

Tips for Parents of Elementary School Children

Children need to be taught explicitly how to respond to situations in which they are being abused or being groomed for abuse. Otherwise, they will not know what to do. We spend time and effort teaching our children how to behave in various school settings and in a variety of situations (e.g., what to do when bullying, conflicts, or peer pressure arise; how to make good choices; and how to be ready learners). We teach them these skills so that we know that our children will know what to do. Likewise, we must equip our children with the skills that they may need to respond to and report abuse.

Below are things ten things that could help children be less vulnerable to sexual abuse:

1. Talk about body parts early.

Name body parts and talk about them with your children at an early age. Help children identify their body parts and teach them what the actual names are for their body parts. When children know the names of their body part and what they mean, they are more able to talk clearly if something inappropriate should happen.

It is important that you, as the parents/guardians, feel comfortable using these words. It is important to create an environment at home in which sexual topics can be discussed comfortably and openly. If you are not comfortable talking about parts of the body or sexual topics, you unwittingly teach your children that these are taboo or unsafe topics and they will be less likely to say anything when it is most important that they do talk with an adult.

2. Teach your children that some body parts are private.

Tell children that their private body parts are called private because they are not for everyone to see. One way to make sure that children know which body parts are private is to explain that these are the body parts that are covered by a bathing suit. Explain that mommy and daddy can see their children naked, but people outside of the home should only see them with their clothes on.

There also may be times when someone may need to touch your child's body (e.g., a doctor during an examination). Make it clear to your children that this is okay only if you are in the room with them and if you tell them directly that it is okay. You can explain that this is safe touch because it has to do with health and because you are in the room with them.

3. Teach your children boundaries.

Tell your children matter-of-factly that no one should touch their private body parts and that no one should ask them to touch somebody else's private body parts. The second part of this sentence is important because sexual abuse often begins with perpetrators asking the child to touch them or someone else.

Model healthy boundaries and teach your children to respect their bodies by modeling and teaching them to respect other people's bodies. Children need to be told not to do something to anyone else that the other person does not want. For example, if your child is jumping up

and down on you, you could say, "I do not want you to jump up and down on me right now. Please stop." Similarly, if one child is tickling a sibling, that sibling should be able to say, "Stop it," and you should ensure that your child respects this. Modeling this for your children and providing absolute rules make it easier for children to understand boundaries.

It is possible to unintentionally confuse children by insisting they hug a relative, for example, even when they do not want to, or by saying, "You must do whatever the babysitter tells you to do." Help your children practice setting healthy boundaries. When children say that they do not want to hug and kiss everyone at a family gathering, do not make your children kiss or hug any relative that they does not want to by teaching them to say politely, "I do not feel like kissing (or hugging) right now." You also may support your children by helping them find another way to show respect to family members (e.g., saying goodbye rather than hugging, shaking hands or giving high fives). Model saying, "No," and assure your children that their "No" will be respected. If others disrespect or ignore your child's limits, it is your job as the parent/guardian to explain your family rules and insist on your child's rights to set boundaries.

It also is important for you to respect your children's wishes and to let them know that no one, not even a parent/guardian, has the right to touch them without their permission. Ask your children before touching them (e.g., "Would you like me to help you with your belt?"). Do not assume it is all right to do so. Ask your children for a goodnight kiss, rather than demanding one.

4. Tell your children that body secrets are never okay.

Most perpetrators will tell the child to keep the abuse a secret. This may appear friendly (e.g., "I love playing with you, but if you tell anyone else what we played they won't let me come over again") or it may be a threat (e.g., "This is our secret. If you tell anyone I will tell them it was your idea and you will get in big trouble!"). Tell your children that no matter what anyone tells them, body secrets are never okay and they should always tell you or a trusted adult if someone tries to make them keep a body secret.

5. Tell your children that no one should take pictures of their private body parts.

There are many pedophiles who take and trade pictures of naked children online. Tell your children that it is never okay and no one should ever take pictures of their private body parts.

6. Teach your children how to get out of scary or uncomfortable situations.

Saying "No" is an important safety skill. Teach your children to say "No" in lots of different ways. Help them communicate "No" through speaking, shouting, shaking their heads, stomping their feet, making faces, etc. Have fun practicing "No."

