

## PRIMARY PREVENTION TIPS

All parents/caregivers want to do the best they can to ensure their children are happy, healthy and safe. This handout offers some tips about how to talk to your children about safety, messages you can give to increase positive feelings about themselves and suggestions for teaching children about healthy touch.

Let your child know they are a great kid! Finding ways to communicate the messages below on a regular basis will help your child feel good about themselves.

- I like you.
- I love you.
- What you have to say is important.
- Listening to what others have to say is important too.
- It is important to say how you feel.
- You can make good choices.
- When you make choices, think of other people's feelings too.
- You are special.
- You can say "no" to any touch that makes you feel uncomfortable.
- All touching can be talked about.
- Tell someone if you need help.
- There are people who can help you.
- Keep telling until someone helps you.

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### BE OPEN AND HONEST WITH YOUR CHILDREN

Parents sometimes wonder how much is too much when it comes to teaching children about safety. While we don't want to frighten children, it is important to be honest and open and give truthful, age-appropriate answers in response to questions they may ask.

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### BUILD TRUST WITH YOUR CHILDREN

Children need to feel that adults trust them. Sometimes this means letting them make their own mistakes and learning from them. If you made a mistake in how you responded to them or a situation, tell them you are sorry – this builds trust. If children earn a reward, don't take it away for inappropriate behaviour – this breaks down trust.

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### HELP YOUR CHILDREN FEEL GOOD ABOUT THEMSELVES

Self-esteem is one of the most important things your child can have. Telling your child often that they are special and loved will build their self-esteem. Help your child to accomplish things. Accomplishment helps build self-esteem. Helping them to make good, safe choices and to respect themselves and others is one of the most effective ways to keep them safe.

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## **TALK WITH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT TOUCH**

Teach your children that there are different kinds of touch and that sometimes people touch children in ways that are not okay. Let them know that if they feel uncomfortable, it is always okay to tell you or another trusted adult. Make sure they understand that touching should never be kept secret and that all touching can be talked about. Teach them they have a right to say “No” to any touch. Tell them that in these types of situations they do not have to be polite, and they are not being rude by saying “no.” Acknowledge that it might be too scary to say “no” and that’s okay – tell them to “talk to an adult they trust about what happened, even if you couldn’t say no.”

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## **TEACH YOUR CHILDREN HOW AND WHERE TO GET HELP**

Let your children know that they can come to you with any kind of problem. Sometimes children are embarrassed about a situation, and don’t want to come to you. They may also worry about upsetting you. Tell them that although you hope they would come to you, it’s okay to go to another adult they trust for help. Help them identify other safe adults they can ask for help if they need it (e.g., in an emergency, if frightened or feeling unsafe). Teach them to call 911 and explain that the police are always available to help. Do not use police as a threat when disciplining your child.

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## **AS YOUR CHILD GETS OLDER GIVE THEM MORE INFORMATION**

You know your child best. Take your cues from your child and give them as much information as you think they understand. Make sure they understand what you are talking about before you go further. Stopping to ask, “Did that make sense to you?” or “Is that what you wanted to know?” may help to ensure the information you are providing is appropriate for their age and stage of development.

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## **KEEP TALKING, AND LISTENING, TO YOUR CHILDREN**

One discussion is usually not enough. Children learn best through repetition and reinforcement. Keep the lines of communication open and be sure to listen. Talk to your children every day about what’s going on in their lives (e.g., school, friends). Try to listen to their stories without offering judgment, commentary or solutions, until asked. This will strengthen your relationship.

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## **IF YOU NEED HELP, ASK!**

Remember parents do not have to have all the answers. If you need help, there are resources you can contact. You can talk to another parent, your child’s teacher or doctor.

## KEY PREVENTION MESSAGES

Focus on simple rules rather than telling young children to problem-solve, use their judgment or follow their intuition. Most children and youth are harmed by someone known or trusted to them and/or the family – do not focus on strangers.

