

Elementary Health Education

3rd Grade PERSONAL SAFETY UNIT PARENT GUIDE

(Created 2008-2009)



For more information, contact:

James Hitchner
Curriculum Specialist for Elementary Health and Physical Education
191 S. East Street
Frederick, MD 21701
(301) 644-5161
james.hitchner@fcps.org

INTRODUCTION

The Personal Safety unit has been in place as a 3rd grade unit of instruction for over 20 years. In 2006-07, the Frederick County School Health Council and the Frederick County Sexual Assault/Harassment Task Force recommended that this instruction should take place below grade 3—in every grade PreK-3. Because instruction was recommended to now take place every year prior to third grade, the unit was revised and updated. A rigorous review process of all curriculum and materials of instruction occurred by parents, teachers, counselors, administrators, local health agencies, and the Frederick County Family Life Advisory Council in 2007-08. Final approval was made by the FCPS Board of Education in 2008.

The goal of the Personal Safety unit of elementary health education is to protect children from unsafe and abusive situations through their expanded knowledge, empowerment, and continued awareness of safety skills.

Just as we teach fire safety, bicycle safety, and safety around the home, the personal safety unit is also part of the health curriculum under the standard, “Safety and Injury Prevention: Students will demonstrate the ability to apply prevention and intervention knowledge, skills, and processes to promote safe living in the home, school, and community.” In every grade, students will be taught safety rules to follow, what to do when safety rules are broken, and identify the trusted adults that they can turn to when they feel uncomfortable.

Lessons will be taught by your child’s classroom teacher, who was specially trained to teach this unit. The school counselor will also consult on the instruction and be available to support the classroom teacher. The unit will be taught in five lessons with an optional booster lesson.

Parental support is crucial to the success of any personal safety program. Children are much more likely to know and use personal safety skills if they have multiple opportunities to discuss and practice them. Studies show that when parents and schools work together to present personal safety information, children are more likely to retain the information and less likely to be victimized. A consistent message that is reinforced at both home and school is the best prevention. This parent guide and other resources are available to support you in this endeavor.

Frederick County Public Schools are grateful to be a partner in teaching safety to your child. If you have questions or concerns, please contact your child’s classroom teacher, school counselor, or Principal. You are also welcome to contact James Hitchner, Curriculum Specialist for Elementary Health and Physical Education at (301) 644-5161 or james.hitchner@fcps.org.

Frederick County Public Schools

GRADE 3

PERSONAL SAFETY HEALTH CURRICULUM

HE.300.50.05 Demonstrate an understanding of personal body safety, including prevention skills and appropriate intervention

- HE.300.50.05.a Define abuse and neglect
- HE.300.50.05.b Identify situations, including online situations, in terms of personal body safety and abuse
- HE.300.50.05.c Identify unsafe situations for potential abuse, including ways to stay safe around strangers as well as people you know
- HE.300.50.05.d Identify how people you know can sometimes hurt you or make you feel uncomfortable
- HE.300.50.05.e Explain the effect of abuse and neglect on personal well-being, including the concept that the victim is not at fault
- HE.300.50.05.f Explain the importance of using one's ability to sense, recognize, understand, accept, and trust warning signs
- HE.300.50.05.g Identify and demonstrate refusal strategies and skills to respond to abuse and neglect, such as using words, not keeping secrets, getting away, and seeking help
- HE.300.50.05.h Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of immediately reporting abuse and/or neglect to a parent, school staff member, or other trusted adult

MATERIALS OF INSTRUCTION

Materials of instruction are tools that teachers use in order to teach the curriculum standards and indicators. Materials were carefully chosen for developmental appropriateness and underwent a rigorous review process. Teachers have a curriculum map and were trained to implement model lessons (see *Personal Safety Teacher's Guide*).

Parents have the opportunity to view all of these materials by:

- Attending the FCPS Personal Safety Unit Parent Preview Session, conducted by the Curriculum Specialist for Elementary Health Education.
- Contacting your child's school counselor to set up an appointment to view the materials.
- Contacting the FCPS Instructional Materials Center (IMC) at (240) 236-8825 to set up an appointment to view the materials. The IMC is located at 44 W. Frederick St., Walkersville, MD, 21793, and is open from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Depending on availability, materials can be checked out for three days.
- Some of the books may also be available for check-out through the Frederick County Public Library System.

