

How Do I Teach My Child About Personal Safety?

By Nancy McBride, National Safety Director

Many parents and guardians feel challenged to keep their children safer in our fast-paced and global society. They may wonder at what age they can begin teaching their children about personal safety.

Unfortunately, "one size" doesn't fit all. A child's ability to understand safety skills and put them into practice is determined not just by age, but also by the child's educational and developmental levels. To truly learn new safety skills, children need to model, rehearse and practice the skills to incorporate them into their daily lives.

- Speak to your child in a calm and reassuring way. Fear is not an effective teaching tool; confidence is.
- Speak openly about safety issues. If you approach child safety openly, your children will be more likely to come to you with problems or concerns.
- Don't confuse children by warning against "strangers." Danger to children is much greater from someone you or they know than from a "stranger."
- Teach children that no one has the right to force, trick, or pressure them into doing things they don't want to do.
- Practice safety skills by creating "what if" scenarios. An outing to a mall or the park can serve as a chance for children to practice safety skills, such as checking with you before they go anywhere or do anything, and locating adults who can help if they need assistance.
- Supervise your children. It is vital to their protection and safety. Children should not be put in the position of making safety choices if they are not old enough or skilled enough to make those choices.
- Check out adults who have access to your children. The more involved you are in your child's life, the less likely it is that your child will seek attention from other, potentially dangerous adults.

Simple Rules for Children When They Need Help

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) has a signature safety publication, [Knowing My Rules for Safety](#), to help parents and guardians teach personal safety skills to children. The rules are simple and concise and provide encouragement and options for children who need an adult's help.

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