

PERSONAL SAFETY SKILLS FOR CHILDREN WITH
VISUAL IMPAIRMENT



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Lack of mobility, social isolation and increased vulnerability to exploitation can be issues for children who are visually impaired. The following suggestions may be useful in helping such children acquire the basic safety skills in Stay Safe. Children with visual impairment may not be aware of common dangers. The class teacher may need to spend extra time ensuring the child has acquired mastery over new skills, particularly those concerning physical safety. This work should be carried out in close consultation with the mobility teacher. With regard to the follow-up exercises outlined in these lessons, students who use Braille write a short paragraph while partially sighted students are expected to draw.

Children complete worksheet no 4 before Topic 1 is introduced.

TOPIC 1: FEELING SAFE AND UNSAFE

Objectives

- To give children the opportunity to discuss times when they felt safe and unsafe.
- To help children to anticipate potentially dangerous situations.
- To enable children to devise practical ways of dealing with unsafe situations

Feeling Safe

Story

I'm going to read a story about a boy called Eamon. It's a story about a time when Eamon felt safe. Eamon wasyears old. He started going to a new school in the city. Eamon found it hard to see and he had to wear special glasses. In the new school he got help for this difficulty. Eamon felt sad leaving his friends in his old school, but he liked his new school immediately. His teacher was kind and the children in the class recited a poem for Eamon to welcome him. At break-time Amy, the girl beside him, gave him half her chocolate bar and Liam showed him his soccer badges. Eamon felt safe in his new class with his new friends.

Did Eamon like his new class? Why?

Why did Eamon feel safe?

The Safe Place

Sit in a comfortable position and think about your breathing. Feel the breath as it moves in and out of your nostrils. As you breathe out your body gets more relaxed. As you become relaxed, imagine you are travelling to a place which is safe for you. It may be a place of great beauty, a forest in the country or by the sea. It may be a room or a space but somewhere you feel safe. Feel the surface under your feet. Use your hands to explore your safe place. What can you smell? Have you anything to eat or drink? Are your friends with you? What makes you feel so safe there? Just enjoy feeling completely safe. Let the children experience their safe place for a while. When you think they are ready start preparing them for leaving their special place. Now imagine that you are leaving your safe place. See yourself walking away - closing the door if its a room, or walking out of the forest, or up the footpath from the seashore. Bring the safe feeling with you. When you are finished, talk to the boy or girl beside you about your safe place.

Music

Play some music from the "Safe" selection (see audio tape). Discuss with the children how the music makes them feel. Do they like or dislike it? Ask them to

think of words to describe the music. Will they use words such as calm, quiet, safe, relaxing and happy? Encourage the children to give their own examples of times when they felt safe.

Follow-up activities

- Draw or paint a picture of when you feel safe.
- Drama: Mime or act out Eamon's story.
- Write your own story about being safe.
- Write a short poem to welcome a new girl or boy to your school. Make sure to include the things you like about your school in the poem.
- Discuss safe places to play in co-operation with parents and carers. Children with a visual impairment may not be aware of common dangers. Make sure that they can identify safe places. Children might also include personal safe places, e.g. favourite corner of the garden, playground, park, playroom, house, school.

Homework: Discuss with Mum, Dad or a special adult about times when you feel safe.

Feeling Unsafe

Play a piece of 'Unsafe' music (see audio tape). Encourage the children to say what they think of the music and to describe how they felt while listening to it.

Ask the children about times when they felt unsafe, e.g. if they were awoken one night by a thunder and lightning storm, or their grandfather told them a ghost story, or they were in unfamiliar surroundings and felt frightened. Help them to explore ways in which they could feel safe again. Encourage the children to tell an adult they trust whenever they feel unsafe.



Story

This is a story about a time when Jack felt unsafe. Jack cannot walk very well, so he has a wheelchair. His mother jokes to him about how fast he is in his wheelchair and how she can hardly keep up with him. Jack and his mother love coffee. Usually they have a cup when Jack gets in from school. One day Jack's Mum was about to make the coffee when she realised she had no sugar. She said she would pop next door to borrow some. Jack's mum had just left when the doorbell rang. Jack got a fright. He did not know what to do. While he was still thinking, the bell gave another loud ring. Jack whizzed into the living room and peeped out. It was a woman and she had books in her hands. She looked friendly and the books looked colourful and interesting. Jack was tempted to open the door because he loved reading. Then he remembered the rule, never open the door to strangers. It seemed like an age before the lady left but eventually she turned away and walked back down the path.

