

We all have the right
to **Feel Safe**



A guide for parents and carers to help their children

Thanks to Alan Dawson whose booklet 'The Right to Feel Safe' was the inspiration for the form and production of this publication and thanks also to Di Margetts whose thoughts about the 'Language of Safety' make so much sense.

Grateful thanks to the parents of Warwickshire children who have already been involved with Taking Care and who encouraged me to put something down on paper for them in order that they could give more help to their children.

Protective Behaviours is used widely in a variety of settings in the USA, Australia and the UK. Preventive child safety education is commonplace in the curricula of hundreds of schools for example, in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the Republic of Ireland. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified by our government in 1991 and clearly outlines children's rights to developmentally appropriate information and material, especially that which is aimed at their social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.

Taking Care was established in 1999 by a multi-agency group representing health, education and social services in Warwickshire with the aim of introducing primary schools to a programme that would help children learn strategies to help them understand safety and how to ask for help.



taking care

helping children learn to
keep themselves safer

INTRODUCTION

This booklet is being given to you because your child is learning about Protective Behaviours at school as part of a countywide programme to help prevent abuse and harm.

In order to protect children everybody needs to take responsibility for their own behaviour towards them.

We also have a responsibility to meet their needs for age appropriate information that will help them to identify when they don't feel safe and equips them with skills and strategies so they can get help to feel safe again.

There are two themes in Protective Behaviours:

- **We all have the right to feel safe all the time**
- **We can talk with someone about anything, even if it feels awful or small**

Protective Behaviours is for everyone. Parents and carers have the right to feel safe too. Hopefully this booklet will be the beginning of interesting and fruitful discussions and decision-making about personal safety for your family.



HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

- It is probably best to sit down and read this booklet all the way through before talking through it with your child.
- Answer the questions for yourself, personal safety is a concern to adults too. It is helpful for children to know that adults need to keep themselves feeling safe as well.
- Find good times to talk with your child so that you all have time to speak and listen and won't be interrupted.
- Don't expect to talk about all the aspects of personal safety in one go. Children's interest is more likely to be maintained if this doesn't feel like homework!
- When you ask your child a question allow them to tell you what they feel, there are often no right or wrong answers.
- Encourage your child to think about safe actions and choices. Sometimes we have to decide what is the safest thing we can do at the time. An absolutely safe choice may not always be guaranteed.
- Clearly, as an adult, you take decisions for your child with regard to their personal safety. When you do this explain the reasons for your decision so they can try to understand. Encourage children to make their own decisions about personal safety wherever possible.



I am
responsible for
me

SAFE LANGUAGE

Our use of language has a large impact on others. If we choose to use 'safe' language then people around us are likely to feel safe.

'Safe' language will not offend or harm others. If we choose to use racist, sexist, homophobic or violent language, for example, then it is highly likely that others will not feel safe with us.

We can ask ourselves:

- Is my language helping others, or 'putting them down'?
- Does everybody understand what I am saying?
- Is anyone being offended by my use of language?
- Does my language help me get on with other people?
- Am I being clear in what I am trying to say, do others understand exactly what I mean?
- Am I speaking for myself and not others?



TRY THIS:

Say "I feel...when you..." rather than "You make me feel..."

E.g.. "I feel really happy when you choose to behave like that" rather than "You make me feel really happy when you behave like that" or "I feel very upset when you choose to talk to me like that" rather than "You make me feel very upset when you talk to me like that".

Nobody can 'make' us feel anything; we all have a personal response/feeling to whatever has occurred. We are responsible for our own feelings.

ENCOURAGE your child to use "**I FEEL...**" statements.

SAFE FEELINGS

We all have the right to feel safe all the time

Most of us don't think too much about when we are actually feeling safe. It is often when we recognise feeling unsafe we start to give it a thought.

TRY THIS:

ASK YOUR CHILD:

- How does it feel to feel safe?
- What are your safe feelings?
- Can you tell me one place where you feel safe?



YOUR CHILD MIGHT SAY:

"I feel comfortable, secure, relaxed..."

"I feel safe at home, at Grandma's, when I'm with my dog.."

FUN TO FEEL SCARED

When we do things and enjoy the scary feeling or 'buzz' that we get, we call it 'Fun to Feel Scared'

Some things that people choose to do for a 'Fun to Feel Scared' feeling might be:

playing 'tig', going on a fairground ride, pedalling fast on a bike, speaking in front of the class, playing hide and seek, watching a scary film, skateboarding, climbing...

