

## **Tackling Tough Topics — Inappropriate Touch**

Some parents ask, "What can I do to protect my child from inappropriate touching." Others ignore the topic out of concern they may frighten their child or take away his/her innocence. Even though parents and children may be uncomfortable with this topic, education provides the only real protection.

At a parent workshop one mother shared how she prepared/protected her children from inappropriate touch. She told other parents that since her children were two years old, she asked them the same questions every time they had their bath.

Mom - "What are the most important parts of your body?"

Child - "The parts that make us a boy or a girl."

Mom - "And these parts are so special, what do we do?"

Child - "Always keep them covered?"

Mom - "Who can touch these parts?"

Child - "Only mom or dad when we have a bath or the doctor or nurse when we are sick."

Mom - "And what do you do if someone else tries to touch those special parts?"

Child - "Go to a grown-up right away and tell them."

The second part of this story was more difficult for this mother to share but she continued her story. She told other parents that two months ago, when her kindergarten daughter was in the school's bathroom, she was inappropriately touched by a boy. After he left, she went to her fifth grade sister's classroom and told her sister what happened. Without saying anything to the teacher, the fifth grader took her little sister right to the principal's office. Their mother said she did not know who she was prouder of, her kindergarten daughter or her fifth grade daughter and, more importantly, she told this to them both. She added that the boy will think for a long time before he touches another child.

Education may not prevent the first inappropriate touch but if a child is taught to go to an adult "right away," the child may be protected from a repeat occurrence. Praising the child for remembering what to do can begin the healing process. A helpful follow-up discussion is to ask the child for three things that could happen if he/she did not tell an adult (she would be scared it might happen again, it could happen to another child, the boy could have gotten away with it or he may not have learned not to do it again). Then, the parent can ask the child for three things that can be done to provide future protection.

Future protection means putting "STOP signs up and learning how to say no like he/she means it. When kids get older, it means not taking deserted short cuts on the way home, locking doors when they are in the house and not being alone at home after school with an opposite sex friend (the #1 Risk). It should include a family code of behavior for internet use and a code word the child can use to let a parent know he/she needs to be picked up immediately.