



PARENT SAFETY TOOLKIT

O.U.R Children's Safety
and Success Project

January 2020



HANDS &
VOICES™

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Acknowledgments

Beginning in 2009, the Hands & Voices O.U.R. Children's Safety Project seeks to engage parents of kids who are deaf/hard of hearing and the professionals who work with families within the community at large in the prevention of childhood maltreatment.



Thank you to our long-time partner Kidpower Teenpower Fullpower International for permission to include content from their exceptional child protection, abuse prevention, and personal safety program in this publication and for their ongoing collaboration and advice to the O.U.R. Children's Safety Project over many years. Since

1989, Kidpower has protected millions of children, teens, and adults worldwide, including those with special needs, from bullying, abuse, and other maltreatment through its empowering and effective workshops, partnerships, and educational resources. www.kidpower.org

Thank you to the members of the Hands & Voices O.U.R. Project Monthly Teleconference Calls in 2018-2019 who contributed greatly to this work. Janet DesGeorges, Harold Johnson, Ed.D., Sara Kennedy, Jennifer Johnson, Lesa Coleman, Christine Griffin, Chresta Brinkman, Cora Shahid, Nancy Sager, Stephanie Olson, Lisa Kovacs Molly Martzke and other members played a significant role.

1. Why a Safety Toolkit for families of Deaf/hard of hearing kids^{1*}?

We at Hands & Voices wanted to share the news that parents and professionals can help our growing kids be safe in the world. There are resources to help parents, kids, and the community to understand specific skills, knowledge and practices that can keep our kids safe and independent. Those same skills are the ones needed to be successful in school and community life. Our children in their youngest years, especially birth to three, are the most isolated from others, so we knew we had to get this information to young families as early in their journeys as possible.

Parents can teach and model behavior and take specific actions that will increase the safety of their deaf/hard of hearing kids. We will share specific strategies in the Toolkit. First, though, parents should be aware of safety issues.

“Our kids” are 3-4 times more likely than typically-developing peers to experience any kind of maltreatment, from neglect to abuse to bullying. Why?

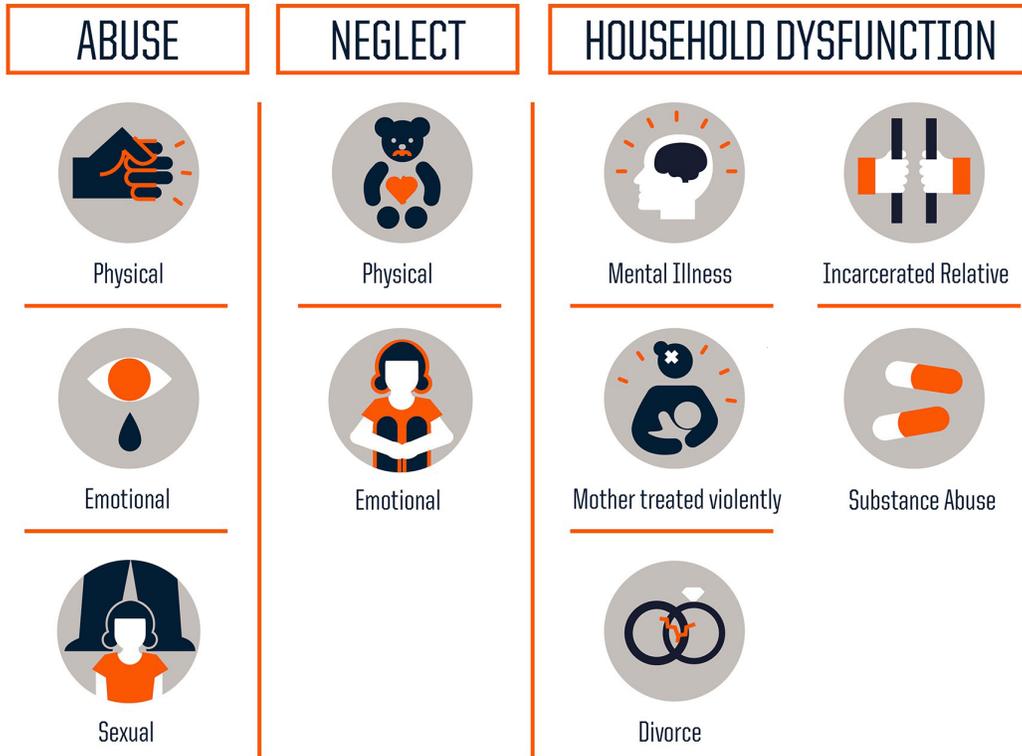
People who want to hurt children look for potential victims who:

- are isolated, lonely, or don't seem to fit in
- are overly compliant to requests from adults or older kids, without a full understanding of the context
- don't know they have the right to say “no”, may not be able to say “no” in a way that is readily understood, and/or do not know what to do if their “no” is not respected.
- can't name body parts, or express complex emotions, and can't effectively retell a story about something that has happened
- doesn't persist in telling a caring adult when they have a problem, and/or doesn't have a safe/caring adult to tell
- are socially naïve and trusting
- are not able to recognize maltreatment when they experience it
- don't understand their own developing feelings, sexuality, stages of maturity, etc.

Children who are deaf or hard of hearing may experience many of these risk factors for maltreatment. Understanding the risk factors above and how they might relate to your child is the first step to reducing a child's vulnerability.

One important mention is that children who have already experienced what are called Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) face a higher risk of re-victimization, reduced health and opportunity even as adults. These difficult childhood experiences (ACES) include neglect or emotional, physical or sexual abuse as well as domestic violence, substance abuse, mental illness or imprisonment in the household, and being separated from parents or parental separation/divorce. ACES disrupt the brain's ability to process events normally, causing a child (or adult) to see life from a flight/fight or freeze stance. Trauma and confusing memories can make a child feel unsafe. If a child feels unsafe, they will have great difficulty learning and forming healthy relationships. See more about the ACE studies at the Centers for Disease Control.

¹ The term “Deaf/hard of hearing” or d/hh is intended to be inclusive of all kids using a variety of modes of communication, kids who are Deaf/hard of hearing “plus”, or who have hearing differences related to or along with Microtia/atresia, Down syndrome, autism, Cytomegalovirus or many other conditions.

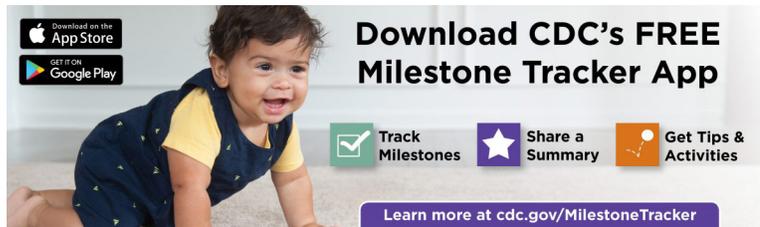


2. What Should Parents Focus On?

The antidote to ACES is a strong attachment with one or more positive, caring adults. One caring adult relationship can make a huge difference! Attachment helps a child feel valued and cherished, and fosters courage to speak up for one’s needs in any kind of relationship. Attachment is the basis for all future relationships.

In addition, parents need a good understanding about how children develop and specifically how language develops related to hearing differences. Low expectations don’t help kids grow, and expectations that are too high can lead to feelings of inferiority or send the wrong message to a parent. Just-right expectations are key.

Expected milestones for children birth to five are listed in detail for parents on the app at <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones-app.html>



More specific to children who are deaf/hard of hearing are the Parent Takeaways and other resources outlining the development of cognitive, social, emotional, language and literacy development of infants and toddlers with deafness. Find them here: <https://www.handsandvoices.org/fl3/topics/lang-lit-soc-development/social-dev-resources.html>

Quality early intervention, teaming with schools/therapy programs and connection to experienced parents and Deaf/hh adults can help parents understand the “just-right” expectations for their individual child. The Parent Takeaways and the CDC Milestone Tracker are powerful tools in understanding your child’s development and how he/she communicates and learns.

3. Prevention is a Daily Practice

Checking in Regularly with Your Child: Intentionally make a routine out of checking in with your child. If your child is not yet communicating, you can observe how they are reacting, notice any changes in their behavior, appearance, expression, or attitude. All behavior is communication, so watch even more carefully for their own safety if your child's communication is delayed or the child communicates differently. Individuals less familiar with your child than you are may misinterpret a change in your child's behavior as "not understanding a situation" vs. looking for other sources of the behavior, including a stress response or call for help from abuse or neglect. Therefore, it is critical that parents interpret their own child's communication and share this with others. (For example, perhaps a child who has been happy to be left at a childcare setting suddenly seems fearful. A parent would investigate any changes in the drop-off routine or the people at childcare before assuming that this might be typical stranger anxiety that often occurs at 10 months.)