About five minutes later Jack's mum came back. He told her what had happened. When his Mum had heard the full story she gave Jack a hug and told him how delighted she was that he had remembered the safety rule.

What happened when Jack's mum went next door?

Did Jack feel safe or unsafe when the doorbell rang?

Did Jack make a safe choice?

Why was Jack's mum delighted when she came back?

What would you do if you were Jack?

Encourage the children to discuss examples from their everyday experience of times when they felt unsafe. Emphasise the importance of making safe choices, taking into account the children's degree of physical mobility.

Rules If You Get Lost

Note

While most children with visual impairment are rarely unaccompanied, teaching them what to do if lost can increase their self-confidence. Liaison with parents and care staff in relation to these safety strategies is important.

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Discuss with the children times when they got lost. When did it happen? Where were you? How did you feel - safe or unsafe? What did you do?

Alternatively, ask the children, 'What if you were just learning how to use your white cane and you got lost'

- in a supermarket?
- in a shopping centre?
- in a sports centre?
- in a strange town?
- at a football stadium?

Help them to decide on the safest option in each situation. Give simple direct rules to the children taking into account their everyday experience. Get the children to role-play what they would do in each situation.

Before moving on to follow-up activities, give the children an opportunity to recap on the concept of feeling safe and unsafe. Ask them to give their meaning of safe and unsafe. Make sure they understand the terms in relation to being physically safe or unsafe and feeling safe or unsafe. Remember the rule - tell an adult you trust if you feel unsafe.

Follow-up activities

- Listen to the musical pieces again. Ask the children to describe them. In what ways do they differ? How did you feel while listening to the different pieces?
- Make 'Safe and Unsafe' face masks or do 'Safe and Unsafe' face paintings. "Play with make-up can be fun even if you can't see the results" (Cattanach, 1992:81).



- Listen to Peter and the Wolf. Try to identify the safe and unsafe sounds (see resource list).
- Revise work covered by mobility teacher.
- Use Poster 1 or suitable stories to reinforce the concept.
- See worksheets on this section.

Homework: talk to Mum, Dad or a special adult about times when you did not feel safe.

TOPIC 2: BULLYING

Objectives

To teach children to value friendship.

To give children safety strategies for dealing with bullying.

To teach children that it is not acceptable to bully others.

Friendship

Introduce the topic of friendship with the following poem.

Puppy Friend

When I talk he always listens
No matter what I say.
And if I want to have some fun
Puppy will always play.

And if I'm sitting quietly
When I like to be alone,
Puppy stays beside me
And chews a juicy bone.

Sometimes when I'm in trouble
And no one will understand,
Puppy nuzzles up beside me
And gently licks my hand.

No matter when he sees me
At day's start or day's end,
Puppy's bark is full of laughter
Telling me he is my friend.

Why is puppy a good friend?

Do you have a pet? Tell the class all about him.

Ask the children for their own ideas on how to be a good friend.

Who are your friends? Why are they your friends?

Encourage the children to describe how friends behave towards one another.

- Friends have fun together.
- Friends listen to one another.
- Friends watch out for one another.

What is Bullying?

Teacher now introduces the topic of bullying. Being bullied can be very hard to deal with and it happens to quite a few children through no fault of their own. Give the children an opportunity to talk about bullying. Establish that they can distinguish the various types of bullying - physical, verbal and emotional. Give some examples of different types of bullying. Have you ever been bullied? How did you feel, safe or unsafe? Was it your fault? Teacher emphasises that it is not their fault if they are bullied. However, some children behave in ways that may make them more vulnerable to being bullied. Ask the children why they think this might happen. Follow on by discussing the ways in which our voices, posture and our responses to questions can sometimes provoke bullying. Children with a visual impairment may want to discuss times when they were subjected to bullying because of their disability. This could be an opportunity to emphasise that they have the right to tell about bullying and they do not have to suffer in silence. At this point it may also be



worth-while to emphasise to the children that they have no right to make life miserable for others by bullying.

Poem

This is a poem about Paul who was bullied. Let us see how Paul solved his problem.

My name is Paul,
I'm not so tall,
In fact I'm quite small.

Bullies took away my ball,
Caused me to fall,
Laughed at it all.

At first I felt mad,
I was hurting real bad,
I was a lonely lad.

