

Being Your Own Best Friend

10-11 Year Olds

Day 1 of 3

Objectives

To distinguish between touch which is acceptable to the child and that which is not for any reason.

To give children permission to say "no" whenever they are touched in ways that:

- they don't like,
- make them feel uncomfortable, or
- they think is wrong.

To role-play responding to everyday examples of unwanted touch, saying "no" effectively and appropriately.

To reinforce the three elements of effective communication:

- eye contact,
- say what you mean, and
- consistent body language.

To acknowledge that individual children have different feelings about touch.

Introduction for adult

Children learn they have control over what happens to their bodies when we teach them, and when we show them by our own behavior that their bodies do indeed belong to them. Children already know what touch they like and what touch they don't like. They know what touch seems wrong or makes them uneasy. Prevention of sexual abuse education gives children permission to communicate the range of their feelings appropriately and effectively.

As you will see, none of the examples in this curriculum actually constitute sexual abuse. However, when children learn to say "no" to someone who hugs them too hard, or touches them in a way that makes them uneasy, they are learning the skills which enable them to prevent abuse.

Prevention, by definition, is what happens before abuse begins. It happens in the first moments of uncomfortableness, while the offender is still testing to see if the child will go along. In an article entitled "What Sexual Offenders Tell Us About Strategies" researchers Conte, Wolf and Smith asked offenders, "After you had identified a potential victim, what did you do to engage the child?"

The following responses from these offenders eloquently portray the efficacy of The Safe Child approach to prevention:

"I would initiate different kinds of contact, such as touching the child's head. Testing the child to see how much she would take before she would pull away."

"Getting comfortable with the child... Making them feel comfortable with me...like a hug, start touching their arms, legs, hugging them."

In essence, activities which would be acceptable and normal under most circumstances become the child's first opportunity to speak up long before the abuse begins.

This is also why it is important to keep our own judgements of good and bad out of the role-plays and discussion. A hug may be wonderful or awful depending on the relationship and the intentions of the person involved. Prevention happens at the level of the child with his/her own interpretation of what is happening. Children who have been told, for example, that all hugs are good will not trust their own feelings and will be hampered in their efforts to say "no" when they feel uncomfortable.

We also need to change our messages about obeying people in authority. These children are old enough to exercise some judgement about the appropriateness of adult requests. Because we cannot and should not always be available to help children make important choices, they need to have the ability to make those choices for themselves and to know they will be supported when they do. Going through the specific role-plays will give you a sense of whether the children in your group know the difference between blindly doing what they're told and saying "no" when they need to.

Remember, role-playing is acting out so children learn the skill, not just the concept.

The central message underlying all the role-plays is this:

There isn't anyone in the entire world that children can't say "no" to if they are asked to do something they think:

- **is wrong,**
- **that could hurt them, or**
- **that they know they shouldn't do.**

Introduction for children

Have you ever found that it can be difficult to speak up to adults or people that are older than you?

We're going to watch some kids learning to speak up so they can communicate exactly what they want to say.

Watch videotape

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TB_2VqAkupE&list=PLSrCYUKewj4dF58wxBmPx0QayhpO6d34T&index=16

Role-play

If someone touches you in a way that makes you uneasy, is there anyone other than you who can take responsibility for communicating about it?

How would you define communication?

Communication is when one person says something with their body or their words, and the other person understands what the person meant to communicate.

Do you remember the three elements of effective communication? (Learned in prior years of program. If children are new to the program, teach the three elements with examples. Practice combining them.)

- Say what you mean.
- Use consistent body language.
- Make eye contact.

What are some ways that people touch you that you don't like?

How do you communicate that it's not okay with you?

Do you ever try avoiding the person, or stepping aside, or just letting them do what they want, like hugging you when you don't want to be hugged, rather than make a fuss?

Let's see what other options you have.

RP: What about if you're at a big family get-together and someone comes up to you and touches your hair, pinches your cheeks, or kisses you and you don't like it?

How would you handle a situation like that?

Role-play several of these situations. Focus on clear verbal communication, consistent body language and eye contact. Be sure the child knows he has your permission to speak up, even with family.

RP: What if you have a coach who slaps you on the back every time he sees you? You don't like it and you feel a little weird and embarrassed about all the attention he gives you. What would you do?

Actually role-play and practice a response including all three elements of communication: Words, consistent body language and eye contact.

RP: What if a friend of your dad's always sits right next to you when he comes to visit and puts his hand on your leg? He seems nice enough, but you feel uncomfortable. You're worried about being rude since he's your dad's friend. What would you do?

If you do things like avoiding the person, or making excuses like you have to go do your homework, could the problem keep coming up?

So, is that an effective way to handle the problem?

Are there some kinds of touch you like with some people and not with others?

That's part of individual differences and should be encouraged.

RP: What about touch that seemed okay at first and then changes so it doesn't seem okay anymore?

Use an example the child brings up or an example like hugging too long, being too close, rubbing the child's arm or leg or kissing.

Would you feel okay about speaking up?

What would you say and do?

What if you do say something and the person doesn't stop, or doesn't respect what you said, or tries to talk you into letting them do what they want to do? What would you do next?

The best thing to say is, "I'm going to tell." That lets the person know you are serious, and you're prepared to get help from another adult if your wishes aren't respected.

Would that be embarrassing or feel like tattling?

Tattling is when they tell on someone so they can get them in trouble. While speaking up and letting the person know they're going to tell may be embarrassing, it's no more difficult than the feelings they'll have if they let the touching continue.

RP: What if an adult friend of yours is putting suntan lotion on you at the pool? After a minute you feel uncomfortable about the way the person is touching you. What do you say and do?

What if the person says something like, "Oh it's ok, we're special friends." Is it okay?

What if you say, "I'm going to tell" and the person says, "If you tell, I won't be your friend anymore."
What would you do?

If someone says they won't be your friend anymore, is that person really your friend?

I don't think so. It's important that you tell someone as soon as you can about what happened.

Your body is part of who you are. People who care about you, and respect you, should also respect your body. When you speak up, they should listen.

If anyone touches you in a way that you don't like, that makes you feel funny inside, or that you think is wrong, what are you going to do?

SPEAK UP and TELL SOMEONE!