Some children are uncomfortable with telling people, especially older peers or adults, "No." Tell them that it is okay to tell an adult to leave if something that feels wrong is happening and help give your children the words to get out of uncomfortable situations. Tell your children that if someone wants to see or touch private body parts, they should say, "Stop!" and tell a trusted grown-up.

7. Have a code word your children can use when they feel unsafe or want to be picked up by you and brought home.

As children get older, you can give them a code word that they can use when they are feeling unsafe. This can be used at home, when there are guests in the house, or when they are on a play date or a sleepover.

8. Tell your children that they will never be in trouble if they tell you, or a trusted adult, a body secret.

Children often do not say anything to an adult because they think they will get in trouble. Perpetrators sometimes use this fear to keep children from saying anything to anyone. It is important that your children know and understand, that no matter what happens, when they tell you anything about body safety or body secrets, they will NEVER get in trouble.

Remind your children to tell you or a trusted adult if someone asks them to keep a secret from their parents/guardians or touches them on a private body part or in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable, unsafe, or yucky. Have your children practice telling an adult. Make sure that your children know that **all** secrets about private body parts are bad secrets and your children should **always** tell you or a trusted adult about bad and uncomfortable secrets.

Teach your children early and often that there are no secrets between children and their parents/guardians and that they should feel comfortable talking with their parent/guardian about anything—good or bad, easy or difficult, happy or sad.

Help your children prepare to ask for help from a safe adult. Identify people in the various places your children spend time who they may turn to for help. Consider your children's personality, their communication skills, and their ability to recognize concerning situations. Use role-playing or practice scenarios to help your children ask for help from a trusted grown-up.

Finally, if your children do disclose any history of sexual abuse, listen carefully, and take their disclosure seriously. Too often, children are not believed, especially if they implicate a family member as the perpetrator. Contact Child Protective Services or Montgomery County Police Department if you have any concerns about your children's safety. If you do not intervene, the abuse may continue and your children may learn and believe that home is not safe and that you are not available to help them.

9. Tell your children about different kinds of body touches.

Many parents and books talk about "good touch" and "bad touch," but this can be confusing because sometimes inappropriate touches do not hurt or feel bad. The term "secret touch" often is a more accurate depiction of what might happen. If any touch makes your children feel unsafe, sad, weird, or yucky, or if someone tries to touch your children's private body parts, they should say, "Stop it!" and tell a grown-up. "Uh-oh" feelings are definite warnings to your children to ask for help from a trusted grown-up.

10. Tell your children that these rules always apply, even with people they know, family members, and with other children.

This is an extremely important point to discuss with your children. When you ask young children what a “bad guy” looks like, they will typically describe a cartoon-like villain. You can say something like, “Mommy and daddy may touch your private body parts when we are cleaning you—but no one else is allowed to touch you there. Not friends; not cousins, aunts or uncles; not teachers or coaches. Even if you like them or think they are in charge, they should still not touch your private body parts.”

Remind your children that they should always check with a parent, guardian, or caregiver before going anywhere or with anyone. Abusers may be people you and your children know.

It also is important to explain tricks that people may use with your children. Some people who sexually abuse children use tricks or bribes to keep children from telling adults about the abuse. The abusive person might:

