



KINDERGARTEN - 2ND GRADE PARENT LETTER

As children prepare to venture out into the world by beginning to attend school daily, it is an exciting time for families! This important developmental step will begin your child's journey to becoming more independent, but close adult supervision by parents, teachers, and other adults is still present. Most adults are positive, safe influences in your child's life that help them to learn and grow. However, some adults can and do take advantage of their position in a child's life to manipulate, exploit, and abuse them. In fact, 90% of children who are sexually abused are taken advantage of by someone they – and their parents – know, love, and trust.

Young school-aged children do not have the emotional maturity or the learned strategies to handle difficult situations they may encounter, so it is important for parents to help to develop these safety tools and strategies with their child.

Children need to understand why rules exist: to keep them safe and to protect them from unsafe situations. It is important for children to develop and internalize the concepts of "safe" and "unsafe." When a child recognizes the characteristics of a safe situation, a safe secret, and a safe touch, they will also be able to recognize when they feel unsafe. Helping your child to recognize and build the "Guiding Voice" within them (the voice inside that helps them determine when a situation feels safe or when something is scary, threatening, icky, or just not quite right) is the first step in building a set of protective strategies that your child will use for a lifetime. Remember, if your child feels unsafe, then they are unsafe. Using the strategy of "Think, Feel, Act" helps



your child to listen to their Guiding Voice as they Think about a situation, as they consider how that situation makes them Feel, and how they will Act to keep safe. The Grown-Up Buddies in a child's Trusted Triangle are the trusted adults that can help a child when there is an unsafe situation. It is important to keep lines of communication open with your child so you can be one of the trusted adults to whom he or she can turn.

The purpose of the **'Safer, Smarter Families' Family Safety Toolkit for Kindergarten – 2nd Grade Children**

is to empower them with the ability to protect themselves in potentially unsafe or abusive situations by arming them with a few basic protective principles:

- Safety rules help children identify safe and unsafe situations for themselves and others; there are warning signs, such as secrets, touches, or threats, to help children recognize unsafe situations
- Children need to have Grown-Up Buddies, adults they trust, whom they can go to whenever a situation arises that makes them feel scared or uncomfortable
- Children have the ability to use their voice to stop an unsafe situation, that it is ok to report any situation that makes them feel unsafe, and they

- have the right to be heard and helped
- The private parts of our body and our body boundaries and personal space are to be respected
- Being aware of one's surroundings is an important safety tool
- A trusted adult must know where a child is, what they are doing and who they are with at all times
- Safe choices extend into the digital world

Involving your child in the activities identified in your family's safety plan is very important. Sharing these strategies will give your child tools to make safe choices and decisions and access help if they are feeling unsafe. Initiating discussions with your child will help them see that they have the personal power within themselves to make choices and decisions that keep them safe. Children can use that power not only to help themselves by recognizing warning signs that alert them to unsafe situations, but to see this in others as well.

Practicing the tips and tools presented in your Family Safety Toolkit is the first step in ensuring your child is prepared to safely navigate these formative years.

For more information, visit LaurensKids.org.

