



No More Birds and Bees: Talking to Children about Body Safety and Healthy Relationships

Ages 1 – 10 years



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Why does it matter?

- Victimization in childhood is common
 - Childhood Sexual Abuse: 1 in 10 before age 18
 - Teen Dating Violence: 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 8 boys
- Risk of violence later in life
- Starting earlier makes conversations easier later!



Myth:

My child is too young to learn about this.

Fact:

There are developmentally appropriate ways to teach your child tools that they will use in relationships.



Myth:

The schools teach them, isn't that enough?

Fact:

Children need continued learning outside the classroom to put what they've learned into practice.



Myth:

My child doesn't want to hear this from me.

Fact:

Decades of research suggests that parent/caregiver involvement is crucial for preventing risk behaviors.



Myth:

I'm not an expert, I don't know what to say.

Fact:

You're the expert on your own child. It's ok to say, "I don't know" and come back to the conversation later.

You have resources for learning more!



Agenda

- What skills does my child need?
- How can I teach these skills?
- Practicing teachable moments



What skills does my child need?

- Emotion regulation



Emotional Regulation (ER)

“Emotional regulation refers to the process by which individuals influence **which emotions** they have, **when** they have them, and how they **experience** and **express** their feelings.” (Gross, 1998, p. 275)

(Buckholdt et al., 2014)

- This learning begins with the parent-child relationship
- Difficulties with ER are associated with depression, anxiety, and aggression
(Shorey et al., 2011)
- Difficulties with ER are also associated with committing dating violence



What skills does my child need?

- Emotion regulation
- Boundary-setting and respecting



Boundary Setting and Respecting

“Boundaries are about **understanding** and **respecting** our **own needs**, and being respectful and understanding of **the needs of others,**” (Dowd, 2021 as cited in Jacobson, 2021)

- Helps children learn how to advocate for themselves
- Teaches healthy communication skills
- Teaches children how to treat others with kindness and dignity



What skills does my child need?

- Emotion regulation
- Boundary-setting and respecting
- Empathy and non-verbal cues



Empathy and non-verbal cues

Developing an awareness of how **others** are **feeling**, and using that awareness as a **guide** for **how to behave**. (Bussman, 2021 as cited in Jacobson, 2021)

- Helps children articulate their own feelings
- Can help increase likelihood of healthy relationships and increase bystander intervention behaviors



How can I teach these skills?