You might incorporate checking in with your child into your bath time routines, getting ready for bed, after reading a story, or anytime you can take your time and look/observe/listen/share with your child. For older kids, late-night chats, sharing car time, or waiting in line for something to begin are good times to check in and find out how they are doing. Discussing a news story or video clip together can be another opportunity to talk about safety, well-being, or any other concerns in a neutral way, natural way. Watch and wait for openings.

What kinds of things do we ask during check-in?

Make your questions routine so your child knows what to expect. Ask open-ended questions, and listen/watch for the answers to: What was your favorite thing that happened today? What worried you? How safe did you feel? What do you have questions about – anything bothering you? I want you to know you are important to me.

Some families incorporate these discussions into dinner table talk with the Rose/Thorn or similar metaphor. What was your rose today? What was your thorn? What do you need strength for tomorrow?

Kidpower Teenpower Fullpower International has developed an exceptional curriculum and many resources to teach people of all ages and abilities about personal safety and most importantly, child protection and prevention.

The Kidpower Put Safety First Commitment™ helps us to overcome the uncomfortable feelings that can get in the way of advocating for our kids:

I WILL put the safety and well being of myself and others ahead of ANYONE's embarrassment, inconvenience or offense – including my own.

The Kidpower Protection Promise™ is a clear message to remember for ourselves and to communicate to our kids through our actions, that, no matter what, their safety is important to us. It goes like this:

YOU are very important to me. If you have a safety problem, I want to know – even if I seem too busy, even if someone we care about will be upset, even if it is embarrassing, even if you promised

Check in with your child regularly.

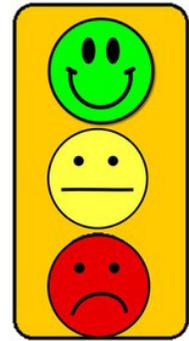
All behavior is communication, so watch even more carefully if your child's language is delayed for safety purposes.

Contact us to share other ideas about how you inspire your child to share their thoughts!

not to tell, and even if you made a mistake. Please tell me and I will do everything in my power to help you.

We think both statements should be committed to memory. Share the Kidpower Promise with the kids in your life regularly and make sure that your actions are consistent with your commitment. The Promise can be useful during “check in” and to remind ourselves, as parents, about what is truly important.

If a child is not yet communicating, a traffic light may be a simple visual resource to indicate *all is well* (green), *I have a question or a concern* (yellow) or *I need help* (red).



Give plenty of wait-time when asking, and model the answer to begin to teach this response. (If it was a happy afternoon at the zoo, you could say or sign, “I think you had a green day – you are smiling and relaxed.” Be cautious about re-asking (child may think they answered wrong the first time if there is a repeat of the question). Parents can teach concepts of safe/unsafe through stories, such as Little Red Ridinghood. (How would the story change if she had invited a buddy to go with her on her forest walk, and left at the first sign of danger to tell a trusted adult?)

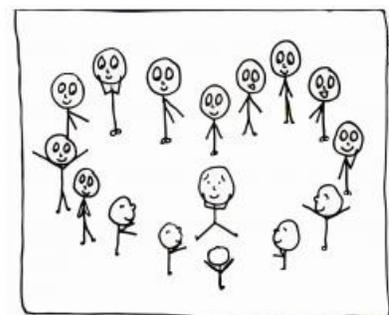
Some children are more introverted and would benefit from encouragement to share openly with parents about their day. Try doing something together to warm up, and then broaching the topic, or sharing a news story from social media or television with an older child versus “lecturing” a child.

4. What Do Parents Need to Know About Safety?

- a. Parents need to know that our children who are deaf/hard of hearing are more vulnerable to maltreatment. Not being aware of this fact can lead to a false sense of security and prevent parents from taking concrete actions that can keep their kids safe.
- b. Strangers vs. People who gain your trust
Individuals who have the most access to time alone (privacy) and control over them pose the greatest risk to your child’s safety. While stranger abductions cause parents great fear, it is the adult who gains your trust and access to time alone with your child who is far more likely to abuse your child. The good news is that there is much that parents can do to protect their child once awareness is raised. You decide who earns a place in your child’s inner circle, or “Circle of Trust”.
- c. Identify potential signs of abuse and neglect. Knowing these signs helps parents to act quickly in safeguarding their own children and those they will meet.

In the Kidpower books *Earliest Teachable Moments: Personal Safety for Babies, Toddlers and Preschoolers* ([Amazon link](#)) and *Doing Right by Our Kids*, criteria for who should be allowed in your “Circle of Trust” are presented. People move from strangers to friends in your circle of trust when they demonstrate:

- Good cleanliness practices – especially with food prep
- Give age-appropriate protection from hazards
- Clear boundaries [established by the parent] about touch, teasing and play between adults and children
- Effective, respectful behavior management
- Seeking specific permission required from parents for any changes in expected routines



Who has earned a place in your family’s Circle of Trust?

- Promote age-appropriate activities for the child
- Give permission for older children to always be able to call the parent if they need help

Parents sometimes feel cornered to accept anyone’s help if they must work and there are other challenging circumstances. It is not easy to find childcare for children who have additional needs. Still, parents truly are in the driver’s seat when it comes to safeguarding their children. Research carefully who has access to your children, ask all of your questions (“Are guns kept in the house? Who else lives here?”) and don’t hesitate to make unexpected visits and keep checking in about expectations. Keep your radar on regarding any changes in personnel, location, policies, activities or behavior that may affect your child’s well-being.

Finally, as your child grows, talk about the Circle of Trust and how you, and later your child, will grant new people entrance as they earn your trust. Not only do kids need to (eventually) speak up for themselves, but parents/other adults need to notice, look out for and safeguard the child until those skills are well-established.

Points to remember

A child who is hurt by maltreatment is always a victim and is *never, ever, ever* at fault. As noted, child maltreatment falls in one or more of four general categories of physical, sexual, emotional maltreatment or neglect but a child often experiences more than one type. While there is no set blueprint to identify abuse, be especially aware of frequent repetition of symptoms or multiple red flags. Rarely does a child experience only one type of abuse.



Certainly, if a child reports maltreatment, believe the child, let them know they are safe, and take steps to understand what happened and how to report for best outcomes. (See What Parents Should Know about Reporting Maltreatment on page 20)

Physical Indicators

- Be especially alert to bruises: unexplained, chronic, or repeated bruising on the face, throat, upper arms, buttocks, thighs, or lower back in unusual patterns or shapes which suggest the use of an instrument (loop, lash, linear, circular or rectangular marks) on an infant and/or bruises in various stages of healing
- Unexplained burns especially circular (could be cigarette) burns and immersion burns.
- Immersion burns characteristically will produce sharp lines of demarcation and appear on the buttocks, genital area, or extremities. On the hands and feet, burns can produce a “glove” or “stocking” effect; on the buttocks, immersion burns often will be “doughnut shaped.”
- Unexplained skeletal injuries: these are bone injuries from physical abuse and often include:
 - Injury to the facial structure, skull, and bones around the joints
 - Fractures and dislocations caused by a severe blow or twisting or pulling of the arm or leg
 - Any skeletal injury in an infant
 - Other unexplained or repeated injuries, abrasions, welts, scars, human bite or pinch marks, missing chipped, or loosened teeth, tearing of the gum tissue, lips, tongue, and skin surrounding the mouth
 - Loss of hair/bald patches, broken eardrum, retinal (back of the eye) bleeding, and abdominal injuries

- Pain/irritation of genitals
- Frequent unexplained sore throat, yeast or urinary infections

Behavioral Indicators

- Behavioral extremes (withdrawal, aggression, regression)
- Inappropriate or excessive fear or shyness
- Reluctance to return to a location (home, school, childcare, etc.)
- Regressive behaviors, such as thumb-sucking, bedwetting, fear of the dark
- Preoccupation with sexual behavior, organs, or those of other children or adults
- Sudden decline in school performance or interest in recreational activity
- Eating disorders, frequent vomiting, or anorexia
- Habit disorders, such as biting, rocking or head banging
- Withdrawal
- Cruel behavior
- Depression and suicide attempts or ideation
- Chronic hunger, tiredness, collecting food, tardiness or absence

For more detail in understanding the signs of abuse: See <https://cps.clermontcountyohio.gov/identifying-abuse/> and <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/whatiscan.pdf>

Parent awareness is the key to increased safety for their kids. If we know better, we can be prepared to do better when it comes to preventing, recognizing and reporting maltreatment.

