

STEP 3

feel safe with people

Teach your children they have a right to feel safe with people

Why?

If you teach your children to believe they *have a right to feel safe with people*, then they are more likely to know they can do something if someone makes them feel scared or unsafe. They are more likely to tell someone else if they are being bullied, threatened or abused, or if something is happening that's frightening or worrying them.

Children are more likely to be hurt or abused by someone they know – a family member, a friend or a visitor – than by a stranger. But this doesn't mean we need to teach them to be worried about everyone they know. If you can teach your children to recognise when they feel unsafe or unsure and to know what to do about it, then you will be helping them to stay safe at your home or someone else's.

what territory kids say...

"I felt scared when my mum's boyfriend used to hurt her. I tried not to shake. I hugged my dog and put a pillow over my ears." (girl aged 12)

"When you feel scared your body starts to shake and your heart beats fast." (boy aged 9)

"They were drinking beer and mucking around at night. I was scared and shut my door." (girl aged 9)

"Sometimes I feel scared with my dad's friends." (girl aged 7)

"It's a good, warm feeling when I feel safe. It's peaceful." (girl aged 8)

How?

1. **Teach your children to know when something or someone is making them feel uncomfortable or scared.**

When a person feels unsafe or scared, things start to happen to their body that tell them they might be in danger. If children can recognise these signs, then they might be able to get out of a "yucky" or unsafe situation before it gets worse.

2. **Teach your children to trust their instincts.**

Sometimes you can feel uncomfortable but not know why. This "instinct" is a warning signal telling you that something is wrong. Tell your children that if they feel this way they need to get out of the situation if they can and tell someone about it.



3. Tell your children that NO-ONE has a right to *make* them keep a secret.

There are good secrets and bad secrets. Good secrets can be fun and exciting. Bad secrets make a person feel bad or scared. Tell your children that if a secret makes them feel bad or scared, then they need to tell an adult they can trust. If that person doesn't listen, then they need to KEEP TELLING until somebody does.

4. Teach your children that it is OK to say "NO" to an adult if they are making them feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

Children are often taught that they should ALWAYS do what adults tell them. But this can make them scared to say "NO" to adults, and put them in danger of being abused or hurt. Teach your children that it's OK to say "NO" to an adult, when that person asks them to do something that makes them feel scared or uncomfortable. Tell them they can yell out or scream if an adult says or does something that makes them feel unsafe.

5. Tell your children they WILL NOT get into trouble for telling you, no matter what.

It's important that your children don't get into trouble if they tell you that someone has said or done something that's made them feel unsafe. Children can feel very scared about telling, because they might have been told that something bad will happen if they do.

6. Tell your children to let you know if ANYTHING makes them feel scared or uncomfortable.

parent tips



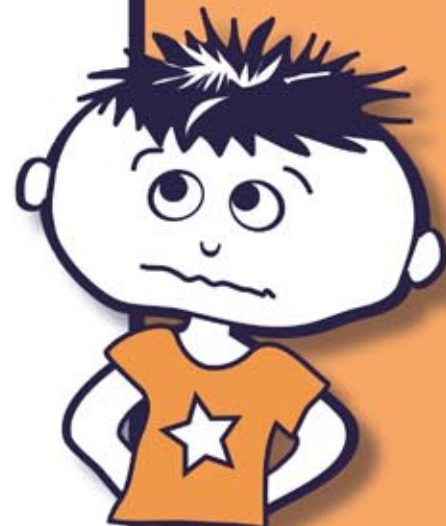
When you drop your child off at a friend's place, tell them to "have fun and keep safe". Remind them to say "NO" if they feel unsafe or "yucky", and to tell you about it.

how do we know when we feel scared?

Ask your child to draw an outline of themselves in the space below (or you can draw around their body on a large sheet of paper). Ask them to show what happens to their body when they feel scared. The list on the left shows some of the things other kids have said. Remember that children can have some of these feelings when they're safe but feeling nervous or excited. You might like to talk to them about these differences.

family activity

- Shake all over
- Butterflies in stomach
- Goosebumps
- Sweaty palms
- Heart beating fast
- Feel like crying
- Need to go to the toilet
- Hair stands on end
- Knees go wobbly
- Feet stick to ground
- Throat feels tight





when can I say "NO"?

Get together with your children. Talk about the safest thing to do in each of the following situations. Tick the boxes you think are right and/or work out what else the children in the stories could do. Check against the recommended answers at the end.

Going through all these situations at once might be a bit much for some children. Choose the ones that are important for each of your children right now, or make up your own.

1. Uncle Harry wants to kiss Jenny goodnight, but she feels "yucky" about it.

Say "NO"? ☐ Say "YES"? ☐

Tell someone? ☐

Think of a different way to say goodbye (e.g. shake hands, wave goodbye)? ☐



2. Gary's dad asks him to clean up his bedroom.

Say "NO"? ☐ Say "YES"? ☐

Tell someone? ☐

Talk to his Dad about it? ☐



3. A woman comes to the door when Russell is on his own and asks for help to look for her puppy.

Say "NO"? ☐ Say "YES"? ☐

Tell someone? ☐

Tell her to check next door? ☐



4. A man puts his arm around Lucy's waist at her mum's and dad's party. She doesn't like it.

Say "NO"? ☐ Say "YES"? ☐

Tell someone? ☐

Move away to where she feels safe? ☐



5. Aunt Mary asks Michael to keep mum's surprise birthday party a secret.

Say "NO"? ☐ Say "YES"? ☐

Tell someone? ☐ Tell his mum? ☐



6. Geoff's big brother wants him to look at some rude pictures on the computer.

Say "NO"? ☐ Say "YES"? ☐
 Tell someone? ☐
 Go and do something else? ☐



7. Shirley's dad wants her to jump backwards into the water, but she feels scared.

Say "NO"? ☐ Say "YES"? ☐
 Tell someone? ☐
 Show dad some other tricks she can do? ☐



