

PERSONAL SAFETY SKILLS FOR CHILDREN WITH
SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS



The Stay Safe Programme

PERSONAL SAFETY SKILLS FOR CHILDREN WITH
SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS



Based on
THE STAY SAFE PROGRAMME

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This handbook is designed to assist teachers in introducing personal safety skills to children with special educational needs. Depending on the nature of their specific learning difficulties, children with special educational needs may require additional instruction in personal safety skills and/or a more intensive and individualised approach. While the mainstream Stay Safe Programme may prove adequate for some children with disability, a more needs-specific approach is required for most children in special education. The development of this supplementary material involved consultation with parents, teachers and child care staff in special education.

It is targeted at children with special educational needs in the 6-12 age group. However, the programme may also be suitable for some older children with special needs. For older children it is recommended that the programme would be introduced within the context of a Relationships and Sexuality Programme.

Public awareness of the problem of child abuse and in particular child sexual abuse has advanced considerably. American and Canadian studies suggest that children with disabilities are from three to seven times more likely to experience sexual abuse (Briggs, 1995:17).

Children with disability may be more vulnerable to abuse for a variety of reasons:

- They may come into contact with a multiplicity of carers and care settings. Some are dependent on adults for their intimate care on a daily basis. This can make the task of distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate touching more difficult.
- Children with developmental disabilities may be at higher risk of sexual abuse (see research quoted in Briggs, 1995).
- Children with a physical disability or a visual impairment may be at greater risk due to their lack of mobility.
- Some children with speech and hearing impairments can be more vulnerable because

they may not be able to tell or their attempts at telling may be misunderstood.

- Children with challenging behaviour may be at increased risk of physical abuse.
- Children with special needs may be over protected. This can result in passivity and compliance, and an over-reliance on adults for all their needs.
- Attitudes to disability in society may confirm a child's feeling of being different or inferior. This can increase the child's desire to be accepted, therefore leading to greater vulnerability.

Taking into consideration the reasons outlined above the Child Abuse Prevention Programme recommends the following measures to all schools who intend introducing personal safety skills to children with special educational needs.

Training - School Personnel

It is important that all school personnel are involved in comprehensive training before the introduction of the programme. Training should include:

- Understanding child abuse and neglect.
- Exploration of the reasons children with special educational needs may be more vulnerable.
- Identification of preparatory work to be completed with the children prior to teaching the Stay Safe Lessons.
- Consideration of how personal safety skills can be integrated into the curriculum.
- Familiarisation with the Stay Safe Lessons, including a detailed plan of how the lessons could be taught to the particular children in the school or class.
- A review of the procedures for dealing with allegations or suspicions of child abuse. This would ensure that all personnel are clear about the procedure they should follow in the event of a case coming to the attention of a member of staff.
- Review or drawing up of a code of good practice for school personnel to ensure that staff relationships with pupils are appropriate to the

age, gender and ability of the pupils. Where pupils need intimate care it is recommended that staff draw up basic rules for safe touching. Parents and pupils should be made aware of these rules.

- Parents education and education for ancillary staff and voluntary workers where relevant, on personal safety for children.
- Provision of a support network within the school for all personnel in relation to the problem of child abuse and disability.
- Incorporating child abuse prevention into the school plan.

Training - Parents

Parental participation is built into the programme. Stay Safe - a Parents Guide, published by the Child Abuse Prevention Programme, is available to all parents. C.A.P.P. also provides parent education on Stay Safe and related issues.

The objectives of this training are:

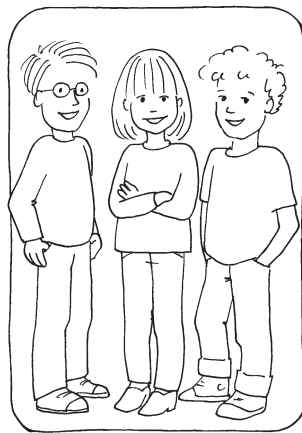
- To ensure that families have accurate knowledge on child abuse.
- To inform parents about their vital role in protecting children from child abuse and to remind them that extra vigilance is needed when a child has a disability.
- To enable parents to help their children in the following areas:
 - Expressing their feelings
 - Self-esteem and assertiveness
 - Social skills and appropriate greetings
 - Personal boundaries and body space.
- To enhance communication and assist children to confide in their parents. Children will only tell about serious matters if they have experienced a positive response to minor problems which they have encountered.
- To enable parents to help their children acquire personal safety skills by familiarising them with the Stay Safe lessons.

