

CHILDREN'S
HOME
SOCIETY



Child Advocacy Center

WHAT IF...
Building safety
through
communication

Introducing the Child Safety Discussion

Begin this discussion by explaining it is important to know what to do if.....there is a tornado, they lose their backpack, they have a toothache, someone touches them, or someone hurts them. Let them know you want to talk about safety and knowing what to do if something happens to them.

Let them know the following:

Everyone should be safe

No one should hit or hurt you.

No one should bully you.

No one should call you bad names or curse words.

No one should ask you to take drugs or drink alcohol.

Everyone has private parts

Private parts are the parts of your body covered by a bathing suit. Boys and girls have different bathing suits because we have different private parts.

They need to stay covered most of the time, but are exposed for bathing and changing clothes.

If someone looks at or touches your private parts, it is important you tell a trusted adult.

If someone touches your private parts it is NOT your fault.

Be cautious of using phrases such as "good touch," "bad touch," "private touch," or "secret touch" (or any similar "touch" descriptor). That approach asks a child to determine the intentions of an adult. The child ONLY needs to know to tell an adult; the adult can determine if it is an appropriate type of touch.

If something happens to you it is important to tell someone

Telling a trusted adult is the right thing to do.

If you tell an adult and they don't believe you, keep telling until someone believes/listens to you.

Telling a friend is okay too but telling an adult is better.

Ask them to tell you someone they could tell -or-

Have them draw four people they could tell and share their pictures.

There are all types of safety situations for kids such as private parts, bullying, getting hurt, stranger danger and others.



Now you are ready to play "What If" to learn "What would you do if.....?"

Beginning the “What If” Dialogue

Instruct the child that you will be asking questions about situations and inviting them to share their reaction of what they would do. You may start with questions about safety plan topics, such as “What if you were at the mall and got lost; what would you do?” or moral topics, “What if someone in front of you dropped a ten dollar bill; what would you do?”

After several topics of safety have been discussed, the topic of sexual touching may be introduced. If the child is young, it may be best to divide this discussion into two sessions, introducing the sexual touching in the second session. With all children it is important to remind them of the guidelines before every session. The following includes samples of questions to ask the child:

What if someone touched your private parts and said it was an accident; would you still have to tell?

What if someone touched you and wanted you to keep it a secret?

What if your best friend told you someone was touching their private parts?

What if someone touched your private parts and said someone would get mad if you told?

What if someone you really loved touched your private parts?

What if someone touched your private parts and said they would hurt someone if you told?

What if someone wanted you to touch their private parts?

What if you told someone about someone touching your private parts and they didn’t believe you?

As the child responds, look for opportunities to reward their initiative of telling an adult. When they respond incorrectly, use this as a teaching moment to help the child understand the correct course of action to take. Here is an example:

Adult: What if someone touched your private parts and said it was an accident; would you still have to tell?

Child: Nope! Because it was an accident.

Adult: Actually, no matter if it is an accident or not, you still *get* to tell me. (Avoid using “have to” or “supposed to.”)

Additional questions about other safety topics may be added at your discretion. Here are some examples of questions that address domestic violence, drug use, pornography, and bullying:

What if you saw an adult hit another adult?

What if you saw an adult hit a child?

What if you know about someone who uses drugs?

What if someone wanted to take pictures of you without clothes?

What if someone wants you to do drugs/drink alcohol?

What if someone at school was bullying you?

Other items might be added such as “What if someone knocks on the door and you are home alone?” or “What if someone approaches you online?” Suggestions for household questions might include, “What if someone says their dog got out of the yard?” or “What if someone says they lost the key to their house?” Most importantly, this discussion allows a dialog to be opened between children and their parents/guardians in a relaxed manner.

IMPORTANT -

During these dialogs it is imperative to keep the conversation light and relaxed. It is important to praise a child when they respond correctly and gently correct when they need more guidance.

Also, it is important NOT to use the phrases: “No one is supposed to touch,” “Do not let anyone touch those parts,” “Bad people might touch those parts.” Use of these phrases tends to imply the child is responsible for “allowing” or “letting” the touch happen. The child’s ONLY responsibility is to tell about the touching. Whether or not this is an appropriate touch is not the child’s concern.

Avoid telling children that only specific people can touch their “private areas.” Doctors, parents, step-parents, and other people who are “allowed” to touch children’s genitals have been convicted of abusing children.

In cases where a child has already been abused, simply change the questions from “What if someone...” to “What if someone.... again?” or “What if someone else...?”

The What If Card Deck is now available!

This 160-card set opens a subtle, yet intentional dialogue with children in the areas of sexual abuse, physical abuse, bullying, morals, stranger danger, peer pressure, drugs & alcohol, internet safety, home safety, promises & secrets, and everyday issues. There are a number of questions for each category, with one question on each card.