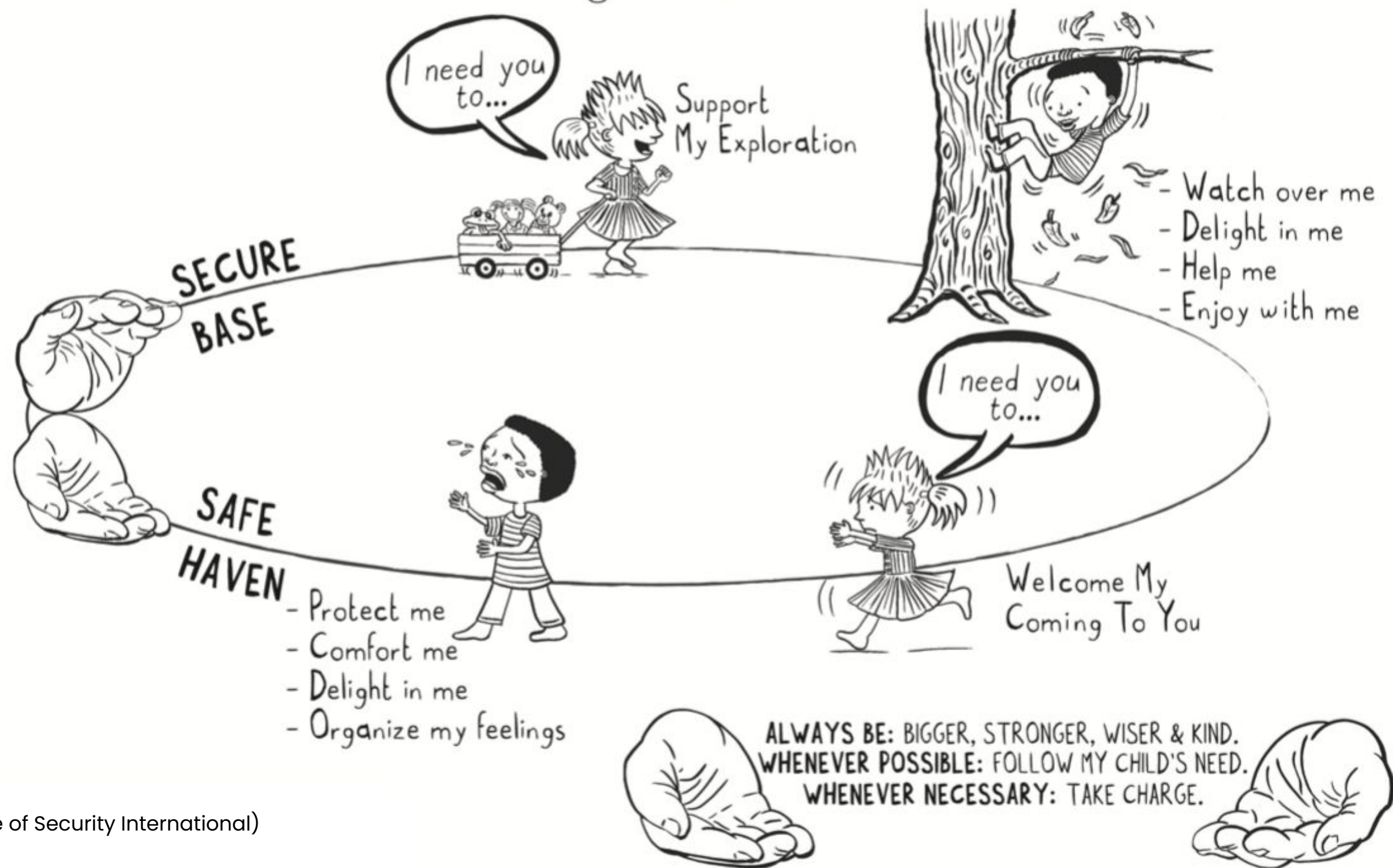


Steps you can take...

- Create a **Circle of Security**
- **Connect and Redirect**
- Use **scaffolding**
 - Instead of having one-time conversations, think of it as ongoing learning!
 - Identify teachable moments for ongoing practice & conversation

Circle of Security®

Parent Attending To The Child's Needs





Connect and Redirect (Dr. Dan Siegel)

- Connect:
 - Communicate comfort
 - Get at or below eye level, use loving touches, and reassuring expressions
 - Validate
 - Take children's concerns seriously
 - Avoid minimizing, denying, or blaming the child
 - Stop talking and Listen
 - Don't try to talk your child out of what they are feeling, just listen and look for the meaning and emotions they are communicating
 - Reflect what you hear
 - Repeat back what you heard to indicate you were listening



Connect and Redirect (Dr. Dan Siegel)

* Remember: Wait until your child is ready (repeat connect steps as needed), be consistent, not rigid

- Redirection Strategies:

- **R**educe words
- **E**mbrace emotions
- **D**escribe, don't preach
- **I**nvolve you child in the discipline
- **R**eframe a "no" into a yes with conditions
- **E**mphasize the positive
- **C**reatively approach the situation
- **T**each tools
 - e.g. deep breathing, pausing before acting, choosing a new behavior



Vygotsky's Scaffolding

- I do.

Direct or explicit teaching = child observes as you demonstrate

- We do.

Guided practice = Child takes some ownership

- You do.

Independent practice = child practices the beh



Scaffolding Examples

- I do...Model the desired behavior yourself
 - Remember the rules go both ways
- We do...Practice together
 - Explain your emotions and help label their emotions
 - Set boundaries together
 - Encourage reflection when they feel hurt or hurt someone else
- You do...Let them try



Teachable Moments are Everywhere!

- During **play** with you and with other children
- While tending to **hygiene** like bathing, dressing, diaper changing
- When offering or showing **affection**
- In **interactions** with friends and siblings



Teachable Moments are Everywhere!

- During **play** with you and with other children
- For example, use play to teach children how to..
 - Read other children's emotional cues,
 - Check in with their friends, and
 - Respect others' boundaries.



