

# Protective behaviours for children

# 18

Being a parent is a challenging and exhilarating job, a roller coaster of feelings and experiences. This can be especially so when you are parenting a 10 – 12 year old.

At this age, children are on the cusp of adolescence; they are in the eldest group of children in the primary school and are taking on leadership roles in their classrooms as well as on the sports arena.

Children 10 – 12 years old are beginning to want to explore their world more, they are spending more time away from you but you still worry about them and want to make sure they are safe.

Children in this age group need to know that their parents care for them enough to set reasonable limits to keep them safe.

Children of all ages need to:

- Be treated with respect
- Have their successes acknowledged
- Know it is their behaviour that is disapproved of, not them
- Be offered encouragement for endeavours
- Be listened to
- Know all feelings are OK, but some expressions of feelings are not.

## Key messages for parents

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As parents of 10 – 12 year olds it is most important that the communication channels are wide open.

Listening to children and carefully observing their body language will allow you to pick up on any signal from your child that something is not ok.

Children may not be able to tell you that they are feeling unsafe or something is not ok for them. Perceptive parents will pick up a

change in behaviour and then can ask how the child is feeling; this may prompt the child to begin to share something.

Parents quickly learn to avoid asking a child ‘How was your day?’ as they get the universal answer ‘Fine’ and when asking, ‘What did you learn?’ get the answer ‘Nothing’. Parents who comment on a child’s body language, ‘You look sad, happy’, etc. have more chance of opening up the channels of communication to allow the child to share how they are.

Parents are the child’s primary caregivers and their behaviour is a model for children.

It is important that parents are able to manage their own anger, knowing what triggers their anger and what socially acceptable outlets parents use to release the anger. The feeling of anger is a very healthy feeling and essential to motivating society to make changes, address inequalities etc. However some adults express feelings of anger in inappropriate ways through violence and abuse. Parents who get angry and release it in a socially appropriate way teach their children the difference between the feeling and how to safely express it. Parents need to teach their children appropriate ways to release their feelings.

Parents also need to think about their problem solving skills. It is ok for children to witness their parent’s arguments as long as they resolve them in a way that models respect, appreciating the other’s point of view and finally is resolved with a win-win outcome. This process teaches children how to keep safe in a possibly volatile situation. Keeping their cool and learning how to resolve conflict situations in a peaceful win-win way will help keep kids safe.

## Resources for parents and teachers

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Protecting children from harm is a responsibility shared by the family, the general community, community agencies, and professionals working with children such as police and government. Each has a significant role to play to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and to help prevent harm from occurring.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has an existing, comprehensive approach to the protection of all students through operational practice, educational and student services and partnerships with family and community. This approach encompasses both preventative and responsive elements.

Child protection and safety issues are also addressed through a service agreement with the Children's Protection Society to support schools' capacity to build a safe and supportive environment, including the delivery of the Personal Safety and Protective Behaviours Program, which includes components concerning teachers' response to issues of abuse and mandatory reporting. Schools provide programs and curriculum which encourage healthy, broad based personal development, including the development of personal skills to respond to situations of potential or actual danger. *Safe From Harm - The Role of Professionals in Protecting Children and Young People* is a resource available to assist education professionals. To download this document

**W** [www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stuman/wellbeing/SafeFromharm.pdf](http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stuman/wellbeing/SafeFromharm.pdf)

**W** [www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stuman/wellbeing/SafeFromHarmMod4.pdf](http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stuman/wellbeing/SafeFromHarmMod4.pdf)

The National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN) is a national organisation committed to the prevention of child abuse and neglect in its many forms. Napcan raises community awareness about the issues of child abuse and neglect, parenting and children's well being. NAPCAN also aims to open the lines of

communication between the many community groups and professionals. Napcan initiates and supports appropriate prevention programs and operates as a lobby group for the implementation of reforms in child protection.

NAPCAN produces a range of free resource materials for parents, caregivers, educators and children.

Information is available on:

- Parenting tips
- Alternatives to hitting
- Cool down before things heat up
- 30 ways to boost a child's confidence
- Children grow with love and care
- When I feel sad and hurt
- What is child abuse?

And many more which can all assist parents in the important job of bringing children up to feel safe in all aspects of their lives.

### For further information contact:

#### **NAPCAN Vic.**

247–251 Flinders Lane

Melbourne VIC 3000

**T** (03) 9654 9552

**W** [www.napcan.org.au/vic](http://www.napcan.org.au/vic)

**E** [vic@napcan.org.au](mailto:vic@napcan.org.au)

*Thank you to Napcan for contributing this section.*

## Discussing safety with your child

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### What does 'safety' mean to you?

There are many ways to talk to children about safety, emphasising that 'We can't **scare** people into feeling safe'. When we discuss safety with children it is important that we do not leave them feeling afraid and disempowered, but instead that we provide them with awareness of their own safety and help-seeking strategies regarding what to do if they feel unsafe.

### Key messages for parents

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Ask your child what 'safety' means to them, and use as many everyday examples as possible to talk about the times they do and don't feel safe, exploring what they can do in those unsafe times to help them feel safe again.

Share your experiences with them, emphasising that we all have times when we don't feel safe.

You could use 'Even if...' questions to discuss safety with your child, eg. How could you keep yourself safe even if...?:

- You heard a strange noise at night?
- Someone bullied you?
- You got lost?
- You were late in being picked up from school?
- Someone you didn't know asked you to go somewhere with them?

Or make up your own 'Even if...' questions.

## How can you talk to your child about safety without making them feel afraid?

The most important factor when discussing safety with your child is keeping the communication channels open, letting your child know they can talk to you about **anything**.

It is also vital that you help your child identify a 'safety network' of trusted adults who they can talk to if you are unavailable.

Discussing an 'emergency network' is also important, identifying who your child could go to if they felt unsafe in a place where their ordinary network of people were not available.

## Further resources for parents and teachers

### Protective Behaviours, a personal safety program (Victoria) Children's Protection Society

When we are thinking about the safety of children, it is important to ask two key questions:

- 1** Do children understand the concept of 'safety', and can they recognise when they are not feeling safe?
- 2** Do children know what to do, or who to turn to if they do not feel safe?

Children need to understand the importance of

their 'body signals' or 'early warning signs' that act like an internal alarm bell to tell us when we don't feel safe, and also to have strategies for what to do when the alarm bell rings.

Protective Behaviours, a personal safety program encourages parents, teachers, and other people responsible for the care of children to educate them about safety, providing knowledge and skills to help children keep themselves safe. This program stresses the need to 'feel' safe, as well as being safe, recognising the importance of psychological or emotional safety.

It is important to resist the language of 'stranger danger' with children, as the reality is that many people who pose a risk to children may not be strangers at all, but may be well known to the child. Instead, children need an awareness of their own feelings of safety and skills to seek help in times when they do not feel safe.

Protective Behaviours, a personal safety program has two key themes:

- 1** We all have the right to feel safe all of the time.
- 2** Nothing is so awful that we can't talk about it with someone.

Training in Protective Behaviours, a personal safety program is available for parents through the Children's Protection Society, providing strategies to discuss safety issues with children.

### Further information

If you are interested in attending a Parent Information Session, please contact:

#### **Children's Protection Society**

Coordinator of Training & Community Education

70 Altona St, West Heidelberg VIC 3081

**T** (03) 9450 0900

**W** [www.cps.org.au](http://www.cps.org.au)

*Our thanks to Children's Protection Society for contributing this section.*