The following materials of instruction will be used for 3rd grade:

- Approved portions of the curriculum kit: *Talking about Touching: A Personal Safety Curriculum for grades 1-3*; published by Committee for Children that includes:
 - Safety Steps Poster
 - Talking about Touching Photo/Lesson Cards #'s 4-11
 - Vocabulary Cards
- Book: *Not in Room 204* by Shannon Riggs and illustrated by Jaime Zollars. Published by Albert Whitman and Company
- Audio CD: *Can't Fool Me!* Published by Yello Dyno, Inc.
- Hand Mirrors

PERSONAL SAFETY VOCABULARY FOR 3rd GRADE

Personal Safety: How to keep your body safe from harm

Safe Touch: A touch that make you feel cared for, loved, and important (for example: a hug, holding hands, pats on the back, arm around the shoulder, or a shot from the doctor).

Unsafe Touch: A touch that hurts you or someone else, or you or someone else's feelings (for example: hitting, pushing, pinching, kicking, and touching the private parts of your body). You are allowed to say "No" to an unsafe touch.

Unwanted Touch: A touch that you do not want or that makes you feel uncomfortable. This can also be a safe touch that a child just doesn't want at that time, or by that person, or in that way. You are allowed to say "No" to an unwanted touch, even if the touch is from someone you know.

Private Body Parts: Parts of the body that are covered by a bathing suit.

The Touching Rule: Nobody should touch your private body parts except to keep you clean and healthy.

Surprises and OK Secrets: Are fun, make you feel good, and will always told when the time is right. They do not make you feel uncomfortable.

Not OK Secrets: Secrets that can hurt you or somebody else if not shared, and/or may make you feel uncomfortable. Nobody should ever keep secrets about the Touching Rule. Nobody should ask you to keep a "not ok secret" from your parents or whoever takes care of you.

The Secret Rule: I don't keep secrets that make me feel unsafe or uncomfortable. Secrets about touching are not ok.

Safety Steps: No, Go, Tell! (1.Say words that mean "No," 2.Get away, and 3. Tell a trusted adult).

Trusted Adult: Someone who: I can ask for help, I can talk to when I feel scared, I am happy to be around, makes me feel safer, and cares about me.

Warning Signs: Your feelings when you are in an uncomfortable or unsafe situation

Always Ask First Rule: Always ask first if someone you know (or a stranger) wants to give you something, or if someone you know (or a stranger) asks you to go somewhere with him/her.

Privacy: Your right to keep something to yourself or share with someone that you trust.

Assertiveness: Standing up for yourself. To be assertive, you need to use a strong voice and look like you mean what you say.

Physical Abuse: When a child is hurt badly by someone who is taking care of him/her. For example, cuts, bruises, broken bones, burns, etc—anything that leaves a mark. This usually happens when that person cannot control their anger.

Neglect: When a child does not have what he/she needs to survive. These needs include food, water, shelter, clothing, supervision, and medical care.

Sexual Abuse: A forced or tricked touch of a your private parts or someone else's private parts that make you feel uncomfortable. This touch is an unsafe touch. Sexual abuse does not have to include touching.

Victim: A person who is hurt by another person. A child who experiences abuse or neglect is a victim. Abuse is never a victim's fault.

3rd GRADE PERSONAL SAFETY

LESSON SUMMARIES & DISCUSSION STARTERS

Lesson One: I Can Play It Safe (Pre-Assessment)

The teacher will introduce the unit by defining personal safety. “Over the next few days, we will be talking about some things that can hurt you. We will also talk about what you or your friends can do if you are being hurt.” She/he will also explain the Question Box procedure (if students have a question that they do not want to ask aloud, they will write it in the question box). The teacher will then read the book *I Can Play it Safe*. This book has been read every year (grades preK-2) prior to 3rd grade, so it will be a memory trigger for students. It will be read as a pre-assessment in 3rd grade, meaning that the teacher will ask students questions as he/she is reading to gain an understanding of how much knowledge students have about the subject. This will allow the teacher to adjust the pace of instruction to meet the specific needs of his/her class. An optional way to do this is through the eInstruction classroom performance system (a form of technology where students take a quiz with remote “clickers” anonymously).

