

Keep them Safe!

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Dear Parents

Often, it can seem as if we live in frightening times, with threats to our children from every side. We want to protect them – and yet we realise the best gifts we can give them are the skills and the assurance that will send them safely into the world. There are different lessons to learn at every age, from toddler years to teens, as they face the challenges of growing up. And we want them to feel confident enough to stand up to situations, and knowledgeable enough to know when and how to get away. As a parent myself, I know how challenging this can be, but also how important.

Happily most children will not be abducted or abused, though many might get lost or encounter bullying or theft. The Kidscape KeepSafe Code that is explained in this leaflet has been developed over the 25 years we have been advising children and parents on safety. Read it with your children, or paraphrase it so they will understand. Many children will benefit from practising these skills at home as a family – shouting a loud NO, for instance, is difficult for many children. Practise till you feel the child has a firm grasp on the techniques.

It's vital not to frighten children – they'll have heard many scary stories just by listening to television or seeing a headline. Frightened children shut down, and we want children who can think on their feet and make wise judgments.

It's important, too, to lay down a pattern of trust and talk between parent and child. From the earliest years, pick a relaxing time for a child to tell you what's new, or what's bothering him or her. Children do keep secrets, whether they're frightened, or threatened, or protecting a parent, or embarrassed. You can't help them unless they are willing to confide in you, a habit born of love and attention.

A child with these skills is prepared for almost anything, something that should give a family reassurance as children move out into the world.

Yours sincerely,

Michele Elliott, Director

KIDSCAPE, 2 Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0DH

Safety ideas

GETTING LOST

Arrange a place to meet in case you get separated from your children while shopping or in a park or some other public place. If they get lost in or near a shop, tell them to ask the shop assistant for help. Tell them not to go outside if you get separated.

If travelling on public transport, arrange what to do if you or they get left on a bus or train. Some parents tell them to stay on the bus or train and tell the guard or driver. Others say to get off at the next stop and wait on the platform or at the stop.

PUBLIC TOILETS

If possible, go with your children when using any public toilet. Talk with children about what to do if they are accosted in a public toilet. Tell them to leave immediately should anyone ask them “if they would like to see a surprise” or offer to take them into a cubicle or try to touch them.

LIFTS

Explain that they can wait for the next lift if they feel worried about someone. If they are already in the lift they should stand next to the control panel. They can also get out of the lift and walk or even ring a doorbell of someone else’s flat, should they be in difficulty.

BABYSITTERS

It can be difficult to find a good babysitter, but be aware that child molesters have advertised themselves as sitters in the hope of getting near children. Avoid using newspapers or notices and:

- Try to get a friend or family member
- Get references on people you don’t know well
- Regardless of who stays with your children, be alert to their reactions when you say the sitter is coming
- If you are worried, ring home and ask to talk to your children. Arrange a code so they can tell you if they are frightened
- Tell your children never to keep secrets and to tell you if the sitter asks them to keep kisses, hugs or touches secret

Points for Parents

Children need to know how ...

TO BE SAFE

Teach children that everyone has rights, such as the right to speak up, which should not be taken away. Tell children that no one should threaten their right to be safe.

TO PROTECT THEIR OWN BODIES

Children need to know that their body belongs to them, particularly the private parts that would be covered by their swimsuits.

TO GET HELP AGAINST BULLIES

Tell children to enlist the help of friends or say NO without fighting. Bullies are often cowards and a firm, loud NO from a group of children with the threat of adult intervention often puts them off.

In cases of real physical danger, children often have no choice but to surrender to the bully’s demands. Sometimes children will fight and get hurt to protect a possession because of the fear of what will happen when they arrive home without it. “My mum will kill me for letting the bullies take my bike. It cost a lot of money.” Tell children that keeping themselves safe is the most important consideration.

TO SAY NO

Tell children it’s all right to say no to anyone if that person tries to harm them. Most children are taught to listen to and obey adults without question.

TO TELL

Assure your children that no matter what happens you will not be angry with them and that you want them to tell you of any incident. Children can also be very protective of parents and might not tell about a frightening occurrence because they are worried about your feelings. Some problems are too big for children to solve. Emphasise the need for all of us to work together to stop the bullying.

Points for Parents (contd.)

TO BE BELIEVED

When children go to an adult for help, they need to know they will be believed and supported. Although sometimes an immediate reaction is to say “I told you so”, this will not help the child resolve the problem. It could also prevent the child from seeking help another time.

This is especially true in the case of sexual assault, as children very rarely lie about it. If the child is not believed when he or she tells, the abuse may continue for years and result in suffering and guilt for the child.

TO NOT KEEP SECRETS

Teach children that some secrets should NEVER be kept, even if they promised not to tell. Child molesters known to the child often say that a kiss or touch is “our secret”. This confuses the child who has been taught always to keep secrets.

TO REFUSE TOUCHES

Explain to children that they can say yes or no to touches or kisses from anyone, but that no one should ask them to keep touching a secret. Children sometimes do not want to be hugged or kissed, but that should be a matter of choice, not fear. They should not be forced to hug or kiss anyone.