- To provide a supportive environment in which families can look at the problem of child abuse and disability and can ask any questions they may have.

Note

Parental reinforcement of the personal safety skills at home is crucial to the success of the programme.

PREPARATORY WORK BEFORE TEACHING
STAY SAFE LESSONS



PREPARATORY WORK BEFORE TEACHING

STAY SAFE LESSONS

Ideally the Stay Safe Programme should form part of a broader Social and Personal Development Programme which would also include Relationships and Sexuality Education. If RSE is not included as part of this broader curriculum, parents, carers and teachers should ensure that children have a basic understanding of body parts and their functions. Some of the preparatory work which is suggested below could be included in this broader personal development curriculum and is not specific to the Stay Safe Lessons.

Feelings

Before introducing the Stay Safe Lessons it is important that children can name and recognise various feelings and that they have ample opportunities to discuss the topic of feelings in general. Such discussions can be integrated across the curriculum including oral and written language development, religious education, drama, poetry and stories. Parents, teachers and carers can help children understand that our feelings tell us how we are on the 'inside', by encouraging them to describe how they are feeling on a regular basis.

Ask the children to think of times when they felt happy, confident and safe. Ask them to think of times when they felt unhappy, frightened, lonely or unsure. Photographs of class outings or of family activities could help the children to talk about how they felt on those occasions.

What if you were watching a horror film, how would you feel?

What if your friends forgot to invite you to a party, how would you feel?

What if your family organised a surprise birthday party for you, how would you feel?



What if you spent a long time working at (appropriate activity), how would you feel when you were finished? (see worksheet no. 1).

Self-esteem

To ensure the successful introduction of the programme it is important that teachers, parents and other significant adults in the child's life use every possible opportunity to develop the children's self-esteem and confidence. Ideally the activities should be integrated across the curriculum. Using similar strategies in school, home and in the care setting where relevant, is important.

The family remains the most important learning environment for the child. Research conducted by Coppersmith (I.N.T.O., 1995) pinpointed three basic conditions which are instrumental to the development of high self-esteem in the home environment:

- Unconditional love and affection.
- Well defined limits, consistently enforced.
- A clear amount of respect shown to the child.

The foundation on which children build their self-esteem has already been established before they come to school. However, children's experience in school can have a powerful influence on their level of self-esteem. "Three conditions are essential in order to create an ethos/climate where learning conducive to the enhancement of self-esteem can take place. They are empathy, acceptance and genuineness". (I.N.T.O. 1995).

High self-esteem is essential for a child's personal happiness and contentment. It is important therefore that home and school are conscious of promoting the harmonious development of a real sense of self-worth in children. All children need love, security, care and success. They also need to know that they are respected at home, in school and in the classroom. The following activities may help to enhance children's self-worth but care, patience and respect are essential for the long term building of self-esteem.

Some suggestions to enhance children's self esteem

The following activities are only suggestions. The teacher, parent or carer may need to make changes appropriate to the age and ability of the children.

- Let children be part of the decision making.
 - Where will we put the flowers?
 - Will we use thumb tacks or Blu Tack to hold up our picture?
 - Should we throw these flowers out or keep them for another day?
 - The children must see that their contributions are acted on.
- Teacher leaves the room for a very short while, asking children if they will be able to mind themselves for a brief period. On teacher's return, she asks for those who are pleased with themselves for being sensible and dependable.
- Give compliments and show children how to accept them gracefully.
- Have a "listening time". The teacher is doing the listening.
 - Let the children discuss things that bother and upset them, for example, being ignored, talked down to, not enough independence. Can they make suggestions to help themselves?
 - Teacher asks children to describe themselves.
 - Each child in the group tells the others what he is good at.
 - Each child tells the person beside them what they like about them.
- Allocate responsibilities to the children, making it clear that they should take them seriously. Children like to live up to expectations. "It's your job to remind me to close the windows before we leave, it's important."
- Emphasise strengths; be specific.
- Teachers, parents and carers can encourage the child to talk about their daily experiences.
- Set tasks at a level at which the child can succeed.