When asking questions, the teacher will define safe touch, unsafe touch, unwanted touch, The Touching Rule, Always Ask First Rule, Secret Rule, OK secrets, not OK secrets, Safety Steps, and Trusted Adults. These are also concepts that will have been taught since Kindergarten, and should be a review. If more emphasis is needed, the teacher will use the picture card (showing a boy hugging his grandfather) to define safe, unsafe and unwanted touches.

Students will then fill out the “Touching Safety” chart. They will categorize each kind of touch into one of three columns; “Safe, Unsafe, or Unwanted Touches.” The teacher will choose to do this as a whole class, in small groups, in partners, or individually.

Parent Discussion Starters, Lesson One:

- So, you started the Personal Safety unit today. What is Personal Safety?
- What is a safe touch? How do you know if a touch is a safe touch? How does a safe touch make you feel? What are some other safe touches? When we go see Dr. _____, and he/she performs the check-up, is this a safe touch? Why?
- What is an unsafe touch? What is an example of an unsafe touch?
- What is an unwanted touch? What are some examples of an unwanted touch?
- Is it ok to say “No” to an unwanted touch? Even if the touch is from an adult?
- What should you do if someone gives you an unsafe or unwanted touch?
- What are your Private Parts? While FCPS employees will not use correct anatomical terms for a child’s private parts in grades preK-3, you might want to consider doing so yourself. If you have not done that yet, now might be a time to introduce those terms. Sexual assault experts recommend using correct anatomical terms so that if necessary, the child is able to communicate accurately about any touching questions or problems that arise. Additionally, health education experts recommend using proper anatomical terms so that children do not develop a negative stigma surrounding those body parts, and so that students are accustomed to using proper terms rather than slang terms.
- What is the Touching Rule? What does it mean “to keep you clean and healthy?”

- Has anybody ever broken the Touching Rule with you? Remind your child that if somebody ever does break the touching rule, it is never too late to tell...make sure that they know you will always listen. Say, "It is never a child's fault if somebody breaks the Touching Rule, and you should never keep secrets about touching."
- What if somebody did break the Touching Rule? What would you do? What are the Safety Steps?
- What is the Always Ask First rule? What are some examples of when you should use the Always Ask First Rule?
- Role play some scenarios with your child to make sure that they know the Always Ask First rule and the Touching Rule.

Lesson Two: Trusted Adults

The teacher will review concepts from the previous lesson. Then she/he will use picture card (showing a girl and a boy on a beach in their bathing suits picking up shells) to define private body parts, the Touching Rule, and the Safety Steps. Students will go through some scenarios where they are to think of options for refusing and removing themselves from an unsafe situation. The teacher will choose to do this as a large group, in small groups, in partners, or in station format.

Then, using more picture cards (showing a boy telling his mother when somebody broke the touching rule) the teacher will discuss secrets and the Touching Rule. Students will continue more skills practices.

The teacher will brainstorm with the students about what characteristics define a trusted adult. Students will create a "Trusted Adult Directory" where they will identify three trusted adults; one family member, one friend, and one other adult. Students will also list "when I see this person, the time of day that is best to talk to him/her, and one type of problem I have talked to him/her about or will talk to him/her about when I need to."

Parent Discussion Starters, Lesson Two:

- What did you learn today during your Personal Safety unit?
- Who did you pick as your trusted adults? Why did you pick these people? What are some characteristics of a trusted adult?
- Thank you for choosing me as your trusted adult! That makes me feel so special. You know that you can always talk to me when you need anything, right? I will always try to help keep you safe. So will (Daddy, Mommy, Grandma, other people trusted adults listed.) It's good that you know when the time is best to talk.
- If one of your trusted adults doesn't listen to you, what should you do? That's right—keep telling until somebody listens. That's why you have listed so many people on your picture.
- What are some other ways to say "No"? (For example: "No, thank you." "Leave me alone please." "Stop that." "I'm not allowed to play touching games." "I don't like that.")
- Help your child realize that getting away can be as simple as moving away from someone or going to another room. Or, it might mean running home immediately. Tell them that even if they can't get away, then the telling becomes even more important.
- When I get that "uh-oh feeling," my body feels funny. (Give examples such as my stomach gets upset, sometimes my heart starts to beat fast, or my hands get sweaty, etc.) What happens to your body when you get that uh-oh feeling (or warning signs go off)?