TO NOT TALK TO STRANGERS

It is NEVER a good idea to talk to a stranger. You may need to talk about what a stranger is, especially with a young child. You can say it's perfectly all right to talk to someone the child doesn't know when with you, for instance. And even though a person is familiar – someone you always see on the way to school, but have never met – that doesn't make him a friend. Anytime someone you don't know suggests something, teach the child to ask you first for permission. Since most well meaning adults or teenagers do not approach children who are by themselves (unless the child is obviously lost or in distress), teach children to ignore any such approach. Children do not have to be rude; they can pretend not to hear and quickly walk or run away. Tell children you will never be angry with them for refusing to talk to strangers and that you want to know if a stranger talks to them.

TO BREAK RULES

Tell your children that they have your permission to break all rules to protect themselves and tell them you will always support them if they must break a rule to stay safe. For example, it is all right to run away, to yell and create a fuss, even to lie or kick to get away from danger.

The Kidscape KeepSafe Code

1. Hugs

Hugs and kisses are nice. Even hugs and kisses that feel good and that you like should never be kept secret.

2. Body

Your whole body belongs to you and not to anyone else. If anyone harms you or tries to touch your body in a way which confuses or frightens you, say NO, if possible, and tell.

3. No

If anyone older than you, even someone you know, tries to touch you in a way you don't like and they say it is supposed to be a secret, say NO in a very loud voice and tell a grown-up.

4. Run or Get Away

Don't talk to anyone you don't know when you are alone, or only with other children. You don't have to be rude, just pretend you didn't hear and keep going. If a stranger, or a bully, or someone you know tries to harm you, get away and get help. Go towards other people or to a shop, if you can.

5. Yell

Wherever you are, it is all right to yell if someone is trying to hurt you. Practise yelling as loud as you can in a big, deep voice. Take a breath and let the yell come from your stomach - not from your throat.

6. Tell

Tell a grown-up you trust if you are worried or frightened. If the first grown-up you tell doesn't believe or help you, keep telling until someone does. It might not be easy, but even if something has already happened that you have never told before, try to tell now. Who could you tell? Make a list.

7. Secrets

Secrets such as surprise birthday parties are fun. But some secrets are not good and should never be kept. No bully should ever make you keep the bullying a secret and no one should ask you to keep a kiss, hug or touch secret. If anyone does, even if you know them, tell a grown-up you trust.

8. Bribes

Don't accept money or sweets or a gift from anyone without first checking with your parents. Some people try to trick children into doing something they don't want to do by giving them sweets or money. This is called a bribe - don't ever take one!

9. Code

Have a code word or sign with your parents or guardians, which only you and they know. If they need to send someone to collect you, they can give that person the code. Don't tell the code to anyone else.

10. Keep Safe

It is possible that you might have to do what a bully or older person tells you, just because you are too frightened. Don't feel bad if that happens because the most important thing is for you to be safe and then tell.

More ideas

- Don't answer the door if you are at home on your own.
- Don't tell anyone over the telephone that you are at home alone. Say that your mum will ring back, she's in the bath - or any other excuse you can think of.
- Always tell your parents or whoever is taking care of you where you are going and how you can be contacted.
- If you get lost, go to a shop or a place with lots of people, and ask for help or find a policeman or policewoman to ask.
- Travel in a carriage of a train where there are other people.
- When you're out on your own, keep far enough away from people you don't know so that you can't be grabbed and so can run away.
- Never play in deserted or dark places.
- Carry enough money for your return trip home and never spend it on anything else.
- Memorise your telephone number and address.
- Know how to contact your parents or a neighbour.
- If you have no money, but need to ring home in an emergency, dial 100 and ask the operator to place a reverse charge call.
- A mobile phone will be helpful when you are old enough to travel by yourself. You might want to choose one that is not the very latest, and be careful when you use it, so you don't attract thieves. If you get bullying texts or messages from someone you don't know, don't answer.

- To make an emergency telephone call:

1. Dial 999 – you won't need money in a call box phone. If you are in a threatening situation with your mobile, leave it set to 999, so you can just press the button.
2. The operator will say, "Which service?"
Say whether the ambulance, fire department or police are needed.
3. You will be put through to the service, who will take your name and location, so they can find you. Tell them what's wrong.

This will happen very quickly. The operator will help you and stay with you. Always get an adult to make an emergency telephone call, if possible. NO ONE should ever make one unless there is a real emergency.

Bullying

POSSIBLE SIGNS

Children who are being bullied may:

- be frightened of the journey to or from school
- have nightmares
- be unwilling to go to school
- begin doing poorly in their school work
- become withdrawn, distressed, attempt suicide
- have unexplained bruises, cuts, scratches, torn clothing
- have possessions or money go missing
- give improbable excuses to explain any of the above

If you are concerned, talk with your child and then with the school. If you are still worried, get in contact with the school governors or the education authority or even your MP.

TEACH STRATEGIES

- Don't fight to protect possessions
- Practise walking in a confident manner
- Shout 'NO' loudly - practise in the mirror
- There is safety in numbers - try to stay with a group
- Send a large self-addressed envelope with 6 loose first class stamps to KIDSCAPE for our free anti-bullying booklets for teachers, parents and children.

