

PARENT CONVERSATIONS

Raising capable kids starts with conversations that matter.

We spend a lot of time teaching our children how to navigate the world. We teach them to look both ways before crossing the street, wear seat belts, and call for help during emergencies.

But how often do we have meaningful conversations about personal boundaries, recognizing concerning behavior, navigating social pressure, and knowing when to leave an uncomfortable situation?

Personal safety isn't one big conversation. It's a series of small conversations that evolve as our children grow.

The goal isn't to frighten our kids or convince them that everyone is dangerous. It's to help them develop awareness, confidence, critical thinking, and the ability to make informed decisions.

And perhaps most importantly, it's about making sure they know they can come to us when something goes wrong.

01 | START EARLY. KEEP IT AGE-APPROPRIATE.

You don't need to wait until your child is a teenager to begin discussing personal safety.

Young children can learn about body autonomy, personal boundaries, trusted adults, and asking for help.

As children grow, conversations can expand to include friendships, peer pressure, dating, online interactions, and personal responsibility.

Conversation starters:

- "What would you do if someone asked you to keep a secret that made you uncomfortable?"
- "What could you say if someone wanted to hug you and you didn't want to?"
- "Who could you ask for help if I wasn't available?"

Remember: Safety education should grow with your child, not overwhelm them.

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02 | TEACH BOUNDARIES WITHOUT TEACHING FEAR

Children need to understand that they have a right to personal boundaries, even with people they know and love.

That includes family members, friends, coaches, teachers, and other authority figures.

Teach children that they can decline unwanted physical affection and speak up when someone makes them uncomfortable.

Just as importantly, model respect for their boundaries.

Conversation starters:

- "What does it mean when someone says no?"
- "What would you do if someone kept touching you after you asked them to stop?"
- "Can you think of a time when someone didn't respect your personal space?"

Remember: Teaching children to respect boundaries includes respecting theirs.

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03 | TALK ABOUT BEHAVIOR, NOT JUST STRANGERS

One of the most important conversations parents can have is about recognizing concerning behavior.

Children are often taught to avoid strangers, but unsafe behavior can come from people they know, trust, or admire.

Instead of focusing exclusively on who someone is, teach children to recognize what someone does.

Discuss behaviors such as:

- Ignoring personal boundaries.
- Asking children to keep uncomfortable secrets.
- Offering rewards in exchange for secrecy or compliance.
- Attempting to isolate a child from others.
- Using guilt, intimidation, or threats.
- Making inappropriate requests or comments.

Conversation starters:

- "What would you do if someone you knew asked you to keep something secret from me?"
- "What if an adult asked you for help and wanted you to go somewhere alone with them?"
- "What would you do if someone told you that you'd get in trouble for telling me something?"

Remember: Familiarity does not automatically mean safety. Focus on behavior, boundaries, and appropriate adult conduct.

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04 | MAKE IT SAFE TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH

This may be one of the most important parts of parenting for personal safety.

Children and teenagers sometimes avoid telling their parents about concerning situations because they're afraid of getting in trouble, disappointing someone, or losing privileges.

If we want our children to come to us when something goes wrong, they need to believe we'll listen.

That doesn't mean abandoning rules or consequences. It means separating immediate safety from conversations about accountability.

Conversation starters:

- "If you were somewhere you weren't supposed to be and needed help, would you feel comfortable calling me?"
- "Is there anything you think you'd be afraid to tell me?"
- "What could I do to make it easier for you to ask for help?"

Consider establishing a family agreement:

"If you ever feel unsafe, call me. We'll get you somewhere safe first. Everything else can wait."

Remember: Your child should never feel that avoiding punishment is more important than getting help.

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05 | DISCUSS FRIENDSHIPS, DATING & SOCIAL PRESSURE

As children become teenagers, relationships become more complicated.

They may experience pressure to fit in, maintain friendships, avoid embarrassment, or please someone they're dating.

Help them recognize the difference between healthy relationships and controlling behavior.

Discuss:

- Respecting another person's boundaries.
- Recognizing manipulation and guilt.
- Understanding consent.
- Identifying controlling or isolating behavior.
- Responding to unwanted attention.
- Knowing when a friendship or relationship is unhealthy.
- Supporting friends without taking responsibility for fixing dangerous situations.

