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Teaching Touching Safety and Preserving Innocence

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A common concern expressed by  Mother and son talking caring adults when dealing with teaching or reinforcing the touching rules is whether it is appropriate for anyone other than parents to have those conversations. Adults often express genuine concern that any discussion of the touching rules with children is somehow more than just safety education, and they wonder if those conversations should be left to parents only.

Obviously, parents should teach children the touching rules as part of a child's personal safety education. Touching rules are about safety, and all adults should be ready and willing to reinforce any rule that keeps children safe.

Teaching children the touching rules can help prevent child sexual abuse. These rules empower children to speak up when anyone touches them in a way that is dangerous or makes them feel uncomfortable. Teaching children to resist the overtures of a potential child molester is an important responsibility for all adults. Child sexual abuse is less likely to occur if the perpetrator can't overcome the child's resistance to his or her attempts at seduction.

The touching rules are safety rules. In the same way we teach children to stay away from open flames, look before crossing the street, or wear a helmet when riding a bicycle keeps children safe from physical harm, the touching rules protect them from harm that can be physical, emotional, and spiritual. The touching rules teach children to speak up when someone tries to touch them in a way that makes them uncomfortable. Speaking up can protect them from harm.

Sounds simple, right? It may be "simple" but it is certainly not easy. Adults often have a difficult time approaching the touching rules the same way they approach other safety rules. It is apprehension that can get in the way of adults' commitment to create and support a safe environment for all children. This unease with the conversations about touching rules means that adults may miss an opportunity to reinforce this important safety rule.

The touching rules are simple:

- No one has the right to touch a child's private parts except to keep him or her safe and healthy—and only a few special safe adults have that right.

- If someone tries to touch your private parts or wants you to touch their private parts, the child should: say “No,” run away, and tell a safe adult even if the person tells you not to tell.

The point is to keep children safe and to let them know how to help protect themselves. Nothing about these rules is sexual. Nothing about these rules tells children what they are protecting themselves from. Nothing about these rules is designed to give children more information than they can handle or more than is appropriate.

All adults can be a part of the safety net that parents want to create for their children by being willing to speak up and reinforce the message about the need for children to say words that mean “no,” run away, and tell somebody. We must be willing to relate to the touching rules as another personal safety rule that children need to know to live happy, safe lives. Our willingness to give up our discomfort about the rules can make the difference in a child's life.

It takes everyone to create the safe environment for children. We all have to be willing to put the safety and well being of children first and be partners in empowering children to live safe and learn how to protect themselves from harm.

Innocence is only lost if a sexual predator is successful at seducing a child. The touching rules are one way to put up barriers to that seduction and, at the end of the day that is what we all want to accomplish.

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