

12-Part Sexuality Series for Parents with Children with an Intellectual Disability

*Part 10 of 12: **Keeping Safe***

As parents we are always teaching our children the things they need to know to keep them safe. Just as we taught to look both ways before crossing the street, we need to teach skills that will help keep our children safe from dangers involving sexually inappropriate behaviours. As scary as it is, we will not always be able to provide supervision so we must ensure our children have personal safety skills.

The goal of teaching personal safety is not to cause our children to be fearful but one of empowerment. Knowledge of personal rights and a plan of action are key to keeping our children safe.

Personal Rights - The right to information

Knowledge is power. By providing children with knowledge and language regarding sexuality, we provide them with them the power to keep themselves safe. It is important that children know medically correct words for body parts and that they have an understanding of privacy, good and bad touch, and personal boundaries.

The right to say NO

It is paramount that children know that they have the right to say “no” to anyone and that their right will be respected. It is important that children recognize and trust their feelings and know that they have the support of an adult in their life to help them process situations and to get them the help they need. Teaching assertiveness extends to all aspects of daily living. Give lots of reasonable choices and accept the answer. If your child says, “no” to hugging grandma, grandpa or you, they need to know that you respect their decision about who they feel comfortable touching. There may be occasions where it is necessary to explain the reason for the touch, such as when visiting a doctor. It is important to keep in mind that there are truly very few times when

“no” is not an acceptable response to being touched, even if it is not the expected response.

The right to make a scene

We teach our children to behave appropriately in public but we also need to teach them when it is okay to YELL, RUN, TELL. Although we hope our children never need to put this plan into effect, it is essential that children are aware that they should be loud and cause a ruckus if they feel they are in danger. They should know that they should then get away from the problem and tell as many people as necessary until someone listen and helps. There are books in most libraries about personal safety for children, which may be a good way of getting the conversation started. Making a game of pretend or “what would you do if...” is often good ways of practicing the skills.

The right to have support

Children need to know that their concerns will be listened to, taken seriously and that help is available. Knowing that they will not be blamed or ignored, but will receive understanding and assistance will increase the likelihood that concerns will be shared. Asking lots of questions, always listening and responding with support to discussions on all matters establishes a solid foundation that encourages discussion on the most difficult of situations.

We hope that our children’s rights are never violated, but we owe it to our children to help them develop skills and plans necessary to ensure personal safety.

References

British Columbia Government (n.d.) Retrieved from
http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/child_protection/keeping_kids_safe.htm#prevention

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Part 11: Stage 11 – When the Plans Go Wrong (November 2015)