

Keeping Kids Safe

A Guide for Grown-Ups



You want your kids to be safe. You talk to them about safety rules for crossing the street, riding their bike, riding in the car...but are you talking to your kids about Personal Body Safety? 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be sexually assaulted by the age of 18 (ICASA.org). Talking to your children about Personal Body Safety rules is one of the best ways to prevent abuse and to teach them what to do if it happens.

When talking to children about touching it is easy to frame it as you would any safety rules. Stress safety, not sex or sexuality. Begin by talking about the three kinds of touches: good, hurtful, and confusing. Your child can easily identify good and hurtful touches. Help your child identify confusing touches as those that cause “in between” feelings. Examples are tickling too much, hugs from someone they don’t know well, and touches in private areas. Because the touches are easily linked to your child’s feelings, you can incorporate reinforcement into everyday life. If your child gives you a hug, you can say, “what a good touch. I like getting good touches.”

Bath time and doctor’s visits can be good times to reinforce that private areas need to be kept clean and healthy. Explain to your child at these times that touches in the private areas should only be to keep them clean and healthy, and touches in their private areas are never a secret.

Help children identify some trusted adults they can talk to if they ever need help or guidance. Assure them that they can always come to you for help if they need it.

Review your Personal Body Safety rules as you would any other safety rules. To be effective, Personal Body Safety rules need to apply to everyone in a child’s life: relatives, siblings, teachers, friends, caretakers, neighbors and even parents. As a reminder, why not cut out the rules and post them where your family will see them every day!

Personal Body Safety Rules

- **My body belongs to me.**
- **Touches are supposed to feel good.**
- **Touches in private areas are only to keep me clean and healthy.**
- **Touches in private areas are never a secret.**
- **If I am ever hurt or scared, I will tell a grown-up I trust.**
- **It’s never too late to tell.**
- **I will keep telling until I get the help that I need.**

Protect Your Child

Take time to get to know the people around your child. Check references for child care providers. Get to know your child's friends and their family members. Is your child being singled out by someone? Is there someone who seems overly interested in relationships with your children?

The unfortunate reality is that 93% of children who are abused know their abuser (RAINN.org). The prime reason children keep abuse a secret is due to their relationship with their abuser. Children want the abuse to end, but they often do not want the abusive person to "get into trouble."

Watch your child for signs that something is wrong. Has your child displayed sudden changes in behavior? Does your child seem anxious around a particular person? More indicators are listed below.

Language Matters

A four-year-old girl commented to her daycare provider that someone was touching her cupcake. The teacher responded that it was nice for the girl to share. Weeks later, it was discovered that the girl was being sexually abused. This girl had been taught to use the word "cupcake" rather than "vagina."

The words we use to talk to children are important. Use CORRECT BIOLOGICAL TERMS for body parts. Using slang terms for a child's genitals can leave a child embarrassed to talk about these important body parts.

What to look for:

Children who are abused may try to tell you through their behaviors. We have listed some here. Please keep in mind that these signs can appear for other reasons, since they are a reaction to stress. They do not automatically indicate abuse.

If you are concerned, please seek professional help.

Physical indicators: difficulty walking or sitting, pain during urination, painful/swollen genital areas, poor sphincter control, frequent yeast infections.

Preschool behaviors: resume outgrown behaviors, excessive fear of separation, sleeping with discarded toy/doll, sexually explicit drawings, nightmares.

School-age behaviors: sleep disturbance, advanced knowledge of sex, running away, overly compliant, aggressive acting out with peers, bed-wetting.

Adolescent behaviors: poor body image, eating disorders, acts older "13 going on 21", sexual themes in stories/art, substance abuse, frequent "spacing out".

How to Respond

If any child discloses abuse, you can be most helpful if you remain calm and respond openly. You do not want the child to think you are angry with them. Don't interrogate or ask the child to tell you more than he or she is willing or able to tell. Most importantly, assure the child that you believe them. Tell the child that he or she is not at fault for the abuse and that they didn't deserve the abuse. Acknowledge to the child that they were very brave to tell. Lastly, get help for the child by making a report.

