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THE UNDERWEAR RULE

How to talk about keeping safe

We understand that talking about keeping safe from sexual abuse might feel daunting. But it doesn't have to be, just take a look at The Underwear Rule: A brief guide for parents and carers. Some points – that privates are private – are pretty straightforward.

But others might be trickier. What if your child starts grilling you about the difference between 'good' or 'bad' secrets? For difficult questions like these, talking it through helps. But how, when and what should you say? That's exactly what this guide can help you with. Each section covers:

- How: bringing up the subject and learning to listen.
- When: being aware of the opportunities to talk.
- What: finding the answers to your child's questions.

We hope this guide will help you, but we're always here if you need more advice or support. Call the NSPCC on 0808 800 5000 or use [our online form](#).





Tips and techniques

- Make eye contact. When someone has your full and undivided attention, they feel more confident about opening up.
- Show your child you understand what they've said. Just saying "OK, I see what you mean, can help a lot."
- If your child isn't interested in talking, don't force the issue. Wait for another opportunity, another time. The last thing you want is for your child to feel it's a big deal.
- Don't see the conversation as a one-off. It's better to have little conversations often. This helps you to reinforce the message and adapt it as your child gets older.
- Don't shy away from awkward questions – answer them as best you can, in a way that's right for your child.

HOW: BRINGING UP THE SUBJECT AND LEARNING TO LISTEN

Parents and carers often tell us that finding the right words can be difficult. But one thing really helps you start to talk openly about keeping safe: building up your listening skills.

The art of listening

When your child talks, really listen. Lean in, nod, and smile. It shows you care about what they think and how they feel. It will mean your child is more likely to come to you if something's really troubling them.

Ask your child questions. Do they think keeping secrets is right? What would they do if they were scared or worried? Then let them say whatever they think, and give them time to answer. You can then back up and add to any ideas your child has about staying safe, like telling an adult if they're worried.

Finding the words

Using words and phrases you know your child will understand is a great place to start. But don't be afraid to introduce the proper names of body parts. It'll help you to be clear and show there's nothing to be embarrassed about. The more open and relaxed you are, the more your child will feel able to talk about anything that's worrying them.





WHEN: BEING AWARE OF THE OPPORTUNITIES TO TALK

By creating that culture of talking and listening, you're really getting things off to a great start. It's best not to treat these conversations like a lecture, but to find easy ways to have comfortable chats, little and often. Start small, and be honest and open with answers to the inevitable questions. Finding the right moment to talk can help.

Weaving simple conversations about staying safe into the daily routine stops it feeling like a big deal, or weird, for your child.

When you're running your child's bath, or helping them with things like getting dressed, you could start a conversation about why there are times when a trusted adult might need to touch them.

Reinforce the idea that your child's body belongs to them, and they can say no if someone tries to touch them.

If you're on your way to school, ask your child who they would tell if something was upsetting them. If you're going swimming, you could talk about the idea of private parts being private.

TV can make children aware of tricky topics. Your child may have heard a story on the news. Or a favourite soap might be handling a sensitive storyline. Explain it in a way your child will understand, and encourage them to talk about anything that upsets them.

Whatever happens during your day, try to think about those moments when conversations happen naturally.

Tips and techniques

- Car journeys are a great time to talk to your child. They're in a comfortable setting, with limited distractions.
- Walk and talk. Whether it's on the way home from school, or a weekend walk to the shops, you'll feel more at ease as you stroll and chat together.
- School lessons about personal relationships can provide a great opportunity to talk about staying safe. Ask what your child remembers – it's a good starting point for more detailed conversations.



WHAT: FINDING THE ANSWERS TO YOUR CHILD'S QUESTIONS

We realise that inviting questions means you're going to need to offer some answers. But don't worry, you don't have to have them all, and you don't have to do it alone. Don't shy away from awkward questions – answer them as best you can, in a way that's right for your child. Helping your child understand the grey areas, and encouraging them to express their opinions, will help them develop their own judgment.

What's good and what's bad?

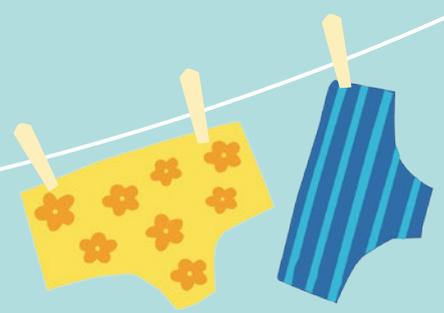
Conversations about right and wrong aren't easy. Even when we talk to children about not letting people touch their private parts, we have to make exceptions, such as visits to the doctor. Talk about times when an adult might have to touch them, ask if they think it's OK or not, and reinforce the idea that your child always has the right to say no.

Exploring lots of different scenarios of 'right' and 'wrong' can help. Take homework as an example. Your child might find it boring, but do they understand why doing homework is right – and why you encourage them to do it?

Tips and techniques

- [The Underwear Rule: A guide for children](#), is a really useful way to remember what your child needs to know. Take a look over the points and use them to answer your child's questions. Download our free resources on [nspcc.org.uk](https://www.nspcc.org.uk)
- If your child finds it difficult to put something into words, they could try practising with a favourite toy.
- If you don't know the answer to your child's question, it's OK to admit it – it will build your child's confidence and trust in you.





Who could your child tell?

Getting your child to think about all the people in their life they can trust is really useful. It shows your child that even if they feel they can't tell you something, they should never have to keep a worry to themselves.

There's strength in numbers. The more your child is aware of all the people they can talk to, the more likely they'll be to tell someone as soon as they have a problem. Talk about the family members, trusted friends, professionals or teachers – even childline – who are there to listen.

Make sure your child knows that if a trusted adult doesn't listen to them, they should keep trying until someone helps.

If your child does tell you something, it's probably a huge relief for them to be able to tell you. Whatever you think and feel, react with love, support, openness and reassurance. It's not something to be frightened of – and we are here to support you.

Keep going as they're growing

We hope this guide helps you have simple conversations that keep your child safe. Remember to continue talking and listening to your child. As they grow up they will have more questions and be able to understand some of the issues in different, more detailed ways. And above all, it'll mean that talking and sharing worries will become part of your family's life.

To find out more about why it's important to talk to your child, the Underwear Rule and further sources of support, visit [nspcc.org.uk](https://www.nspcc.org.uk)

Tips and techniques

- If you've had a conversation with your child about keeping safe, tell other adults who regularly care for your child. Your child may ask other adults 'follow up' questions and they can reinforce the same messages.
- If you ever need help, advice or support, contact us. We're here 24/7. Call 0808 800 5000 or use our [online form](#).
- If you're a child and you're finding it difficult to talk to an adult you trust, ChildLine can help. Call them on 0800 1111, it's free even if you're using a mobile. ChildLine is ready to listen and can help you find the right words.

