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A Child Safety Information Series † Diocese of Colorado Springs

### Teaching About Boundaries

Going about a typical day, few of us experience serious boundary violations. Boundaries are lines that mark the limits of an area, such as personal space. We have emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and behavioral boundaries as well. If someone gets a little too close, we instinctively move away. Most people know not to ask probing questions needlessly. Predators are adept at gradually conditioning children to tolerate inappropriate grooming behaviors. For this reason, boundaries must be strictly enforced.

Some programs offer the following wisdom:

- Teach children their full name, address, and phone number. Knowing these can empower them if they ever find themselves lost or in an uncomfortable situation. An easy way to help even the youngest child learn them is to recite them before every book you read to them. “My name is \_\_\_\_\_, my address is \_\_\_\_\_, and my phone number is \_\_\_\_\_. Now let’s read \_\_\_\_\_.”
- Children should learn the proper names for their anatomy. Young children are taught names such as nose, ears, arms, feet, and legs. Teaching about penis, scrotum, anus, vulva, vagina, and breasts can be done in just as straightforward a manner. Explain that medical professionals and certain caregivers may have a legitimate reason for touching these areas, such as cleanliness and to maintain health, but even then only in certain circumstances. These parts are private for a reason and others should not touch them. Equally important, our children should not touch anyone else’s private areas either.
- Children should know who their safe adults are and, ideally, how to contact them. Candidates for a “Safe Adult” should always have the child’s best interests at heart, have always behaved as a proper role model, and have demonstrated a flawless record of safety.
- Say “NO” to secrets. Sexual abuse relies on the cover of secrecy to thrive. You can differentiate between surprises and secrets. Surprises are meant to be divulged eventually, and are used for a good or fun purpose. Secrets are burdensome and typically only useful to cover up something mean or bad. Encourage children to tell if anyone tries to make them keep a secret.
- Teach children to honor their gut feelings. If someone makes them uncomfortable, it’s ok to ask for help, to scream, and to resist going anywhere out of public view with someone they don’t know.
- Young people must be taught to become responsible digital citizens. Online behavior should be lawful and respectful, and they should protect their reputation and their personal information. Nasty or bullying comments or threats should be reported immediately. Parental control software should be installed on every device a minor uses.

Creating and maintaining open communication with our young people is the most effective way to keep them safe. Predators will avoid a child when he knows that the child is comfortable talking about anything with a parent.



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