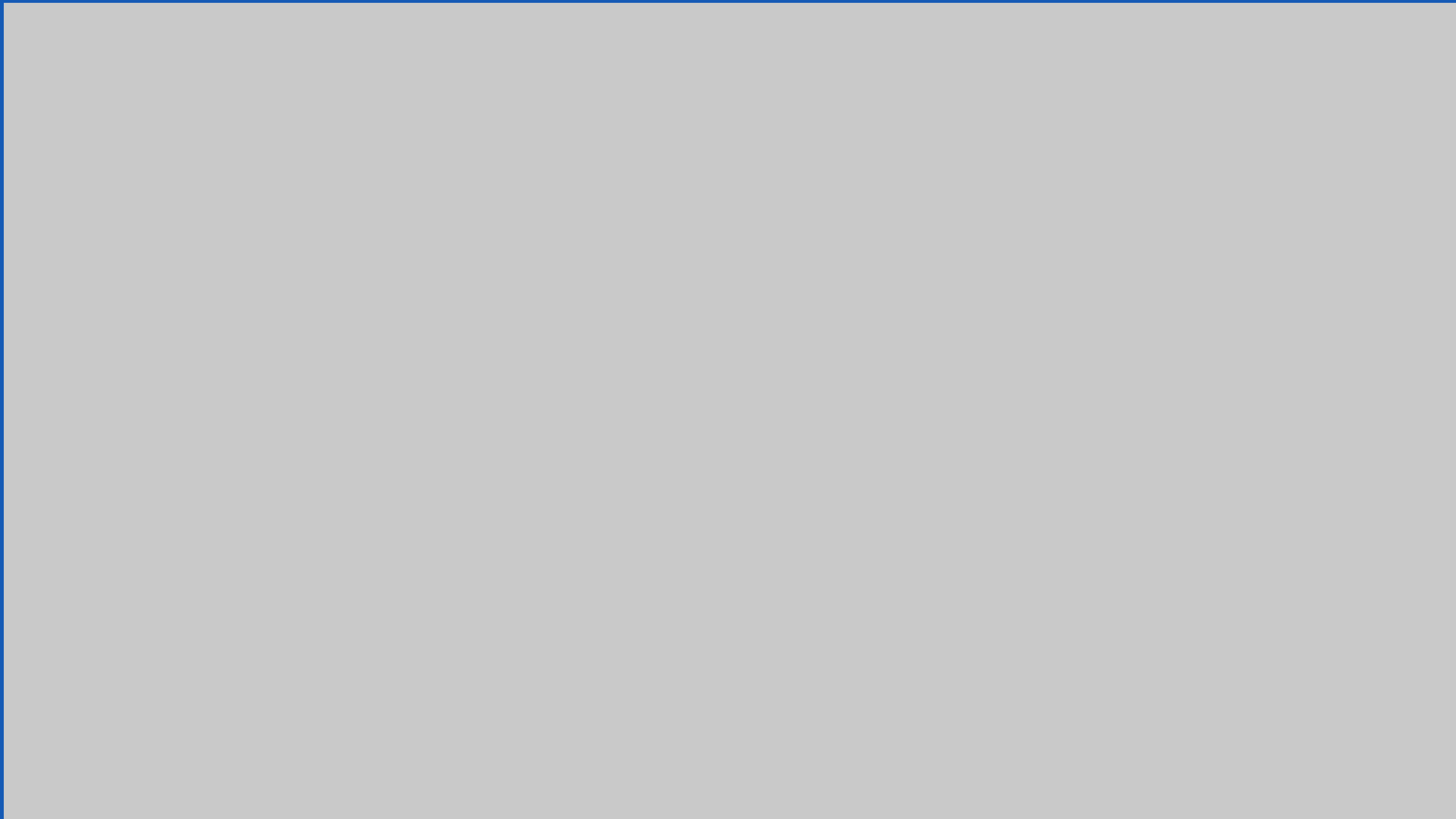
Teachable Moments are Everywhere!

- While tending to **hygiene** like bathing, dressing, diaper changing
- For example, use **hygiene** to teach children about...
 - Correct, medically accurate terms for body parts,
 - Safe touch vs. unsafe touch, and
 - Appreciation for their own body.



Teachable Moments are Everywhere!

- When offering or showing **affection** or in **interactions** with friends and siblings
 - For example, use interactions to teach children how to..
 - Set and negotiate boundaries,
 - Read and respond to non-verbal cues, and
 - Listen to their own feelings and bodies.





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Practicing teachable moments



Scenario #1: Emotion Regulation

Your child is visibly upset: crying and banging their hands on the table where they are sitting. You begin to connect by walking over and patting them on the back. You notice in their hand that their favorite toy seems to be broken.

What can you do to help them navigate this emotion? What will you avoid doing?



Scenario #2: Boundary Setting

You are at a holiday party with family and friends. An adult cousin approaches your child and tries to pick them up. Your child has recently told you that they are a "big kid" and they are too old to be picked up.

What can you do to help them set a boundary? What will you not do?



Scenario #3: Empathy and Non-verbal cues

Your child is playing "squishmallow fight" with the neighbors. You have already set out rules that the children can throw the squishmallows, but cannot hit each other directly with them. During play, your child runs over the another child and hits them with the squishmallow. This child rubs their head and looks distressed, but does not say anything. A few moments later, your child hits them again. This time the other child begins to cry.

What would you do to teach both children about boundaries? What might you avoid doing?



Other tips for safety in

childhood

"Anywhere a bathing suit goes"

- Scientifically accurate words for body parts
- Never get in trouble for being touched

We can't be present in every moment. If something should happen...

- Believe them.
- Assure them it is not their fault.
- Call LAWS: 703-777-6552



**HELP US LEARN ABOUT OUR IMPACT BY
ANSWERING JUST A FEW QUESTIONS!
IT SHOULD ONLY TAKE ABOUT 3 MINUTES!**

