



Feeling safe

March 2020

A parent and carer guide to helping children feel safe

How a child experiences the world – their safety, self - perception and understanding is reliant upon those that care for them and guide them through their experiences.

Parents and caregivers have the wonderful opportunity to help their child(ren) understand and unpack these experiences, learn from them and develop strong resilience strategies and healthy positive characteristics.

Helping our children to feel safe and recognise when they are not feeling safe and how to help themselves feel safe again, is the most empowering strategy a parent can nurture and develop in their child.

Children who feel safe are less likely to experience anxiety, distress and display concerning behaviours. Children who feel safe are more likely to overcome trauma, loss and difficult experiences.

**We all have the right to feel safe
Our children require us to help them feel safe**

Feeling safe can appear to be difficult when people are scared and unsure of what to expect and what may or may not happen next, as in the case of COVID-19.

As parents we may not feel sure how to respond to the current COVID-19 crisis, it is an unfamiliar and rapidly changing landscape and as a result we may feel that we don't have the answers for our children. We ourselves can feel unsafe with the fear and uncertainty a pandemic can bring into our lives.

A combination of Stressors including the wellbeing of our children, families and friends, employment insecurity, actual and perceived financial hardships, combined with the other issues we may be facing can negatively influence our thought patterns and our response. When this happens, it can be difficult to determine our responsibilities for ourselves and to others.

We are responsible for our own right to feel safe; feeling safe is internal and as adults when we recognize we're not feeling safe we need to take steps to help ourselves. This means that it is ok for us to seek help, talk to our safety team, ask questions and get accurate information. Once we have helped ourselves to feel safe, it is much easier to help others feel safe.

We are responsible for our actions, behaviours, attitudes and our values.

We are responsible to other rights to feel safe, especially our children's right to feel safe; we are responsible to provide our children ways in which they can feel safe all the time.



Feeling safe is different to being safe

We can assist children to FEEL SAFE even in the unusual situation of being unsafe, such as COVID-19 by reinforcing their feeling safe building blocks.

The building blocks to feeling safe – the safety equation

To help our children feel safe it is important to understand the elements of feeling safe. The Protective Behaviours personal safety and empowerment programs refers to this as the safety equation:

$$\text{Safety} = \text{Choice} + \text{Control} + \text{Time limit}$$

On the safeness continuum when the elements of safety are not present, it will result in someone feeling unsafe. During times of crisis, children and adults alike may feel like they have no choice, no control and no idea of how long the crisis will last. There are ways we can reinforce feelings of safety for our self and others.

Continuum of Safeness



Feeling unsafe can result in panic, anxiety, stress, confusion, anger and behaviours that are out of the normal” range for that person. Example: panic buying is an attempt to control some of the situation and in turn help(s) the buyer to feel safer.

Feeling safe by reinforcing the elements of safety

Choice

Encouraging children’s own decision-making regarding strategies that can help them to feel safe. Ensure you are demonstrating your strong safety choices. We have the choice as to how we respond to what is happening around us.

Control

Show your children that they can trust in your ability to control their immediate experience, explain to them in an age appropriate and honest way, how you are making safe choices and maintaining control over the elements you can control. For example, we may not control the situation, but we have choice and control as to how we respond.

Time limit

Talk to them about time in increments they can measure. Checking in with them regularly This way their focus is not on months/ years but on their next supportive check in with you.



Tips for parents to help their children feel safe

- 1- Ensure children know they all have the right to feel safe and their feeling safe is your first priority and that you will do all you can to help them to feel safe.
- 2- Ensure your children know that they can talk to you or anyone on their safety team if they feel unsafe or unsure about anything, practice talking with your child and encouraging them to talk with their safety people.
- 3- Talk to your children about how they are feeling, make sure you have quality time with them every day. Quality time is time where they feel relaxed and comfortable enough to talk with you if they want to.
- 4- Be honest and age appropriate with children when talking about any crisis particularly COVID-19. Helping children to discuss feelings is a very important part of helping them to manage their feelings.
- 5- Young children can find it difficult to negotiate what is legitimate media coverage, understand sensationalism and discern fact from fiction, they pick up on the quality of language, body language and on heightened emotions.
- 6- You can help children to feel safer by encouraging them to stay away from social media and being mindful of the possibility of children hearing and or experiencing emotionally charged and panic driven conversations.
- 7- If your child overhears or sees confusing and scary messages, talk with them. Use the opportunity to teach them the difference between credible and non-credible news stories. Young children at this age often do not know the difference between reality, reality TV, Facebook, social media and even Disney movies. Be their guide, steady true and with purpose.
- 8- You can access correct information from your local government authority [WA Health Department](#) has some great resources [here](#). The [World Health Organisation](#) has other resources that are fantastic for using as guides in your education and care setting.
- 9- Help them to feel safe by strengthening and reinforcing their feeling safe building blocks. (the elements of the safety equation).



This information is provided by PB West. For more information please email info@pbwest.com.au or visit pbwest.com.au