

Know your boundaries: Tips to teach kids about body safety

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It's important for children to learn about body safety and boundaries.

Empowering them with information can help them recognize unsafe situations and may help protect them from abuse.

"Children and teens who feel in control of their bodies are less likely to fall prey to sexual abusers," said [Dr. Shalon Nienow](#), a fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

"And if they do suffer abuse, they are more likely to tell a trusted adult—which can make all the difference in stopping the events and subsequently helping them recover from this painful experience," she said in an academy news release.

About 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 20 boys will experience [sexual abuse](#) or [sexual assault](#) by age 17.

Nienow is featured in a video that explains how to protect children from sexual abuse. The AAP also offers a number of tips to help parents teach kids about how to stay safe.

It recommends parents teach their kids the proper names for all body parts, including their genitals. Proper names are penis, vagina, breasts and buttocks.

Making up names for [body parts](#) may give the impression that they are bad or a secret, the AAP noted.

Teach your [child](#) which parts are "private." This includes parts of their body that are covered by their swimsuit as well as their mouth. It's important for kids to know that these places should not be touched or looked at without their permission.

Consider your family's respect for modesty and model good social boundaries. Teach [younger children](#) to give older siblings their privacy if

they request it, the AAP suggested.

Don't force affection—even when your kids don't want to hug or kiss Grandma or Grandpa.

Teach your child ways to show affection and respect that involve no touching, including high fives and thumbs up. Reinforce that their body is theirs to control, a concept called body autonomy.

Explain "OK" versus "not OK" touches. A caregiver helping with bathing or toileting can be an OK touch, as can a doctor checking to be sure their body is healthy. Most touches are OK, and you can reassure your child about that.

A not OK touch is one they don't like, that hurts them, makes them feel uncomfortable, confused, scared or one that has anything to do with private parts.

Teach kids it is never OK for anyone to look at or touch their private parts without their permission. Tell them they should not look at or [touch](#) other people's bodies without their permission, the AAP said.

Make a solid rule about inappropriate touches to help empower them to say "no" to these.

Remind your child to always tell you or another trusted grown-up if anyone ever touches their private parts or makes them feel uncomfortable in any way, the AAP advised.

Reassure your children that you will listen to and believe them if they tell you about not-OK touches.

Control your child's exposure to video games, movies and television with

parental controls and appropriate alternatives that avoid exposure to sexual content.

Your children may see adult sexual behaviors in person or on screens and may not tell you that this has occurred, the AAP said.

Review this information regularly with your children. You might remind them during bath time, bedtime, doctor visits and before any new situation.

Giving [children](#) the tools to recognize and respond to uncomfortable situations is key.

Expect questions and give answers based on what's appropriate for the child's age, the AAP recommended.

"Always let your child know that you believe in them and will do everything you can to protect them from harm," Nienow said. "Help them to understand that they will not be in trouble for telling you about information that should not be kept secret. Empower them to tell another trusted adult if they are too uncomfortable telling you."

Talk to your child's pediatrician if you have any questions about ways to keep your child safe from harm, including sexual abuse.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [preventing child sexual abuse](#).

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