- Teachers, parents and carers can help children to make choices by asking them to express their preferences.
- Keep a class achievements calendar, e.g. children working well together; learned how to (appropriate activity); played the game fairly.

Finally, in seeking to enhance children's self esteem, how we speak to them says volumes about our regard and esteem for them.

Do you mind if I move your wheelchair or would you rather do it yourself?

Well done - that's a lovely drawing. I really like how you have made his coat such a bright red. What do you like about it?

I don't like it when you shout like that.

The next time we do this, perhaps you could remember to do bigger writing.

If you need help let me know.

I knew you could do it.

In all of these examples, care has been taken to emphasise the positive. Telling a child that his writing is always too small does little for his self esteem and saying that he makes you mad when he shouts, does even less. "If you need help let me know", is more acceptable than "I'll help you if you can't do it", because it leaves the child with some control. "I knew you could do it", clearly works better than "So you have it done at long last."

Assertiveness

Assertiveness is the ability to stand up for your own rights without resorting to aggressive behaviour. 'Self-esteem and assertiveness are inextricably linked. In a sense assertiveness may be regarded as a manifestation of high self-esteem.' (I.N.T.O., 1995) The Stay Safe lessons give children permission to say 'No' in certain circumstances and therefore they can help to develop children's assertiveness skills. Co-operation and liaison between parents, teachers and carers is essential. The following suggestions may also be useful.

PREPARATORY WORK BEFORE TEACHING

STAY SAFE LESSONS

Some suggestion to develop children's assertiveness skills

- Encourage the children to focus on what they can do (see worksheet no. 2).



- Through PE and drama classes help the children to develop good posture and show them how to use assertive body language.
- Remind the children that they can say 'No' to a touch they do not like. Using 'What if' scenarios can be very effective. What if you are tickled too hard, what could you do? What if your aunt wants you to sit on her knee and it makes you feel like a baby?
- Let the children practice saying 'No' to bullies.
- Teach the children what to do in various emergencies. What if your Mum became ill and there was no one else in the house? What if your friend got into difficulty in the swimming pool? What if you got lost in a football stadium?
- Teach the children their names, addresses and telephone numbers.
- Teach the children how to ask for directions, e.g. Which way is it to the Principal's office? Where are the toilets?
- Teach the children the importance of saying, 'I do not understand' if they are not clear about something. Remind the children that it is okay to say, 'Repeat that please.' Also, that it is all right to say, "Please talk slowly as I am finding it difficult to understand."

Developing Social Skills

In order to enable children to interact socially, adults should encourage their awareness of dress, health, cleanliness and neatness, good manners and general conduct. Everyday courtesy could also be covered, and could include social greetings, table manners, making requests politely and responding appropriately to visitors to the school.

Let the children practice responding to various requests.

May I borrow your pencil? Yes, I have another one, or No I am using it right now.

Please show me your holiday photographs? OK. but be careful not to damage them.

Will you share your lunch with me? Yes, I have too much, or No, not today I only have one sandwich.

Personal Boundaries and Body Space

Some children with special needs have a poorly developed sense of their own personal space and that of others. This can lead to inappropriate physical interactions. Teach the children the meaning of personal and private. Encourage the children to give their meaning first. Reinforce the concept by showing the difference between one's personal belongings such as a copybook, marker or pencil, and the materials which are in the classroom for everyone's use. Remind the children that we must ask before borrowing someone's personal belongings. Follow up by discussing the activities we do in public and in private. It may also be necessary to teach the children simple rules concerning personal boundaries and body space.

Get the children to draw or list people -

- they say hello to regularly.
- they shake hands with.
- they hug.

Now ask the children for examples of people they would not greet, shake hands with or hug. Emphasise the limited range of people whom they might hug (see worksheet no. 3).

Other Safety Skills

Before introducing personal safety skills to children it is a good idea for children to have learned safety skills relevant to other areas such as road safety, water safety, travelling alone and safety with medicines.

Language and Vocabulary Development

To increase the effectiveness of the Stay Safe Lessons it is preferable for children to be familiar with the vocabulary used in the lessons prior to starting them. This is particularly important for children who have poor communication skills. Teaching the children the Stay Safe Song from the mainstream programme and the poem on page 19 are useful ways of introducing some of the vocabulary.