- Do you remember when _____ happened? How did you feel? Those were your body's warning signs! (give example of an unsafe situation that recently occurred. Or, give example when child got "caught" doing something they weren't supposed to do and was going to get in trouble, as this physical response simulates a stressful situation where a child's warning signs would be initiated) You should always listen to your body's warning signs when deciding if a touch is safe or unsafe, or if a secret is ok or not ok. If something makes you feel uncomfortable, you should always tell me.
- What is the difference between a surprise/ok secret and a not ok secret?
- Can you remember when we kept _____ a surprise? (give example like a surprise birthday party or a Christmas present) That was fun, wasn't it? It was a good surprise, or an ok secret, because it made you feel good and we told when the time was right.
- What is an example of a not ok secret?
- What would you do if somebody asked you to keep a secret from me?
- Has anybody ever asked you to keep a not ok secret from me?

Lesson Three: Not in Room 204 (Sexual Abuse)

The teacher will review all concepts and vocabulary taught so far. Using the picture card (showing a girl sitting and reading a book) the teacher will differentiate between ok and not ok secrets. The teacher will then define victim and emphasize that when someone breaks the Touching Rule, it is never a victim's fault.

The teacher will read *Not in Room 204* aloud and discuss the book. In this book, the teacher Mrs. Salvador has lots of rules. (The teacher will liken the rules in Room 204 to the rules that students have learned about personal safety). When Mrs. Salvador is reading a book to the class about "stranger danger" she adds an impromptu comment that, "It's not always strangers who touch children in ways they shouldn't be touched." This rule hits home for one of her students, Regina Lillian Hadwig, who hesitantly reveals her secret that she has been abused (which is not overtly revealed in the story) to the teacher. After reading the book, students will also discuss how important it is to immediately tell a trusted adult about any secrets that make you feel uncomfortable.

The teacher will then define sexual abuse by stating that the examples shown today about unsafe and unwanted touching are called sexual abuse.

Students will then role play going to adults with a problem. They will practice using the words, "I need to talk to you about a problem. It's important," or "I have a problem. It's a secret but I need to talk about it." or "Something's bothering me. Can I talk to you about it?"

Parent Discussion Starters, Lesson Three:

- What did you learn today during your Personal Safety unit?
- What is sexual abuse?
- Did you realize that strangers are not always the ones who commit sexual abuse? Sometimes it's people that you know. How can you tell? If somebody doesn't follow the touching rules or makes you feel uncomfortable in any way.
- Help children to realize that there are a variety of reasons why children who are abused do not tell. They may have been told to keep it a secret. They may have been threatened with punishment if they tell.

Reiterate that kids should not keep secrets about touching, that it is never too late to tell, and that it is not their fault. Emphasize that if a friend told them a not ok secret, it is being a good friend to tell.

- Someone at work was telling me that she was walking through a parking lot at night and got this funny feeling in her stomach. Then she saw a police officer and it turned out to be okay. I think people should listen to that funny feeling they get—it's your body's warning signs. What do you think?
- When I get that “uh-oh feeling,” my body feels funny. (Give examples such as my stomach gets upset, sometimes my heart starts to beat fast, or my hands get sweaty, etc.) What happens to your body when you get that uh-oh feeling (or warning signs go off)?
- Do you remember when _____ happened? How did you feel? Those were your body's warning signs! (give example of an unsafe situation that recently occurred. Or, give example when child got “caught” doing something they weren't supposed to do and was going to get in trouble, as this physical response simulates a stressful situation where a child's warning signs would be initiated) You should always listen to your body's warning signs when deciding if a touch is safe or unsafe, or if a secret is ok or not ok. If something makes you feel uncomfortable, you should always tell me.
- Who was the trusted adult that Regina Lillian Hadwig went to in the story today? Yes, your teacher is a trusted adult.

Lesson Four: Physical Abuse and Neglect

The teacher will review all the rules about sexual abuse and go over vocabulary. Using a picture card (showing a teen babysitter and a child holding her head and crying) the teacher will clarify unsafe touches and define physical abuse and neglect.

