

PROTECTIVE BEHAVIOURS PROGRAM

What is Protective Behaviours (PB)?

Protective Behaviours (PB) is an internationally recognised personal safety program aiming to empower children, young people and adults with strategies to promote safety and resilience.

The PB program teaches and promotes concepts of emotional literacy, empowerment, assertiveness, problem solving and an understanding of safety. In teaching these concepts and strategies PB aims to prevent abuse, increase safety, and reduce violence.

PB messages can be delivered in a clear, simple and non-confronting way by using fun and engaging activities, developed in accordance with children's age and developmental stages at home, in educational settings and throughout the wider community.

Why do we need Protective Behaviours?

BECAUSE...

'Before they turn 18, 1 in 6 boys... and 1 in 4 girls experience some form of sexual abuse' (APA,2014)

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'90% of children abused, were abused by someone they know and trust' (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006)

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Child sexual abuse offenders are '30% family, 60% known to the child/family, 10% stranger' (US Department of Justice, 2017)

The Protective Behaviours Program

Theme 1

"We ALL have the RIGHT to FEEL SAFE at ALL TIMES"

We explore this theme in detail with children. The main teaching points are:

'we all' everybody, including children - there are no exceptions.

'right' inform children of what a 'right' is, and what rights they have. Rights are not earned; they simply exist. Explore with the children rights vs responsibilities and rights vs wants.

'feel safe' teach and help children to identify what 'feeling safe' means/feels like.

'at all times' explore what 'at all times' means....there are no exceptions

Feelings

Children experience the same range of emotions as adults. Children's emotions are real, and need to be expressed and accepted by adults. Help children develop their feelings vocabulary and include safe/unsafe feelings. Avoid telling a child not to feel scared, or that they are silly to feel scared. Instead, provide understanding, reassurance and encouragement to problem solve the situation. Role model expressing your feelings and encourage the children to have the opportunity to express, own and understand their feelings.

Early Warning Signs

Early warning signs are the involuntary, physical responses which we feel in our bodies when we do not feel safe, or when we are in an exciting or challenging situation. Just like our body gives us signals to let us know we are hungry, our bodies also give us signals to tell us we may be in an unsafe situation. Children can learn to identify their body signals when they feel unsafe and safe. Examples of Early Warning Signs are beating heart, butterflies in the tummy, jelly legs and sweaty palms.

Teach children emotional regulation strategies. Taking slow breaths when they have their Early Warning Signs, can help them calm down and be able to think clearly about what to do next. Encourage children to, when they have their Early Warning Signs and they are feeling unsafe, tell someone on their network, and keep on telling until they feel safe again.

Safety Continuum & One Step Removed Problem Solving

Feeling safe is something we may not think much about until the feeling goes away. We can help children understand that everyone is different and something that makes them feel unsafe, may not make other people feel that way. Every child has the right to make their own decisions about what feels safe and unsafe, and we need to respect how they feel and vice versa.

PB teaches children that there is a continuum of safety ranging from ... feeling safe, to 'fun to feel scared' (eg. going really high on a swing or playing chasey) ... to risking on purpose (eg. telling news at school or going on a roller coaster) ... to feeling unsafe. The safety questions help us identify where we fit on the continuum at any one given point of time. Do you have a choice? Do you have control? Do you have your Early Warning Signs? Is there a Time Limit? Use this continuum to problem solve different scenarios with children by using a one step removed problem solving approach – this means we use a puppet or toy to explain the problem, and the children can then help solve that problem. Using this method helps the child learn problem-solving skills without having to think of themselves as being in an unsafe situation.

Theme 2

“We can talk with SOMEONE about ANYTHING no matter WHAT it is”

Explore this theme in detail with the children. The main teaching points in this second theme are:

- 'talk'.... Encourage children to identify and communicate how they are feeling. Open up the lines of communication between children and the people they trust.
- 'someone'.... Encourage children to identify specific people in their lives when they feel safe to talk with, people who will listen, believe and get help if needed.
- 'about anything no matter what it is'.... Teach and reinforce to children that they can talk about everything and anything, no matter what it is. Encourage open honest communication.

