

## Teaching Touching Safety to Young Children

A fact of life is touching. Young children thrive on hugs, kisses, pats on the back and "high fives." These self-esteem touches nurture a child's sense of worth and value. Unfortunately there are negative touches that children face. There's the shoving, pinching, kicking and hitting that comes from normal childish behavior. Parents are continually challenged as they teach their young children how to deal with peer conflict appropriately.

There is another touch that is increasingly becoming a threat to young children, especially for those between the ages of 4 to 11 years. It is the touch of the sexual offender. It is a proven fact that young children who are instructed in personal safety are less likely to become victims of sexual perpetrators. Unsafe situations are more readily identified by young children who learn personal safety and their training empowers them to make a right choice to protect themselves.

Here at the Missionary Learning Center we teach the curriculum, Talking About Touching which was published by the 2001 Committee for Children. Many public and private Christian schools use this material. It is also the recommended series by ACSI, the Association of Christian Schools International.

Teaching your child about 3 kinds of touches can empower them to protect their bodies from unsafe touches and learn to use good touches to show compassion, kindness, and friendship.

Christian parents need to share with their young children the message of their child's personal creation in Psalm 139:13-16. Sit down with your child and create a "God Made Me" book. In sharing this scripture with your child, talk about God's preplanning of who they would be. He wrote down in His Special Book all about them. He knew the color of their eyes, hair, their height, skills, abilities and interests, even who their parents

would be. Have a page in your book with titles like: This is me, These are my parents, This is my brother/sister, This is what I like to do, This is my hobby or interest, I like to go here. You can add any title you wish.

Conclude your project by sharing that God gave them the power of choice over their body, feelings and emotions. He wants them to make good, safe choices that will bring happiness and joy to their life. Tell your child you want to talk about 3 touching choices that will help keep them safe and happy.

First, share that Good Touches are good choices. Talk about a list of choices with your child that you both agree are good touches. These would be:

- hugs from family members
- kisses from Mom and Dad
- snuggling while reading a book together
- holding hands with a friend
- riding on Daddy's or Uncle's shoulders
- high fives and pats on the back

Help your child to understand that if sometimes they do not want any of these good touches, it's OK to say, "I don't want a kiss just now", or "I don't want to hug, thank you." Explain to your child that it's all right to not want to be touched in a way that's normal at other times. Children need to be empowered with words to know what to say if they do not want to be touched.

Secondly, share that Unsafe Touches are not good choices to make. Explain to your child that an Unsafe Touch is one that is not good for their body or feelings and can hurt them. Teach your child to respond firmly in a polite way with phrases like "Stop doing that," or "I don't like that, it's not safe." This would be said for things like:

- hitting, shoving, pushing, tripping
- pulling on one's clothes, or taking one's clothes
- biting, pinching, dangerously throwing things

- spitting, slapping
- lifting a friend off their feet

If their friend does not respond to their words for an Unsafe Touch, teach your child to go away from the offended and find a grown up. Their teacher or caregiver can then assist your child in resolving the conflict.

The last touch is the Unwanted Touch. This touch at times can be a safe touch, but your child may not want to be touched at that particular time. Children need to learn the "Touching Rule" in relation to the Unwanted Touch. The "Touching Rule" says, "Other persons should not touch your private body parts except to help you to be healthy or clean." Explain to your child that their body belongs to them. Tell them that the parts of their body covered by their underwear/or bathing suit is called their private body parts. Explain that no one at anytime should look at or touch their private body parts except to keep them clean and healthy.

There are times when private body parts are touched:

- being examined by the doctor, or getting a shot
- when family or babysitters help me with my bath to get clean
- when Mommy changes the baby's diapers
- when being examined by a nurse

Tell your child that if another person wants to look at or touch their private body parts they should:

- Immediately say words that mean no like, "Stop, my parents told me I can't do this!" or "Don't touch me there, my body belongs to me!"
- Get away from the person
- Find a grown up to tell

Explain to your child that sometimes the people who do this may be people they know. (Studies reveal that most sexual offenders of young children are people the child knows within their family, neighborhood or social acquaintances.)

Also warn your child that this person may want to keep a secret with them or bribe them about this Touching Rule violation. Or, sometimes they may try to threaten or scare them about telling what happened. Assure your child that you will always believe what they tell you and will keep them safe. Explain to your child it's never be too late for them to tell you about an Unwanted Touch that happened to them.

God has entrusted our children to us. It is our responsibility to teach them about this potential danger. The prepared child is better able to protect himself. Sexual offenders prey on the ignorant child. Children who are taught about these 3 touches will be better equipped to identify danger and confront those who try to harm them in their environment.

As a parent you need to be alert to mood changes in your child. Sometimes this may be an indicator that your child has had a negative experience. Or, another indicator of possible sexual abuse may be if your child uses words or exhibits behaviors that are not age appropriate for him.

Remember Good Touches are good choices. Our children need to be taught to recognize the Unsafe Touch and Unwanted Touch so they will be able to make choices that are safe and healthy for them. God gives each of us, even young children, the power to say: "This is my body. I will make the right choice." As responsible parents let's empower our children to make right choices.

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