Then I went to my dad,
I told him I was sad,
And now I feel so glad.

My name is Paul,
I look quite small,
But inside I feel tall.

What happened to Paul?

How did Paul feel at first?

What made Paul feel glad?

Why do you think Paul felt 'tall' inside?

Paul told his Dad about the bullying. Encourage the children to think about what they would do if they were bullied. Remind them that we all have the right to be Safe.

Safety Rules

So what can we do if we are bullied? We can follow some rules which will help to make us feel safe again.

The Safety Rules are - Say 'No', Get Away and Tell. The teacher and children may need to spend additional time looking at how they can adapt and modify these rules, taking into account the extra difficulties a visually impaired child may experience.

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1. Say 'No'

Discuss with the children how they would say 'No'. What kind of voice will they use? Give the children an opportunity to practice saying 'No' with conviction. Encourage them to focus on their body language also. Children with a profound visual impairment will need extra help. What is their posture like when they are saying 'No'? Can they use their bodies to emphasise that they mean 'No'? Let them try out various ideas. It is hard to say 'No' to a bully especially if the bully is bigger and stronger than you are, or if you are being bullied by a gang. Acknowledging that in some situations children may be too frightened to say 'No' is important particularly when working with children who may feel extra vulnerable. Emphasise that they can say 'No' in their heads.

2. Get Away

Discuss with the children how they would get out of the situation. Partially sighted children can move away. What can the children who are unable to see do? Teacher and children can explore other options - shrugging, ignoring, becoming engrossed in another activity, turning away, calling for a friend to help. Children practice each option.

3. Tell

Finally the discussion focuses on telling about being bullied. It is not telling tales, it's telling to keep safe. So who would you tell? When? Where? How? What if the person you tell does not listen? Try again, tell someone else, keep telling until someone listens and helps.

Get the children to role-play the safety rules they will use.

Follow-up activities

- Draw a picture of one of your friends.
- Children devise a short drama around a bullying incident, incorporating the use of the safety rules they have learned.

- Each child makes a model of herself standing up to a bully. The teacher can choose from a variety of modelling materials.
- The children role-play their safety rules for dealing with bullying. Ensure that each child is given plenty of opportunities to role-play rejecting bullying and then telling about it.
- Use Poster 2 with partially sighted children to reinforce safety rules.
- See worksheets on this section.



Homework: Talk to Mum, Dad or a special adult about your safety rules for dealing with bullying. Show them your model.

TOPIC 3: TOUCHES

Objectives

To encourage children to value and enjoy normal affection.

To teach children how to deal with an inappropriate touch.

To teach the rule 'Never keep secrets about touching'.

Our Five Senses

Teacher revises 'Our Five Senses' with the children.

Seeing

When working with children with visual impairment the following quotation from Cattanach is interesting: "I have worked with partially-sighted and

blind children who wanted to take photographs because they liked the process of working the camera with direction about where to point it." (1992:81)

Hearing

Teacher has a tape with various sounds on it (see audio tape). The children have to guess what each sound is. Encourage them to talk about the sounds they hear at home, in school, in church and so on. They may like to talk about the sounds they like and dislike. The Irish Times Music in the Classroom series could be used to give children the opportunity to experience different musical sounds.

Smelling

Cookery class can give children direct experience of this sense. Growing flowers which have a strong scent like Hyacinths and Freesias in Nature class can also help children to appreciate this sense. Children will give you lots of examples of nasty smells. Such examples can give the teacher an opportunity to remind the children about personal hygiene.

Tasting

Lunch time, parties and cookery class can be a useful way of illustrating how we experience this sense.

Touch

All of your body collects touch feelings. You can use your arms or your legs or your feet or your knees or your bottom to find out how things feel. But some parts of your body are much better at finding out than others, like your finger tips or the tip of your tongue.

Make up a treasure bag to stimulate the children's sense of touch. Include various objects which have a variety of textures such as leather, textiles, paper or cardboard.

- Children then paste various examples of materials into their scrapbooks.
- Working in groups, children make a collage using a range of materials.

Body Awareness

Children with a severe visual impairment are likely to need extra help to develop body awareness. The following activities may help.

Visualisation

Imagine you are by the sea. It's a warm sunny day. You can hear the waves lapping gently onto the sand and some other children playing. There's a strong smell of seaweed on the breeze. You can taste the salt on your lips. You're in your swimming togs. You can feel the sand between your toes and the warmth of the sun on your skin. Every now and then you pick up a shell and trace its smooth lines. Soon it is time for a swim. You enjoy splashing about in the waves with your friends. Afterwards you all dry off in the sun before heading back towards the sand dunes and home. Discussion follows on things the children like and dislike to touch.