Safe and Unsafe Secrets

Educate and discuss with children the difference between a safe and unsafe secret.

Safe Secrets/Surprises

- Keep for a short time (can always be told eventually)
- Usually linked with feeling happy and excited
- No one is getting hurt on the outside or the inside
- You can tell someone if you want to ... there is choice and control about telling

Unsafe Secrets

- Feeling worried or unsafe (might be getting early warning signs)
- Someone is getting hurt on the outside or the inside
- Have to keep it for a long time or forever
- Someone said if you tell, something bad will happen
- Only between two people – not allowed to tell anyone else
- There is no choice and control about telling



Networks

A network is a group of adults, chosen by the child who will provide them with support, assistance and if necessary, protection. We encourage a variety of people from the children's lives to be on the network and actively help them develop their Networks.

The Network concept ties in closely with the second theme of PB. 'We can talk with someone about anything, no matter what it is'. It encourages children to talk with specific people who they identified, when they feel unsafe and need help. Network members must be adults and able to: Be accessible, listen, believe & take action, if necessary

Persistence

We can help children learn that sometimes we may not get help or assistance the first time we ask for it. PB can teach children that if they are feeling unsafe or have their Early Warning Signs, they need to keep on asking people on their network until they feel safe and get the help they need. Give children opportunities to be persistent in asking for help.... eg. 'Sorry, I am busy; I can't help you right now. Is there someone else on your network you could ask for help'?

Body Awareness and Ownership

PB encourages the use of accurate and correct terminology for all body parts. PB includes the mouth as a private part, due to child sexual abuse sometimes involving oral sex acts. The correct terminology for body parts empowers children, removes the shame and embarrassment about private parts and reinforces Theme 2 'We can talk with someone about anything, no matter what it is'.

No one is allowed to see, touch or take a photo of the private parts of your body without your permission or a good reason (e.g. Check up at the doctor). PB teaches that it is important for children to value their bodies and learn how to take care of them, to recognise that they are the boss of their own bodies and the need to respect other people's bodies.

Personal Space

Teaching children about personal space helps children understand social distance and the different types of touch. PB uses different 'bubbles' to help explain personal space to children. There is a Personal Space bubble (a hoola hoop is a good visual tool to use): Kiss, Cuddle and Squeeze bubble; Hug bubble; High Five bubble; Wave Bubble; and Stranger Bubble. Help children identify a personal space plan which identifies people who they would put in each of their bubbles. Children need to be in charge of their own personal space and respect other people's personal space.

Children should not be forced to give anyone a hug, kiss or any form of physical contact if they do not want to - unless there is good reason (i.e. doctor's visit or to help to clean themselves). Encourage children and the people in their lives to ask consent for entering a child's personal space and to explain why they are entering their personal space (whether that be for a hug, doctors visit or to help with a child's toileting/personal care).

Assertiveness

We know from the research into child sex offenders one of the things they look for in a victim is someone who appears more vulnerable and shows minimal resistance. Therefore it is important we teach children how to be assertive, and show confidence. It is important that children know and have permission to say "No" to adults if they are feeling unsafe. When it comes to children's body safety they have the right to say no. Problem solve with children about different scenarios. Teach children the different ways we can say 'no' and help them identify situations where they would use each type of 'no'. Playful No (No way! laughing), Polite No (No thanks), Assertive No (No you can't), Angry No (NO I don't want to) and Emergency NO (NO leave me alone!!!). With Angry and Assertive No's we want to encourage children to use appropriate body language to show their objection.



In an emergency, an ambulance can break the rules eg. Go through the stop sign. In a personal emergency, it is ok to also break the rules by yelling "NO" to an adult.

Theme and program reinforcement

The Protective Behaviours Program is not a one off topic or program. All the themes and topics need to be constantly revisited and discussed. It is important to ensure that the underlying principles of the themes and program are understood and able to be put in practice. Theme reinforcement involves a variety of methods to keep the themes, core concepts and strategies in awareness and encourage their use. You can use songs and posters to help reinforce the program's principles.