Recognising the difference between feeling safe and unsafe is central to the programme. Familiarising the children with the use of other 'un' words is therefore recommended, e.g. unlucky, untidy, untie, unpaid.

Teaching Stay Safe to children who have been victims of abuse

As schools are not always made aware of child abuse cases it is best to err on the side of caution and assume that there could be children in the school who are victims of abuse. Where the school knows about a particular case, liaison with the child's family is essential. In some instances staff may decide to teach the lessons on inappropriate touching on an individual basis, with parental involvement and support. Children who have been abused may show distress and they may want to disclose again. Therefore adequate arrangements need to be made for this eventuality before proceeding with the lessons. Some victims may express a sense of relief after completing the lessons. This may be due to the realisation that other children have also been victimised. It is also helpful and supportive for the children to hear that the abuse was not their fault.



HOW TO USE THE
TEACHING MATERIALS



HOW TO USE THE TEACHING MATERIALS

How to use the Teaching Materials

The lessons for children with special needs are divided into five categories:

- Lessons for children with visual impairment.
- Lessons for children with physical disability.
- Lessons for children with general learning difficulties.
- Lessons for children with hearing impairment.
- Lessons for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

There are five topics in each set of lessons. These are:

- Feeling Safe and Unsafe.
- Bullying.
- Touches.
- Telling and Secrets.
- Strangers.

Note

The same topics are used in the mainstream Stay Safe Programme.

These lessons may be used as presented or adapted to meet the particular needs of individual pupils in mainstream or special education settings. Some teachers may also wish to refer to the mainstream Stay Safe lessons depending on the particular learning needs of the children in their care.

Role-play exercises form an essential part of the programme. Children need to have an opportunity to translate concepts into behaviour. In order to avoid confusion between role-play and reality, children wear a scarf, an arm band, or a wrist band as a sign that they are pretending. When the role-play is over they take off the particular object and then they are back to themselves again.

The Stay Safe pack for children with special needs also contains:

- Posters: There are 5 colour posters, one for each topic, to aid visual reinforcement of the concepts.

- An audio cassette: The tape contains 6 musical pieces which have been selected to reinforce the concept of feeling safe and unsafe.

Side 1 Safe: Skater's Waltz

Cradle Song

Adagio (Spartacus)

Unsafe: Menace from the Deep

Deadly Nightshade

The Psycho Suite

Side 2 Sound effects

- Worksheets: There are 30 worksheets to accompany the Stay Safe lessons. The teacher can adapt them taking into consideration the specific learning difficulties of the children she is working with.

WORKSHEETS

Preparatory

1. Feelings.
2. Write three things you can do.
3. Would/wouldn't shake hands with, hug, speak to.
4. Myself.

Topic 1. Feeling Safe & Unsafe

5. Jack made a safe choice.
6. Colour in Eamon with his new friends.
7. I feel safe at home when/I feel safe at school when.
8. I don't feel safe at home when/I don't feel safe at school when.
9. Write the words you would use if you were lost.
10. Write safe or unsafe under each picture.

Topic 2. Bullying

11. Pat is happy in the tree house.
12. Draw yourself with a friend.
13. Bullying is

14. Paul's poem.
15. I was afraid when I was bullied in the pool.

Topic 3. Touching

16. Some parts of our bodies get touched a lot. Can you name these parts?
17. Some parts of our bodies are private.
18. These adults keep us clean and healthy.
19. Helen told her teacher. Write what she said.
20. If a touch makes me feel unsafe.

Topic 4. Telling & Secrets

21. Mark the good secrets.
22. Draw someone you would tell at home.
23. Draw someone you would tell at school.
24. Look at each picture, tick the box if you think it would be a good time to tell.

Topic 5. Strangers

25. Write what Ciara said.
26. What would you have done if you were Deirdre?
27. What did the boys do next?
28. Circle the safe strangers.
29. Strangers.

Revision

30. Revision.

Teacher/Pupil Relationship

It is important that the teacher knows the children well and has established a good relationship with them before the introduction of the programme. Since the underlying message of the Stay Safe Programme is that children can tell an adult if they have a problem, it is possible that a child in your class may be prompted to confide in you. You can facilitate this by letting them know that you will be available if anyone needs to speak to you on their own.

