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**Parenting Tips and
General Guidelines
for Keeping
Children Safe**

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It is our responsibility, as parents and caregivers to safeguard our children and to teach them skills to stay safe. Since parents and caregivers are the best people to teach children about personal safety this booklet is designed for you to provide children with the required information, guiding principles and skills to ensure their safety. This information sheet also aims to equip you to initiate conversations about personal safety, setting boundaries and responding to children accurately and respectfully in order to create an environment of comfort and assurance in which children will feel free to share their experiences.

Get Involved in Your Child's Life as there is No Substitute for Your Attention and Supervision:

- Be aware of your children's environment when you are not with them (home, school, activity classes and playground). Pay surprise visits to these places.
- Know your children's schedule.
- Tell your children to keep you updated if there is a change in plans.
- Meet your children's teachers or caretakers often.
- Know your children's friends and, if possible, their parents as well.
- Keep a check on the kind of programs they watch on television in your presence as well as absence.
- Discuss the kind of games they play and encourage your children to play in the playground or in a public place instead of a playing in a friend's home whose family you don't know very well.
- Take part in your children's games and encourage them to play in open rooms instead of closing the doors and playing secretly.
- Keep the computer in a place where everyone in the family can notice it; block adult websites on your computer if your children have access to the internet and keep a check on the websites they visit.

Teach your Children about Personal Safety as You are their Best Teacher:

- Teach them the correct names of private body parts as early as eighteen months when you start teaching children names of all body parts. If you feel uncomfortable, practice saying the words out loudly, talking with other adults before speaking to your child so that you become more comfortable and confident in using the words and responding to your children's questions. Otherwise your children will catch hold of non-verbal cues of awkwardness or

nervousness and will attach the same with private body parts.

- Teach them personal / touching safety rules along with general safety rules as soon as they can understand.
- Set boundaries about places they may go, people they may see, and things they may do. However, while setting boundaries speak to your child in a calm and reassuring way as fear is not an effective teaching tool, but confidence is.
- Tell children why are you restricting them from doing certain things i.e., give them reasons why is it important to follow the safety rules you teach them instead of just dictating what they should / should not do.
- Tell your children to trust their instincts and that it is ok to say 'NO' politely if they do not like any touching or some other behavior.
- Use daily life events as an opportunity to talk about their personal/ touching safety.

For example:

- While bathing young children name their private body parts like other body parts and talk about the importance of keeping them clean and healthy and not letting anyone touch them.
- When children express curiosity about their body parts or ask question about sexuality.
- When children have questions about private body parts of the opposite sex.
- Use “what if” questions and concrete examples relating to their life to practice safety rules. This will make children think about situations they may encounter and give them confidence to take decision and act assertively.
 - What if your friends want to play with matchsticks?
 - What if your friend wants to play doctor-doctor game and touch your private body parts?
 - What if someone dared you to jump off a wall?
 - What if an uncle or an older boy wanted to play a secret touching

game with you?

- Teach children their full name, home phone number and how to use the telephone. Post your contact information where your children will see it: office phone number, cell phone etc. List names and contact details of other adults whom they can contact in case you are not available.
- Tell children to call an adult if they're scared, feel unsafe or have an emergency. Use “what if” questions like “If your younger brother falls down badly who could you talk to?” Also ask “if parents are not available who else can you call?”

Respect Children's Feelings, Listen and Talk to Them:

- Show unconditional love towards them and tell them that your love for them is independent of their academic performance or achievements.
- Do not label children as *bad* or *nasty* as this affects their self esteem negatively. Always refer to the *behavior* as incorrect and not the person.
- If there is a change in the children's behavior or performance do not correct them with force immediately, speak to them and find out what is bothering them.
- Ask your children about what happened during the day and things that they liked or disliked?
- Ask them about their teachers, friends, classmates, relatives whom they like or dislike and why? What qualities do they appreciate in a person?
- Share your feelings, good and bad experiences and how you tackled difficulties faced by you, if any. Children will learn to express and handle difficult situations when you share with them.
- Listen to your children's concerns, understand their feelings and

try to reflect that feeling back to your children: for example, “you feel really angry when your uncle squeezes your cheek tightly.” This will make them feel that you understand them well and also teach them to label their feelings and express them.

- Respect children’s feelings. Stop tickling them, squeezing their cheeks or hugging them if they don’t like it. Don’t force children to hug or kiss anyone whom they are not comfortable with including close family members. Support them by helping them find another way to show respect to family members. It helps children set their boundaries and when adults at home respect children’s boundaries they learn to say ‘stop’ or ‘no’ to a touch that makes them feel uncomfortable.
 - Have healthy communication with other adults in the family as parents and significant adults are role models for the children and this encourages children to have healthy communication with others in the family.
 - Read books on general and personal safety with your children and encourage them to ask questions.
 - Encourage open communication. Your children will know they can talk to you about any situation. Be open to answering their questions and comments and use it as an opportunity to educate them. Don’t get angry with them for asking such questions or ask them to keep quiet or go away. Answer their questions in an age appropriate manner. If you don’t know the answer, it is ok to tell them that you don’t know how to answer and will find out. Remember to inform them about it after you have found out the answer. Don’t avoid answering their questions because children can sense your discomfort while addressing certain issues.
- For example, in movies, cartoons or serials if an inappropriate situation arises, speak to your children about it and do not avoid it.

This information sheet is geared towards supporting you in your endeavor. If you are still feeling awkward about addressing such issues or developing communication channels do not feel anxious. It might be a matter of time. If your anxiety persists in spite of considerable effort, please seek help in getting the child the required information and also think introspectively as to what is preventing you from initiating the dialogue with your children. Please feel free to seek help to deal with your anxiety and discomfort.

We have listed some additional resources for you:

- Tickles and Hugs: an audio CD by Karadi tales
- On Track: a series of 6 workbooks available at Macmillan Publishers.
- <http://www.kidpower.org/store/index.html>
- <http://childcarefinders.org/parents-tips-for-teaching-about-child-sexual-abuse.htm>
- <http://www.goodparenting.co.in/>

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