can also be discussed with the child. A child's private parts are 'no-go' areas for anyone, (other than the circumstances already mentioned), but also touches such as stroking or tickling under a child's clothes. Hugs can be great, but what should a child do if someone wants to give them a tight bear-hug and they don't like it? The answer is

simple – they can say a confident 'no' (preferably followed by a thank-you!), 'I don't like that'.

The Christian perspective

There are passages in the bible that encourage children to do what their parents tell them but this does not mean in *every* circumstance adults must be obeyed. Clearly it would be wrong for a child to be coerced into anything immoral, illegal or abusive and there is a very strong rebuke in Matthew 18 v 6 for those who involve children in any of these activities. There are also several accounts of Jesus' encounters with children. Without exception Jesus welcomed them and treated them with acceptance, respect and dignity, even when his disciples wanted them pushed to one side.

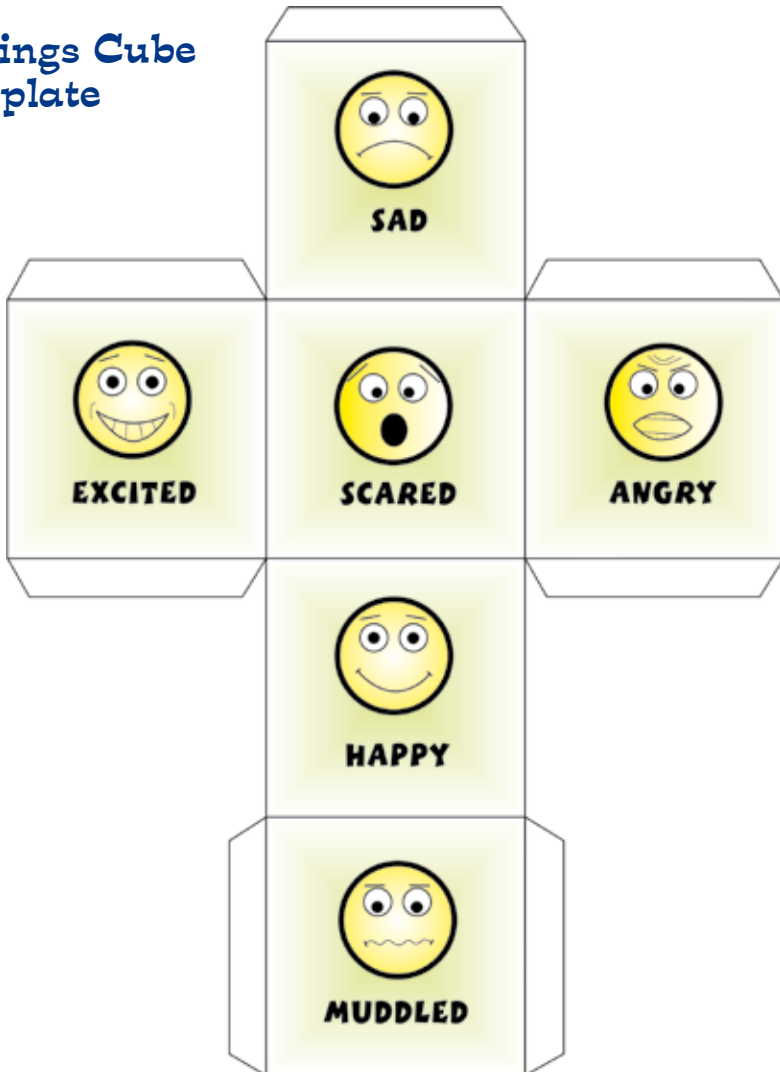
Children can be taught to respect adults and do what they are told, unless they sense what they are being asked to do is wrong or makes them feel uncomfortable (we're not talking legitimate bed-time here!). Jesus placed great importance on their wellbeing and as adults we have an obligation to do the same.

NB There are biblical examples that can be used to help children understand personal safety skills and they can be found in an article 'Keeping Children Safe' on the CCPAS website.

Conclusion

We have shown in this booklet that teaching a child personal safety skills really isn't an optional extra. Rather, it is an essential part of the healthy and safe development of any child. Acquiring these skills from an early age will not only instil confidence and maturity, but also equip a child to respond appropriately in situations and circumstances they find themselves in, wherever they are and whatever they are doing. They are skills that are not difficult to impart as they grow and mature into adulthood, and they will last a lifetime.

Feelings Cube Template



Useful organisations

Churches Child Protection Advisory

Service: An independent Christian-based charity providing training, advice, help and support in all areas of child protection and good working practice, including a 24 hour helpline.

PO Box 133, Swanley, Kent, BR8 7UQ.

Helpline: 0825 120 4550

Email: info@ccpas.co.uk

Web: www.ccpas.co.uk

Kidscape: A national charity publishing books and information on self protection skills for children.

2 Grosvenor Gdns, London, SW1 0DH

Helpline: 08451 205 204

Email: webinfo@kidscape.org.uk

Web: www.kidscape.org.ouk

Childline: A 24 hour helpline for children.

Helpline: 0800 1111

Web: www.childline.org.uk

NSPCC: A national child protection charity

Helpline: 0808 800 5000

Email: help@nspcc.org.uk

Web: www.nspcc.org.uk

Stop it Now!: A national campaign that helps to prevent child abuse by encouraging potential/actual offenders to seek help. It also provides adults with information to help safeguard children.

PO Box 9841, Birmingham, B48 7WB

Helpline: 0808 1000 900

Email: office@stopitnow.org.uk

Web: www.stopitnow.org.uk

**This is one of an expanding series of Help... leaflets.
See CCPAS website for more details.**

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ADVISORY SERVICE

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