

PLAYING SAFE

It is alarming that the incidence of sexual molestation of children escalates every year, despite increased public awareness of this heinous crime.

Did you know that in South Africa one out of every three females and one out of every six males will be interfered with, exposed to or sexually abused before the age of fifteen?

Frightening, isn't it? More frightening, however, is the fact that South Africa is far behind in educating children in this subject, and although there has been excellent media coverage, very few schools or parents know how to teach children about managing their safety. So says Juliette Geva, director of Supersound Securities, who has been involved in child sexual abuse prevention programmes for the past eight years. Juliette Geva, concerned about the issue for many years, gives tips on how to keep your child safe.

Juliette, who specialises in safety and self-protection programmes for both women and young children, has designed her own highly successful educational project geared specifically towards parents and teachers.

“Only very recently has the Department of Education begun to encourage schools to focus on teaching children self-protection, how to recognise dangerous behaviour and what to do in these circumstances. But it is a part of the curriculum only at a school's discretion.

In most schools in the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Canada, posters, puppets, videos, tapes and activity books are standard equipment. These schools teach children about “good touch” and “bad touch”, “good feelings” and “bad feelings”.

How many teachers act out situations with children about approaches that can be made in parks, shopping centres and public toilets? What instruction is being given to children about their right to say “no” to anyone who tries to touch them on their private parts and, more importantly, are children being told that anyone who does this in a way that makes them feel frightened or funny, is doing something wrong? If parents want to protect their children they have to educate them, because uninformed children are vulnerable.”

Teaching youngsters about potentially dangerous situations is not being paranoid; it is good, common sense. If parents and teachers approach this correctly, in a non-alarmist way, they will initiate safety habits which will always remain a part of their children's lives.

"Listen and communicate," says Juliette. "Your children do not have the language development and the sexual experience to make up stories about abuse, and should be believed if they describe situations about "funny" touching and kissing. Sexual abuse starts with hugs and kisses and can end up with sexual intercourse and sodomy. In most cases it is accompanied by bribes, gifts or threats; and is a confusing, frightening and painful confrontation for any child.

"Motivate and build up confidence by making safety awareness a family project and act out situations with the whole family to show your concern and interest in your child's well-being and security."

Teaching basic safety and security should start at an early age. With this in mind Juliette has compiled an essential 11 point plan that should be learnt by every child.

1. I will make up a special code word with my family. I will not just go off with anyone who says my Mom or Dad is waiting for me. People must first use our family code word then I know that my parents know, and can trust them.
2. I must learn my full name, address and telephone number.
3. I will tell my parents and teacher if someone wants to or has been touching or holding me in a way that makes me feel funny or bad.
4. I will not listen to anyone who tells me to keep something secret from my Mom or Dad.
5. I will remember that I have my rights too. I can say "no" if someone I don't know wants to give me a present or wants me to go for a ride in a strange car.
6. I will never go over to a stranger's car. I do not have to answer questions or give directions to anyone.
7. I will not tell strangers on the phone when I am alone at home. I won't tell them the names of any of my family or that my Mom or Dad are out. I will tell them that my parents are busy and can't come to the phone.
8. I will not allow strangers into my home if I am alone, even if they say there

has been an accident and they want to use the phone. I will tell them to go to the police station.

9. I will remember that if I get lost when I am out shopping, I must go to the cashier or manager and ask for help. I will not go out to the parking lot on my own to look for my Mom or Dad's car.
10. I will not play in lonely or deserted areas, even if I am with a friend.
11. I will never go anywhere with anyone – even a friend or neighbour – unless Mom and Dad say it is okay.

Teach your children Juliette's Safety Nursery Rhymes":

One, two, three, four,
Always check who's at the door
Five, six, seven, eight,
Mummy wants you to be safe
Next nine and then ten
Look before you let them in.

Little Miss Muffet
Sat on a tuffet
Eating her curds and whey;
A stranger sat down,
She gave him a frown
And said, "Why don't you go away?"

by Lynne Gidish
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