



SEXUALITY

Feel Safe – promoting self protection



Helping children to be safe is one of our most important responsibilities. Teaching self protection skills can be valuable and rewarding.

Self protection for parents and carers

Self protection skills are one way to help children to be safe or know how to find safety. This factsheet talks about how to help children be safe from sexual assault. The factsheet also explains how to use the FPQ booklet for children on self protection, *I have the right to be safe*.

Many parents and carers are concerned about the safety of children. This is a valid concern as statistics on sexual assault show the issue is very real. Sexual assault is against the law. It includes any sexual contact with a child and showing a child sexual acts or material.

Sexual assault can happen to any child. Some children have a higher risk of being sexually assaulted. These may include children with a disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, refugee children, children of sole parent families and children of parents who have alcohol abuse, substance abuse or psychiatric problems.

It is important for every child and family to learn self protection skills.

Avoid talking about “stranger danger” to prevent sexual assault occurring with children. Perpetrators of sexual assault are most commonly people who are known to the victim/survivor because of their relationships or employment.

Parents and carers can reduce the risk of abuse.

Giving children information and skills about self protection can help.

Learning about self protection includes:

- self esteem
- assertiveness
- body awareness
- understanding feelings
- understanding relationships
- identifying the rules about touch
- knowing what to do if the rules are broken

When to start

Children are never too young to learn about being safe and whom they can talk to if they need help. Children with learning difficulties and disabilities can and should learn from an early age.

How to help

- make time to talk
- make time to listen
- acknowledge feelings
- believe in and respect your child
- remind them that you are always there if they need you
- teach self protection skills
- celebrate your child and let them know you love them

What to teach

Use the FPQ booklet, *I have the right to be safe*, to help teach the following topics.

Feelings

Help children to understand and recognise different feelings and how to talk about these feelings with someone they trust.

Bodies

Talk to children about the names and functions of both public and private body parts. It is important that they feel good about their body and know that their body belongs to them.

Types of touch

Children need to know about the many different types of touch in their lives and recognise whether a touch is loving, friendly, helping, sexy or a NO touch. This can help them to know when they need to tell someone they trust about confusing touch.

Rules about touch

Teach children the rules about sexy touching. Knowing the rules helps children to be aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Warning signs

Teach children to know when their body tells them something is wrong. Help children to know how their body reacts at times of stress including scary, confusing and sad situations. When the body does this it gives warning signs such as the heart beating fast, sweating, crying and shaking.

What to do

Practice 'NO GO TELL' with children. Teach them to be clear, loud and assertive when saying 'NO'. Encourage them to 'GO' to a safe place. Sometimes children are unable to say no or go to a safe place. Remind them that they can always 'TELL' someone if something has happened.

Who to tell

Make a list of the people they can talk to and how they can contact them. Encourage them to keep telling until they feel safe.

Scenarios

Practice safety techniques using make-believe situations, TV shows or children's stories. Ask them to say what they would do and how they would get help.

Assertiveness

Support children to stand up for themselves. It is important that they learn how to make decisions and have real choices. Remember you are their best role model.



SEXUALITY

Giving information

Do not worry about giving too much information. Children will only take in as much information as they are able to understand.

Remember to be positive, factual and brief:

- Be positive by talking about their ability to be safe and focussing on strategies rather than consequences.
- Be factual. Children do not need to be fearful of monsters and all strangers.
- Keep it brief. Short, regular talks about self protection are better than just a one-off talk. Teach safety skills in every day situations to reinforce information.

What to do if a child talks about sexual assault

You can help by:

- not panicking or expressing shock or outrage as this may make the child think that they have done something wrong
- listening
- telling them that you believe them
- thanking them for telling you and saying that it was the right thing to do
- emphasising that whatever has happened was not their fault
- telling them that some people do wrong things

- talking in private
- acknowledging that it is hard to talk about such things
- not giving promises that cannot be kept, for example, that you will not tell anyone or that you will stop it happening again
- contacting the appropriate support services

Not all children can or will tell you if something has happened. Often there are other signs or behaviours that may indicate abuse. Talk to support services if you suspect something has happened. Remember to trust your own warning signs and seek help.

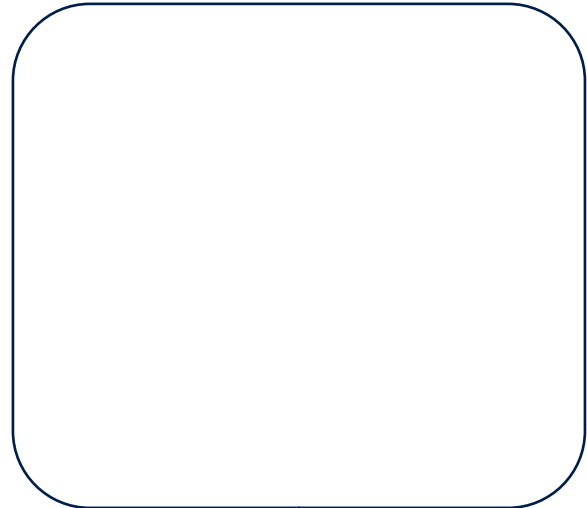
If a child is assaulting others take it seriously. Be supportive and find out how you can best help them and stop abuse from happening again. Abuse is rarely a one off situation.

How to help yourself

It is important to seek support for yourself if your child has been sexually assaulted. It can be an extremely emotional and difficult time. It may help to talk to people you trust, gather information from support services and books and see a counsellor. Some people may seek help through police and legal services.



NOTES



Where to get more help

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Parent Line | 1300 30 1300 |
| Department of Child Safety | 07 3224 8045 1800 811 810 |
| Police Communications | 07 3364 6464 |
| Lifeline (24 hour crisis counselling line) | 13 11 14 |
| Brave Hearts (family support and counselling) | 07 3290 4474 |
| The Talera Centre (for children) | 07 3397 7287 |
| Disability Training Program – Victims of Crime (for people with a disability) | 07 3862 4066 |
| Murrigunyah (for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women) | 07 3290 4254 |
| Immigrant Women’s Support Service | 07 3846 5400 |

This factsheet is best used as part of a self protection education program with the FPQ booklet, *I have the right to be safe*. Also available is an educational CD-Rom, *Feel Safe*, promoting self protection for young people with learning needs.

References

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2002). Child Protection Australia 2000-01. *Child Welfare Series*. 29, 14-20.
- Bryan, B., & Batch, J.A. (2002). An Australian Perspective: The Complexities of Ethnic Adolescent Health. *Youth Studies Australia*. 21 (1), 24-33.
- Healey, J. (Ed.). (2000). Child Abuse and Neglect. *Issues in Society*. 131, 4-7.
- Wallis Consulting Group. (1996). *Proposed Plan of Action for the Prevention of Abuse and Neglect of Children with Disabilities*. Canberra: WCG.

Winner of the 2002 Child Protection Week Award for Curriculum in Schools.



CHILD PROTECTION WEEK

Disclaimer

Family Planning Queensland (FPQ) has taken every care to ensure that the information contained in this publication is accurate and up-to-date at the time of being published. As information and knowledge is constantly changing, readers are strongly advised to confirm that the information complies with present research, legislation and policy guidelines. FPQ accepts no responsibility for difficulties that may arise as a result of an individual acting on the advice and recommendations it contains.

© Family Planning Queensland
Version 1 / April 2005

P: 04/2005 10m

Funded with assistance by  **Queensland Government**
Queensland Health



Phone: 07 3250 0240

www.fpq.com.au

fpq
Family Planning Queensland

PROMOTING
HEALTHY SEXUALITY