- Sometimes people touch children in ways that are not okay – children have the right to say 'no' to any touch, especially those that make them uncomfortable: "I can say 'no' to any touch I don't like!"
- It may be too scary to say 'no' – that's okay. "Tell someone you trust what happened, even if you couldn't say no."
- If a child feels uncomfortable about a touch, it is always okay to tell a trusted adult. "Only you can decide how a touch makes you feel."
- Secrets about touching should never be kept, even if someone you know really well tells you to keep it a secret – touching is never secret.
- All touching can be talked about.
- No one should tell you to keep a secret from a parent or caregiver.
- Talk to someone, even if you feel confused, embarrassed or scared about telling – "If you need help: ASK!"
- Make sure children know that they are never to blame in any way for what has happened, even if they have broken a rule – their safety is the most important thing.
- Help the children identify safe adults to talk to.
- Focus on appropriate/inappropriate touching; talk about behaviours rather than specific people.
- Discuss the difference between secrets and surprises (a surprise will eventually be revealed).
- Empower children to get help for themselves and others by encouraging them to keep telling until someone helps them.
- Children need to know that angry feelings are okay, and problems can be solved without hurting one another.

**Children should never be given the message that they are responsible for protecting themselves, nor should staff, educators, parents/caregivers expect children to protect themselves. It is the responsibility of adults to protect children.**

## MORE PRACTICAL SAFETY TIPS

- Explain to your children that it is your responsibility to keep them safe, and that it is important that you always know where they are, who they are with, what they are doing, and when they are expected back. This means that you do not want them going anywhere with anyone unless they have permission.
- Know your children's friends and where they gather. Be aware of whose house they like to go to and why (e.g., there is no supervision, the TV/videos/computer games they are allowed to watch/play). Meet and speak to the parents where your child wants to sleep over. Wherever your children go, ask about supervision. Make sure you have the addresses and phone numbers of your children's friends.
- Tell your children that if they want to change their after-school plans or go from one place to another (e.g., from one friend's house to someone else's house, or from the library to the mall) they are to call you first. Make sure your children understand that you expect them to check in with you when they arrive at their destination. Get the address and phone number each time they move from one house to another. Be sure that you know how to reach your children at any time.
- As children become older and more independent, explain to them that knowing where they are is basic safety, and not an issue of controlling their whereabouts, or mistrusting them. Role model for your children – make sure they know how to get in touch with you at any time, or someone else they can call or go to for help.
- Post your contact information where your children will see it and be sure to include: 911; your office phone number; your cell/pager number; and the names and numbers of who to contact in an emergency. Teach your children how to dial 911 in an emergency, both from home and public phones. Make sure your children know their last name, address, and telephone number.
- Take a walking tour of your neighbourhood with your child. Ask your child where their favourite place is to play. Check for wooded areas, abandoned buildings, vacant lots, laneways, poorly lit walkways, and creeks or rivers so your child knows to stay away from these areas.
- Know the route your child takes to school, to lessons, to friends' houses, etc., and the length of time it takes your child to go to and from these places. Make sure your child knows not to take shortcuts through alleys and parking lots. Remember, at any age it is always safer to walk with a buddy.
- When your child is ready to use the bus/subway, do public transit training with your child (e.g., where the bus stop is, the right bus to take, how to read the direction signs in the subway station).
- Let your child know that adults should not ask kids for directions or help, and your child is not being rude by ignoring them or walking away.
- Discuss with your children what to do if they get lost. Tell them to stay in the place where they are (e.g., if they are in a store, stay in that store). Suggest people that they can go to for help (a Mom with children, someone who works there, the person at a cash register).