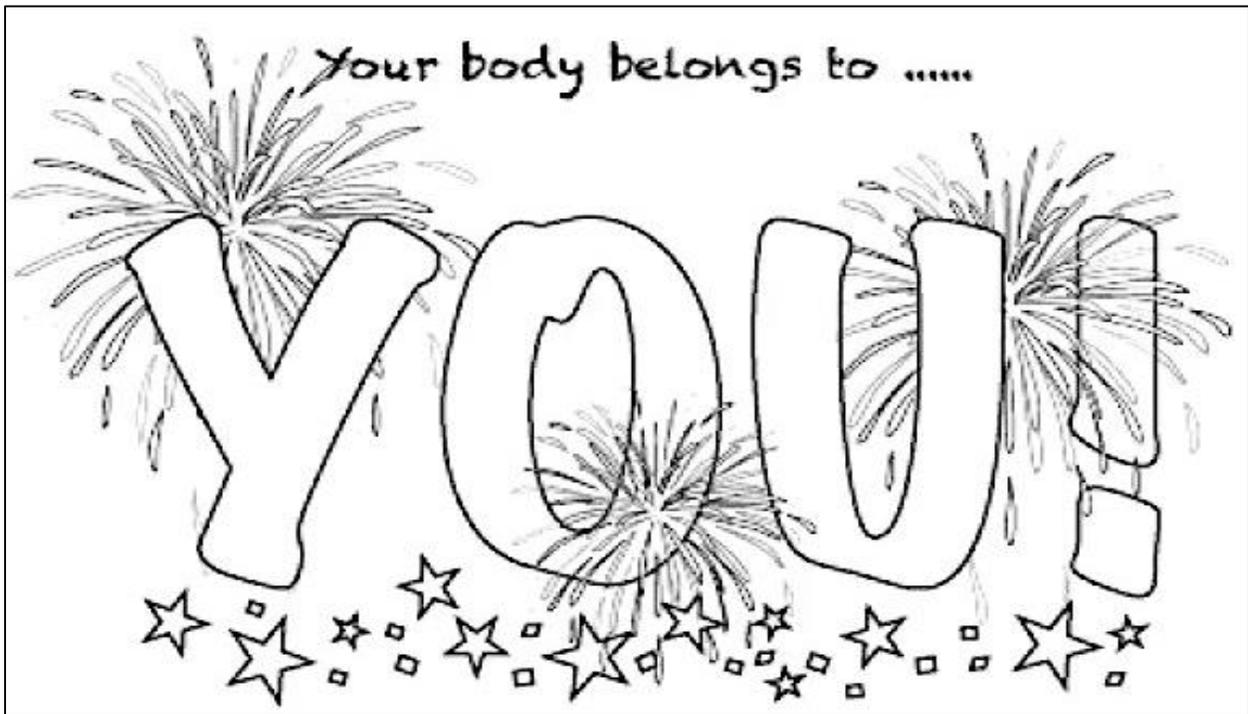
- Promise a gift or allow a forbidden privilege,
- Tell the child that it is the child’s fault or that no one will believe him/her,
- Tell the child that if he/she tells anyone, the abusive person will hurt his/her family or pet, or
- Tell the child that if he/she tells anyone, the abusive person may get into trouble or have to go away for a long time.

Explain these tricks to your children and reassure them that you can and will handle the situation, even if your children did not object to the sexual interaction at the time. Important messages to tell your children include, “As your parent/guardian, I will always believe you and love you, and I will always be here to keep you safe,” “It is never your fault if someone touches you in an uncomfortable way,” or “They just tell you that to trick you.”

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Adapted from the American School Counselor Association, the National Association of School Psychologists, and Stop It Now!

Games and Activities



Say:

NO

in a
loud voice

If you feel
uncomfortable
about what
someone is
doing . . .