Artwork

Children make their own hand prints or foot prints. Children draw their silhouettes or body outlines with help if necessary.

Maths work

Partially sighted children make bar charts or graphs to illustrate their height, weight, hair colour and colour of eyes.

Story

Helen is years old. She is partially sighted and she goes to the local primary school which her younger sister also attends. Helen loves music and dance. She's been going to dance classes for nearly a year now. Until recently Helen looked forward to her weekly dance class. Lately she's reluctant to go. Last week she said she had a pain in her tummy and she didn't go.



You see, now that the dances are getting more complicated the other children in the class are inclined to treat Helen like a baby. They're afraid she'll fall over because she can't see very well. Sometimes they hold onto her hand too tightly. Also they've been giving her little nudges because they think she won't remember what to do next. The other children are just being over-anxious because of Helen's poor sight and they forget that she's just as good a dancer as they are.

What would you do if you were Helen?

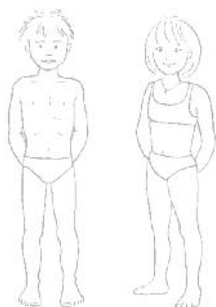
While it is important to avoid being too critical of any solution the children may arrive at to solve Helen's problem, try to emphasise the importance of telling an adult they trust.

Teacher then tells the children what Helen did. Helen told her dance teacher what was worrying her. At the next class the dance teacher got Helen to demonstrate one of the more complicated steps to the other children in the class. The other children realised that Helen was as good as anybody at dancing. Now Helen looks forward to her dancing class again.

Touches We Like/Dislike

Get the children to talk about touches they like and dislike. They may want to talk about incidents similar to the one in the story, where others didn't respect their right to body space and boundaries. Ask the children what they could do about a touch they did not like. Prompt them, if necessary, to recognise that they can say 'No' politely.

To emphasise this point ask the children what they would do in the following or similar dilemmas:



- What if your aunt is always patting you on the head when she comes to visit, and you don't like it, what could you do?
- What if your Mother still insists on holding your hand when you are out and about together and it makes you feel like a baby?
- What if your uncle keeps tickling you when he comes to visit and you do not like it?
- What if your granny is always holding your arm to guide you even though you do not need help?

Ensure that each child feels confident about dealing with a touch they do not like. Get the children to role-play their response to the above situations.

Unsafe Touches

Discussion follows on touches which might make children feel unsafe. Ask them for examples of unsafe touches, or use examples like the following to explain what you mean.

- What if someone deliberately kicked you while you were playing in the school yard?
- What if Paul's older brother hits him when Mum and Dad are not there?
- What if the boy beside you in class keeps pinching you on the arm when the teacher is not looking. What could you do?

Children role-play using the Stay Safe rules- Say 'No', Get Away and Tell to deal effectively with these situations.

Distinguish for the children between a touch that they do not like or an unsafe touch, and being examined by the nurse, doctor or helper. Explain that sometimes these adults have to touch us in a way we do not like to keep us clean and healthy.

Inappropriate Touching

Teacher can ensure that each child has developed an awareness of his body by developing sensory and physical awareness in drama and PE class. The children can then go on to name the various body parts. It is envisaged that sex education, appropriate

to the age and ability of the children, would have been taught prior to introducing the topic of inappropriate touching.

Note

The use of anatomically correct dolls is recommended when teaching sex education to children with a severe visual impairment.

Remind the children that some parts of our bodies get touched a lot. People may shake your hands or pat your head. Other parts of our bodies are private and do not get touched so much. Unless children are ill or need help with bathing people do not generally touch their private parts:

- What if your private parts are sore and the doctor needs to examine you, will he ask you to keep the examination a secret? Of course not.
- What if you need help from Dad, Mum or your carer with bathing, will they ask you to keep it a secret? Of course not.
- What if you need help from Dad, Mum or your carer with dressing will they ask you to keep it a secret? Of course not.

No one should ever ask you to keep a touch a secret. It is never your fault and you have the right to feel safe. The rule is - We never keep secrets about touching, and this rule applies everywhere, at home, in school, in the swimming pool, on the bus and so forth.

