

10 Kidpower Safety Tips for Parents of Young Children

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Kidpower Teenpower Fullpower International is a global nonprofit leader in child protection, positive communication, and personal safety skills for all ages and abilities. Since 1989, Kidpower has protected over 4.4 million children, teens, and adults, including those with special needs, from bullying, abuse, abduction, and other violence through our workshops, partnerships, and educational resources. The following safety tips are from Kidpower's book, Earliest Teachable Moment: Personal Safety for Babies, Toddlers, and Preschoolers.

1. Put Safety First. Kidpower's Underlying Principle is that, "The safety and well being of a child are more important than anyone's embarrassment, inconvenience or offense." Putting safety first seems obvious, but can be hard to uphold in daily life. Don't let reluctance to inconvenience someone, being too busy, worry about embarrassing someone, fear of being embarrassed, fear of offending someone, or avoidance of uncomfortable feelings stop you from taking charge of your child's safety and well being.

2. Stay calm and upbeat. Children learn better and feel safer when their adults sound hopeful. Worrying and talking about the bad things that might happen can make everyone anxious without making anyone safer. Instead, focus on all the positive ways you can protect your child from harm most of the time.

3. Stay in charge. Young children do not always have the understanding, skills, or life experience to recognize potential danger – whether from an animal, a cliff, a piece of glass, an electric outlet, a car, or a person who might be unsafe. They are too small and too precious to have their safety left to chance. Make sure you always know who is with your children, where they are going, and what they are doing.

4. Pay attention to your own intuition. If you are even a little bit uncomfortable about a person or a situation involving your child, take action rather than hoping that the problem will go away by itself. No matter what the relationship, your job is to speak up, stick around, intervene, and keep watching until your concerns are addressed.

5. Set a good example. Model staying respectful even if you are frustrated, using your words to solve conflicts, moving away from trouble, advocating for your child and yourself, waiting your turn when you want something, interrupting to get help if you have a safety problem, and being careful.

6. Give your kids practice in taking charge. When playing tickling or roughhousing games, teach children that their "No" means "No" and their "Stop" means "Stop." For example, when playing a chasing game such as "I'm going to get you!" – sometimes have children stop you by turning, making a stop sign with their hand, and yelling, "STOP!" You can give children practice in throwing hurting words away instead of taking them into their bodies. By stopping, you are teaching children to use their personal power. You can teach preschoolers to imagine that someone is acting scary and coach them to run yelling "I NEED HELP!" to their adult and have that person tell the child, "I will help you!" Give children practice in moving away from anything or anyone they don't know well and checking first with their adult.

7. Accept children's right to be upset or have unhappy feelings when you need to set limits. For example,

in stopping a child from running off, you might say in a compassionate and firm way, “I see you are angry that I am holding your hand. You want to be able to run without being stopped. Staying together here is not a choice. Holding hands helps keep you safe.”

8. Empower children with choices when you can. Allowing children to choose between the red cup or the blue cup, walking by themselves or being carried, doing something right away or in five minutes, helps children develop decision-making skills and confidence in their personal power.

9. Remember that affection should always be a child’s choice. Let children choose hugging or kissing, even with Grandma. Teach children how to move away from unwanted touch or teasing and say, “Please stop. I don’t like that.” Tell adults or other children to respect the child’s wishes by listening and stopping. Remember that forced affection is not love. Give children choices about how to acknowledge a family member or friend, such as waving, giving a high-five, blowing a kiss, or making a drawing.

10. Listen to Children! Even if their fears seem insignificant to you, listen with compassion and calmness, without lecturing or getting upset. Be a supportive adult for them to come to. Teach children NOT to keep secrets about problems, any kind of touch, any activities or friendships, treats or presents that someone gives them, or photos or videos that anyone shows them.

Instead of using fear to teach about violence prevention, Kidpower makes it FUN to learn to be safe. Visit www.kidpower.org to learn about our extensive free online library, affordable books, and workshops.

Author Irene van der Zande is the founder and executive director of Kidpower International and also the author of the bestselling book, 1, 2, 3.. *The Toddler Years: A Practical Guide for Parents and Caregivers*, which is used in early childhood programs internationally and has a foreword by Magda Gerber, early childhood development pioneer and founder of Respect for Infant Educators (RIE). In her newest book, *Earliest Teachable Moment*, Irene provides inspiring stories, clear explanations, and positive practices showing how to use the skills and strategies developed in Kidpower since 1989 to increase the personal safety of young children in ways that are empowering and joyful.