GO

to a safe place
with other people



and

TELL

an adult
you trust



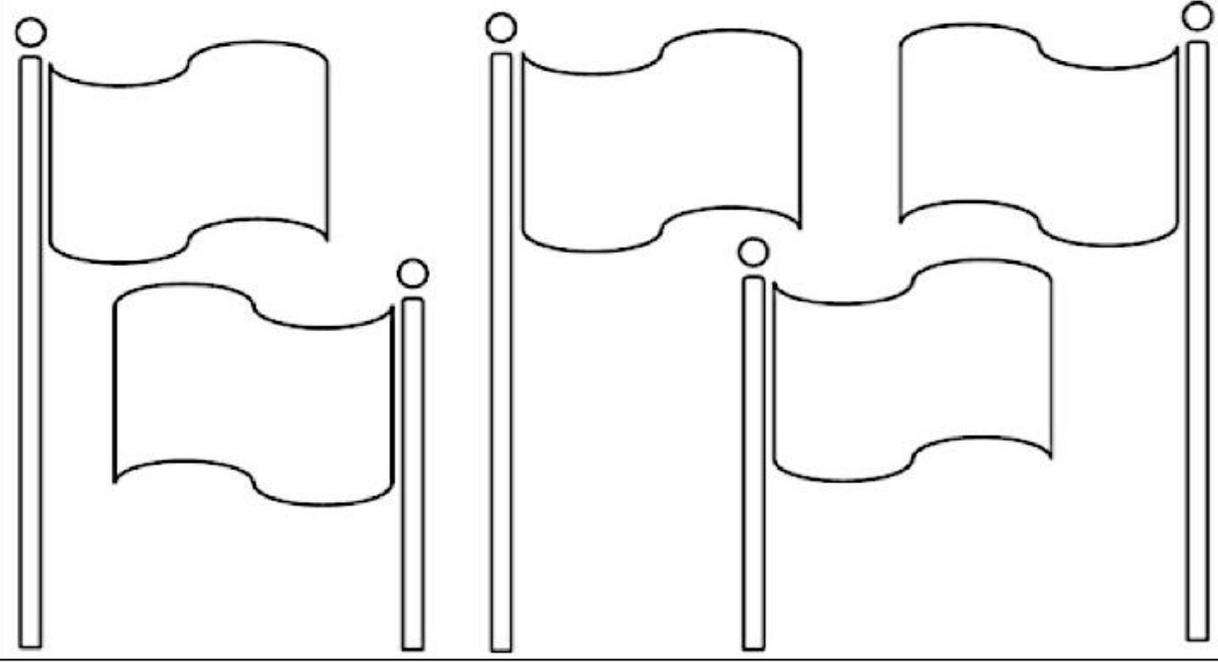
Before you go anywhere with anyone,
EVEN someone you know . . .



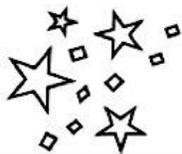
Check First!

My Green Flag People

Adults I Can Trust to Talk to About Hard Things



Practice ways you might tell someone you trust;
draw a picture, write a note or a conversation you
might have.



The "OK, NO!" Game

Come up with scenarios with your children and ask them if it is okay to say "NO!" in these situations. Ask them to explain their answers.

Some examples might include:

- Is it okay to say NO if your mom asks you tidy your room?
- Is it okay to say NO if your dad asks you to brush your teeth?
- Is it okay to say NO if your uncle asks you to sit on his lap and you don't want to?
- Is it okay to say NO if your teacher touches your penis?
- Is it okay to say NO if an adult pats you on the head?
- Is it okay to say NO if an adult pats you on your bottom, even if it feels nice?
- Is it okay to say NO if an adult asks you to do something you feel is wrong?
- Is it okay to say NO if an adult asks you to keep a secret from your parents?
- Is it okay to say NO if an adult tells you to put your seatbelt on?
- Is it okay to say NO if your sister asks you to touch her vagina?
- Is it okay to say NO if your teacher asks you to pull down your pants to smack you if you have been naughty?

Making this a game and practicing it regularly with your children is helpful to reinforce the information and to give your children the practice they may need to say, "NO!" at the same time. For older children, this could be the "WHAT IF...?" game in which you make the scenarios more complex to reflect situations your children may encounter.

You Are the Boss of Your Body!

© The Mama Bear Effect, Inc.

Meet Emma and Ethan

They are learning what it means to be the boss of their body.



Auntie Heather is coming to visit. Emma can't wait to give her a big hug, but Ethan is feeling a bit shy. Does Ethan have to give his aunt a hug?



Nope!

Hugging and kissing, sitting next to someone or on their lap, are always up to you - if you don't feel comfortable, you don't have to show affection - even for family or big people, like a teacher or babysitter.

What could Ethan do instead of hug?

Wave? Shake hands? Give a high five?

Ethan and Emma were playing around and tickling each other. After a little while, though, Emma didn't want to play anymore - even though Ethan did.