5. The Role of Parents in Modeling Safety

Parents play a vital role in teaching and modeling safety skills for children. Do we treat each other with love and respect as a model for our kids? Do we tell someone else when we are expected home? Do we get our keys out before venturing out into the parking lot at night? Do we look at our surroundings while walking, not with our eyes only on a device? Do we ask questions of our children’s caregivers and check in regularly with our child? Does a parent say “no!” or take action when someone is being bullied or mistreated? Does a parent express feelings about their day and encourage kids to do the same? If we want kids to develop these skills, parents have to model them first.

We know that children who are d/hh may have missed some important foundational knowledge about critical safety concepts. Kids benefit from direct instruction as the opportunity arises during family and school routines to bring up these topics. Here are some frequently needed concepts for all children who are deaf/hard of hearing: Talk about these often and give visuals whenever possible!

- a. Saying “no” and having it honored, (setting boundaries). Play the “yes, yes, no” game with your toddler – lift the child in the air to get a giggle, or do something asking “yes?” or “more?” until she/he says no and then honor that *no*. Repeat.
- b. Create clear rules about personal boundaries and model following these yourself. See the Kidpower article *Touch and Consent in Healthy Relationships*, including the rules about private areas - <https://www.kidpower.org/library/article/consent/>
- c. As children become more able to understand, practice with them what to do if someone doesn’t respect

their “no” or breaks the safety rules. What should a child do when the unexpected happens? If someone ignores their “no”, what can the child do next?) See <https://www.kidpower.org/library/article/5-levels-of-intrusion-persist-protect-boundaries/> to learn more about how to practice responding when someone doesn't respect boundaries.

- d. Help family and friends understand the safety rules about touch, teasing, and play for fun or affection. See the Kidpower articles *Advocating for Your Child with Adult Family and Friends* - <https://www.kidpower.org/library/article/advocating-with-family-members-for-your-kids/> and the seven ground rules in *Grandparenting: Supporting Strong Family Relationships* at <https://www.kidpower.org/library/article/grandparenting-supporting-strong-family-relationships/>
- e. Allow younger children to connect with people they don't know well at their own pace or with gentle encouragement. Does Aunt Joanne really need a big hug and kiss? Never coerce a child to give physical affection. Teach alternatives that show respect and acknowledge others through a wave, fist bump, high-five, or handshake with well-meaning friends or relatives, instead of being pressured to give or accept a kiss or hug.
- f. Teach specific names of body parts, so that a child can accurately report any questions or problems to parents and health care providers. If a child says “my front bottom”, that is not very specific for relaying symptoms or retelling experiences.
- g. Public vs private: What does public mean? Where are your private body parts? (They are covered by a bathing suit.) Who is allowed to see them (parents and if needed, a health care provider for health reasons.) Is touch ever meant to be a secret? (Of course not; we can tell anyone about touch.) For older children, model and talk about behavior appropriate in public versus private settings. Use books and news stories, too.
- h. Listening to your intuition: the inner voice, the “uh-oh-feeling” that comes over us is important for parents and kids to listen to. Learn to know that “uh-oh” feeling. Listen to your own intuition, share that with your kids, and encourage their inner voice when it prompts them, too. (You saw the electric cord out of the plug and came to tell me to keep your baby sister safe. You listened to your intuition. Good job!”)

Make Safety Plans for every place you go. The Kidpower curriculum has drawings, simple language, social stories, and skills practices for what the safety rules are and how to follow these rules in real life. See *Kidpower Skills Guides*- <https://www.kidpower.org/library/skills-guides/>, *Kidpower Safety Signals* <https://www.kidpower.org/library/kidpower-safety-signals/>, and *Kidpower 30 Skills Challenge*. <https://www.kidpower.org/kidpower-30-skill-challenge-coaching-handbook/>

Be sure your child knows how to:

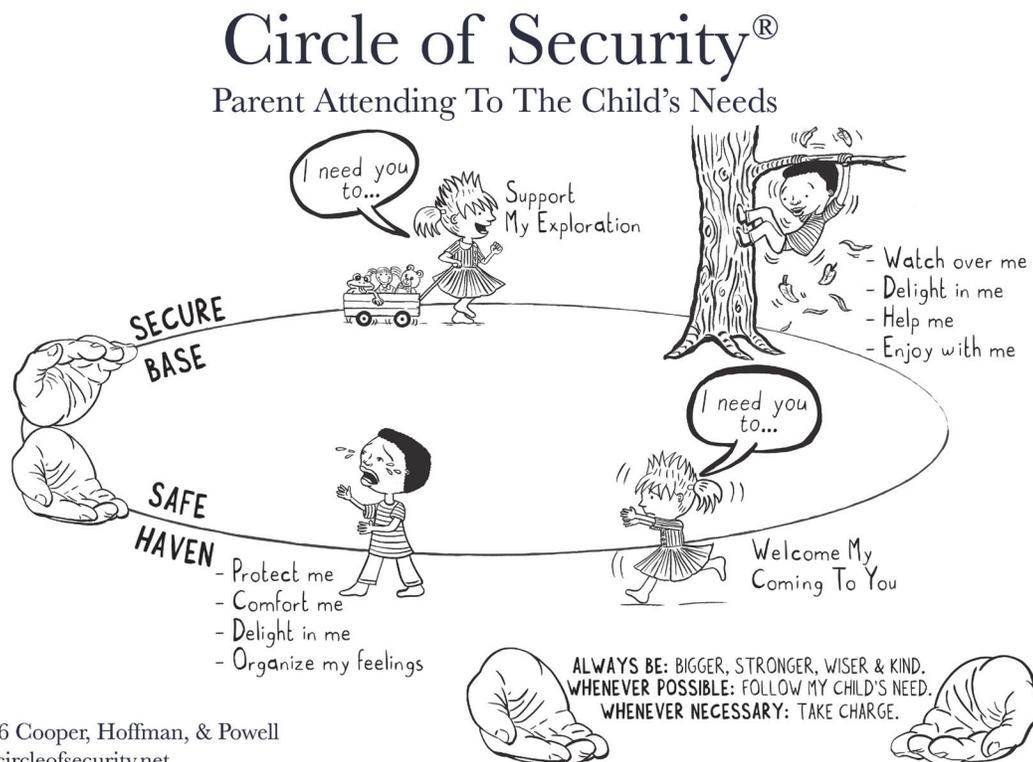
- Check First before you change your plan about where you are going, who is with you, and what you are doing
 - Stay together in public,
 - What to do if you become separated or bothered by another person
 - How to be persistent in getting help from busy, impatient adults
 - How to set boundaries with people you know
 - Instead of labeling a child's behavior as “tattling” or being a “tattle tale”, ask, “Are you telling me this because you need something or because you just want me to know? See: <https://www.kidpower.org/library/article/making-words-like-tattling-obsolete/>
- i. Use many more vocabulary words for feelings beyond mad, sad, and glad. Help children label their feelings (and yours) to learn how to organize those feelings.

- j. Teaching about kind, respectful behavior versus unkind, disrespectful behavior. Not everyone who smiles at us is a “friend.” What can we expect of others? See: *Acting Friendly or Being a True Friend?* <https://www.kidpower.org/library/article/acting-friendly/> for a good discussion. One child believed that any person who could use ASL was a friend, and tolerated what turned into abuse for a long time because of chronic loneliness.
- k. Checking out each situation for safety without scaring a child. We can share with children that most adults are caring people. Strangers are just people we don’t know well. All situations should be considered for safety, whether with people we know or people who are strangers. Ask questions of both your friend who is watching the kids for an evening and the coach who has swimmers for a whole-day tournament. Preparing is strong prevention.
- l. The importance of independent play and giving kids practice with safety rules and safe experiences at home and in the widening world. Role play before giving your child more independence and check in after. (Maybe your child leads the walk to school with you walking further behind as you feel comfortable, for example.) Role plays can be carried out even with infants. “I am sorry you are upset that we have to stop and change your diaper. (Weight shifting to take the baby’s point of view: “It’s okay, mommy. I know it is part of staying clean.” “Thank you for understanding!”)
- m. Secrets vs. surprises: Problems or touch should *never* be a secret. See more on this in Section 5.

6. Keeping My Child Safe at Home, School and in the Community

There are many proactive strategies for keeping our kids safe, no matter what environment they are in. This section gives some ideas for you in thinking about where your kids are moving about in their day.

- The “safest children” are those who develop these skills over time: communicate frequently and well with their parents, teachers or trusted adult if they themselves or a friend has been maltreated;



- are effective self-advocates, i.e., communicate boundaries, persist in reporting as needed;
- understand boundaries in healthy relationships, (or what constitutes “maltreatment”);
- recognize “risky” situations;
- have practiced how to respond when boundaries are not respected: and
- understand their own emerging sexuality as they grow.