8. Sam's stepdad asks if he wants to try some pills, but he doesn't want to.

Say "NO"? ☐ Say "YES"? ☐
 Tell someone? ☐
 Go somewhere Sam feels safe? ☐



9. Joshua's babysitter tells him not to tell anyone that he watched Joshua take a shower.

Say "NO"? ☐ Say "YES"? ☐
 Tell someone? ☐
 Say nothing and tell someone later? ☐



10. Rachel's mum asks her to turn off the TV.

Say "NO"? ☐ Say "YES"? ☐
 Tell someone? ☐
 Talk to her mum about it? ☐



11. Steven's big sister says: "Do what I say or I'll bash you."

Say "NO"? ☐ Say "YES"? ☐
 Tell someone? ☐
 Find a safe place? ☐



12. Sarah's dad keeps tickling her after she tells him to stop. She's not having fun any more.

Say "NO"? ☐ Say "YES"? ☐
Tell someone? ☐ Tell her mum? ☐



13. A woman tells Anne to get into her car.

Say "NO"? ☐ Say "YES"? ☐
Tell someone? ☐
Scream loudly and run away fast? ☐



Recommended answers

1. It's OK to say "NO". Jenny feels "yucky". Children should not be forced to touch or be touched by other people. Jenny's parents should talk to her to find out why.
2. It's OK for Gary's dad to ask this. Gary does not feel scared or unsafe.
3. It's OK to say "NO". Even if Russell feels safe at first, it's dangerous to let anyone into the house without an adult there. Keep reminding your children of this rule. Russell should tell an adult what happened.
4. It's OK to say "NO". It's not OK for an adult to touch a child in this way when they don't want it. Lucy should tell her mum or dad what happened.
5. It's OK to say "YES" to Aunt Mary. This secret does not make anyone feel scared or "yucky".
6. It's OK to say "NO". Geoff should tell someone.
7. It's OK to say "NO". Parents should teach children that they don't have to do things that make them feel scared or unsafe.
8. It's OK to say "NO". Sam should tell someone what happened.
9. It's OK to say "NO". This is a "bad" secret. Joshua's body belongs to him, and he should tell someone what happened.
10. It's OK for Rachel's mum to ask this. Rachel does not feel unsafe or scared.
11. It's OK to say "NO". Steven should tell someone what happened. It's not OK to be bullied or threatened.
12. It's OK to say "NO". Parents should stop tickling or wrestling when their child asks them to. This helps to teach children that they have a right to say "NO" to touching by other people.
13. It's OK to say "NO". Children should make as much noise as they can to get help if someone is trying to force them into a car.



1. ALWAYS listen to your children and BELIEVE and SUPPORT them if they tell you that someone has made them feel "yucky".
2. Have a "code" for each child so they can let you know if they feel threatened or unsafe when they're out and need to be picked up. One family uses the code: "I've got a migraine", which lets their daughter "save face" with her friends.
3. Add the following rule to your "Our Family Rules!" list, if you haven't already (see **Step 2: Cool Tools for Family Rules**):
"Tell somebody if someone makes me feel scared or unsafe".
4. Make a "Helper Plan" with each child so they have a special list of people they can talk to if they feel scared or upset (see Family Activity: "Make a 'Helper Plan'", this Step).

my helper plan

sometimes I need to talk to someone.
I know I can talk to one of these
people if I feel



angry



sad



scared

Kids Help Line
1800 55 1800



make a "helper plan"

A "Helper Plan" is a list of people children can talk to if something's worrying them or they feel scared. Your children can use the attached example or make up one of their own. Maybe you could trace around each child's hand. Some children might like to do this activity by themselves.

Follow these steps:

1. If your children are making their own plans, help them to write in the Kids Help Line number: 1800 55 1800. Kids Help Line is a free, confidential 24-hour telephone and online counselling service specifically for young people aged five to 18.

2. Talk to each child about the people they want to put on their plan. They could be a friend, teacher, neighbour or anyone else your child trusts. They need to be adults they feel safe with and who:

- are willing to listen and believe them
 - have agreed to be on your child's helper plan (your child will need to check this with them)
 - your child can contact easily
 - will help your child decide what to do next
 - will support your child
3. Help each child to write down the names and contact details of the people they have chosen.
- Your child might like to draw pictures or attach photos of their support people.
 - It's OK if your child wants to put down the name of a pet or toy. Just make sure they still have names of REAL people.

4. Ask each child if they would like to decorate their plan.

5. Help each child put their plan in a special place.



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Sources

7 Steps to Safety was developed in consultation with Northern Territory parents, children and service providers and from current Australian and overseas literature. Kit developed by Meron Looney, Project Worker, "Family Safety Plan Kit". Editorial assistance by Ros Moya. For further information contact Office of Children and Families, Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services, Australia on 1800 005 485 or email families@nt.gov.au

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