

Kidpower Personal Safety Issues and Developmental Stages

What is Personal Safety?

Kidpower defines “personal safety” (or “people safety”) as people being safe with and around people. Personal safety knowledge and skills prepare us to take charge of the emotional and physical safety and well being of ourselves and others.

Throughout our lives, we all need to be emotionally and physically safe – and to believe that everyone has the right to be safe. What changes are some of our abilities, some of our responsibilities, and some of the situations we face. A strong foundation and shared knowledge of personal safety can prepare us to prevent problems such as bullying, violence, and abuse and to develop positive relationships with others. By recognizing maltreatment, we can recognize that it should not be “normal” to be experiencing violence or abuse and make wise choices for ourselves and others.

Critical knowledge and skills for safety and success include the abilities to:

1. Understand what is safe and what is not safe with people and in our world as we change and grow.
2. Communicate effectively about what we do want and what we do not want so that we can express our needs, feelings, wishes, thoughts, and boundaries in ways that are understandable to others.
3. Understand the communications of others about their needs, feelings, wants, wishes, and ideas so that we can recognize and respect their boundaries.
4. Take charge of the emotional and physical safety of ourselves and others when experiencing or witnessing disrespectful, abusive, threatening, or violent behavior.
5. Be persistent in asking for help so that we can advocate for the well being and safety of ourselves and others, sometimes in the face of obstacles.
6. Develop positive relationships with peers.
7. Know how to protect our feelings and our bodies if others act in thoughtless, mean, scary, unsafe, or dangerous ways
8. Stay in charge of what we say and do so that we can avoid or stop unsafe behavior from others and act safely and respectfully ourselves no matter how we feel inside.

Adult Leadership is Necessary to Protect Children’s Personal Safety

Children’s belief that they are valuable, capable, and powerful is the most important personal safety tool they have. Our job as adults is to provide them with experiences that can help them to develop this belief and to protect them from experiences that can take away for this belief.

Parents, educators, and other responsible adults must take leadership to:

1. Protect their children from maltreatment including bullying, abuse, kidnapping, and other violence:
2. Advocate for children’s well being so that they can make the most of their lives.
3. Teach children personal safety knowledge and skills so that they can develop positive relationships and the ability to take charge of their own safety and well being; and
4. Ensure that children act safely and respectfully towards others.

Protecting personal safety requires that parents and caregivers know how to:

1. Stay aware so they can recognize potentially dangerous situations and unsafe behavior;
2. Select and supervise other adult leaders to provide care, education, and professional help for their children;
3. Intervene to stop children from being harmed by others or causing harm to themselves or others.
4. Support children in developing independence so they can develop the ability to navigate their world with safety and confidence.

Preparing Young People for More Independence In the Real And Virtual Worlds

Being able to do something effectively and safely requires:

- Knowledge – of what the behavior is and why it is important
- Skill – to perform the behavior
- Experience - to apply the knowledge and use the skill successfully in real life until it becomes a habit.

Often, the knowledge and skill comes ahead of the ability to become independent in using this skill safely without adult support. For example, a twelve-year-old might have the knowledge and skills to drive a car, but lacks the life experience to do so safely.

Before children go anywhere or do anything without adult protection, they need to be prepared to protect themselves. See Kidpower articles:

[*Preparing Children for More Independence*](#)

[*Safety for Kids on Their Way to School: Checklist for Parents*](#)

As soon as children are using the Internet, adult supervision is needed to ensure that they are not exposed to sexual information or tricked into giving personal information, etc. In other families, children are not using the Internet until they are teenagers.

Young people need to learn how to use the Internet safely and responsibly before they are allowed to do this without adult protection and supervision. See Kidpower articles:

[*Internet Safety*](#)

[*How to Prevent and Stop Cyber-Bullying*](#)

Typical Developmental Personal Safety Issues for Different Ages

Personal safety must be an ongoing conversation that takes place throughout the different ages and stages of life. Child protection actions and personal safety rules and skills need to be reviewed and further developed each year as children continue to change and grow – and at any time a child is experiencing a transition.

To help identify personal safety issues for your child's IFSP, IEP, or 504 plan, please click on the sections below for your child's age.

Each section includes:

- Typical personal safety developmental stages for that age
- Personal Safety Objectives and Assessment Checklist for that age
- Common personal safety challenges and goals for children of that age, especially those with disabilities
- Some age-appropriate resources for helping to meet these goals.

Birth to 3 years

Preschool - 3 to 5 years

Elementary – 5 to 11 years

Middle School – 11 to 14 years

High School and Transition – 14 to 22 years

These are approximations –children learn and grow in widely different ways. This is not intended to be a comprehensive list but provides some key indicators about what developmental issues can be important for personal safety. Any issue that was not addressed at an earlier age needs to be addressed later. Also, family situations and values are very different, and this will affect how issues can be addressed most effectively.