For very young children or children who have additional challenges, parents must play a greater role in their child’s safety by intentionally supporting the “Circle of Trust” idea. Parents can bring up the concept often and talk about it as people are added and why.

Parents can give their children a secure base with which to explore and grow while being aware and watchful over their safety. This is also true for older children; the circle just gets wider and they return to home base less often.

What about Intuition?



Sometimes referred to as our “super hidden power” or a “gut feeling”, our intuition guides us and can alert us of potential dangers. The dictionary describes intuition as “*the ability to understand something immediately, without the need for conscious reasoning.*” The human brain has been developing for thousands of years to help us sense when something isn’t quite right. The more we listen to that quiet inner voice, intuition, the stronger it becomes. Teach your kids to listen to their wise inner voice. An effective way to teach this skill is to engage in “think-alouds” where you, as the adult, talk through experiencing intuition. For example, “I’m having an “uh-oh feeling. I think I forgot to turn off the iron. That might be a safety problem. What should we do?” Or, “I am wondering why this person wants to be my friend. Friends want the best for each other, and this person gives me a weird feeling,” and then talk about how age differences, different values, or motivation behind acting friendly might mean this person isn’t a good choice for friendship.

If you or your child have a gut feeling about a possible maltreatment situation, you can call the confidential counselors at 1-800-4-A-Child for help. Childhelp counselors can talk you through what may be red flags, help you know where to report or where to get help. If you are under stress and need to help your kids be safe while you figure out something in your life, this number could be a good choice.

Kids may also call the toll-free number about concerns that they have themselves.

The **Crisis Text Line** is a 24-hour confidential texting helpline. The Crisis Text Line is available throughout the United States, and texters will connect with trained volunteers who have had special training to work with people and kids. If a texter identifies themselves as deaf or hard of hearing, they can connect with volunteers who have had additional training. You may have a hotline specific to your state as well.

The following are some considerations in different environments your child is likely to experience as they move through their world from your home, neighborhood and community.



At home:

- Ensure the whole family, including siblings, are a part of the safety considerations in the home
- Establish “Safety Rules” with your children from a very young age. Help them know how to get your attention quickly when their safety is at risk. (View Bright Spot video “Talking to Children About Maltreatment” on how to have this conversation with your children)
 - **Secrets:** As mentioned, one particular Kidpower safety rule all families should have is “no keeping secrets”. Sometimes an adult or older child will give a treat or special attention and ask that this be kept secret. Children should know that surprises are fine (and fun to keep) but it is not safe to keep secrets, no matter what they are about, such as any kind of problem, touch, presents someone gives you, or favors someone does for you, or friendships.
 - See <https://www.kidpower.org/library/article/5-levels-of-intrusion-persist-protect-boundaries/> to learn more about how to practice responding to the five levels of intrusion children may face, from someone not listening when they say “no” to outright coercion.
 - The Kidpower Consent Checklist is another tool that addresses secrets and can be found at <https://www.kidpower.org/library/article/consent/>. Parents can use the Kidpower Consent Checklist when children are playing any game together. This incorporates the skill in everyday life and makes it a routine rather than an emergency skill.
 - As noted, touch should never be a secret. While having to be touched for health and safety may not be the child’s choice (examining a hurt knee, for example), it is never a secret. No one should ask a child to keep a secret. Surprises, that will be told eventually, are okay to keep private temporarily. See Kidpower Boundary and Consent Posters: <https://www.kidpower.org/library/consent-posters>
 - Unlimited access to the internet at home or in the community can be a safety risk. See more under internet safety about digital citizenship.

In the neighborhood:

- Encourage your kids to listen to their intuition regarding people or places they may encounter.
 - **Stay Aware.** Notice people, animals, cars, bicycles, & buses. Pay attention to sounds, smells, & sights. Be aware of everything going on around you. Kids who are deaf/hard of hearing need additional practice and sometimes equipment to be aware of traffic or sounds (to clarify, think about rear view bicycle mirrors and lots of practice for neighborhood biking and watching for cars, pedestrians, and predicting behavior).
 - As always, have a safety plan and practice it often. Reward kids for following the safety plan.
 - Role-play the plan about how to leave/what to do if they can’t leave and other next steps.
 - Talk about who has earned a place in our “Circle of Trust”.

In the community: (church, childcare, camps, clubs and sports) Assure safety. Don’t just assume your children will be safe in community settings. Know the details for what your child will be participating in: who the participants are; what permissions are needed; what supervision will be available; the training, certification, or expertise of facilitators; travel safety; equipment safety; emergency and communication plans.

- Talk to fellow parents/know your network/build a “Circle of Trust” in your neighborhood and school

Protecting the Gift

This book by Gavin DeBecker is an excellent resource for families on childhood and personal safety. The book can help replace worrying through positive, proactive and practical steps for both you and your child.

- Review the safety plan with your child. What will you do if separated? Take a picture of your child so you have the most recent picture if needed. Does a child need a written address/phone number card to take along in case of an emergency?
- Bus: role-play potential bus situations from bullying to driver issues.
- Are parents able to stop in /join the activity or observe from a window at any time? If this not permitted, that could be a red flag.)

Play Dates:

For how to prepare, see Kidpower article: *Keeping Play Dates Fun and Successful* <https://www.kidpower.org/library/article/keeping-playdates-fun-and-safe/>

- Sleepovers – Sleepovers can be a lot of fun, but consider these safety measures before allowing your child to spend the night at other’s homes: A small group of deaf/hh teens said that their first exposure to pornography (or R-rated movies), their first exposure to experimentation with crime or substances, and certainly differing family values occurred at a sleepover. This may be a rite of passage for all kids, but it is up to you as a parent to decide how to equip your child and when to permit sleepovers and with whom.

Ask questions and set rules with your kids before they go:

- Encourage your child to always check with you first before agreeing to a plan. This saves trouble later.
- Have you met the parents and child who is inviting your child?
- Is the sleepover with a person who is within our “Circle of Trust?”
- Who will be here the night of the sleepover?
- Will any other adults be present?
- Will older children be present?
- Discuss different routines at your house vs. other homes
- Privacy concerns (rules around bathing, dressing, bathroom, nudity, etc.)
- Are there any guns in the house?
- Do the parents smoke or drink? (Ask about any values you might hold.)
- What are the television/computer/smartphone and Internet rules? Are there parental controls set up on the internet?
- Plan to stick with a buddy (to reduce isolation/vulnerability). Teach kids to avoid being alone with an older kid or an adult who is not in our “Circle of Trust”.
- What is the safety plan if a child feels uncomfortable? Practice your plan by doing a role-play. How will the child contact you if a boundary is crossed? Make this clear to the host.

To practice, the child could name an activity that would make them uncomfortable. A child may say “being offered a cigarette.” The parent and child role play the dialogue that is likely to occur in the situation. Some helpful phrases Kidpower recommends include:

- a. “No, thanks.” Repeat as needed.
- b. In response to “if you were my friend you would....” – “I am your friend and no thanks.”

At school

- Practice walking to and from school, transportation, after school activities, playground and recess, after school clubs, sports. Be wary of any secret or special attention including tutoring or other private time offered by adults. This gives another opportunity to practice responding to someone crossing their boundaries. (“No, thanks. I need to talk to my parent(s) about that.” See above for the Kidpower Five Levels of Intrusion article (under “At home”).
- Consider using the safety checklist for IFSP/IEPs for language, social skills, building in safety knowledge and self-advocacy skills as kids grow.
 - See http://www.deafed.net/Forms/03_22_16_Safety_Checklist_Document.pdf
- Safety policies at school:
 - Are established, clear, legal policies, procedures and programs implemented for background checks on all employees and volunteers?
 - What are the school’s policies for prevention and response to bullying and maltreatment? (Ask for a copy.) Get involved with a school committee concerning school climate. <http://www.handsandvoices.org/resources/OUR/2014/questions.html>
 - What are the plans if there is lack of access on a given day (no interpreter, captions, or staff to provide communication access)?
 - Emergency considerations: What are the plans for late school start or early release, fire, evacuation, lockdown, lockout, active shooter drills, etc. if your child’s bus is late, and/or if you can’t pick them up at school? Schools can tend to “pre-warn” any students with disabilities or special needs about safety drills. If this is done, students and staff don’t truly get a chance to practice the drill as other students do. Insist upon real practice. Request that information systems are accessible to your child (which will assist other students or future students.)

