

MY CHILD IS DISABLED – WHAT SHOULD I BE THINKING ABOUT TO KEEP THEM SAFE?

You might think that the world is scary and people are reacting badly to your child, or don't understand them. You might be worried that they already stand out.

When you have a child who communicates, moves, thinks or listens differently from others in the world around them, there are some specific things you can do to keep them safe.

Listen.

You know your child best. Trust your own gut if something is off!

This tip sheet was created for Hohou te Rongo Kahukura by Sehar Moughal, Registered Psychologist, Behaviour Analyst (BCBA).

There are two important things for every child to be able to tell you

I need help !

I need a break !

There are lots of ways to teach your child how to tell you these things

- You can ask them directly when they appear to want something – do you need help or do you need a break?
- You could make flash cards for them to point to.
- If they are getting upset or frustrated, you can slow everything right down until they can tell you the answer.

And once they tell you, you MUST follow up.

It's important because if they can trust that you will help them when they ask, and you will give them a break if they need it, they will trust that they can tell you the important things.

What about caregivers and teachers?

Remember that you know your child best, and you are in charge of how your child is treated and cared for. Here are some of the things you can do to help ensure that the caregivers your child uses are safe

1 Make sure you spell out the rules in your home for caregivers and have these conversations in front of your child. These are not the same in all homes and so you need to be explicit. The kinds of rules you might want to consider include:

- Not being alone with my child
- No closed doors in the house / no locked doors
- Two people present for showers
- Always knock before entering rooms
- Always ask consent before touching, for any reason

2 Make sure your child knows the rules about touching as well. These might include:

- Deciding what kind of hugs are okay
- Only getting hugs from Mum and Dad
- Rules about how the child can be helped with dressing / undressing



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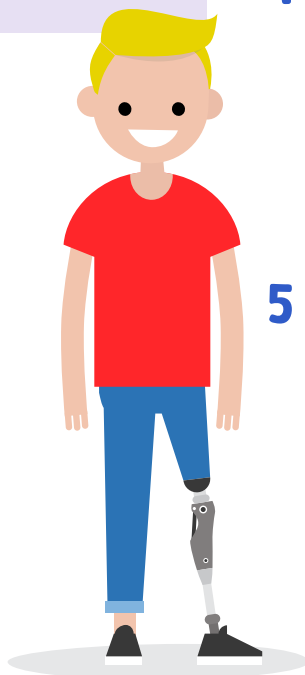
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What about sex, sexuality and gender?

Working out who you are is a normal part of human development. Your child is likely to still develop an interest in sex, in their own sexuality and in their own gender. It is important that you become comfortable with talking about this because otherwise it can become an area of vulnerability.

You will find some of the suggestions in Kōrero mai | Talk to me useful

And some extra things might fit:

- 1 Ensure they feel comfortable in their own self-expression and what they choose to wear
- 2 Be open that people have many different kinds of relationships and they will as well, as they get older.

“Good relationships are the ones that make you feel good and you can tell everyone about. Dangerous relationships are ones where you have to keep secrets.”

- 3 Talk explicitly about self touch and that it should be done alone. Talking about this can be as early as 3-4 years old.

“You should not touch your penis or vagina when people are around or in places where other people come and go. You can do it in your bedroom with the door shut”

- 4 Teach your child to set rules for their own body. This means:
 - Asking before touching them

“Can I touch your shoulder?”

- Making sure they can make choices about what they wear

“What feels the most comfortable?”

- Making sure they can make choices about where they go

- 5 Be explicit about times when your child can't consent, or has to have a procedure they don't want. Point out how it is different from sexual safety.

“Nobody is allowed to touch you in ways that make you feel yucky or uncomfortable. You are always allowed to say no when someone is making you feel uncomfortable with how they touch you. That is different from going to the doctor with me. I will be there.”

