



## *Guidelines for Parents*

# **Maintaining a Safe Environment for Your Children**

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We sponsor educational programs on child safety for parents at least once per year. We hope that you will make it a priority to attend the session when it is scheduled. In the meantime, we hope these points will be helpful to you in talking to your children about personal safety. Please do ask about any point that you would like to discuss.

During the course of the year, we will provide education to your child about how to be safe. This education will be done in a manner appropriate to the age of the children and in the context of our faith. In the annual education for parents, we will talk more about the program that will be offered to your child. When you understand what we are doing, we think you will appreciate very much the value of personal safety education. Please ask for as much detail as you desire. Nevertheless, if you do not want your child to participate in personal safety education, all you need do is give us in writing your instruction not to provide personal safety education to your child. We will honor your instruction.

### **Teaching young children in the home about personal safety**

1. Focus on safety rules rather than concepts. Remember all the different areas of safety—traffic, fire, bicycle and the like.
2. Your child will understand the difference between touches or other contacts with adults or other children that feel safe and comfortable and those that feel unsafe or uncomfortable. Reinforce the difference by using examples.
3. A comfortable way to talk about unsafe touches is to teach your child about “private parts.” Private parts can be described as the parts of the body that are covered by the bathing suit. Private parts are touched only by parents or others charged with the care of the personal needs or health of the child.
4. Children sometimes think it is wrong to “say no” to an adult. Let your child know that he or she can “say no” if he or she feels unsafe or uncomfortable, even if the adult is one of the above. A good person will welcome the child’s expression of discomfort, treating it as important feedback and something to talk about.
5. Be sure that your child knows that “saying no” applies to anyone. Most child abuse or maltreatment is perpetrated by someone the child and you know and trust. It is worth repeating, a good person will welcome the child’s expression of discomfort, treating it as important feedback.



6. Children can also understand the rule, “get away,” when you feel unsafe or uncomfortable with what another person is doing. It is a rare situation in which the potential molester will physically confine or restrain a child who wants to leave.
7. Finally, let your child know that it is important to tell a trusted adult if he or she feels uncomfortable or unsafe with an adult. Teach the child that there is never a good reason to keep secrets for an adult about something that feels unsafe or uncomfortable. Help your child name trusted adults and encourage him or her to talk to them until someone takes his or her report seriously.
8. Have these conversations regularly. They will help you build a relationship with your child in which he or she is likely to bring up whatever is troubling. You don’t want to be “the last to know.”

### **Teaching older children and teenagers in the home about personal safety**

1. As children reach the fourth and fifth grades, they are more able to understand concepts.
2. They are also more vulnerable to being lured in more subtle ways by harmful persons. These lures are often very attractive; those who would take advantage of children are very sensitive to their needs and wants.
3. As they get older still, especially when they reach high school, the number of dangers multiplies, as do the problems our children can get themselves into.
4. Those who would take advantage of older children and teenagers are very good at identifying what will attract or win over the targeted child. They see what the child needs or wants and they try to provide it.
5. At these ages it is even more important to have in-depth discussions and to invite persons from the community with special expertise to help with these discussions.
6. In-depth discussions are important because you do want to develop a relationship with your child in which he or she will feel comfortable to come to you with concerns.
7. Other persons from the community are important because in our rapidly changing world parents are often unaware of the type and nature of the dangers young people face. Internet traps are one very clear example of such new dangers.
8. The basic messages are the same. Help your older children trust their instincts and their consciences.
9. When they feel uncomfortable or unsafe, when they know that they are being asked to do something wrong, remind them that they can be assertive and refuse to go further. They can get away from the situation and they can talk to you or another trusted adult.



### General information

1. The mandated reporting law requires any member of the parish or school team to make a personal report to Child Protective Services (CPS) and/or law enforcement if there is reasonable suspicion that is being, has been or is in danger of being harmed.
2. Our personnel are required to make that report regardless of who may have harmed the child. CPS or law enforcement will investigate to sort out the facts of the situation as fairly as possible.
3. All involved realize the trauma for a family at such a time and, within limits necessary for the investigation, will provide support that you may need. Ask for help for your child or the rest of the family.
4. If your child reports abuse to you or to another trusted adult, your reaction is very important. As much as possible at such a difficult time for you as well as for your child, try to remain calm. Do not rush to judgment; neither deny the truth of what your child has reported nor make an interpretation of the facts that might turn out to be wrong. Focus instead on supporting your child for making the report and cooperate with law enforcement or CPS in sorting things out.
5. One of the most damaging thoughts a child can hold in the case of abuse is the belief that it was his or her fault. We know that a child is not held responsible for abuse or maltreatment by an adult, but the child may assume just the opposite. There will be time later for further education about safety rules or (for older children) avoiding dangerous situations; in the immediate aftermath of a report, focus on simply being there with and for your child.
6. You cannot protect your child from every danger, but you can teach him or her about personal safety. You can collaborate with your parish or school to reinforce that teaching.
7. You can form a relationship with your child in which he or she will have confidence that you are a person who can listen and offer counsel worth heeding.
8. You can, if you have reasonable suspicion of danger, make a report yourself to law enforcement.