7. Internet Safety: Being a Safe “Digital Citizen”

What is “different” about raising kids who are deaf or hard of hearing in the digital world? Technology can truly level the playing field; no one has to repeat themselves; no one corrects your speech or sign. Some of our kids may feel very socially isolated, and that alone can make them vulnerable to anyone who wants to take advantage of them for any reason. As parents, we may celebrate even an online connection, and perhaps be more lenient in our supervision than we would have been otherwise with hearing kids. Language skills may be an issue either in terms of understanding the nuances of others or even choosing appropriate search terms. In these ways, our kids can be at higher risk for safety issues in the “online” world.

How can we teach safety skills so that a child is not vulnerable to the people or concepts encountered online? How can we make it clear that our child understands that the “perfect life” seen on social media is not real? Roleplay and reflecting on our experiences-- ours and our child’s-- are two tried and true ways. Parents of kids who are deaf/hard of hearing try to be mindful of creating natural, fluent and affirming conversation at home so that kids *don’t* prefer to connect in the unrealistic tech world. We know that kids who are immersed in technology communication are missing out on real-life experiences and learning; texting or messaging does not offer real-life give and take, but it does provide reward systems that can sway those developing brains into wanting more and more digital connection in the absence of intimate bonds in real life.

How our kids communicate with others and have access to their world is of utmost importance, including how our kids interact through technology. Technology is a communication tool that helps connect our kids with their friends and family and--brings them into contact with people they don't know, along with the world at large. As with any other tool, we teach our kids how to use it first, and model doing so ourselves with safety in mind. Understanding ways of keeping our kids safe while using technology is as important as teaching them how to use a knife or drive a car. If we do not model and practice how to use it, the tool itself can become a hazard.

Often, it's our kids who are showing us how to use our own devices, but being digitally literate does not always mean being digitally safe. We can show our kids ways of being a good digital citizen. Digital citizenship is defined as *the norms and rules we follow to act appropriately when using technology*.

Here are some considerations to increase your child's safety when using technology:

- Enact safety agreements for independent technology use. Go over these documents and keep them in plain sight when you may need to refer to it and be consistent with consequences if agreements have been broken. Two examples of parent-child contracts: <https://www.kidpower.org/library/article/kidpower-digital-citizenship-safety-agreement/> or <https://www.understood.org/en/family/managing-everyday-challenges/daily-expectations-child/download-cell-phone-contracts-for-kids>
- Keep open communication with your child. Model showing that the people surrounding you more important than devices. Parents have to intentionally connect with kids as peers (and devices) take a larger place in their lives.
- Discuss "digital footprints". While you may delete something on social media or texting, the other person still has it. Nothing truly disappears from the Internet. How do you want to be known in the world? That discussion might help a child or young adult choose with a bigger picture in mind.
- Review this article for keeping our kids safe online *Internet Safety Tips*. <https://www.kidpower.org/library/article/internet-safety/>
- If a child encounters something inappropriate online or through texting, instruct the child to leave the screen open (or minimize it) and share with a parent or trusted adult before exiting.
- Consider parental controls or filters to minimize what might appear on an innocent search. (See resources at the end of this section.)
- Kids will encounter pornography online. Role play looking away from pornography. Commit to supportive communication when inappropriate online content is reported. Younger kids can find material disturbing and scary; reassure and explain as directly as you can.
- Engage experts! When your child approaches you about a new technology (device or game) that you are unfamiliar with, find a young adult familiar with the technology who can talk with you and your child together about the pros and cons and safety issues. By discussing this together with your child and a third party "expert", you make decisions collaboratively based on the same information.
- Consider adding a goal to your child's IEP for using technology appropriately. For example:
 1. Student can identify (e.g., draw, tell, write, or role play) 2-3 age-appropriate individuals (i.e., friends) they interact with, or plan to interact with, using technology regularly.
 2. Student can identify 3-5 age-appropriate frequent activities with friends or others using technology.
 3. Student knows what action to take if activities become unsafe. (Tell a trusted adult, save the screen, etc.)

Additional Considerations Recommended by Experts:

- Technology (cell phone and computer) use permitted in public areas of your home. (Avoid use in private areas such as bathrooms or bedrooms).
- Set up a charging station in a central location in your home. (No phone charging in their bedrooms to reduce access and to reduce the effects of blue UV light found to interrupt sleep.)
- Research has shown that unlimited access to technology may be too much for some children and their developing brain and the brain's immature reward center and judgment abilities. Unlimited access has also been linked to depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, including in adults. Why increase a child's risk, or yours? See this article about developing a healthy perspective on technology use: <https://www.handsfreemama.com/2017/12/15/tether-yourself-the-enlightening-talk-parents-arent-having-can-keep-teens-from-a-damaging-drift/>
- Model for your child, "when we know better, we do better" if you are changing rules in your home (or classroom). When we learn something new, we can work to change our behavior.
- Be persistent about monitoring their cell phone and computer use.
- Become aware and understand the hazards some specific apps pose to our kids' safety and privacy, including videogame messaging.

Additional Resources:

10 Actions to Prevent and Stop Cyberbullying - <https://www.kidpower.org/library/article/prevent-cyberbullying/>

Enable internet safety by kidproofing your internet.

<https://www.pcworld.com/article/2042233/how-to-child-proof-the-internet.html>

Age-appropriate and captioned videos and activities, tip sheets, lesson plans and more to help teach children to be safer online. Also includes a Cyber tip line to report online exploitation.

www.netsmartz.org

<https://www.vpnmentor.com/blog/the-ultimate-parent-guide-for-child-internet/> A guide to cell phone use, streaming and television, gaming, social media, privacy, predators, and links to more information for parents.

Glow Kids: How Screen Addiction Is Hijacking Our Kids-and How to Break the Trance, by Nicholas Kardaras

Hands Free Life: 9 Habits for Overcoming Distraction, Living Better and Loving More, by Rachel Macy Stafford

8. About Bullying:

Bullying is one of the most discussed topics among parents. You may be concerned about whether your child has been bullied in the past or will be in the future. Bullying of students who have any additional special need happens at a higher rate, and communication issues factor in highest. Some kids need a reminder about what bullying actually means. Bullying is when someone repeatedly hurts, mocks, shuns, badmouths, or threatens another person on purpose. Keeping up with the fast-paced social interactions of peers and trying to determine intent can be challenging for our deaf/hard of hearing children. Sometimes

our children perceive “bullying” when another child has said one thing without tact or caring; this is not the same thing as bullying. (But do celebrate that the child reported and let you know their concerns.)

Here is a list of helpful strategies for bullying prevention (knowledge to keep your child safe from bullying) and intervention (if a child is bullied).

Prevention

1. Recognize that bullying happens to kids who are deaf or hard of hearing in higher incidences than to typical kids, and that incidence is high, too. *A 2013 study found that students who are deaf/hard of hearing experienced bullying at rates 2-3 times higher than those reported by hearing students. These students reported that school personnel intervened less often.*
2. Be alert that bullying might be happening to your kid
3. Help create a communication-friendly environment in your child’s school
4. Teach your child to be a self-advocate as they grow; responding quickly often stops bullying in its tracks.
5. Teach your child to recognize bullying of other kids, respond and report to caring adults. An “upstander” (as opposed to a “bystander) can question the bully’s behavior, use humor to redirect the situation, get help from others, including other bystanders and nearby adults, and/or walk with the person being bullied or reach out private to let them know they are not alone and are cared about. It makes a difference. Bullying stops within 10 seconds more than 57% of the time that bystanders intervene.
6. Beware of cyberbullying online, text or other digital means. Give your child digital safety information, limit access, and check in regularly with them, asking kids to report anything they receive that is troubling. Be specific in your teaching about what that might be. *Bullying comes in many forms. It can happen in person, in writing, online, on cell phones, in school, on the bus, at home--anywhere. Wherever it happens, it’s NOT acceptable.*
(From Cartoon Network/Hands & Voices: What To Do If Your Child is Bullied, <https://www.handsandvoices.org/resources/OUR/assets/CNetworkBullying.pdf>

Intervention

1. Be supportive if you discover that your child is being bullied; don’t wait.
2. Gather information, find out everything you can about the incident(s).
3. Communicate your concerns calmly with the school. Positive communication is usually the key to getting results.
4. Be persistent. Bullying is not to be tolerated after it has been discovered and reported.
5. Utilize your child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP). Once a school knows there is an issue, they have an obligation to take action.

Final Word: There is no quick fix to the problem of bullying. It is a serious situation that requires the ongoing involvement of family, school staff, and community members.

Once you have come to a resolution, share your experiences with the special needs community. We’re all in this together and the more information that is available, the easier it is for everyone.

