

Conversations about Safety & Boundaries

Strategies for Talking to Children about Safety

- Keep conversations short, simple and frequent.
- Do not use scare tactics.
- Be a good listener.
- Ask open ended questions and let them know that they can come to you with anything.
- If your child does not seem interested in talking, do not be discouraged or give up. They may need time to open up.
- Maintain interest in your child's life.
- Let them know it's okay to trust their instincts and it's okay to say "NO" to uncomfortable touch.
- Observe and listen to your child. If they don't want to be around a particular person (babysitter, relative, family member), don't make them and find out why. They may be responding to a "red flag" that you are unaware of.

Conversation Starters:

- What was the best and worst part of your day?
- Who are your "safe adults" at school/extracurricular activities/in the neighborhood?
- Has anyone ever made you feel uncomfortable? Have you ever been touched in an uncomfortable way?
- What did (or would) you do if someone did touch you in an uncomfortable way?
- What does it mean to be safe?
- Did you have to make a "safe choice" today?

Boundary Violations

When talking to children about safety, teach them about their bodies, personal boundaries and why their bodies are special and private. Teach children what boundary violations are, and what you want the child to do if he/she experiences a boundary violation. Include that touching boundaries are for everyone: even parents, family members, other youth, cousins, babysitters and friends. Some examples of boundary violations include:

A person (adult or child) who:

- Insists on hugging, touching, kissing, tickling, wrestling, or holding, especially when the child doesn't want physical contact.
- Tells inappropriate, personal or suggestive jokes or stories with a child.
- Talks repeatedly about the child's developing body, focusing on the sexuality of that child.
- Insists on spending time alone with a child.
- Appears "too good to be true," offering to babysit for free, taking kids out, giving them money or gifts randomly.
- Often walks in on a child when in the bathroom or changing.
- Invites children to spend time alone at their home, offering toys or games, especially an adult who doesn't have children.
- Seems to give more attention to one particular child.

*Adapted from Safely Ever After, Inc.
& Darkness to Light*

Healthy Sexual Development from Birth to Age 18

Birth to Age 2

- learn about love and trust through relationships with their parents and caregivers
- explore their bodies, including the genitals
- have erections or lubricate vaginally
- experience genital pleasure
- start to notice differences between the bodies of boys and girls and children and adults
- begin to learn expected behavior

Ages 3 to 5

- become very curious about their bodies and the differences between girls and boys
- play house, doctor or other body exploration activities
- learn they are female or male
- learn female and male roles by observing others
- enjoy learning about and talking about body parts and functions
- find adult bathroom activities very interesting
- ask questions about pregnancy and birth
- learn words related to sex and attempt to use them in conversations
- mimic adult sexual behavior
- begin to masturbate

Ages 6 to 8

- develop strong friendships with children of the same sex
- react to stories they hear in the media (AIDS, abuse, violence)
- increase their ideas about female and male roles
- have a basic sexual orientation and identity
- desire to be like their peers
- engage in name-calling and teasing
- continue body exploration activities
- begin and/or continue to masturbate

Ages 9 to 12

- onset of puberty
- grow to be more modest and want privacy
- value same sex friendships
- experience increased sexual feelings and fantasies
- develop romantic feelings toward the same sex and/or the opposite sex
- explore sexual activities with peers
- may masturbate to orgasm
- face decisions about sex

Ages 13 to 18

- continue and complete the changes of puberty
- value independence
- experience increased sexual feelings and want physical closeness with a partner
- continue to face decisions about sex
- choose romantic relationships over close friendships
- may encounter violence in relationships

Adapted from: CARE House 2005 www.region.peel.on.ca