Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s)—

Today your child attended an in-class presentation on personal safety. These programs are provided to students in K-5 classrooms across the district and are designed to teach students to recognize potentially dangerous situations, protect themselves against bullying, child abuse, and sexual abuse, and to take appropriate action if they are unsafe. We discuss surprises versus unsafe secrets, safe versus unsafe touches, and empower children by emphasizing their bodies belong to them and they can always say “no” if they don’t want a touch or it makes them feel uncomfortable or confused. Children learn that private parts are off limits unless someone is helping them stay healthy or clean (like doctor checkups). Students know that if they encounter unsafe secrets or touches it is not their fault and they need to tell a safe adult right away.

We believe these lessons are important as part of classroom education on social and safety skills. However, we also know that family can be the most important teachers for children this age! We encourage you to review this type of information throughout the year with your child to strengthen their understanding of safety guidelines and skills.

Please see the included sheet with some tips on how to talk to lower elementary children about personal safety. We also encourage you to work on coloring sheet and safety planning page with your child, to help them brainstorm safe adults and safe places they can go if they are ever dealing with an unsafe touch or secrets. It is important for your child, and your child’s friends, to know they have safe adults in their lives with whom they can confide.

For other resources, additional information, or for questions or conversation about the presentation, please don’t hesitate to contact either of us.

Sincerely,
Jeanine Brooks
School Counselor Grade K-2    Sitka School District
966-1321    brooksj@sitkaschools.org
&
Elena Gustafson
Youth Development Specialist    Sitkans Against Family Violence
747-3370    egustafson@safv.org

Sample Resources (books available to checkout from SAFV):
My Body Belongs to Me by Jill Starishevsky
I Said No! by Zack and Kimberly King
My Body is Special and Belongs to Me! By Sally Berenzweig, MEd and Cherie Benjoseph, LCSW
Talk About Touch by Sandy Kleven, LCSW
Some Secrets Should Never Be Kept by Jayneen Sanders
**Talking to Children about Personal Safety**

**How to Talk to Kids**
- Create a comfortable environment so it’s easy for a child to talk to you
- Use a calm voice
- Practice what you want to say
- Talk to your child every day—do check-ins over dinner or at bedtime or after school—listen to your kids!

**Personal Safety Tips**
- Tell children that their bodies are their own—no one else has a right to touch or hurt them.
- Teach children that they can always say “no” when it comes to their bodies.
- Practice NO, GO, TELL: brainstorm ways to say no, safe places to go to, and safe adults to tell.
- Talk about touches they think are safe and those they think are unsafe. Examples of safe touch might be high-fives, hugging, or touches that keep us healthy or clean. Unsafe or inappropriate touches might include hitting and shoving, as well as all sexual touch between adults and children.
- Encourage children to trust their feelings about safe and unsafe touches. Touches that make them feel “uh-oh” or uncomfortable are probably unsafe.
- Use anatomically correct words for private parts to help children develop a dignified vocabulary for parts of the body.
- Avoid scare tactics. Explain to children that most people don’t do anyone harm, but if anyone, even other kids, makes you feel uncomfortable or touches you in an inappropriate way, you need to tell an adult that you trust.
- Teach children that touching safety rules apply all the time, not just with strangers.
- Stress that unsafe or uncomfortable secrets should be told to a trusted adult.
- Help create a support system for your child—make a list of people they can talk to and trust besides you. Remind them it’s never too late to tell.
- Remind them **unsafe touches or secrets are never the child’s fault!**

**Help your children plan ahead**

**What would you do if:**
- You were asked to keep a secret that made you scared?
- You were given an unsafe or uh-oh touch from a classmate? A friend? An adult? A relative?

**Additional Resources**
Any school counselor or children’s advocate can help adults understand how to talk to children about personal safety. If you have any questions, feel free to contact:

- **Baranof Counseling Office:** 966-1321
- **Keet Gooshi Heen Counseling Office:** 966-1213
- **Blatchley Counseling Office:** 966-1412
- **Sitka High School Counseling Office:** 966-1925
- **Pacific High School:** 747-0525
- **SAFV Children’s Program:** 747-3370
- **Office of Children’s Services:** 747-2802

**To report suspected abuse:** 1-888-622-1650
Talking to Children about Personal Safety

Educating children that “their body belongs to them” can start early, and continue through teenage years, to help raise empowered young adults who have a clear understanding of healthy consent. Boundaries are important for all ages! And it is important to allow children to have choices in how they are touched by other people to show that their boundaries are respected and help grow self-esteem.

Here are some education tips for young children (ages 6-9):

*Teach your kids that “no” and “stop” are important words and should be honored.

Both when someone else says stop (“Sarah said ‘no’, and when we hear ‘no’ we always stop what we’re doing immediately, no matter what.”) and when your child say no (“If a friend doesn’t stop when we say “no,” then we need to think about whether or not we feel happy and safe playing with them. If not, it’s okay to choose other friends!”)

If your kids like to create pretend worlds or put on plays together, it may be helpful to create a safeword with friends. At this age, saying “no” may be part of a game or play, so they need to have one word that will stop all activity (perhaps something silly like “peanut butter” or something serious like “I really mean it!”) Chose what works for their group of friends.

*Give children options for greeting and saying goodbye to adults and friends.

Instead of a hug, a child could give a high five, a fist-bump, a wave, or even a handshake. Kids may not always feel comfortable around people they just met or even relatives who live far away, and it is important to allow kids to listen to their “gut feelings” about what feels safe, unsafe, or confusing. Giving a child the choice in greetings shows that manners—treating people politely and with respect and care—is different than demanding physical affection.

*Teach children to ask permission before touching or embracing a playmate, and to check in with friends during play, so they learn to respect other people’s boundaries.

Use language like, “Sarah, let’s ask Joe if he would like to hug bye-bye.” If Joe says “no,” cheerfully tell your child, “That’s okay, Sarah! Let’s wave good-bye to Joe.” Encourage kids to watch each other’s facial expressions during play to be sure everyone is comfortable, and teach them to take a time out every so often to check in with each other. This reinforces that everyone has options for how they want to be touched and that each person’s boundaries and feelings should be respected!

*Never force a child to hug, touch or kiss anybody.

Explain to relatives why you are giving your child the choice in how they are touched by others (hug, high five, wave, etc), even if it might make that relative upset. The most important thing is to give each child the tools to be safe and happy and empower them by respecting their control over their body! It’s important not to teach kids that it’s their job to use their bodies to make others happy.
SAFE PEOPLE TO TALK TO:

- Principal & Counselors
- TEACHERS
- 911

SAFE PLACES TO GO:

- Home

Things I can do when I feel unsafe:

I DESERVE TO FEEL SAFE!
Some parts of your body don't need clothes all the time.

Other parts of your body need clothes most of the time. These are PRIVATE PARTS.