

SEXUAL HEALTH IN PLAIN ENGLISH

PROTECTIVE BEHAVIOURS

Anything a person does, or can learn to do, in order to keep their body safe is called a protective behaviour. These protective behaviours are important to know about when it comes to someone's body and sexual behaviour.

To help people stay safe, it's important to remember that:

1. We all have the right to feel safe all of the time
2. There is nothing so awful that we cannot talk about it.

The best way for a person to stay safe is by:

- knowing their own body
- recognising behaviours that are **O.K.** or **NOT O.K.** and
- getting help from trusted people when they feel scared, worried or unsafe.

Knowing your body

Everyone is be the boss of their own body. This means that, when it comes to their body, they get to say what goes. This can involve saying 'yes' or 'no' to how their body is touched by others.

Sometimes a person might need help with their body. This could be with keeping clean or getting medical help. Even when a person needs help, they should understand and agree to how their body is being touched.

Some body parts are public. This means that people can see these body parts because they are not covered by our clothing.

Some body parts are private. This means that not everyone can see them all of the time and they are covered by our underwear or bathers. Words to know for outside private body parts are:

- penis
- scrotum
- vulva
- breasts
- nipples
- bottom.

It's important that a person knows what their body parts are called and how they work. This will help them to take care of and talk about their body.

When it comes to doing sexy things with another person, people must give consent. Consent means the freedom to say 'yes' or 'no' to doing sexy things without fear, force or pressure. Doing sexy things without consent is **NOT O.K.** and is against the law. ([see Consent and the Law factsheet](#)).

Recognising behaviours that are O.K. or NOT O.K.

Being able to recognise behaviours that are **NOT O.K.** is an important way of keeping a person safe. To help people to do this, it is important that they understand their body and their rights. People need to pay attention to their 'early warning signs'.

Early warning signs

Early warning signs are the things a person experiences in their body when they don't like something, feel scared, worried or unsafe.

All bodies react differently to danger, but some common early warning signs are:

- heart beating loudly and quickly
- tummy feeling strange
- wobbly knees
- sweaty palms (hands)
- crying or wanting to cry
- goosebumps
- hair stands on end
- wanting to go to the toilet

Some people might not experience all, or any, of these things, but might just have a feeling that something is **NOT O.K.**

Once a person knows what their early warning signs are and they can tell when they are happening, they will be able to know when they are not feeling safe. This understanding will help them to let others know that they need help.

Any sexual behaviour without consent is **NOT O.K.** There are also things to know about where and when it would be O.K. to show private body parts. ([see Sexual Behaviours – Where & When factsheet](#))

Safe surprises and unsafe secrets

Safe Surprises:

- are usually only kept for a short time
- usually have a happy ending
- are always told ... eventually
- do not involve touching your body
- do not involve you doing something to someone else's body
- e.g. someone is having a surprise birthday party

Unsafe Secrets:

- someone threatens, e.g 'You must not tell'.
- they last a long time
- they make you feel sad, worried, uncomfortable, awkward, unsafe, or **NOT O.K.**
- they involve a threat or something bad happening.
- e.g. Someone shows you pictures of naked people and then says, 'it's our special secret'.

It is important for a person to recognise how secrets make them feel by listening to their early warning signs. If the secret makes them feel scared, worried or unsafe, it is important to tell a trusted adult about it straight away. The person does not need to keep unsafe secrets.

Getting help from trusted people when feeling worried or unsafe

Safety teams

Safety teams are trusted adults that a person can go to for help and support when they are feeling worried, scared or unsafe. It is important that a person has more than one person on their safety team, and safety teams may change over time.

When thinking about identifying a safety team, people could include:

- Someone the person lives with
 - It is a good idea to include someone from a person's home environment that they can turn to for help and support when needed.
- Someone the person doesn't live with
 - Not all people have trusted adults within their home environment. Because of this, it is important to include a trusted person from outside of the home environment on their safety team. This may be someone from school, work, sporting or social connections, allied health professionals, etc.
- Someone who cares for the person
 - This can be any adult that the person feels will support them to get help when they are feeling worried, scared or unsafe.
- Someone the person cares about
 - This is any adult that the person feels a close connection to and knows will support them to get help when they are feeling worried, scared or unsafe.
- A mandated reporter
 - A mandated reporter is a person, who, because of their profession/job, is legally required to report any suspicion or belief to the relevant authorities.

[\(see Getting Help factsheet\)](#)

- **No-Go-Tell**

If a person is ever in a situation that makes them feel worried, scared or unsafe, they can follow the No-Go-Tell response.

- **No**

- People can say 'no' to situations that make them feel worried, scared or unsafe.
- It's O.K. to give a firm **No!**

- **Go**

- As soon as possible, a person should leave a situation that makes them feel worried, scared or unsafe.

- **Tell**

- Telling people on a person's safety team when they feel worried, scared or unsafe is important. The person must keep telling trusted people until someone listens and helps.
- For a person who has limited ways of communicating, it may be possible to set up signs or symbols for a person to relate when they are feeling unsafe.

Persistence

It is important that, whenever a person feels worried, scared or unsafe, they tell a trusted adult, ideally someone on their safety team.

If the adult they tell doesn't listen or act, people need to know that they should keep telling that adult, or other adults from their safety team, until someone listens. This means that a person keeps telling trusted adults until someone listens and helps.

Mandatory reporters must listen and help if a child needs protection.

A person can use their early warning signs to help decide when enough has been done to help.

For example, if, after telling a trusted person about the problem, the early warning signs have gone away, then the person might decide that enough has been done to help.

Or, if, after telling a trusted person about the problem, the early warning signs have not gone away, then the person might decide to keep telling trusted adults and asking for help until the early warning signs do go away.

Trusted people don't always get it right – that is why it is important to persist in asking for help until the person feels safe again.