Conversation starters:

- "What does a healthy relationship look like to you?"
- "What would you do if someone you were dating demanded access to your phone?"
- "How would you respond if your friends pressured you to do something you didn't want to do?"

Remember: Healthy relationships don't require someone to surrender their boundaries or independence.

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06 | TALK ABOUT ONLINE SAFETY WITHOUT JUST TAKING THE PHONE

Our children's digital lives are part of their real lives.

Social media, gaming platforms, group chats, and messaging apps create opportunities for connection, but they can also expose young people to manipulation, harassment, exploitation, and pressure.

Rather than relying exclusively on restrictions, help children understand how to recognize concerning online behavior.

Discuss:

- Sharing personal information and location.
- Privacy settings and digital footprints.
- Online manipulation and impersonation.
- Requests for intimate images.
- Cyberbullying and harassment.
- Threats involving private photos or messages.
- When to block, report, document, or ask for help.

Conversation starters:

- "Has anyone online ever made you uncomfortable?"
- "What would you do if someone threatened to share a private picture?"
- "Would you feel comfortable telling me if something happened online?"

Remember: A child who fears immediately losing access to their phone may hesitate to report a dangerous online interaction.

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07 | PRACTICE WHAT-IF CONVERSATIONS

One of the easiest ways to build safety awareness is through everyday conversations.

You don't need elaborate scenarios or frightening stories.

Use ordinary situations to encourage critical thinking.

For example:

At the mall:

"What would you do if we got separated and your phone died?"

At a friend's house:

"What would you do if you wanted to leave but your friend didn't?"

At school:

"Who could you talk to if another student kept making you uncomfortable?"

At a social gathering:

"What would you do if someone offered you a ride and you didn't feel safe accepting?"

Online:

"What would you do if someone you met through a game wanted to meet you in person?"

Let your child think through their answer before offering suggestions.

Remember: The goal isn't to give children a script for every possible situation. It's to help them develop problem-solving skills.

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08 | TEACH THEM THAT LEAVING IS AN OPTION

Children and teenagers often feel pressure to remain polite, avoid confrontation, or follow the directions of authority figures.

They need to understand that personal safety can take priority over social expectations.

Teach them that they can:

- Decline an invitation.
- End an uncomfortable conversation.
- Refuse unwanted physical contact.
- Leave an unsafe environment when they can do so safely.
- Seek assistance from another trusted adult.
- Call home when they need help.

Direct confrontation isn't always the safest response. Sometimes creating distance, leaving quietly, or seeking help is the better option.

Remember: Avoidance is a skill, not weakness.

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PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR CHILD THIS WEEK

You don't need to turn these into a formal lesson. Bring them up during a drive, while making dinner, or whenever conversation happens naturally.

1. "If you ever felt unsafe somewhere, would you know how to get home?"
2. "What would you do if someone you trusted asked you to keep an uncomfortable secret?"
3. "Do you feel comfortable telling people no, even when they might get upset?"
4. "If something happened online that scared or embarrassed you, who would you tell?"
5. "Is there anything I could do to make it easier for you to talk to me about difficult things?"

Then do something equally important.

Listen to their answers.

Resist the urge to immediately correct, lecture, or solve every problem.

Sometimes the most valuable thing we can do is show our children that we're willing to listen.

REMEMBER

You cannot prepare your child for every situation they'll encounter. But you can help them develop the skills to recognize problems, make decisions, and ask for help.

Safety conversations shouldn't happen only after something goes wrong.

Make them part of everyday life.

Keep them age-appropriate. Keep them practical. Keep communication open.

And remember that children learn as much from how we respond to their concerns as they do from what we teach them.

Raise capable kids. Not fearful ones.

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KEEP LEARNING. KEEP GROWING.

Knowledge is just the beginning. Take your training further with our free and paid online courses at Hero Self Defense Academy, where you'll build practical skills, strengthen your awareness, and learn to take a proactive approach to your personal safety.

Visit meangirlselfdefense.com to explore our training programs, find an instructor, or register for an upcoming seminar.

Built to Survive. Trained to Rise.