

RESPECTING YOUR CHILD'S PERSONAL SPACE AND BOUNDARIES

An integral part of safety is teaching children about respecting personal boundaries. Individuals who present a risk to children usually begin by breaking down boundaries with them. Setting personal boundaries is about learning to protect and take care of ourselves.



As we head into the holiday season, many parents may be confronted with that awkward moment when their child refuses to either sit on Santa's lap or hug and kiss a family member. Many parents are not prepared to deal with these situations: should you force your child to sit on Santa's lap? Kiss Grandma? Hug Uncle Bill? To spare a relative's feelings, many parents will urge children to endure or even return unwanted physical contact. But is this the wisest thing to do?

In our Personal Safety Workshops **we teach children to trust their instincts (internal alarm)** and remind them that they always have the right to say NO! to anyone or in any situation that leaves them feeling scared, confused or uncomfortable. When your child signals to you either verbally or physically that a contact touch makes him feel uncomfortable, respect his right to say NO! Let him decide the physical proximity with which he is comfortable. Your child will gradually learn to trust his instincts and to identify the body signals that warn him to avoid any situation or person that makes him uncomfortable, embarrassed or scared.

It can be challenging to find the proper balance between good manners and respecting a child's right to say No! When your child refuses to kiss Grandma good bye, avoid making comments such as: "If you really love Grandma, you'd kiss her goodbye. Look how sad you made Grandma!" You may feel it is impolite or even rude to refuse to kiss and hug relatives but keep in mind that refusing affection should not be equated with bad manners. Children are learning to set their own personal boundaries therefore it is important that we allow them to decide their level of comfort with displays of affection.

If your child refuses physical contact with another adult, we suggest the following: blowing kisses or smiling when saying hello, offering a handshake, a wave or a "high five". You can even encourage your children to create their very own special handshakes! For older children, sending thank you notes or saying a big "thank you" to a room full of people instead of approaching each person individually are also ways in which children can express themselves without feeling pressured to hug or kiss people. It is very likely that you will have to patiently **explain to your relatives the importance of respecting your child's personal space and boundaries.**

Finally, after a long wait in line, it's your child's turn to sit on Santa's lap and have his photo taken. Should your child shy away or openly protest, allow him to first observe from a distance and then ask if he is ready to see Santa. You can even offer to go first and sit on Santa's knee. If your child still refuses, you need to be okay with their decision and keep in mind that you are respecting his personal space and boundaries.

By respecting your child's boundaries you will help make him less vulnerable to abuse or exploitation. As well, you are not only helping him build his self-esteem but also giving him the confidence to observe all of the important safety rules he will need in his life to ensure his personal safety.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!