NO ONE DESERVES TO BE BULLIED.

BE HAPPY TO BE THE UNIQUE INDIVIDUAL YOU ARE.

What to do if your child tells you...

Having been through the KIDSCAPE KeepSafe Code with your child or children, it is possible that you may be told about a problem or incident which has worried them. In many cases this will be about problems such as bullying; it is important to let your child see that you are prepared and willing to listen to them.

If your child tells you about a more serious problem your reaction will often determine how much they will tell.

- Find a quiet place to talk.
- Although this is a difficult situation for any parent, stay calm and be reassuring. Children may have been threatened or be concerned about your feelings, or that you will not love them or will be angry with them about what happened.
- Take what is said seriously. Children rarely lie about sexual abuse.
- Listen, but try not to press your child for information. Say that you are glad the child told you.
- Children are never to blame for sexual assault. One way to help them realise this is to explain that the offender has a problem.
- If necessary seek medical advice, contact the police or social services or the organisations listed at the end of this booklet.

If the children are angry, sad, fearful or feeling guilty, acknowledge that these are natural feelings, but keep telling them that they are not to blame. Say that you will keep them safe and do everything you can to help.

If you find out that your child has been assaulted, you will probably need help dealing with your own feelings. Try to find someone sympathetic whom you can talk to about it. The whole family may need counselling.

Finally, try not to keep discussing either the assault or your feelings about the offender in front of the child.

What if?

The following questions may help you to talk about safety issues with your children. Discussing and thinking about what to do may be more helpful than having 'right' answers. Sometimes there are no 'right' answers, just possibilities.

What if...

- you were being bullied and had promised not to tell?
- you got lost in a park (shop, busy high street, etc)?
- you were on your way home and someone was following you?
- someone asked you to keep a kiss, hug or touch a secret?
- you notice a fire in the kitchen and no one is home?
- you are home alone and someone comes to the door?
- you see a friend steal something?
- you saw a flasher?
- someone rings and says rude things on the telephone?
- a stranger asks you directions, and offers you a ride, sweets, etc
- your dog ran into the road and a car was coming?
- you are alone in a lift and someone you feel uncomfortable about gets in?

What if? questions are simple, easy to make up and useful for teaching personal safety to children.

Kidscape Resources

For Parents...

501 Ways To Be A Good Parent

Tried and tested ways to survive and thrive as a parent.

101 Ways to Deal with Bullying

- A Guide for Parents

Commonsense advice for parents to help children build self-esteem, make friends etc.

Keeping Young Children Safe

Leaflet giving advice for parents of children under 5.

It Shouldn't Happen! DVD

DVD, guide and notes for teaching younger people (7 - 11) how to stay safe from bullying. Contains role plays, verbal assertiveness exercises and techniques. Also suitable for teachers and other professionals.

For More Information...

KIDSCAPE has booklets and leaflets about bullying and protecting children from paedophiles. These can be downloaded from our website www.kidscape.org.uk, or for one free copy and an order form for all KIDSCAPE materials, please send a large self-addressed envelope with 6 loose first class stamps to:

Kidscape, 2 Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0DH

For Children and Young People...

Bullying: Wise Guide

Commonsense ideas for dealing with bullying. Ages 10 to 16.

Don't Bully Me

Advice for primary age children

Kidscape Resources (contd.)

Feeling Happy, Feeling Safe

Colour picture book involving children in learning what to do about getting lost, bullies, secrets and other personal safety issues. Ages up to 6.

The Willow Street Kids - Be Smart, Stay Safe

Chosen for the Good Book Guide, this fun book weaves a story around a group of children and how they keep safe. Ages 7 to 11.

The Willow Street Kids - Beat the Bullies

The Willow Street Kids enter secondary school and have to deal with bullies. Ages 7 to 11.

Don't Bully Me!

Advice for primary age children

All these can be ordered online at: www.kidscape.org.uk

Help

Police, social services, education departments and child guidance clinics are available in your area. In addition, you may wish to contact some of the following by phone or via their website:

KIDSCAPE 08451 205 204
Helpline for parents of bullied children www.kidscape.org.uk

Children's Legal Centre 0845 345 4345
Free legal advice concerning www.childrenslegalcentre.com
children & young people

ChildLine 0800 1111
24 hour helpline for children www.childline.org.uk

Childnet International www.childnet-int.org
Online safety for children

Education Otherwise 0845 478 6345
Advice on home education www.education-otherwise.org

NSPCC 0808 800 5000
Help for anyone concerned about a child www.nspcc.org.uk

Parentline Plus 0808 800 2222
Help and information for parents and families www.parentlineplus.org.uk

M.O.S.A.C. 0800 980 1958
Supports non-abusing parents and carers whose children have been sexually abused www.mosac.org.uk

Children 1st Scotland 0131 446 2300
Helps children overcome abuse and difficulties in their lives www.children1st.org.uk

Samaritans 24 hours 08457 90 90 90
Support for those experiencing distress or despair www.samaritans.org.uk

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