- If your child is old enough to go out to places with friends, make sure they have enough money to take a taxi home in case they want to leave a situation that is uncomfortable (e.g., peer pressure about drugs, sex or doing something they know is wrong).
- Tell your children that if they are ever in a situation where they feel uncomfortable or unsafe, and want to be picked up right away, they can always call you, no matter what. Focus on the fact that they made the right choice in calling you, and that you hope if they are asked to go again, they will not go – tell them that if there is peer pressure to go, it's okay to make an excuse to friends for why they can't (e.g., they have to babysit younger siblings, there is a family gathering they must attend). You may want to have a code word or phrase through which your child can signal that they want to be picked up right away, without having to expressly say so.
- If your child spends time alone at home, review the "home alone rules" regularly (e.g., never answer the door; if they are allowed to answer the phone, never tell callers that your parents are not home, instead, say that mom/dad cannot come to the phone and offer to take a message).
- Monitor your child's use of the computer/Internet and mobile devices, and review Internet safety. Talk to children and youth about their use of digital communication, including social media, and their online experiences.
- Ask your child care provider and child's teacher what their policy is with respect to taking pictures of the children, including posting them on the Internet. Make sure your children understand that no one should take and/or post pictures of them unless they have your permission, and no one should tell them to keep a secret about having their picture taken.
- Explain to your children that if they ever have a friend who tells them something concerning, or that they are "in trouble" (e.g., being bullied, mistreated in a relationship, hurting themselves or thinking of hurting themselves), but asks them not to tell anybody, it is important to tell an adult they trust about their friend. Even though children may worry about loyalty and that "they won't be my friend anymore," emphasize that these kinds of problems are too big for kids to handle on their own. Even adults need help from other adults when they have problems or are worried. Their friend may be angry at first, but in time will probably be thankful.

**Children often find themselves "in trouble" because they were somewhere they should not have been, or with others they were not supposed to be with – they often think that if they have done something wrong or broken a rule, that they cannot go to a parent. Children break rules and make mistakes; we all do. Make sure children know that they can come to you no matter what – their safety is the most important thing.**

## BASIC INTERNET SAFETY TIPS

1. Make sure safety/privacy settings are high, and set parental controls on each online streaming service, but recognize that it is impossible to filter out all unwanted material, even with specially designed software. Use passwords so children cannot go online unless they ask you first.
2. Clear your browser history regularly, and be aware that what you view online may impact the types of ads that are displayed. Children may inadvertently easily access content that may be unsuitable for their age or developmental level. Do not view adult material on family devices.
3. Pay attention to Internet sites and games that incorporate a chat component – use caution before permitting children to engage in chats.
4. Tell your children that they always need your permission before doing any online quizzes or contests (these may be techniques to obtain personal information for advertising or scams), or for downloading any files or apps. Files should only be downloaded from people or sites that are known and trusted.
5. Explain that once a picture/video/text/sext is sent online, they lose control of where it goes and what is done with it. Even if something is shared via an app that guarantees it will disappear, it can be saved to someone's phone or computer.
6. Sending, forwarding or requesting a sexual/intimate image (photo or video) may be a criminal offence, including child pornography charges.
7. Teach children to respect the privacy and reputation of themselves and others:
  - Never say/post anything mean, rude, hurtful, threatening or untrue about someone online (some of these statements/images may even be against the law). Don't give in to pressure to do anything that makes them feel uncomfortable. Ask, "How would you feel if someone did that to you, or your best friend?"
  - If they receive a rude or unkind message about someone, or a picture, do not forward it.
  - Don't say anything that they would be afraid to say in person. Ask, "Would it be okay if I did or said this face-to-face?"
  - Don't post or share pictures/videos of family, friends, or anyone else, unless they have been given permission to do so.
  - If they received a sexual message/photo/video, even if they felt good about it, they don't have to send one back in return.
  - Don't post anything that could damage their friendships or reputation, (a coach, teacher, or future employer could be the next visitor to the page – employers often use the Internet to find current and past information about someone before hiring).
  - Avoid posting any information online that might reveal who you are (e.g., your school), using provocative names and sexual language, and making comments about sexual interests or the use of alcohol and/or drugs.