Call Maine's Department of Human Services at 1-800-452-1999

For emotional support, call Sexual Assault Response Services of Southern Maine at 1-800-313-9900

Cyber-Safety

Smartphones, e-readers, tablets, laptops, video games...today's children are navigating the digital world as they grow up. The possibilities for learning and making connections are amazing, but new skills are needed to stay safe and responsible. Be proactive and get involved in your child's online life. Set and maintain boundaries around what websites, apps, and games your child uses. Visit www.common sense media.org for reviews of content and tips on parenting in the digital age. Help your kids stay safe online by teaching them to be savvy consumers and responsible creators of digital media. Check out our rules below and discuss them with your child.

If your child is harassed or receives messages that make them uncomfortable, make a report to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's Cyber Tipline for sexual exploitation at www.missingkids.com/cybertipline. You can also contact your local police.



Internet Safety Rules

- I will follow the rules about the sites I can visit and the apps I can use.
- I will not share my name, age, school, address, phone number or picture with people I meet online.
- I will tell a trusted grown-up right away if I feel uncomfortable with the words someone uses or the questions they ask.
- I will not respond to mean, frightening, or uncomfortable messages.
- I will keep my password secret and only share it with my family.
- **I will be a good online citizen! Remember:**
 - *Be respectful and responsible just like you are off the computer!*
 - *Online friends are real people. If you wouldn't say something to someone's face, don't say it online.*
 - *Nothing is ever really private online. Only post things you would be proud to show your family and teachers.*
 - *Cyber bullying hurts. If you see it, report it.*

Resources for Grown-ups

The following books can be helpful for grown-ups and children. Read at home to strengthen personal body safety and use as a discussion starter for questions about bodies, babies, and puberty.

BOOKS ON PERSONAL BODY SAFETY

My Body Belongs to Me, Jill Starishevsky, Safety Star Media, 2009.

No Trespassing – This is MY Body!, Pattie Fitzgerald, Safely Ever After Media, 2011.

Your Body Belongs To You, Cornelia Spelman, Albert Whitman & Company, 1997.

My Body is Private, Linda Walvoord, Albert Whitman & Company, 1984.

I Said No! A kid-to-kid guide to keeping your private parts private, Kimberly King, Boulden Publishing, 2008.

I Can Play It Safe, Alison Feigh, Free Spirit Publishing, 2008.

Do You Have a Secret? (Let's Talk About it!), Jennifer Moore-Mallinos, Barron's Educational Series, 2005.

Some Secrets Should Never Be Kept, Jayneen Sanders, UpLoad Publishing, 2011.

BOOKS ON HUMAN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Who Has What? All About Girls' Bodies and Boys' Bodies, Robie Harris, Candlewick, 2011.
(Pre K-2)

What Makes A Baby, Cory Silverberg, Triangle Square, 2013. (Pre K – 2)

It's So Amazing! A Book About Eggs, Sperm, Birth, Babies, and Families, Robbie Harris, Candlewick, 1999. (Grades 2-5)

On Your Mark, Get Set, Grow! A "What's Happening to My Body?" Book for Younger Boys, Lynda Madaras, William Morrow Paperbacks, 2008. (Grades 4-6)

Ready, Set, Grow! A "What's Happening to My Body?" Book for Younger Girls, Lynda Madaras, William Morrow Paperbacks, 2003. (Grades 4-6)

Find additional resources for talking to your children in the 'For Parents' section at www.mainefamilyplanning.org/resources/parents

Sexual Assault Response Services of Southern Maine (SARSSM), the state's oldest and largest rape crisis center, was founded in 1973 to support survivors of sexual assault, their families and friends, and to help eradicate sexual violence. From these roots, we have grown into a major crisis intervention and resource center for all of southern Maine.

All of SARSSM's services are free & confidential. We offer services to women, men, adolescents, and children of all ages and backgrounds in York & Cumberland counties.

If you or someone you know has been hurt by sexual violence and would like to speak with an advocate, please call this confidential toll-free number: **1-800-313-9900**. Find us online at www.sarsonline.org

Thanks to Sexual Assault Support Services (SASS) of Portsmouth, NH, who originally developed this newsletter.