

Protective Behaviours

Information for Parents.

- In the early 1970's Peg West, a school social worker in Madison Wisconsin USA, noticed some children were coming to her for help. All of them seemed to be telling her in one way or another how they were not feeling safe.
- In Australia in the early 1980's a person who worked with survivors of sexual assault, Philomena Horsley wrote to then Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, Mr Mick Miller, asking: Why were they teaching stranger danger in the schools when their own statistics showed that less than 4% of abuse was perpetrated by strangers?
- Discussion around the dangers of the Stranger Danger message...

- Protective Behaviours was an empowerment process that covered all forms of abuse and could be used with anyone in a variety of ways.
- Because of the excitement generated by finding such a simple and yet profound process, Peg was invited to come to Australia. This original training in 1985 was very well received in most states and so the nucleus of Protective Behaviours (PB) in Australia was born. From these humble beginnings and using the PB concept of Networking, Protective Behaviours has developed in different ways in each state.

- It is also during the years since 1990 the contextual development of the process occurred. This came about as a result of the same issues being raised by so many different people.
- These developments include understanding the origins and effects of unwritten rules thus putting PBs into a social context.
- Next came the recognition of how our feelings and thoughts interact with and influence our behaviour giving us an understanding of the bridge between the external rules and internal feelings of safety.
- the model for understanding the importance of language in the context of the PB themes and our right to feel safe at all times and in all contexts. **PB is not a sexualised message.**

Protective Behaviours, a personal safety program, aims to promote resilience in children, young people, and adults, using empowerment strategies, clear communication, and awareness of “safe” behaviours. Ultimately the aim is to reduce violence in our community and prevent child abuse.

The *Protective Behaviours* program was originally developed as a child abuse prevention program. Today however, *Protective Behaviours* has a much broader application, not merely focusing on abuse prevention but addressing empowerment, communication, self-esteem, resilience, social skills and other life skills. By teaching and promoting these concepts, *Protective Behaviours* helps to prevent abuse, reduce violence and promote life-enriching rather than life-depleting experiences

It encourages people to:

- Assert their right to feel safe
- Listen to what their body tells them
- Follow up by taking action to either solve problems on their own or to seek assistance from other people.

There were 187, 314 children who were the subject of 286, 437 reports of child abuse and neglect in Australia during 2009-2010. (AIHW 2011) An Epidemic!

- **The Protective Behaviours Program** teaches children, young people and adults a range of skills and strategies to help prevent and reduce child abuse and violence in our communities.

Whilst the task of preventing child abuse appears daunting for most parents, teachers and service providers, Protective Behaviours provides a framework that can be easily adapted to home, school and community environments.

- **Children who have been taught Protective Behaviours** are more able to discern threats to their safety and are more likely to suggest using personal safety strategies than comparison children (*Johnson, 1985*)

<https://www.protectivebehaviourswa.org.au/>

Video

In order to work towards preventing children becoming victims of abuse, particularly sexual abuse, it is important to educate children on their rights (children are vulnerable and are at greater risk for no other reason than they are children) to personal safety and the way we do this is by teaching children the following:

- 1) **“We all have the right to feel safe at all times”**
- 2) **Early Warning Signs**(the physical sensations we experience in our body when feeling unsafe or excited.)
- 3) **Safety continuum** (safe/fun to feel scared/risking on purpose/unsafe) and **Problem Solving** (what can I do to feel safer)
- 4) **“We can talk with someone about anything, no matter what it is”** and **safe secrets/ unsafe secrets**

- 5) **Networks** (Identifying adults that we can talk with and ask for help if we feel unsafe/scared/worried.)
- 6) **Persistence expectation** (Persisting in asking for help until you feel safe again.)
- 7) **Body Awareness and Ownership and Private and Public** parts of the body (including teaching and using the correct anatomical names for private parts of the body) Private and Public clothing/Private and Public places/Private and Public Behaviours/ Private and Public Information.
- 8) **Personal space** (social distance) and **safe and unsafe touch**
- 9) **Assertiveness**

10) Theme and Program Reinforcement

It is important that we empower children so as they are able to apply these preventative strategies as everyday life skills.

The Protective Behaviours Program teaches children all of these preventative strategies in a non threatening and non sexual way

Help save your child from abuse

1. Let your child take small risks so that they develop problem-solving and conflict-management skills.
2. Teach your child that if they don't feel safe, they have the right to do something about it.
3. Encourage them to discuss and express their feelings.
4. Help your child learn how to identify their body's early-warning signs for feeling unsafe.
5. Develop a shared language around safety, e.g. Safety = choice + control + time limit.
6. Help your child develop a network of trusted adults they can talk about anything to.
7. Practise "What if..." scenarios. Ask "What would you do if someone gave you a present and told you to keep it a secret?"

8. Develop an expectation that secrets can always be shared with someone we trust.

9. Use the correct terminology for all body parts and avoid “nicknames” or “cute” names for the private parts of the body. Reinforce that children own the whole of their body and no one should touch their private parts (those covered by bathers) and also their mouth and they shouldn't touch anyone else's.

10. Teach about personal space and let children decide themselves how they want to express physical affection. Children should not be forced to hug or kiss anyone.

Books

- Everyone's Got A Bottom - by Tess Rowley, publisher Family Planning Queensland, reading age 3-8 years.
- Jasmine's Butterflies - by Justine O'Malley, publisher Justine O'Malley, reading age 2-8 years.
- Sam's Hats - by Amber Fabry, publisher Sinclair Publishing Group, reading age 3-6 years.
- Sarah's Secret - by Sonya Kupfer, publisher NooBee publishing.
- Some Parts Are Not For Sharing - by Julie Federico, publisher Tate Publishing.
- Some Secrets Should Never Be Kept - by Jayneen Sanders, publisher Upload Publishing, reading age 3-12 years.
- Those Are My Private Parts - by Diane Hansen, publisher Empowerment Productions.

Acknowledgements:

<http://www.pbpeople.org.uk/history-of-protective-behaviours>

<http://www.protectivebehaviourswa.org.au/what-we-teach>

<http://health.thewest.com.au/news/741/education-is-best-defence-against-child-sex-abuse>