8. Teach children how to block anything that makes them feel uncomfortable, including anyone who:
  - communicates rudely;
  - appears to be sending “overly friendly” messages;
  - wants to talk about sex or asks for a “sexy” picture;
  - offers “gifts” or wants to establish a “special” relationship;
  - persists even after they have been told “no” (they don’t have to respond to any message that makes them uncomfortable);
  - tells them they can earn money quickly; and/or
  - threatens.
9. Caution children to never share their password with friends. Insist that they give you a sealed envelope with a list of their user names and passwords, in case of emergency, or if they lose their password.
10. Before children/youth meet anyone in person that they have only met online, discuss the situation with a parent/caregiver. If a parent/caregiver approves of the meeting, consider safety precautions, including taking someone with them, meeting in a public place, having a cell phone, and a plan for leaving if feeling uncomfortable.
11. Turn the computer and webcam off when they are not being used. Consider setting limits around the use of electronic devices and the Internet, including online gaming (e.g., how late they are allowed to be online). Switch off auto-play on platforms to avoid binging on programs, and difficulty enforcing time limits.
12. Think about designating screen free times or areas at home (e.g., during meals, all devices put in the kitchen after a certain time in the evening/at night).
13. Reinforce to children that they should always tell an adult if they feel uncomfortable, upset or threatened about anything online – don’t wait to tell.
14. Show children how to contact [Cybertip.ca](http://Cybertip.ca) to report any concerns about online sexual exploitation.
15. Think carefully before posting any information and images of your children online, including personal details that could identify you or your family (e.g., the children in their school uniform, where the children go, especially if they are unsupervised).
16. Consider the potential impact of posting information and images of your children without their informed consent (e.g., children may be embarrassed by the content, feel their privacy has been violated). This creates a digital footprint that often starts in infancy, without permission of the individual.
17. If you or a caregiver has an online dating profile, do not include any information about your children or children they look after.

## INTERNET TIPS FOR TEENS<sup>1</sup>

1. Be smart about what you post on the Web and what you say to others. The Web is a lot more public and permanent than it seems.
2. Provocative and sexy names and pictures can draw attention from people you don't want in your life.
3. Sexy pictures can get you into trouble with the law. If you are underage, they may be considered child pornography, a serious crime.
4. Be careful what you download or look at, even for a laugh. Some of the images on the Internet are extreme, and you can't "unsee" something.
5. Going to sex chat rooms and other sex sites may connect you with people who can harass you in ways you don't anticipate.
6. Free downloads and file-sharing can put pornography on your computer that you may not want and can be hard to get rid of. Any pornography that shows children or teens under 18 is illegal child pornography and can get you in big trouble.
7. Adults who talk to you about sex are committing a crime. So are adults who meet underage teens for sex. Some teens think it might be fun, harmless or romantic, but it means serious trouble for everyone. It's best to report it.
8. Don't play along with people on the Web who are acting badly, taking risks and being weird. Even if you think it's harmless and feel like you can handle it, it only encourages them and may endanger other young people.
9. Report it when other people are acting weird and inappropriately or harassing you or others. It's less trouble just to log off, but these people may be dangerous. Save the communication. Contact the site management, your service provider, the CyberTipline<sup>2</sup> or even the police.
10. Don't let friends influence your better judgement. If you are surfing with other kids, don't let them pressure you to do things you ordinarily wouldn't.
11. Be careful if you ever go to meet someone you have gotten to know through the Internet. You may think you know them well, but they may fool you. Go with a friend. Tell your parents. Meet in a public place. Make sure you have your cell phone and an exit plan.
12. Don't harass others. People may retaliate in ways you don't expect.
13. You can overestimate your ability to handle things. It may feel like you are careful, savvy, aware of dangers, and able to manage the risks you take, but there are always unknowns. Don't risk disasters.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.cybertip.ca](http://www.cybertip.ca) is Canada's national tipline for reporting online sexual exploitation.