

## 8 Essential ‘Body Safety’ Rules to Keep Your Kids Safe

by Jayneen Sanders

As they say, knowledge is power, *right?*

And as parents, we teach our children about water safety and road safety—we make sure they wear their life vests or puddle jumpers, that they know they must hold our hands and look both ways before crossing the street and to never touch a hot stove.

But are we taking the time to incorporate body safety into our parenting conversations? I understand, it’s an intimidating topic to discuss. *What should I say? How should I say it? I can’t even imagine anything bad happening to my child—it’s too scary to think about*, etc. But avoiding it won’t do anyone any good. Keeping an open line of communication can make a difference in a child’s life.

**The following body safety skills can be taught throughout your child’s life and can be included as part of daily conversations.**

### **1. Teach your children the proper names of their body parts.**

As soon as your child begins to talk, name each body part correctly including the genitals, i.e. penis, vagina, vulva, buttocks, breasts and nipples. Explain to your child that their ‘private parts’ are the parts under their bathing suit. *Note:* a child’s mouth is also known as a ‘private zone’.

Avoid the use of ‘pet names’ to describe the genitals. This way, if a child is touched inappropriately, they can clearly state where they were touched.

### **2. Make sure there is a clear understanding of the word ‘private.’**

Explain the terms ‘private’ and ‘public’, i.e. ‘private’ means just for you. Talk about a toilet as being a private place but the kitchen, for example, is a public space because it is shared. Relate these terms to both spaces and body parts.

### **3. Explain to your child who they should talk to if they feel unsafe.**

Teach your child that no one has the right to touch or ask to see their private parts, and if someone does, they must tell a trusted adult straightaway. Teach your child that if someone (i.e. the perpetrator) asks them to touch their own private parts, shows their private parts to the child or shows them images of private parts that this is wrong also.

As your child becomes older (3+) help them to identify three to five trusted adults they could tell anything to and they would be believed. These people are part of their Safety Network. *Note:* at least one person should not be a family member.

### **4. Talk to your child about all different types of feelings.**

At the same time as you are discussing inappropriate touch, talk about feelings. Discuss what it feels like to be happy, sad, angry, etc. Encourage your child in daily activities to talk about their feelings, e.g. 'I felt really sad when ... pushed me over.' This way your child will be more able to verbalize how they are feeling if someone does touch them inappropriately.

### **5. Make sure they have a clear understanding of 'safe' vs. 'unsafe.'**

Talk with your child about feeling 'safe' and 'unsafe'. Discuss times when your child might feel 'unsafe', e.g. being pushed down a steep slide; or 'safe', e.g. snuggled up on the couch reading a book with you. It is important children understand the different emotions that come with feeling 'safe' and 'unsafe'.

### **6. Discuss what it feels like to feel unsafe.**

Discuss your child's Early Warning Signs when they feel unsafe, i.e. heart racing, feeling sick in the tummy, sweaty palms, etc. Let them come up with some ideas of their own. Tell your child that they must tell you or a person on their Safety Network if any of their Early Warning Signs occur. Reinforce that you will always believe them and that they can tell you anything.

## **7. Discourage secret keeping.**

Talk about ‘happy surprises’ instead such as not telling Granny about her surprise birthday party. Compare this with ‘unsafe’ secrets such as someone touching their private parts. Make sure your child knows that if someone does ask them to keep an unsafe secret that they must tell someone on their Safety Network straightaway.

## **8. Empower your child to speak up if something feels wrong.**

Discuss with your child when it is appropriate for someone to touch their private parts, e.g. a doctor when they are sick (but making sure they know you must be in the room). Explain that if someone does touch their private parts (without you there) that they have the right to say, ‘No!’ or ‘Stop!’ and outstretch their arm and hand.

Reinforce to your child that they are the ‘boss of their body’ and they do not have to kiss or hug a person if they don’t want to. Explain that we all have a ‘body boundary’. This is an invisible space that surrounds our body, and that no one can enter another person’s body boundary unless they allow it.

### **Jayneen Sanders**

*Jayneen Sanders is an author, teacher, mother of three and an advocate for the empowerment of children. Jayneen’s most recent children’s book [‘Let’s Talk About Body Boundaries, Consent and Respect’](#) for children ages 4 to 10 covers many of the key concepts mentioned above in a child-friendly and age-appropriate way. The book also includes Discussion Questions for parents, caregivers and educators. This book and Jayneen’s other children’s books on Body Safety, consent, gender equality, and emotional and social Intelligence can be found at [www.e2epublishing.info](http://www.e2epublishing.info) and Amazon*