The students will then play a game called the “Needs or Wants” game. A picture of a need or want will flash up on the screen. Students will stand up if it is a “need” and wave their hands in the air if it is a “want.” After the game, the teacher will create a list of needs vs. wants in order to define neglect. The teacher will then read some scenarios. The teacher will decide to do this activity as a large group and model a “think aloud” activity, in small groups, in partners, or in station format. In this role play activity, students will pretend to tell a trusted adult that they, or a friend, is being physically abused or neglected.

Parent Discussion Starters, Lesson Four:

- What did you learn today during your Personal Safety unit?
- What is physical abuse?
- Give scenario: You know, I was really angry the other day at _____. It was really hard not to yell at him/her. But, I counted to ten and got my patience back. Do you have any strategies you use when you get angry? Reiterate that it is ok to get angry, but it is not ok to hit when you are angry.
- Some children may ask if being spanked or slapped by parents or caregivers is physical abuse. This is a delicate issue, as families have their own values, beliefs, and practices regarding discipline. Reflect on your own discipline style. Safe discipline ends and physical abuse begins when a parent or caregiver intentionally causes repeated injury to the child's body, or when discipline causes extreme pain or has lasting physical effects, such as broken bones, burns, bruises, cuts or internal damage. If you are having difficulty with this issue, please contact your child's school counselor and she/he will direct you to many resources that are available to you in terms of healthy discipline.
- What is neglect?

- What do all kids need to survive?
- Discuss with your child specific examples to help him/her differentiate among needs and wants (for example, having a pair of shoes is a need, but having a \$200 pair of shoes is a want).
- What would you do if one of your friends told you that he/she was being abused? Yes-tell me or a trusted adult right away because your friend would need help.

Lesson Five: Being Assertive and Saying No

The teacher will review from yesterday's lesson. Using a picture card (showing a girl next to an open car door), the teacher will then discuss the Always Ask First rule. Scenarios that describe common lures will be described and students will need to respond with "Always Ask First."

Then, the teacher will explain that "Sometimes you cannot ask first because you are by yourself or with a friend. Sometimes you need to stand up for yourself and be assertive." The teacher will discuss the picture card (showing two girls in a movie theater). The teacher will define assertive.

Students will play the "Situation Game." Students will be divided into pairs; each pair will get a stack of cards. On one side of the card will be a "Say No" situation. One student will read the situation, and the other student will practice being assertive and saying no in a strong voice. On the other side of the card is the suggested solution that students can discuss together.

The unit will be summarized by taking the CPS post-test. In addition, students can make their own personal safety book. This book will include ways to open a conversation up with a trusted adult, vocabulary words and definitions, as well as information that they feel is most valuable that they can share with their parents or trusted adults.

Parent Discussion Starters, Lesson Five:

- What did you learn today during your Personal Safety unit?
- What were some of the ways that grown-ups could trick kids? What would you do in those situations?
- Help your child realize that getting away can be as simple as moving away from someone or going to another room. Or, it might mean running home immediately. Tell them that even if they can't get away, then the telling becomes even more important.
- When I get that "uh-oh feeling," my body feels funny. (Give examples such as my stomach gets upset, sometimes my heart starts to beat fast, or my hands get sweaty, etc.) What happens to your body when you get that uh-oh feeling (or warning signs go off)?
- Show me how you practiced being assertive and saying "No" in a firm way. (give scenarios and let your child practice with you). You can videotape your child during the role play, play it back, and watch it with your child. You can then discuss the body language that your child used that showed he/she was assertive (not aggressive).
- Can I look at your personal safety book? Why do you think that these are the most important ideas that you learned this week?
- Congratulate your child for knowing all the safety rules. Emphasize that he/she can always talk to you about anything that makes him/her feel uncomfortable.

NOTE ABOUT INSTRUCTION FOR ALL STUDENTS

Last year in Frederick County, over 3000 calls and referrals were made to Child Protective Services. Of those, 310 reports of child abuse were indicated (substantiated.) However, reporting rates of abuse are significantly lower than actual cases of abuse. Experts estimate that only 36% of abuse cases are reported. If that is accurate, there are likely over a thousand cases of child abuse in Frederick County each year.

The youngest children are the most vulnerable in terms of child abuse. According to the US Dept. of Health and Human Services, 39% of all abuse cases occur before the age of 3. Over half of abuse cases occur before a child reaches 3rd grade. 63% of all abuse occurs while a child is in elementary school.