Story

This is a story about a girl who was asked to keep a touch a secret. Let us see how she solved the problem.

Kate is years old. She lives in the country with her Mum and Dad and younger brother Michael. Their nearest neighbours are about half a mile away but Kate is rarely lonely. There is always something happening on the farm and Michael is her best friend. They both love horses and cannot wait to grow up and get a real job working with them. Tuesday is their favourite day as they go to horse riding lessons straight after school.

It was when a new instructor came to the school that Kate's problem started. His name was Keith. He was extra friendly towards Kate and promised her additional help with her jumping. Kate was thrilled with how she improved once Keith started helping her. Then one afternoon as Kate was brushing down her horse, Keith came into the stable. He started telling her how good she was with horses and how special she was to him. He came really close to her and kissed her on the lips and then tried to touch her private parts. Kate did not know what to do. She felt frightened and embarrassed. Keith said it would be their little secret. With that Kate just dropped the brush and ran.

For the next few Tuesdays Kate pretended that she was not well and Michael went to lessons on his own. Kate really missed the lessons and wondered if her horse, Sandy, would miss her too. She was sad and could not eat very much. Finally Michael asked her what was wrong. At first Kate did not want to tell but eventually Michael persuaded her. When Michael heard Kate's story he immediately gave her a big hug and said, 'We will tell Mum and Dad straight away and they will sort it out.' That is exactly what happened. Michael and Kate told Mum and Dad and they got the owner of the horse riding school to sort the matter out. Kate and Michael are back enjoying their lessons again. They remember the rule - never keep secrets about touching.

Discuss Kate's story with the children

- What if someone touched you on your private parts and you felt unsafe?
- What if an older boy wants to touch your private parts and warns you not to tell anyone?



- What if a stranger offers you sweets if you touch his private parts?
- What if a woman you know and like wants to touch your private parts but warns you to keep it a secret?

You could use your safety rules - Say No, Get Away and Tell. Remember it is okay to tell, even if you know and like the person who is touching you. It is never your fault and you have the right to feel safe.

Note

Some children may need to modify the safety rules as outlined in Topic 2 on Bullying.

How many of you think that you might get into trouble for saying 'No' to an adult? There are times when it is right and good to say 'No' to an adult. Ask the children to give you a list of situations where it is appropriate to say 'No' to an adult. Include circumstances where an adult asks a child to do something which is dangerous, wrong or which Mum and Dad have forbidden.

Differentiate between saying 'No' to something that is dangerous, wrong or inappropriate and saying 'No' to going to bed, doing homework or household chores. Emphasise the importance of saying 'No' to keep safe.

Follow-up activities

- Poster 3 can be used with partially sighted children to promote discussion.
- Decide which of the following touches you would need to tell about.

You are doing PE in school and the teacher asks you to find a partner and hold his hand.

The doctor needs to examine your tummy.

An older boy wants to touch your private parts.

Your Dad wants to give you a hug.

Your Mum wants to help you to wash your hair.

The teacher takes your hand to show you how to play chess.

- Draw, paint or make a model of Helen at her dance class, or write a poem about her.
- Make a list or draw the touches you like and the touches you don't like. Children discuss their lists or drawings in pairs afterwards.
- Role-play: Children practice telling an adult they trust about an inappropriate touch.
- See worksheets on this section.

Homework: Talk to Mum, Dad, or a special adult about your worksheets.

TOPIC 4: TELLING AND SECRETS

Objectives

To help children to recognise the difference between a good secret and a bad secret.

To help children to identify the adults they could tell if they had a bad secret.

To give children the opportunity to practice telling an adult about a bad secret.

Good Secrets

Sarah's Mum and Dad had an exciting secret to tell. Her Mum was going to have a new baby. Sometimes Sarah's Mum let her feel the new baby kicking in her tummy. Sarah could hardly wait for the baby to arrive. She had already made a card to welcome her. She was hoping it would be a girl as she didn't have a sister, but a brother would be great also.

Is Sarah's secret a good secret? Yes.

Discuss other examples of good secrets with the children, e.g. surprise picnic, presents, surprise birthday party, making a mother's day card or doing some jobs at home to surprise mammy. Explain that a good secret is something you feel good about and that good secrets are not secrets for ever.