Related links for bullying prevention and responding to bullying:

- **Stop Bullying: Speak Up:** A website produced by the Cartoon Network, that educates kids about the problem of bullying and encourages them to spread the word about bullying awareness and prevention. www.cartoonnetwork.com/promos/stopbullying/index.html
- **What Should You Do if Your Deaf or Hard of Hearing Child is Bullied?** From Hands & Voices and Bridge Multimedia: <https://www.handsandvoices.org/resources/OUR/assets/CNetworkBullying.pdf>
- **National Bullying Prevention Center:** A website created by PACER, a parent training and information center for families of children with disabilities, to address bullying through educational, creative, and interactive resources. www.pacer.org/bullying/
- **StopBullying.gov:** A website that provides information from various government agencies about how students, parents, educators, and community members can prevent or stop bullying. <https://www.stopbullying.gov/>
- **Kidpower's Bullying Solutions** page <https://www.kidpower.org/bullying/> and book: <https://www.amazon.com/Bullying-Adults-People-Kidpower-Solutions/dp/0979619165>
- **Kidpower** article on *Bullying Questions and Answers*: <https://www.kidpower.org/library/article/bullying-questions-answers/>
- **TeachSafeSchools.org:** Bullying prevention and interventions: http://www.teachsafeschools.org/bully_menu5-2.html#5d1
- *What to Do If A Child Reports Possible Abuse, Bullying, Harassment, or Anything Else That Bothers Them* provides 7 practical steps that adults can take to support them. <https://www.kidpower.org/library/article/what-if-a-child-comes-to-you-for-help/>
- **Bullying and the Child with Special Needs:** A website that offers a comprehensive report and online resources regarding bullying and children with disabilities. <http://www.abilitypath.org/areas-ofdevelopment/learning--schools/bullying/>

9. Independence: Beginning to Spread their Wings

We strive for our children to gain more independence and earn more responsibility. Every day, we are showing our kids how to access their world more independently. We see our child's independence increase slowly and then take a leap in adolescence, such as when our 14-year-old is escorted into their doctor's appointment without us, or beginning to volunteer or getting that first part-time job, learning to drive, dealing with the police/fire safety, relationships and dating, school field trips and overnight trips. We often aren't ready for the rush of independence (cue sound effect of a record scratching).

Preparing our kids for independence can help both parent and child feel much more confident before these milestones arrive, knowing we've done our utmost to prepare them well. Giving our kids small opportunities while keeping a somewhat watchful eye is a way to ease the reins. Perhaps using the *Kidpower Safety Comics* before trying on a new responsibility/level of independence can be a fun and easy way to discuss and most importantly--practice--safety skills.

Here are the five Kidpower steps to prepare our kids for greater independence.

Step 1: Make Realistic Assessments: Is your child ready for this step?

Step 2: As a Family, Learn and Practice ‘People Safety’ Skills Together

Do we discuss setting boundaries with others, saying “no”, making a plan for emergencies like getting separated, how to communicate in emergencies, talking through safety plans before and after events?

Step 3: Co-pilot to Field-test Skills in the Real World: Using the “I do, we do, you do” teaching approach, how can a parent give a child experience with safety in the real world?

Step 4: Conduct Trial Runs with Adult Backup to Develop Independence: Short time periods alone in the house with back up of a parent working in the yard could be a good choice!

Step 5: Keep the Lines of Communication Open: Be a safe and welcoming parent; keep checking in with your child.

For more description of each of these five steps, see: <https://www.kidpower.org/library/article/preparing-independence/>

Consider adding an IEP goal or 504 support that will strengthen a skill required for a particular job you child desires in the future or for independent living skills the child will need as a young adult. The focus of special education itself is preparing our students for further education, employment and independent living, so goals can address any of these areas

For example:

- Child will, following interview with parents for medical history prior to next medical, dental, audiology or other appointments, complete history with minimal prompts.
- Child will rehearse questions to bring up to medical staff, using a written list if needed.
- Child will role play potential adverse scenarios occurring during school event (dance, game, overnight trip) and plan for safety with minimal prompts. (losing ID, wallet, unwelcome advance, request or bullying by another student, etc.)

Self-Advocacy: Parents can underestimate how difficult it is for kids to “speak up” to adults on behalf of their own needs, whether they are strangers or people kids know. We want to be on the lookout as parents for areas our child might be struggling in, and also welcome them coming to us with any requests for support or help.

Encouraging and rewarding smaller steps of self-advocacy as our child grows can encourage more self-advocacy in the future. For example, a fourth grader who can say “Dad, I don’t like to go to movies without captions. Can we go to the open caption show or wait until it comes out on video?” seems less likely to be involved in a relationship where someone can take advantage or hurt that child. Support self-advocacy even if it looks like defiance or misbehavior at first; our kids are learning a lifelong lesson in how to best advocate for themselves.

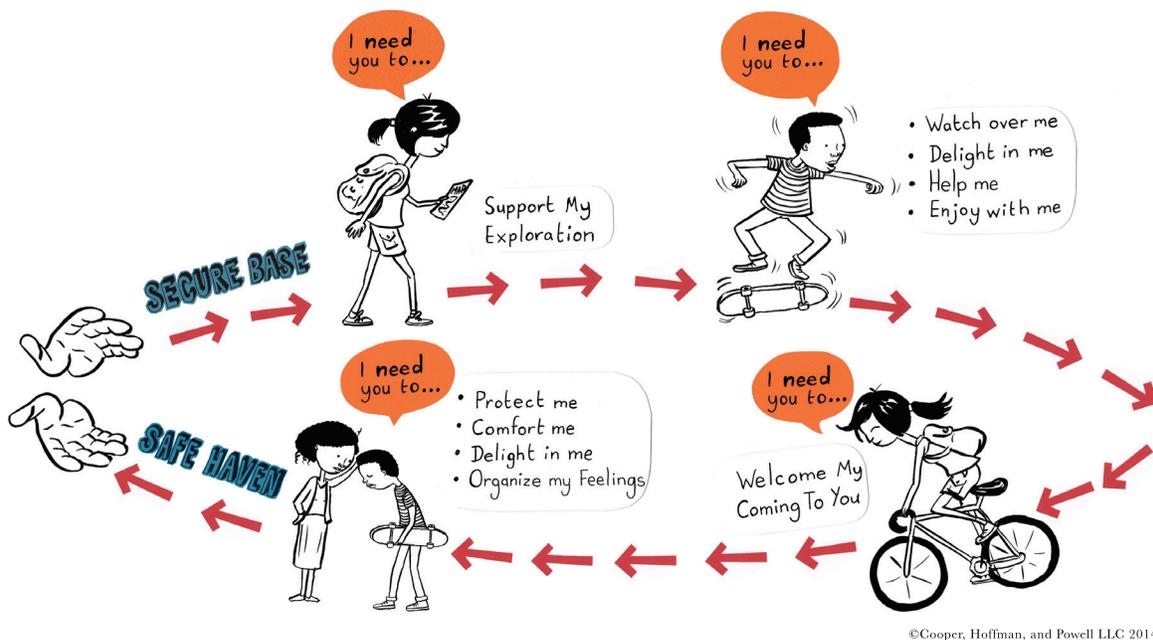
If your child comes to you with a story requiring self-advocacy, look at it as a parenting victory that the child came to you. Believe them. Then...

- **Get to a place of calmness.** As a parent, modeling emotional steadiness in the face of upset will calm the child. Don’t let your own fear or anger overwhelm your child. Children also often misinterpret the feelings of those around them, so clearly communicate that your child is loved and it is not their fault.
- **Thoughtfully reason through courses of action.** Seek help from more experienced parents, Deaf/hh adults and/or professionals. The issue may involve more complexity (or even maltreatment) than you may realize at first.

- **Action Steps:** If your child is younger, it may be important to just let the child know you will look out for their needs and handle the issue. If a child is older, you will want to work through the issue together. If the issue is school-related, ask your child who they have a good relationship with in the building. Approach that person. Consider the IDEA Special Considerations (or Communication Plan if your state has this). Advocate regarding the importance of full access, direct communication with peers and adults and your child's full range of needs.



Parent Attending to the Teen's Needs



10. Emerging Sexuality:

Most adults today did not learn directly from their own parents about sexuality. However, our children who are deaf or hard of hearing benefit from direct instruction on this topic from their parents or other trusted adults. What are the top things that kids want to learn from parents about sexuality? Teens want to learn about their parents' values and how they arrived at them, and to receive support for their own emerging self. They don't need an expert – they need you!

What are some of the issues as a child is developing their sexual self?

- **Understanding one's changing body and feelings:** As children grow older, the adults around them and their own feelings begin to change around the principles of privacy, needing alone time, wanting to differentiate from parents and family, and figuring out their changing body. Parents who can maintain a safe environment where kids have consistent loving support and can keep their own emotions in check is vital. Helping teens (and younger kids) identify their feelings and problem-solve decisions actually helps their brains develop well. Kids who are deaf/hard of hearing can also struggle

with loneliness, putting them at more risk for maltreatment and addiction through a hunger for human connection from anyone, safe or not.