These statistics reaffirm the Board of Education's decision to begin developmentally appropriate personal safety instruction in Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten in Frederick County Public Schools. It is our hope that through their expanded knowledge, empowerment, and continued awareness of safety skills, children are less likely to be victims of abuse.

Nationally, in 87% of all physical abuse cases, 77% of neglect cases, and 27% of sexual abuse cases, the child's parent is the perpetrator of abuse. Thus, the expectation in Frederick County Public Schools is that all children receive instruction about personal safety. Parent permission is not required. Yet, we highly encourage parents to be partners in educating students about the dangers of abuse and threats to personal safety.

FCPS realizes that personal safety instruction is a sensitive topic that may not be suitable for all students. After reviewing the materials of instruction and the model lessons, if you wish for your child not to receive instruction, contact your child's school Principal. This decision will be made on an individualized basis.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

From *I Can Play It Safe* book by Alison Feigh

- “When a child is abused or abducted, the offender likely is someone the child knows. So teaching kids about “stranger danger” is not effective. In fact, there may be times when a child needs to ask a stranger for help.
- Along with the Always Ask First rule, teach children what to do if an adult tries to get them to go somewhere without letting them ask first. For example, make as much noise as possible, quickly get away, and find someone you trust to help. Also, explain how to use a family password for those unplanned times when you need to send another adult to pick up your child.
- Perhaps our greatest safety defense is that gut instinct we all have. Sometimes our gut works faster than our brain. When you know that a certain person makes your child afraid or uncomfortable, do not allow that individual to be alone with the child. Learning to listen to the “uh oh” feeling is a powerful tool to help protect kids their entire lives.
- Teach kids to be wary of anyone who asks them to keep a secret from their parents or guardians. The child should tell the person that they do not keep secrets, and then find a trusted adult to tell what happened. Even if the adult doesn’t have bad intentions with the secret, the child’s response will be a reminder for the adult to self-check his or her behavior.
- If an adult asks a child for directions or to help find a lost pet, the child’s first instinct likely is to help. Teach your child to leave the situation to find a trusted adult. Even in an emergency, the best thing to do is to leave the situation and call 911. At the same time, kids don’t need to feel useless. They can still help a friend or a neighbor, but the Always Ask First Rule always applies.
- Attention and affection are common lures of child abductors. The need for love and attention can be used against children. Kids who receive appropriate love and attention from trusted, caring adults are more likely to be suspicious when someone offers inappropriate affection in an attempt to gain control over them.
- One of the obstacles that prevent children from seeking help in cases of abuse is the fear that they will be blamed or that parents will not love them anymore. It is easier for children to stand up for themselves if they know they have the love and support of the people closest to them...let the kids in your life know that you love them and want them to be safe.”

Source: Feigh, A. (2008). *I Can Play It Safe*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

From Protection from Sex Offenders by the Maryland Office of the Attorney General

<http://www.oag.state.md.us/sexualoffender/protect.htm>



WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MY CHILDREN FROM UNIDENTIFIED SEX OFFENDERS?

The **single, most important fact** that we must understand to protect our children is this:

MOST SEX OFFENDERS ARE NEVER APPREHENDED BY THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM.

Being concerned about the sex offenders we do NOT know about, therefore, is just as important as focusing on those we do. This means taking steps to safeguard your children against sexual abuse from known convicted offenders, other strangers, and people they know. The following are common sense guidelines to help your children stay safe:

A. TALK OPENLY AND LISTEN CAREFULLY.

The key to your children's safety is effective two-way communication. You must give your children the knowledge they need to protect themselves, and they must feel able to express their fears and describe any real problems they may encounter. This requires an environment where you and your children feel comfortable talking about sensitive, embarrassing, or frightening things. Listen to them and believe them, even about little things, for the conversations about little things build the foundation for communication about big things that could change their lives. Emphasize a few key points which will foster more open communication:

- You always want to know if something scary, confusing, embarrassing or weird happens to them and you will never be angry. You want to know even if they are not sure exactly what happened.
- If an adult does something that makes them feel scared, uncomfortable or confused, it is the adult's fault and not the child's fault, even if the adult tries to blame it on the child. You will never blame it on your child.
- An adult who tries to make a child keep a secret, or tells him something bad will happen if he does not keep a secret, is very wrong. Children should not keep adults' secrets.
- You or someone can always help, even if your child thinks something has happened that can never be fixed.