Saying 'NO'

We sometimes need to encourage children to take part in some of these activities in order that they grow personally and emotionally. It is very important that they are able to say 'NO' if they really do not want to join in, or if they change their minds once the activity has begun. Sometimes we may be able to help them to take part by asking:

"What can we do to help this feel safer for you?"

TRY THIS:

ASK YOUR CHILD:

- What do you like to do that feels exciting but scary?
- What could you do if you didn't like it any more?

YOUR CHILD MIGHT SAY:

"I like listening to ghost stories and going on roller coasters. If I didn't like it I could decide not to do it again."



I am
responsible for
what I say

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

Signs in our bodies

We know we are not feeling safe because of EARLY WARNING SIGNS in our bodies. If we can recognise what these are we can make a choice for ourselves about how to help ourselves feel safe (comfortable) again. Adults sometimes recognise these signs as symptoms of stress.

The signs our body gives us are the same whether we are doing a 'Fun to Feel Scared' activity or if we are really not feeling safe. Our bodies give us these signs so that we can heed them and take action to help ourselves feel safe again. It is important to encourage others to 'listen' to what their bodies tell them. We can demonstrate that this is important to our children by talking about our own unsafe feelings and telling them what we do to help ourselves feel safe again (e.g. counting to 10 instead of shouting when somebody behaves badly, having a long bath to relax when we are feeling very stressed, talking about our worries with another adult to help us decide what to do next).

Signals to ask for help

Having Early Warning Signs may be the signal to ask for help if we cannot solve the problem for ourselves. Sometimes we get our Early Warning Signs when we are doing things, sometimes we get them when someone tells us something, sometimes we don't know why we get them, we just have a gut feeling that we need to move away from a person or a situation.

TRY THIS:

ASK YOUR CHILD:

How does your body tell you if you are not feeling safe?

YOUR CHILD MIGHT SAY:

"I get butterflies in my tummy, my heart beats faster and I get a dry mouth"

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

When we don't really have a choice

Sometimes we get our Early Warning Signs when we don't really have a choice to say 'no'. It may be about going to the dentist or doctor, going into hospital, going to school, moving to a new area, having an immunisation...

This is called "Risking on purpose" - We feel the fear, choose to do it anyway, because the outcome will be worth it.

These things need to be done, often for our own good. We can encourage our children to tell us how they are feeling and again ask the question:

"How can we help this feel safer for you?"

Help your child come up with all sorts of ideas for helping things that we have to do to seem better.

TRY THIS:

ASK YOUR CHLD:

What could you do if you had your Early Warning Signs about:

- ...going to see the doctor
- ...reading in assembly?

YOUR CHILD MIGHT SAY:

"I could talk to you about what is likely to happen there. I want you to stay with me"

"I could tell the teacher how I feel and see if we could work out a way it might feel safer."



NETWORKS

We can talk with someone about anything, even if it feels awful or small.

Everybody benefits from having a personal network. A network is a group of people that **we choose for ourselves** who we can talk with about all the good things that happen to us and who we talk with about things that are worrying us.

Sometimes we need to talk to adults in order to get help

The 'Taking Care' work that the children learn in school emphasises to them that there are some things we need to talk with adults about if we are going to help ourselves feel safe (or OK) again. Research tells us that children invariably share their worries firstly with each other. They will learn that to be a good 'network friend' they may need to help/encourage their friends to get adult help.

Sharing secrets

The children also learn that there are some things adults cannot keep secret (or confidential) because the child is not safe. Encourage your children to always tell a network adult about secrets if they have their Early Warning Signs about them. These are NOT safe secrets to keep.

Children are asked to think of at least four people other than any adults at home who they can turn to if they need help. Parents cannot be with them all the time, and sometimes someone else may be easier to talk to or may be in a better position to offer the help they need.



I talk to
my network
people

NETWORKS

A network is personal

A personal network is exactly that, PERSONAL. It is nobody else's business who we choose to put on our networks. A person you choose may not be a good network person for a different member of your family. We need to learn for ourselves whether or not our network is working for us, and then make our own decisions about replacing network people if necessary. This may be very challenging for parents.

Learn to trust your children

Learn to trust your children's judgements and reinforce their responsibility for decision making for themselves. If things are not going well for them we can help them come up with some alternative solutions, but they need to make the final choices about what to do/who to choose themselves.

