

# 7 safety rules to prevent child abuse

One of the most important safety rules is item 5 – there are good and bad secrets. If the child knows exactly, where to turn to with bad secrets and bad feelings, if he/she has a trustworthy person, a large part of prevention is already in place and exploitation can be prevented at an early stage.

## 1 Your body belongs to you

You are important and your body is unique and precious. You can be proud of it. You alone decide about your body and you have the right to decide who may come near you and how, when, where and by whom you want to be touched.

## 2 Your feelings are important

You can trust your feelings. There are pleasant feelings, then you feel good. But there are also unpleasant feelings. You are entitled to have unpleasant, strange or silly feelings. They tell you that something is wrong and not good for you. It is good when you talk about your feelings, even if they are difficult feelings and you think they are not suitable for a girl or boy.

## 3 Pleasant and unpleasant touches

There are touches that are good to feel and really make you happy. Such touches are important for every human being. But there are also those, that are unpleasant, confuse you, scare you or even hurt you. You have the right to reject such touches. Adults do not have the right to put their hands under your clothes and touch you on the breast, on the bottom, on the penis or on the vagina. Some people might want to be touched by you in a way you don't want, for example at their genitals. No one has the right to persuade or force you to do it, even if you know and like this person.

## 4 You have the right to say NO

You have the right to say NO. If someone wants to touch you against your will or asks something of you which you don't want to do, then you may say NO and defend yourself. Let us think of situations, in which obeying could be bad and how you could defend yourself.

## **5 There are good and bad secrets**

There are good secrets that make you happy and are exciting, for example if you want to surprise somebody with a gift. Bad secrets feel weighty and frightening. You have to tell about such secrets, those that make you feel bad, even if you have promised not to. This is not telling tales.

## **6 Ask for help**

When a bad secret depresses you or you have had unpleasant experiences: please talk about it. Then we can try to help you. Please do not stop talking until someone believes you. Let us think together of people with whom you could discuss difficult things.

## **7 It is not your fault**

If you experienced it or it happens to you, that an adult or an older child exploits you sexually, then it is not your fault. Even if you tried to defend yourself. There are adults who go beyond what you allow them. Or perhaps you couldn't defend yourself, because your fear was too great. In any case you are not responsible for what happens, regardless of what the perpetrator claims. The other person is responsible for what he/she did to you.

Girls and boys whose physical and personal boundaries are respected early on and who have learnt, that they may express their feelings and that these feelings are taken seriously, girls and boys who grow up in loving and positive environments and who are supported in discovering their bodies and developing a healthy relationship to them, will be better able to recognize sexual abuse, to talk about it and to look for help. On the other hand, a child, whose „NO“ is frequently passed over and whose feelings are not taken seriously, will not suddenly dare to strongly resist an adult person. This means that an education which accepts children as persons in their own right and grants them basic personality rights, protects them better from sexual exploitation. A loving, respectful, encouraging and positive education is the best protection from sexual exploitation you can give your child.

...and... let children cry – „Do not cry...“ – is no prevention – comfort your child and let him/her express and experience feelings.