B. TEACH YOUR CHILDREN TO BE AWARE AND CAREFUL, BUT NOT AFRAID.

Be honest and open about dangers, but you know more than your children need to know. Avoid scary details, talk in a calm and reassuring manner, and use language that is age- appropriate. For example, with a young child it would be enough to warn, "there are people who do bad things to children," when

talking about safety rules.

C. FOCUS CHILDREN ON CERTAIN SUSPICIOUS SITUATIONS AND BEHAVIOR RATHER THAN CERTAIN KINDS OF PEOPLE.

Warning children to beware of “strangers” ignores their vulnerability to unidentified sex offenders whom they may know quite well. Teach your children instead to be on the lookout for suspicious behavior in any adult. Be sure to emphasize that they should tell you or another trusted adult immediately if they encounter such behavior, which can include:

- Asking a child for help. Children help other children, but should not be asked to assist adults, like giving directions or helping to “find a lost puppy.” An adult who tells a child his parent is in trouble and offers to take the child to the parent is also highly suspicious.
- Paying an unusual amount of attention to a child. Offenders often initiate seemingly innocent contact with a victim and cultivate a close relationship over time. Most adult-child relationships are healthy and positive, of course, but certain behaviors can be warning signs of trouble, like insisting on physical affection the child does not want, giving inappropriate gifts, wanting time alone with the child, etc.
- Touching a child or asking to be touched by a child in areas of the body that would be covered by a bathing suit. No one should touch your children in any way that makes them feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused.
- Asking a child to get into a vehicle or following a child on foot or by car. Children should know never to get into someone’s car without parental approval, and always to make a loud scene if someone tries to take them somewhere or force them into a car.
- Asking to take a child’s picture. Children should know never to let an adult take their photograph without parental consent.

D. BE SPECIFIC AND ENGAGE IN ROLE-PLAYING TO TEACH THE BEST RESPONSES TO DANGER.

Act out different situations and give children specific ideas about what to do. Examples include:

- Your child is separated from you in a store or other public place. Tell your child not to wander around looking for you, but to go immediately to a police officer, store salesclerk or other person in authority, or to a mother with children.
- A man tries to get your child into his car. Tell your child to make a loud scene by kicking and resisting physically, and by screaming things like, “this man is trying to take me away,” or “this man is not my father,” or “help me - he’s hurting me.”
- Your child’s soccer coach gives him a ride home and touches him in a way that feels uncomfortable. Tell your child that he does not need to be polite. He should say no, or stop, or he should push the coach away. He should also tell you immediately what happened, even though the coach said not to tell anyone else. Emphasize that people who do this kind of thing almost always make the child afraid to tell anyone else, and explain that this is wrong. Explain that a child should not believe any adult who says something bad will happen if he tells a secret. Your child should not keep other adults’ secrets from you. Emphasize also that if an adult touches your child or asks to be touched, it is NOT your child’s fault.

E. TEACH YOUR CHILDREN TO TRUST THEIR INSTINCTS AND UNDERSTAND IT IS SOMETIMES O.K. TO SAY NO TO ADULTS.

In the effort to raise our children to be polite, well-mannered, and respectful of authority, we may miss conveying the message that their safety is nonetheless always more important. They must learn to trust their own feelings and know that they have every right to say no when they sense something is wrong, like someone trying to take them somewhere, touch them inappropriately, or do anything else that makes them feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused.

F. MAKE YOUR CHILDREN AWARE OF KNOWN, SPECIFIC THREATS.

If a convicted sex offender does live or work in your community, make your children familiar with the offender and the risks he may pose to them. Show them the offender's photograph, warn them to avoid inappropriate or unsupervised contact, and instruct them to tell you immediately if the offender initiates contact with them or makes them feel uncomfortable in any way.

G. KNOW YOUR CHILDREN. KNOW WHERE THEY ARE, WHO THEIR FRIENDS ARE, AND WHAT THEIR DAILY ACTIVITIES ARE. BE SENSITIVE TO CHANGES IN THEIR MOODS AND BEHAVIOR.