Bad Secrets

Story

Liam is years old. He has just changed schools and is now going to a special school. At first he liked his new school a lot. But now some of the boys on his street are calling him thick and stupid. Liam has started to hate himself. He feels sad. Sometimes the boys hit him as well as calling him names. This makes him feel very unsafe. A few weeks ago the teacher started to do the Stay Safe Programme with the children. Now Liam has learned that he can say 'No' to the bullies.



Liam shouted 'No' at the bullies and ran away. Next day he told his Mummy and his teacher in private. His Mummy and the teacher helped him. Now Liam is happy again. He feels safe and there is no more name calling or hitting.

What kind of secret did Liam have? Safe or unsafe?

What happened after he told?

What if you were bullied, would that be a good secret? No. Anything that makes you feel unsafe or confused is a bad secret. What can you do if you've a bad secret? You can tell someone you trust. Remember Helen in the last story? What was her secret?

Helen told about what was worrying her and now it's okay.

Are the following secrets good or bad?

- Mum bought a present for Granny's birthday. She asked the children to keep it a secret.

- Ciaran has a stammer. Two of the other children on the street are always teasing him about it. Ciaran is afraid to tell anyone.
- An older boy touched Jason's private parts. He gave him sweets and told him that he had to keep it a secret.
- A woman Siobhan knows and likes touched her private parts and warned her to keep it a secret.
- Bernadette won the sports person of the year award in the school but the teacher told the other children to keep it a secret until prize-giving night.

Telling

Make sure the children are clear about who they would tell, when they would tell, where they would tell and how they would tell.

Who to tell

Ask the children for examples of unsafe secrets, e.g. bullying, inappropriate touching. Take each example in turn and get the children to draw who they would tell. Then each child role-plays telling, making sure that they know the words they would use.

Some children may need help to choose the adults they would tell. They should include people outside the family as well as parents. Explain that it is important to tell an adult rather than another child.



When to tell

Clarifying with the children when they would tell is also important. Use some of the following examples.

What if I am just about to teach a new maths lesson to the class would that be a good time to tell?

What if Mum is trying to get the grass cut before it starts raining, would that be a good time to tell?

What if Dad is just about to go off to a football match with his friend, would that be a good time to tell?

The teacher also highlights for the children the benefits of telling in private. Give each child an opportunity to practice telling.

What if the adult doesn't listen

Get the children to look at what they would do if the adult they chose just would not listen. What if you tried to tell your Mum about bullying on the street. She was not busy at the times you tried to tell her but she still did not listen. What could you do then?

Encourage the children to look at the possibility of telling another adult if the first one does not listen. The rule is - Keep telling until someone listens and helps.

Role-play: Each child role-plays telling the teacher about an unsafe secret but the teacher does not listen. The child has to choose another adult then, such as another teacher, caretaker or principal. Children practice until they get the message that they keep telling until someone listens and helps.

Follow-up activities

- Choose a partner. Describe to him/her how you think Liam was feeling before he told about the bullying. Now get your partner to describe how Liam felt after he had told.
- Choose an adult you know well. Discuss together why some adults do not listen to children.
- Children draw up a list of good and bad secrets with teachers help. Teacher emphasises to the children that they can always tell about a bad secret. Children role-play telling an adult they trust about a bad secret.

- Use Poster 4 to reinforce the importance of telling with partially sighted children.
- Get the children to think about a good and a bad secret. Then have a 'listening time'. The teacher is doing the listening.
- See worksheets on this section

Homework: Talk with Mum, Dad or a special adult about telling and secrets. Name the adults you would tell if you had a bad secret.

TOPIC 5: STRANGERS

Objectives

To clarify for the children who strangers are.

To give children safety strategies for dealing appropriately with strangers.

To help children to feel less fear and anxiety about strangers.

Note

Before introducing this topic the school should review its practice concerning visitors to the school. Close co-operation with parents and carers is essential in relation to this topic.

So far we have learned about keeping ourselves safe. We have learned about safe feelings and unsafe feelings and we have learned the safety rules - Say 'No', Get Away and Tell someone. Today we are



going to talk about using these rules if a stranger ever makes you feel unsafe.

Definition

As children may have some difficulty understanding who strangers are, the teacher may wish to do some preparatory work.

Asking children who strangers are can produce some surprising answers, e.g. strangers wear dark glasses, strangers are always men, strangers have big cars, strangers have beards. When a teacher receives such answers she may like to ask the children's parents to point out who strangers are when they are out and about with their children.