Establishing Ground Rules Before Introducing the Programme

When teaching the Stay Safe lessons some teachers found it beneficial to change the seating arrangements in the classroom slightly, e.g. children sitting in a circle. It may also be useful to spend time establishing some ground rules for the implementation of the programme. Such rules could include giving everyone an opportunity to speak, no interrupting, respect for one another and the adults in charge, confidentiality, support for one another, fair play and so forth.

Circle Time

From time to time during the implementation of the programme some teachers may like to do 'Circle Time' with the children. If held regularly circle times can improve children's self-esteem and promote greater co-operation within the school.

The children sit in a circle. Each says their name and one positive thing about themselves. The game finishes when every child has had a turn. You can have a different theme each time e.g. I like/dislike..., I am good at ..., I help...

Note

Circle time is commonly used in schools to ensure that bullying and other inappropriate behaviour is dealt with.

Integrating Personal Safety Skills into the Curriculum

Religious Education:

- Myself
- My family
- My friends
- Adults who help me
- My five senses
- Respect for self
- Respect for others

Oral Language:

- Vocabulary relevant to Personal Safety Skills
- Expressing feelings

HOW TO USE THE TEACHING MATERIALS

Stories and Poems
Problem solving - What if
Making requests - asking for help
Responding to a request
Developing social skills

Written Language:

Writing Stories or Poems
Completing worksheets
Reading - word recognition

Maths:

Bar charts, graphs and pictograms depicting individual differences

Drama:

Role-play and puppetry

Physical Education:

Body awareness
Posture
Body language

Art:

Completing worksheets
Drawing pictures
Making 3D models
Appreciating our sense of sight

Music:

Stay Safe song - mainstream programme.
Listening to various musical pieces such as 'Peter and the Wolf' to help children distinguish between feeling safe and feeling unsafe
Appreciating our sense of hearing

Social and Personal Health Education:

Keeping myself clean
Appreciating our sense of taste - healthy food

Myself and others - sharing with other children
Adults I trust
My body
General safety

RESOURCE LIST

Resources/References

- 'Art in the Classroom', The Irish Times.
- 'Bullying- A Resource Guide for Parents and Teachers', Vivette O'Donnell, (1995), Dublin: Attic Press.
- 'Developing Personal Safety Skills in Children with Disabilities', Freda Briggs (1995) London: Jessica Kingsley.
- 'Drama for Children with Special Needs', Ann Cattanach (1995), London: A&C Black.
- 'Enhancing Self-Esteem', An I.N.T.O. Publication (1995).
- 'Keep Deaf Children Safe Project', Margeret Kennedy. Nuffield Hearing and Speech Centre, Gray's Inn Rd. London WC1X8DA.
- 'Meeting the Needs of Children with Social and Emotional Problems', An I.N.T.O. Publication (1995).
- 'Music in the Classroom' The Irish Times.
- 'Oliver Twist', Charles Dickens. Retold by Margeret Turner, (1993). Oxford: Heinemann Guided Readers.
- 'Peter and the Wolf', The Irish Times Music in the Classroom Series, Tape 1 Section 5.
- 'The Body Book', Claire Rayner (1994). London: Scholastic Publications.
- The Listening School, Part 1 and 2. The Co-operative Classroom. Circletimes, Enhancing self-esteem. Patrick Dymond and Jane Gilmore (1993 and 1994). Shropshire, United Kingdom: Links Education Publications.
- 'The Willow Street Kids', Michelle Elliot (1996). London; Piccolo Books.

Organisations

- Anti-Bullying Centre, Resource and Research Unit, Room 3125, Department of Teacher Education, Arts building, Trinity College, Dublin 2.
- Child Abuse Prevention Programme, Cherry Orchard Hospital, Ballyfermot, Dublin 10.
- 'Sticks and Stones' Theatre Company, 19 Watkins Square, The Coombe, Dublin 8.
- Team Educational Theatre company, 4 Marlsborough Place, Dublin 1.
- Val Moffat, Chailey Heritage, Childcare/Nursing Services, North Chailey, Near Lewes, East Sussex, BN8 4EF.
- Special Education Support Service
C/o Cork Education Support Centre,
The Rectory, Western Road, Cork.