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"What works for your child is what makes the choice right."

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On behalf of the OUR children's safety project, I am sharing my thoughts with parents today about speaking with your deaf or hard of hearing child about child abuse.

I learned recently that our kids are three times more likely to experience child abuse or neglect. Since incidents of abuse are most common before a child enters school, we can't wait for a child to mature before teaching them about safety.

There's lots of reasons why we DON'T want to talk about this – we want to maintain their childhood innocence, we are afraid they'll see abuse everywhere, or we are uncomfortable with the topic.

The reason to begin is that knowledge can keep our kids safe. Since abusers are most often known to the child and family, knowledge is the best defense.

The good news is that you don't have to have a long lecture about it – ever. Be casual and relaxed, but bring up the topic.

To introduce public and private, I said "this is your knee, this is your leg..." these parts of public. We can wear clothes that don't always cover these parts. The parts that your bathing suit covers are private, and belong to you. Only for health reasons would anyone need to look or touch private parts." End of topic during bathtime. Yes, you will get comments about magazine covers showing private parts, but then you can continue the conversation. I think we should use real names for body parts so that a child communicates clearly not just to us but to others.

To talk about safety rules, you can say "You are good at following the rules to cross the street. Another safety rule is..." and add your rules about parents knowing where a child is, about private parts staying private, checking with you before any plans are changed, letting you know if something makes them uncomfortable, or whatever your rules are. If a child sees something on the news, you can use the opportunity to say "I will keep you as safe as I can as your mom, and you can help me by...." following our family rules, knowing how to talk and when to talk to a stranger, and when to get help, among other things.

To talk about secrets, I explained the difference between a secret and a surprise. If anyone says “I’ll get you in trouble” or “I’ll give you a treat” if you keep a secret, that’s not the kind of secret we keep in our family. As Kidpower teaches, go ahead and promise not to tell, but come and tell as soon as you can!

- Tell your children that if anyone touches or tries to see their private parts; tries to get them to touch or look at another person's private parts; shows them pictures of or tries to take pictures of their private parts; talks to them about sex; walks in on them in the bathroom; or does anything that makes them feel uncomfortable to tell you or someone they trust as soon as they can. It is never too late to tell. I explained to my kids that some adults have problems and if kids would tell and keep telling until they got someone’s attention, we could keep kids safe from those adults.

Two things that really stuck out for me in learning about people who want to hurt children were these points: a person with these intentions will have a child sit on their lap, give them hugs, etc. in front of the parent. By doing this it establishes that the parents are witnessing this and not reacting thereby making other contact a "natural" extension of this. While it is horrifying, I think parents should have their antenna up around people we know.

The other thing is to let your child know that strangers are mostly good, but we don’t trust them with ourselves or our information because we don’t know them. Have a plan if your child gets separated from you as you enter any store or park or event. Where will you meet? Coach them to ask and ask for help”for their safety” until they get help. If they are lost, have them find another mom with small children if they don’t see a store employee or a security guard. Another parent will be more motivated in helping the lost child.

Let kids know you feel uncomfortable. They might misinterpret your uneasiness as thinking they are in trouble or have done something wrong.

We can’t wait for the perfect opportunity to come around... we have to make those opportunities happen to teach our kids to be safe.