Although sex offenders can be the most unlikely suspects, you are the best gauge your children have of whether they are at risk from someone in their familiar circle. Watch for suspicious behavior in adults who come into contact with your children, and watch for changes in your children which could signal trouble. Above all, keep talking to them.

WHAT ARE COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILD SEX OFFENDERS I SHOULD WATCH OUT FOR?

Sex offenders come in all shapes and sizes. They can be adolescents or senior citizens, homeless or executives in Fortune 500 companies, and they can come from any racial, ethnic or religious background. They cannot, therefore, be identified easily. Yet certain behaviors can be a sign of trouble, although it is also important to remember that such behaviors are not always indicative of sexual offending. Some common warning signs can include an adult who:

- insists on hugging, kissing, touching, wrestling or holding a child even if the child resists;
- is too interested in a child's developing body, sexuality, dating habits, etc.
- seeks uninterrupted time alone with a child;
- spends more time with children than with people his own age, and more time doing activities involving children;
- offers to baby-sit children free of charge and/or takes them on overnight outings alone;
- gives children inappropriate gifts or money for no reason;
- often walks in on children in the bathroom;
- is too permissive with children and allows misbehavior;
- talks repeatedly about the sexual activities of children and teens;
- talks with children about sexual fantasies, and seems unclear about what is O.K. to do and talk about with children;
- encourages children to keep secrets;
- looks at child pornography;
- asks adult partners to dress or act like children or teens during sexual activity;
- has a series of children who are "special friends;"
- makes fun of children's body parts, and calls them sexual names such as "stud"

HOW CAN I TELL IF MY CHILD IS BEING ABUSED?

Both behavioral and physical signs may provide clues that a child is being sexually abused. Keep in mind, however, that many of these changes can also occur at other times of stress or trauma in a child's life, like a divorce or the death of a loved one or pet.

Behavioral warning signs:

- nightmares, fear of the dark, or other sleeping problems;
- extreme fear of "monsters";
- loss of appetite, trouble eating or swallowing, or constant stomach aches and disturbances for no apparent reason;
- sudden mood swings, e.g., rage, fear, anger, or withdrawal, or spacing out at odd times;
- fear of certain people or places not formerly feared, or uncharacteristic behavior around a certain person, e.g., a talkative child becomes quiet and distant around a babysitter;
- regressive behavior, like a return to thumb sucking or bed-wetting;
- imitating sexual behavior with toys or other children;
- using new words for body parts;
- refusing to talk about a "secret" the child shares with an adult or older child;
- talking about a new, older friend;
- suddenly having money;
- cutting, burning, or hurting himself or herself as an adolescent.

Physical warning signs:

- unexplained bruises, redness, bleeding, or pain around a child's genitalia, anus or mouth;
- sores or milky fluids in the genital area.

OTHER RESOURCES

Frederick County 2-1-1 Mental Health Services Directory

Call 211 on the phone or go to www.211md.org

Frederick County Mental Health Association and Child Care Choices

263 West Patrick St.

Frederick, MD 21701

(301) 663-0011

<http://www.fcmha.org/>

Kids on the Block Puppet Show <http://www.kotb.com/>

Frederick County Sheriff's Office Registered Sexual Offenders Mapping

http://ww3.frederickcountymd.gov/gis/mapServices/agreement_rso.html

Sex Offender Compliance and Enforcement for Maryland

<http://www.socem.info/>

Frederick County Child Protective Services in the Department of Social Services

100 East All Saints Street

Frederick, Md 21701

301-694-2464

(After 5:00 p.m. & weekends : 301-694-2100)

<http://www.fcdss.sailorsite.net/cps.htm>

Victim Services of Frederick County (contact information for multiple agencies)

<http://www.dpsecs.state.md.us/victimservs/frederick.shtml>

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. <http://www.missingkids.com>

NetSmartz Internet Safety www.netsmartz.org and www.netsmartzkids.org

Talking about Touching Personal Safety Curriculum

<http://www.cfchildren.org/talking-about-touching.aspx>

Yello Dyno Safety Party Curriculum

<http://www.yellodyno.com/>

US Dept. of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families

www.acf.hhs.gov

Stop It Now! The Campaign to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse, *Warning Signs About Child Sexual Abuse*, 2005, <http://www.stopitnow.org/warnings.html>