NSPCC

Simple conversations to keep your child safe from abuse

EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

Helping you find the right words

We want to help parents and carers talk to their children about staying safe. The Underwear Rule is just one way that - together - we can prevent child abuse. And it's what this guide is all about.

Simple conversations, like crossing the road safely, bullying and dealing with strangers, are subjects that you and your child might talk about. But what about staying safe from sexual abuse?

It's a conversation no parent wants to have, but thankfully it doesn't have to be scary. In fact, you don't even have to mention 'sexual abuse'. Simple conversations really can help keep your child safe, and that's what – over the next few pages – we will help you do.

The Underwear Rule

The Underwear Rule is a simple way to help keep children safe from abuse. It teaches children that their body belongs to them, they have a right to say no, and that they should tell an adult if they're upset or worried.

To help children really remember the Underwear Rule, we want to get everyone talking PANTS. Each line of PANTS covers a different part of the Underwear Rule and provides a simple but valuable lesson that can keep a child safe.

How and when you talk PANTS to your child is your choice. After all, you know them better than anyone. You'll know when they're ready and how much detail you need to go into.

This guide has everything you need to get those conversations started. Plus, the centre spread of this book is designed to be pulled out for you to use with your child when the time is right.

> "YOU CAN HELP PREVENT ABUSE. SIMPLE CONVERSATIONS REALLY CAN KEEP CHILDREN SAFE."

Tips and techniques

- Don't view conversations about staying safe as a one-off. It's much better to have conversations little and often. This will help you to reinforce the key points, and to adapt the message as your child gets older.
- Once you're ready to talk, you might find your child isn't. That's OK. The most important thing is to not force the issue. The last thing you want is for your child to feel it's a big deal.
- Weaving simple conversations about staying safe into the daily routine is a great way to stop it feeling like a lecture. If it feels less weird for your child, it will feel much easier for you too.

P RIVATES ARE PRIVATE

A LWAYS REMEMBER YOUR BODY BELONGS TO YOU

N O MEANS NO

T ALK ABOUT SECRETS THAT UPSET YOU

S PEAK UP, SOMEONE CAN HELP

Talking PANTS

PRIVATES ARE PRIVATE

Anything covered by underwear is private. No one should ask to see or touch parts of the body covered by underwear. No one should ask your child to touch or look at parts of their body covered by underwear. If anyone tries, your child should say no.

In some situations, people – such as family members at bathtime, doctors or nurses – may need to touch your child's private parts. Explain to your child that this is OK, but that those people should always explain why, and ask if it's OK first.

NO MEANS NO

Your child has the right to say 'no' – even to a family member or someone they love. This shows your child they're in control of their body and their feelings are respected.

There are times when you may need to overrule your child's preferences to keep them safe – like when you're crossing the road – but it helps if you explain why. If a child feels empowered to say no to their own family, they are more likely to say no to others.

ALWAYS REMEMBER YOUR BODY BELONGS TO YOU

Your child should know their body belongs to them, and no one else. No one has the right to make your child do anything with their body that makes them feel uncomfortable. If anyone tries, they should tell a trusted adult.

GO TO POSTERS

> YOUR CHILD SHOULD KNOW THEIR BODY BELONGS TO THEM AND NO ONE ELSE.

TALK ABOUT SECRETS THAT UPSET YOU

Help your child feel confident about speaking up about a secret that's worrying them. Reassure your child that it won't get them into trouble. And explain the difference between 'good' and 'bad' secrets.

Some secrets, like surprise parties, can be good. But adults should never make a child keep a secret that makes them feel worried, sad or frightened. Secrets are often an abuser's greatest weapon. Phrases like "it's our little secret" are their way of making a child feel worried or scared to tell.

Help your child to feel clear and confident about what to share and when. Secrets shouldn't be kept in exchange for something, and should never make your child feel uneasy. A secret should always be shared in the end.

SPEAK UP, SOMEONE CAN HELP

If your child feels sad, anxious or frightened they can talk to an adult they trust. This person will listen, and can help stop whatever's making them upset. Remind your child that whatever the problem, it's not their fault and they won't get into trouble.

A trusted adult doesn't have to be a family member. It can be a teacher, an older brother or sister or a friend's parent. It can even be Childline.

Your questions answered

Why is it important to talk PANTS?

We understand that conversations like this can be difficult for both parents and children. Parents don't want to scare or upset their children, and some feel it's too soon.

That's why the Underwear Rule is important and we encourage parents and children to talk PANTS – simple conversations that are appropriate for 5-11 year olds about staying safe.

Unfortunately, as stories in the media remind us, child sexual abuse is widespread. 90 per cent of sexually abused children were abused by someone they knew. And one in three children abused by an adult told no one else at the time.*

*Based on NSPCC research with 11-17 year olds: Radford et al (2011) Child abuse and neglect in the UK today.

Children find it hard to speak out. By encouraging children to talk about issues earlier, and listening to their thoughts and feelings, parents can create the culture of openness that helps keep children safe from abuse.

Won't talking to my child about this scare them?

We believe in safe, secure childhoods – which is why the advice we're giving is practical and reassuring. We don't want to upset or scare families and we definitely don't want to make children feel they can't accept a hug or a kiss from an adult.

Feel free to use language and ideas you know your child will understand, and adapt it as they get older.

> YOUR CHILD WILL FEEL CONFIDENT THAT THEY CAN COME TO YOU WHENEVER THEY'RE WORRIED.

Does this mean I have to talk to my child about sex?
You don't have to talk about sex or keeping safe from sexual abuse until you feel your child is ready. But if your child asks questions, it's really valuable to take the opportunity to talk.

You can show your child that you're open to having conversations. And it will help your child feel confident that they can come to you whenever they're worried.

What if my child says something that worries me?
If your child says something that worries you in any way, get some advice. Talk to a teacher at school or get in touch with us on 0808 800 5000. We're here 24/7 to give advice and support.

If it's nothing to worry about, you can feel assured that you've checked it out.

Remember, it's probably a huge relief for your child to be able to talk to you. Whatever you think and feel, it's about reacting with love, support, openness and reassurance. It's not something to be frightened of – we can support you and help you move forward.

Talk to us

You can find lots more information and support on the Underwear Rule, as well as talking and listening techniques, at nspcc.org.uk/underwear

If you ever need to talk, contact us. We're here 24/7. Call 0808 800 5000 or send one of our counsellors a message at nspcc.org.uk/help

If you're a child and you're finding it difficult to talk to an adult you trust, Childline can help. We're free, we're ready to listen, and we can help you find the right words. Call us on 0800 1111 or visit us online at childline.org.uk

The Underwear Rule
nspcc.org.uk/underwear

NSPCC
0808 800 5000
nspcc.org.uk/help

Childline
0800 1111
childline.org.uk

Do you know about the underwear rule?

It's a simple way to have conversations with your child about staying safe.

We've created this guide with parents in mind, helping you talk to your 5-11 year old child about their body, and what to do if they're made to feel uncomfortable.

nspcc.org.uk/underwear

©2015 NSPCC. Registered charity England and Wales 216401 and Scotland SC037717. J20151000. Illustrations by Jamie Nash.