- **The developing adolescent brain has difficulty making decisions and taking the perspective of others.** The emotional brain lights up more than the frontal lobe when making decisions. They also have a tendency to see anger when a parent or friend is actually surprised, shocked or afraid. While the reward center is working great in adolescence, impulse control is not. Thus, our teens are at more risk for addiction and risky behavior for the rewarding feeling those activities bring in the short-term.

I will put the safety and well-being of myself and others ahead of ANYONE's embarrassment, inconvenience or offense - including my own.

Kidpower Put Safety First Commitment Pledge

- Clear, loving consistent boundaries, with praise and affection, and a parent who stays engaged, who encourages positive behavior and thinking skills, allows teens to grow in independence, and knowing an adult believes in them helps all children. Sleep is also really important for teens!
- **Understanding boundaries in healthy relationships:** Joining in a healthy relationship is an important part of growing up. Talk to your child about what is healthy in relationships: equality, respect for another's opinion or wishes, hoping for the best for each other, and caring for each other. Use books and movies to illustrate what is healthy and unhealthy about relationships. Kids with hearing differences can be concrete: thinking that if someone smiles at them, they want to be friends or be closer.

- **Consent** is an important topic to discuss with all kids to increase their safety. Consent – and especially sexual consent, should be freely given among equals, can be taken back at any time, is fully informed, enthusiastic and specific. This graphic (See “Consent”) shared with permission from Planned Parenthood makes the principle of consent simple to understand. Other favorite metaphors for consent are “do you feel like pizza” or “would you like some tea?” Sometimes you do, sometimes you don't. One should never make someone else eat pizza or include ingredients they don't want, even if they liked it yesterday.

CONSENT



Freely Given
Reversible
Informed
Enthusiastic
Specific

Planned Parenthood

There is far more information in these simple metaphors that could be shared more explicitly with children who are deaf/hh to illustrate the concept of consent. (see these helpful YouTube videos: [Would you like a cup of tea: https://youtu.be/pZwvrxVavnQ](https://youtu.be/pZwvrxVavnQ) or [Sex Needs a New Metaphor \(https://youtu.be/xF-CX9mAHPo\)](https://youtu.be/xF-CX9mAHPo) (Do you want pizza?) videos.)

- See this article from Kidpower on role plays to stop unwanted sexual attention and behavior, insisting on sexual protection and being persistent in getting help. <https://www.kidpower.org/library/article/yes-means-yes-consent-and-protecting-sexual-safety/>
- **Developing identity separate from parents and family** is the developmental task of adolescence, including one's identity as a person of a specific gender.
- **Risky behaviors:** “Sexting”, (or sending drugs and alcohol, and how they can increase vulnerability.

The Kidpower Protection Promise is worth repeating here, as it also emphasizes personal responsibility for safety for “myself and others” in a growing young adult:

Here are some resources parents can investigate to help with this topic. Sexuality and boundary setting should never be a one-time-only discussion.

Resources:

- <https://parentsaretalking.com/> and <https://parentsaretalking.com/reproductive-health/>
- <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-new-york-city/campaigns/lets-talk-about-sext>
- <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-virginia-league/education-and-training/for-parents>
- Personal safety, relationships, and sexuality issues related to school age groups: <https://www.planned-parenthood.org/learn/parents/personal-safety>
- Kidpower has some amazing role plays for boundaries to stop sexual attention and behavior, boundaries to insist on sexual protection, and being persistent in getting help. <https://www.kidpower.org/library/article/yes-means-yes-consent-and-protecting-sexual-safety/>
- A mom's wise and uplifting response to another mom about how to explain an adolescent's changing brain and attitudes to the teen: https://www.upworthy.com/this-mother-s-description-of-her-tween-son-s-brain-is-a-must-read-for-all-parents?xrs=RebelMouse_fb&ts=1560027922&fbclid=IwAR1YB-vWTZe1521o8OZR-8sxKjaMTx_mGVCgfkdRiDeFh9wFTOhGkHJiGIco
- This article shares a helpful understanding of the developing teenage brain: <https://time.com/4929170/inside-teen-teenage-brain/>
- Communication and the Teenage Brain, Martyn Richards, TEDxNorwichED <https://youtu.be/BbruY11oQl8> Helpful ideas in a TED talk format about how to communicate effectively during the massive brain growth of adolescence.

11. What Parents Should Know about Reporting Maltreatment:

When we have suspicions about maltreatment, our job is to report our suspicions as soon as possible. We might feel that we could keep an eye on the family ourselves or that someone else should report, or even that reporting may make a situation worse, but it is the responsibility of Child Protective Services and/or the police to investigate and take action.

- Helping a child to report: When a child discloses something, it's important to listen, to believe them, to let them know that a trusted adult will help them, and that it is never, ever their fault. Ask open-ended questions like "are you afraid now?" Avoid direct questions about a perpetrator, as in, "Did xxx hit you?" Ask enough to know whether and how to proceed.
- Call 1-800-4-A-Child (Childhelp) to help determine if a child you know is at risk.
- Call Childhelp if you have concerns about your own stress level. The counselors are confidential, free, and experienced with reporting steps and requirements, and can let you know who to call and how best to share your concerns.
- When reporting, stress the importance of having communication access for the child and parents during the interview process. Do not assume that investigators know anything about deafness or communication skills. Children who have lower language levels may benefit from a Certified Deaf Interpreter as well as an American Sign Language Interpreter.

- See the Child Welfare Information Gateway for all state abuse and neglect reporting numbers; you can also get this from the Childhelp counselor. https://www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/?CWIGFunctionsaction=rols:main.dspList&rolType=custom&rs_id=5

12. Supporting other parents: A Guide's Guide to the O.U.R. Project

You may be an experienced parent, Deaf/hh adult or professional in the field in your community or are involved within an established Hands & Voices Chapter as an official Parent Guide, ASTra (Advocacy Support and Training Program) Advocate, or Board Member. At some point, you may find yourself in a position to support another parent through a safety question or issue with their own child. More likely, you will have an opportunity to raise awareness about safety issues with fellow parents.

All Hands & Voices Chapters are asked to join the community of learners through the O.U.R. Project. A monthly teleconference call is available, led by Hands & Voices staff and with occasional guest speakers on a variety of safety topics from reporting to resilience to responding to maltreatment or bullying.

Fellow parents also raising a child who is d/hh have a unique window into the challenges faced by other families. Shared below are more details on two important areas of focus for those working with other parents: There are six protective factors outlined by the Child Information Gateway. Parents can use these as a springboard to think about how to support these factors in a community of parents in an intentional way. The Child Welfare Information Gateway's mission is to connect child welfare and related professionals to help protect children and strengthen families at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/> Secondly, parents supporting other parents should know about the Silence is Not an Option documents.

A. The Six Protective Factors:

- ***Understanding Nurturing and Attachment:*** Parents are a child's first teachers through the language of touch, affection and shared attention. How can we help parents bond with their children? Often coming alongside another parent of a child who is newly identified with the sense that "it's all going to be okay – you can learn about hearing loss and you can be a good parent to your child" is critical. How can we help them recognize and respond to a child's unique communication and needs? Is the parent finding joy in parenting (despite any concerns about hearing or other conditions that may be present)? Fellow parents can be a huge resource in helping a new parent find their way in developing a positive attachment to their own child.

Guides can also consider the questions from http://www.deafed.net/Forms/03_22_16_Safety_Checklist_Document.pdf when working with families. These make good goal-setting areas if families need support for any of these topics. For Guide By Your Side Coordinators, also reference the Guide By Your Side training materials.

- ***Knowledge of child development (what's typical for any child, and what's typical for a deaf/hh child)***, Some knowledge of parenting and expected child development is needed to develop a picture of what a child can learn and what areas might need more support at each stage, particularly in language development. As mentioned, resources for this include the child's early intervention or later educational team, and these online resources: https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/prevention_ch2_2018.pdf. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html> (Typical development from 2 months to 5 years)

<https://www.handsandvoices.org/fl3/topics/lang-lit-soc-development/social-dev-resources.html> (More specific development for children who are deaf/hh)

- **Parental Resilience:** ideas for coping with the stresses of daily life with children, celebrating the victories, developing self-care practices, concrete strategies for calming themselves and their children, and connecting with other parents for support. Respite possibilities, and knowing when to connect with professional support are good resources to develop for supporting parents. Check with primary care providers about general screening questions for new moms around post-partum depression or anxiety. For example, one might ask how is the parent “bouncing back” from particularly difficult days? How can we help support a parent in enlarging their toolkit for self-care and actions that could promote greater resilience?
- **Social Connections for parents:** Where is my circle of support? Does the parent have connections to other parents, to professionals and to deaf/hh adult mentors? Is there an immediate need for a short-term support system? Help parents reduce the feeling of isolation by introducing them to each other and to non-deafness related parent supports.
- **Concrete Supports for Families:** What to do when you can’t buy the earmolds and pay rent at the same time. Help your community create ideas and connections for concrete supports, including respite. “Strong families ask for help when they need it,” is a favorite quote from Childwefare.org. We also have paid taxes to support the very programs that we might need ourselves at some point.
- **Social and emotional competence of children:** As children learn to tell parents what they need and how actions make them feel, parents and teachers are more positive in their interactions with children. Encourage parents to understand their children as unique human beings – focus on giving them vocabulary and opportunity to express how they feel despite the need to follow a rule or a parent’s direction.