When working with partially sighted children teacher can give out a selection of pictures from magazines, depicting a variety of people - faces or full-length figures, well dressed or shabbily dressed, young or old, pleasant or unpleasant looking, with or without beards, wearing glasses or sunglasses and so forth.

Ask whether these people are strangers or not. Of course they are all strangers, but some children may say that they are not strangers because they are smartly dressed or friendly-looking. Clarify any misconceptions children may have.

When explaining the concept of strangers to children with no sight, using an audio tape with a mix of familiar and unfamiliar voices could help them to understand.

Story

Ciara loved to go shopping with her Mum. Because she couldn't see very well she had to be extra careful about keeping up with her Mum and not getting lost.



Once she did get lost but she remembered what her Mum had told her, "Ask someone to guide you to the information desk in the shopping centre and wait for me there." Ciara did just that. She felt someone beside her and turned and asked for help. A woman's voice said straight away, "I'd love to help you." Ciara took the woman by the arm. She knew the shopping centre well and was very alert as to where the woman guided her. After a while she said, "I think we're going towards Burger King and not the information desk" The woman replied that she thought that Ciara might like a Coke or a milk-shake first. Ciara was tempted because she loved milk-shakes, especially chocolate flavoured ones. But there was something about the woman's voice that made Ciara feel unsafe. She said, "No thank you" and stood still. The woman got angry and said "I was only trying to be nice to you."

Ciara didn't care if the woman was angry or not. She felt unsafe with her so she walked into the next shop and asked for help. The shop assistant brought her to the information desk straight away where her Mum threw her arms around her and gave her a big hug.

Discuss the story. Focus on what made Ciara feel uneasy about the woman. Emphasise that if you feel unsafe it is okay to say 'No'.

Discuss the rules the children have been given about going places, such as to the shop, library or swimming pool. What have they been told to do if they become separated from their Mum, Dad or friend? What would you do if you were Ciara?

The children then devise short dramas using these rules. Teacher encourages the children to use various examples of who the strangers in their stories might be, e.g. an older child, couple, woman, man, teenage boy or girl.

Get the children to think about who would be the safest person to ask if they were lost while shopping. Who did Ciara choose first? Was it a safe choice? What about Ciara's second choice, was it a safe one? Explain that if they ever need help while out shopping, it is safer to choose someone who is working in the shops. If you were Ciara would you

PERSONAL SAFETY SKILLS FOR CHILDREN WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

have gone off with the woman for a milk shake?
What is the rule if you are offered a gift from someone you do not know? Would you do what Ciara did - Say 'No', Get away and Tell someone?

Children then act out Ciara's story incorporating the safety rules into it.

Ask the children what they would do if a stranger called them by name and offered them a lift home. See what solutions they come up with. Explain to them that just because someone uses your name it does not mean the person knows you. Ask how else could they know your name? Encourage the children to see that the safe choice is to ignore the person, Say 'No', Get Away and Tell. This is not rude - it is simply keeping yourself safe.

Ask the children to give you examples of when they made safe choices. Get them to consider the following situations.



What if you were offered a lift from someone you do not know?

What if you were on the wrong train or bus, who would you ask for help?

What if an older boy you do not know says he will give you a video game if you will go home with him?

Telephones: If appropriate teach children how to use public telephones, coin and card operated as a further safety measure.

Reinforce

- Never go anywhere with a stranger.
- Never take anything from a stranger.

So does this mean that strangers are bad? No, it just means you do not know them. So you do not go with or take anything from someone you do not know. This rule applies when you are on your own or with your friends.

Follow-up activities

- Role-play saying 'No' to a stranger who makes you feel unsafe. The teacher devises various situations.
 - A stranger offered Paul a lift. She was very persuasive. "You will be soaked, and I am going your way." Paul said 'No' firmly.
 - Debbie was travelling on the train alone. She was going to her granny's in Cork. A strange man who was sitting opposite her started chatting. The stranger insisted that he knew Debbie's granny well and that he could drop her off at her house. Debbie said, "No thank you", and she turned on her Walkman.
- Children use puppets or dolls to practice saying 'No' to a stranger who offers them something.
- Children use puppets or dolls to practice saying 'No' to a stranger who wants them to go somewhere with him/her.
- What if you get lost in a shopping centre, who would be a 'safe' stranger to ask for help. When the children have identified who they could ask for help they can role-play what they would say.
- Use Poster 1 and worksheets for this section.

Homework: Talk to Mum, Dad or a special adult about the safety rules for strangers.