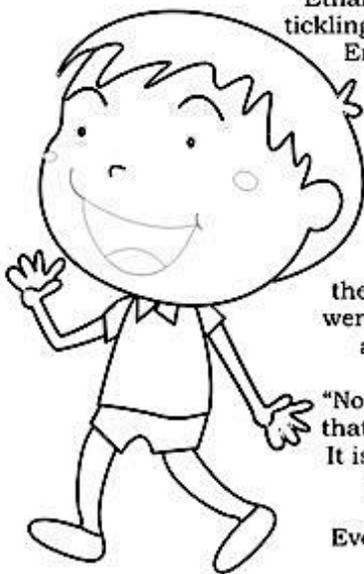
Does Ethan have to stop tickling Emma?

Yes.

If someone doesn't like how their body is being treated - even if they were ok with it at first, that is their right, and the other person needs to stop.

"No" and "stop" are very important words, that need to be listened to and respected. It is best to ask before a first hug or kiss, so that we know the person is ok with being touched.

Even big people need to follow this rule.



What about a doctor's visit?

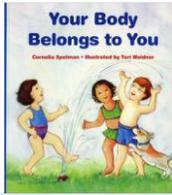
At a checkup, the doctor will have to look and touch your body to make sure you are healthy. Your mom or dad is with you to watch and make sure the doctor is respecting your body. If you ever have a concern about how someone is touching or treating you - you should go to a parent or other trusted adult like _____, and tell them about it.

For more information visit TheMamaBearEffect.org

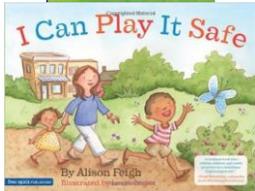


Additional tools and resources are available for download and use on The Mama Bear Effect (www.themamabeareffect.org) and Stop It Now! (www.stopitnow.org) websites.

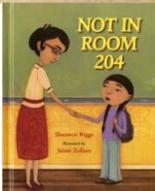
Books for Children



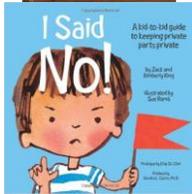
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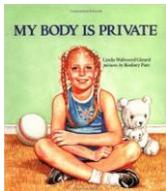
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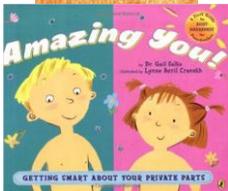
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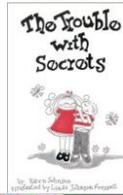
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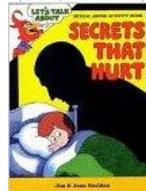
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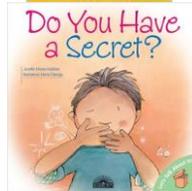
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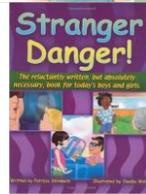
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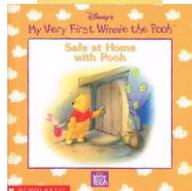
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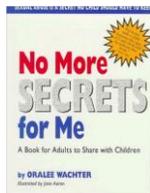


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For Adults



Wachter, O. (1994). *No More Secrets for Me: A Book for Adults to Share with Children*. Boston, MA: Little Brown and Co.

Community Resources

The Tree House Child Assessment Center of Montgomery County, 7300 Calhoun Place, Suite 600, Rockville, Maryland 20850, 240-777-4699, treehousemd.org.

Montgomery County Child Protective Services, Department of Health and Human Services, 1301 Piccard Drive, Rockville, MD 20850, 240-777-4417.

Montgomery County Public Schools, Child Abuse and Neglect Information, www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/childabuseandneglect.

Online Resources

The Mama Bear Effect, www.themamabeareffect.org. This website includes tools and resources for you to download and use.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, www.nctsn.org. *Caring for Kids: What Parents Need to Know About Sexual Abuse* (www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/caring_for_kids.pdf). This booklet also is available in Spanish (www.nsvrc.org/publications/websites/caring-kids-what-parents-need-know-about-sexual-abuse).

Stop It Now! www.stopitnow.org, Helpline: 888-PREVENT. This website includes tools and resources for you to download and use.

Additional tools and resources are available for download and use on The Mama Bear Effect (www.themamabeareffect.org) and Stop It Now! (www.stopitnow.org) websites.

If you need additional support and resources, please contact your school's administrators or counselor at 301-989-5770 or the Office of Student and Family Support and Engagement at 240-314-4824.