B. Silence is Not an Option:

These educational documents named “Silence is Not an Option” are a resource for parent guides, parents and educational teams. A child’s educational team can be brought in to increase safety supports for a given child. Safety statements can be included in the IFSP, IEP or even 504 Plan to address strengthening protective factors or lessening the risk factors mentioned at the beginning of this booklet. A team may feel more comfortable including goals as communication, self-advocacy or language areas; and that’s okay, too!

For example, an IFSP team may determine with the parent that there is a need to expand knowledge of the protective factors listed above to increase a child’s safety.

To consider further areas that might benefit from goal setting: think about these questions.

- Can parents demonstrate the concrete actions that will protect a very young child, such as asking for background checks for agency and childcare personnel, taking the time to really know a child’s caregivers as well as making impromptu visits while a child is in someone else’s care, and the importance of remaining alert and aware for changes in a child’s behavior?
- What do parents know about the concept of “grooming”, or the idea that that potential perpetrators work to gain the trust of a child and family over months and years of time?
- Do parents understand how a child’s hearing loss may contribute to maltreatment without targeted support for the family to learn about nurturing, modeling the ability to set boundaries with others from a young age, (whether known or unknown to the child), early self-advocacy skills, and proactive communication skills?

Sample goals:

- A child will give clear nonverbal, signed or spoken “no” to uncomfortable interaction through role play and real-life activities followed by appropriate parent response to that “no.” including an explanation

when interaction is necessary for health or safety of the child. (e.g., medical visits, hygiene.)

- Parents will understand questions to ask of potential caregivers and how to monitor for safety.
- Parents can describe physical and emotional signs of suspected abuse or neglect in a very young child.
- Parents will connect with child daily about worries and victories.
- Parents will actively seek out child's friends, teachers, coaches and caregivers to get to know them.
- My child will recognize risky situations.
- My child will recognize appropriate boundaries (recognizing and then setting boundaries)).
- My child will recognize the differences between acting friendly and being friendly.
- My child will know when it right to say "no" and what to do next.

A 504 Plan could also accommodate safety teaching, though generally not individual goals. Such individual goals come under individual educational plans and specialized instruction.

What social-emotional skills does your child need more time and focus to master? Bring your concerns to your educational team and challenge them to help you write a goal for this specialized instruction.

For more examples of goals and resources for these educational teams, see

- https://handsandvoices.org/resources/OUR/SafetyAttachmentIntro_v1.pdf:
- http://www.deafed.net/Forms/03_22_16_Safety_Checklist_Document.pdf
- For discussion of IEP, IFSP and 504 Safety statements, see https://www.handsandvoices.org/resources/OUR/SafetyAttachmentIntro_v1.pdf
- See the Hands & Voices Parent-to-Parent Support Activities Guide at the secure website for staff at <http://www.handsandvoices.org/gbys/secure/miscdocs/P2Psupportactivities-2019.pdf>

13. Chapters and Guide By Your Side Programs: Modeling Organizational Safety

For parents acting as supports for other parents, this Parent Safety Toolkit is a beginning resource. As members of a formal parent support organization, we also must model organizational safety, following such principles as these below.

1. At community events, requiring full visibility of childcare, welcoming parents into the room at any time, and never being alone with a child.
2. Consider asking for background checks for volunteers and staff (though we would never recommend being with a child without another adult present).
3. Ensuring the safety of parents and children at any community events. Instruction of childcare activity personnel is critical.
4. Regularly bringing up the topic of child safety in our work with parents one-on-one and at our events and workshops. Hands & Voices "Bright Spots", or parents and professionals who have experience presenting on safety issues, can be brought in to share.
5. Encouraging parents to ask schools, churches, camps, coaches and others serving families about their safety policies and practices.
6. Realizing that when we bring up this topic at any parent event, there may be parents who have

experienced maltreatment themselves and disclose this. It is important to acknowledge this at the beginning of any presentation as a parent leader due to the high incidence of maltreatment. Recognize that disclosure is difficult for anyone, and acknowledge that bravery as an important part of the discussion and raising awareness for all in the room. It is okay to return to the topic after a brief acknowledgment in public and reach out to that person following the meeting. Often, no further support is needed and the person just wants to share their story, in itself part of the healing process. See more on sharing the O.U.R. Project through your Guide By Your Side Coordinator or HQ staff. An exhibit table and the O.U.R. Project Story Quilts are also available on loan.

7. Always, always, look for safety issues for our kids. We can't assume any situation is safe. Emotional and physical safety and nurturing must always come first.

14. Returning to Joy

When our children were identified as deaf/hard of hearing, we joined a community. Now as a member of that community, we hope that you will use this Toolkit to help protect your own child and the other children you will meet. While the incidence of maltreatment for “our kids” is higher, we know this targeted approach to reducing their risk factors and taking practical actions to improve their safety, and increasing awareness among our communities will raise the bar for all kids, their schools, sports teams and clubs. Asking a well-placed question about “how will my child’s safety be assured?” can change a policy or habit that helps *all* kids. We may have even experienced abuse as children ourselves, but we don’t have to let the cycle, or the shame, or the powerlessness continue. Whenever we give a presentation on safety, we inevitably have a comment from someone in the audience who experienced maltreatment as a child and are glad to know we are sharing this with today’s parents.

The good news is that it is never too late to start healing or to focus on prevention moving forward with our own kids. We can be the parents our kids need; we can take courage from each other to teach them personal safety skills. After all, don’t we want a WASK? (a well-adjusted, successful kid) however you define success. Keeping kids safe as they grow is the best way to get there.

What if every deaf or hard of hearing child had access to this information and support? While this can be a difficult topic to broach with families, we find it is the most important one to discuss. While this has been a difficult subject, we always want to return to joy; the joy we feel in raising these remarkable young people outshines anything else. The vision of each child reaching their potential through nurturing and attachment always returns us to a place of joy. Please let us know how this work is going for you, your Chapter, or your community.

Brief Index:

Common Risk Factors

Checking in with your child regularly

Circle of Trust

IFSP, IEP and 504 Safety Statements and Goals

Increase these Protective Factors for your child

What parents should know about reporting

Bullying

Cybersafety: Digital Citizenship

Sexuality

Modeling Community Safety

A Parent Guide's Resources: the Guide's Guide and more

Modeling Organizational Safety

Resources:

Resources are included in each section. The following are general resources.

Childhelp: childhelp.org, the National Child Abuse Hotline (10800-\$-A-Child) (1-800-422-4453), prevention, intervention and treatment programs.

Child Welfare Information Gateway: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/>, a resource on protecting children, maltreatment incidence and responses, tools and resources, state legislation and activities.

Council for Exceptional Children (www.cec.sped.org) Policy on the Prevention of and Response to Maltreatment: <https://www.cec.sped.org/~media/Files/Policy/CEC%20Professional%20Policies%20and%20Positions/FINAL%20Policy%20on%20Maltreatment%2020180925.pdf>

Hands & Voices: To Request an O.U.R. exhibit table display loan, connecting with resources, past articles and presentations, speaker requests, and joining the community of learners: Email Parentadvocate@handsandvoices.org or see <https://www.handsandvoices.org/resources/OUR/index.htm>

The O.U.R. Children Safety Project A brief YouTube video explanation of the O.U.R. Children's Safety Project: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tIT44UhQ9Bo&feature=youtu.be>

Kidpower Teenpower Fullpower International: www.kidpower.org, Training, education, library of resources and publications such as *Doing Right by Our Kids*, and the *Kidpower Book for Caring Adults*, the *Kidpower Safety Comics*, in the U.S.A. and international locations. Kidpower prepares people of all ages, abilities, and walks of life with training, resources, and skills to prevent and stop bullying, abuse, kidnapping, prejudice, and sexual assault and to develop safe and strong relationships that enrich their lives.