

One of the most important things parents and carers can do to protect their children from child sexual abuse is help them understand and identify when something doesn't feel right or safe, and to talk to a trusted adult without fear of consequences. This is what personal safety is all about.

## WHAT IS PERSONAL SAFETY?

Personal safety (also known as 'protective behaviours') is a vital extension of the safety rules and concepts we teach our children, such as road, fire and sun safety. The concepts that underpin personal safety promote safety of self against all forms of child abuse, but in particular, child sexual abuse.

Personal safety:

- empowers children by giving them age-appropriate information and skills that increase confidence, resilience and self-esteem;
- teaches children that their body belongs only to them and nobody has the right to touch them in a way they don't like or understand;
- helps children better understand their emotions and accompanying physiological reactions to identify when they are feeling unsafe or unsure;
- teaches empathy and assertiveness, helping children to stand up for their rights without violating the rights of others;
- builds the support system of each child, including the family, school, community, and friends.

## WHY TEACH YOUR CHILD PERSONAL SAFETY?

The benefits of personal safety education include:

- Reduces the likelihood of your child entering into or remaining in an unsafe situation.
- Demonstrates clearly to your child how to respond to an unsafe situation.
- Increases your child's confidence and resilience, which may reduce the likelihood of child abuse, online exploitation and bullying.
- Increases your child's knowledge of their own body and their personal rights.
- Increases the likelihood that your child will tell a trusted adult if they feel unsafe about something or someone.
- May interrupt or prevent grooming.

## HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT PERSONAL SAFETY

Take it one talk at a time. Talking to your child about personal safety should not be a one-off conversation. Rather, create opportunities that allow talking about personal safety to be part of an ongoing dialogue between you and your child. Always let your child know you are there for them, and that keeping them safe is your number one priority.

Speak calmly and confidently, keeping a neutral tone, ensuring that you allow time for your child to process the information and ask questions. Never make them feel ashamed or embarrassed about asking questions about sexual behaviour or body parts.

## WHEN CAN I START TEACHING MY CHILD ABOUT PERSONAL SAFETY?

It's never too early (or too late!) to begin talking to your child about personal safety. Children below the age of three may not be able to retain or fully understand the concepts, however the gradual introduction of personal safety-themed storybooks, visual aides (such as posters), and songs can begin when children are as young as one.

If your child is a teenager or pre-teen, do not let this discourage you. Talking to older children and teenagers about personal safety (known as respectful relationships education, which includes topics like consent, sexting and pornography) is extremely important. You can find advice around how to talk to older children and teens about these topics in our Free Parent Guide (QR code to download below).

## IS THIS SEX EDUCATION?

No. Personal safety education is not the same thing as sex education. Personal safety education does include helping children identify body parts using correct anatomical names, body ownership and personal boundaries, but it does not include concepts around sex or sexuality. These concepts are explored in respectful relationships and consent education for older children and young people.

**CONT. OVER PAGE >>**

## THE PRINCIPLES OF PERSONAL SAFETY

Personal safety and protective behaviours education programs, including Bravehearts' personal safety program, Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure, are generally all underpinned by the following principles.



### Feelings

Understanding the concept of 'Yes' and 'No' feelings and how to respond to such feelings. 'Yes' feelings include happy or excited and are associated with being safe. 'No' feelings include sad or scared and are linked to feeling unsafe.



### Warning signs

Recognising when their bodies are giving them a 'warning sign', which could indicate they are feeling unsafe. Common warning signs include a fast-beating heart, shaky legs, sweaty palms, and feet feeling 'stuck'.



### Private parts

Discussing private parts assists children to take ownership of their own bodies and reiterates the importance of respecting their own and others' bodies. The use of nicknames for these areas of the body are not appropriate as the use of such names may negatively impact a child's ability to disclose or report harm. Bravehearts refers to 'mouth', 'chest', 'between the legs' and 'bottom' as private parts. We also support the use of anatomical names (penis, scrotum, vagina, vulva, anus).



### Touching

Differentiating between safe and unsafe touch can be difficult for young children to comprehend, so it is important to establish rules. For example, it may be considered appropriate for a doctor to touch private parts during a medical examination and when accompanied by a trusted adult.



### Boundaries

Understanding their own and others' personal boundaries. Children are naturally inquisitive and sex offenders take advantage of this. Through grooming, offenders skillfully erode their victim's personal boundaries. Children with high levels of knowledge relating to personal boundaries can interrupt the grooming process, and this can reduce the risk of harm.



### Secrets

Knowing what to do if they are faced with a secret that makes them feel unsafe or unsure is a vital part of personal safety, as secrecy enables perpetrators to offend. As it is difficult for children to identify whether a secret is good or bad, the overarching message is that there is no secret so 'yucky' that they cannot tell someone about it.



### Trust and safety teams

Identifying safe, trusted adults in their personal networks (safety team). It is important to reinforce with children that their safety team needs to contain people that can take action to keep them safe. It is also important to explore options of safe adults within the home and outside the home such as, school and the community.

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES FOR TEACHING CHILDREN PERSONAL SAFETY

- Bravehearts - [bravehearts.org.au/about-child-sexual-abuse/resources](https://bravehearts.org.au/about-child-sexual-abuse/resources)
- Act for Kids - [actforkids.com.au/resources/learn-to-be-safe-with-emmy-and-friends](https://actforkids.com.au/resources/learn-to-be-safe-with-emmy-and-friends)
- Daniel Morcombe Foundation - [danielmorcombe.com.au/keeping-kids-safe-resources](https://danielmorcombe.com.au/keeping-kids-safe-resources)

Bravehearts has resources available to [purchase on our website](#), including storybooks and activity books that will assist you with extending your child's personal safety knowledge and skills. Go to: [bravehearts-merchandise.myshopify.com](https://bravehearts-merchandise.myshopify.com)



**DOWNLOAD OUR FREE GUIDE FOR PARENTS & CARERS - PROTECTING CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE FROM SEXUAL ABUSE**