It is helpful to remind them regularly to review their network to see if it is working for them.



I don't
keep unsafe
secrets



I choose
my own network
people

PERSISTENCE

Tell, tell, tell, tell and tell again. In fact, keep on telling until your Early Warning Signs go away and you feel safe again

We need to keep telling until we find someone who listens, believes us and does something to help us feel safe again. We will know when we feel safe again because our Early Warning Signs will go away.

TRY THIS:

ASK YOUR CHILD:

**Who could you turn to at school for help if you weren't feeling safe?
Who could you talk to if you couldn't find them?**

YOUR CHILD MIGHT SAY:

"I would talk to my classroom assistant, my old reception teacher, the secretary, the head teacher..."

"If I couldn't find the right person for me at school that day I could tell you when I get home, tell my childminder, tell my friend's mum..."

ASK YOUR CHILD:

What if you ask someone for help and they don't help for some reason?

YOUR CHILD MIGHT SAY:

"I could keep asking different people until I get the help I need."

Personal Emergencies

We can teach children it IS OK TO BREAK THE RULES in an emergency, just like the fire engine does if it breaks the speed limit on the way to a fire. It is ok to interrupt, shout, say 'no', break secrets, not be polite... if they are feeling scared or uncomfortable.



**If I don't
feel safe I will
keep on telling**

BODY PRIVACY

It is important to give children clear information about body privacy. In order to do this we need to use language that is not misunderstood. Families have all sorts of different words for naming the so called 'private parts' of our bodies. Sadly adults do not always understand what children are saying to them when they are asking for help because they do not share this language.

School staff should use the correct terminology for naming body parts so everyone knows exactly what is being talked about. The key message given to children is that the whole of their body is private and it is up to them to give permission for people to touch them. Examples of when touching may be necessary and out of the child's control are given e.g. the dentist touching their mouth, a baby requiring a nappy change, a doctor asking to look at a child's penis or vaginal area to diagnose the problem if they are complaining of soreness or a rash, a parent applying a prescribed cream.

We can help children think of alternatives to kissing and hugging friends and relatives if they do not feel comfortable doing so. Adults can role model respect for their child's feelings by never insisting children have close body contact with anyone unless they feel happy to do so.



AND FINALLY...

Things to remember:

- From time to time it is great to remind your children **that they have the right to feel safe**. The more they hear this message from people that are important to them, the more they will live by it.
- Reinforce the fact that our behaviour is our own responsibility. We are all responsible for respecting other people's right to feel safe.
- Reassure your child that whatever problems they may have they can choose to talk to a network person for help.
- Please teach your child **stranger awareness** and basic safety rules about never going anywhere with anyone without checking with a parent or carer first. Don't teach children not to talk to strangers or that strangers are dangerous. **Teach them that sometimes a stranger is the only person who can help**. Discuss with them ways of choosing the safest possible stranger (e.g. if a child gets lost in a shop they should go to the till to find a shop assistant or ask a mummy with small children for help). Adults are not good role models when it comes to practising what they preach about not talking to strangers!
- If everyone takes responsibility for his or her own non-violent behaviour and language, the world will be a safe place for everyone.



I am
responsible for
what I do

GAMES YOU CAN PLAY

Next time you're on a journey perhaps have a game of 'How could someone keep themselves feeling safe even if...' instead of I-Spy.

For younger children:

How could someone keep themselves feeling safe even if:

- ...they were hurt in the playground?
- ...a rocket landed in their garden?
- ...they changed their mind at bedtime about sleeping over?
- ...grown-ups around them shouted a lot?
- ...they were sad that their pet had died?
- ...they had a bad dream in the night?
- ...someone did things to them they didn't like?
- ...they were lost in a park?
- ...their friend said they didn't like them anymore?

For older children:

How could someone keep themselves feeling safe even if:

- ...their friend wanted them to go shoplifting with them
- ...they were at home alone and someone came to the door
- ...someone at school was bullying them
- ...someone was touching them in ways they didn't like
- ...the bus went past their stop and didn't let them off
- ...they found out they were pregnant
- ...an adult was threatening them
- ...they were lost and their mobile didn't work
- ...their friend was seriously ill and they felt very upset



*I choose
how I behave*



taking care

helping children learn to
keep themselves safer

No matter how much you teach your child about safety,
remember the limits of their age and maturity.