Discussion Guide

(Ages 5-8)

It is important to talk to young children about safety without overwhelming or scaring them. This discussion guide offers age-appropriate messages and strategies to help you start a conversation about personal and online safety.

What to Talk About

When discussing personal safety, empower children by helping them learn what to do if they find themselves in a threatening situation. Tell children:

- A trusted adult is someone like your mom, dad or teacher who makes you feel safe, helps you and listens to you. You can tell a trusted adult any time you feel sad, scared, uncomfortable or confused.

- Ask me or another trusted adult first before going anywhere, helping anyone, or accepting anything.

- It's important to stay with me or the trusted adult in charge when you are away from home.

- Let's learn your full name, home address and telephone number. If we get separated, knowing this information can help you get home.

- Some of the body parts your swimsuit covers are private. If anyone touches you there or anywhere else in a way that makes you uncomfortable, you can say "no" — even if that person is a grown-up.

When discussing online safety, focus on helping children learn behaviors that minimize risks. Tell children:

- Our family has rules about what you can do online in order to help keep you safe. You may not like all of these rules, but it's important that you follow them.

- We should be polite and treat others with respect while online.

- Just because something is online does not mean it's true.

- Ask a trusted adult before sharing information like your name, address or telephone number.

- Not everything online is meant for children. It's not your fault if you accidently see these things, but you should tell me about it so we can deal with it together.

Whether on- or offline, one of the most important safety messages for children is **tell a trusted adult**. Children should know they can talk to you about anything that happens.

How to Talk About It

Focus on how, not who. Instead of saying, "Don't talk to strangers," discuss the methods would-be abductors may use such as offering treats or money, asking for help, or offering to show an animal.

Role-play. Don't just talk about safety. Practice it! For example, have children practice yelling, kicking, and pulling away when discussing what to do if someone tries to take them.

Don't skip the hard stuff. It can be hard to talk about some safety issues, especially those involving sexuality. Set the foundation early by talking openly with your children about their bodies. For example, teach them to use the correct names for private parts.

Keep calm. Children make mistakes. If they break a safety rule, remind them why you set it and enforce the consequences. Then talk about what they should do differently the next time.

Listen. Encourage your children to talk about their concerns and listen respectfully — even when you disagree.

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Teachable Moments

The following stories demonstrate how you can incorporate the safety tips into real-life interactions with your children.

Ask before going places

Tom and his 8-year-old son Aaron are at the playground. "Do you want me to come with you to the monkey bars?" Tom asks. "Dad, I'm not a baby!" Aaron says. He wants to be more independent so his parents have been teaching him about personal safety. Before Aaron goes to play, Tom asks him to repeat their family's personal safety rules. "Remember," Tom says, "these rules are to help keep you safe. When you follow them, your mom and I know that we can trust you to do more things by yourself."

Inappropriate online content

Jeanine's 6-year-old daughter Rachel accidently clicks a link to an adult website while playing an online game. Jeanine wants to slam the laptop closed and pull Rachel away from the disturbing images, but she knows that this could confuse or scare Rachel. Instead, Jeanine calmly navigates away from the website. She tells Rachel, "Some online sites are just for adults. Children may accidently find these sites, but it's not their fault. If you come across another site like this, tell me or another trusted adult so that we can help you get back to a children's site."

You don't have to wait for a real-life situation to arise before discussing safety with your children. Start talking to them about it right now by creating your own teachable moments.

Get Started

While at the grocery store, ask your child

"What would you do if we got separated?" Have your child point out people to ask for help such as a store clerk or parent with children.

While driving to school, ask your child

"Who are your trusted adults? Why?" Later, make a list of your child's trusted adults so he or she knows who to contact for help.

While playing an online game with your child, ask

"Has anyone or anything you've seen online ever made you feel confused or uncomfortable?"

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