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February 2016

Volume 4, Issue 6

Autism Agenda



Linn Benton Lincoln ESD-Cascade Regional Autism Program

5 Tips on Teaching Safety Skills to Children with Autism

Posted on [December 11, 2014](#) by [Different Roads to Learning](#)

This week, we're thrilled to bring you a second guest article by **Sarah Kupferschmidt**, MA, BCBA. Sarah has written a very comprehensive article on teaching street safety skills in children with autism and other developmental disabilities. Learning to navigate the real world involves many complex skills that we may often take for granted. So how do we teach our children when to cross the street and what to watch out for? Read on for Sarah's tips on how to teach and reinforce safety skills in children.

I am passionate about empowering children with special needs and their families with skills and knowledge that they can use to improve their quality of life. This is why I am super excited to be sharing tips and strategies that relate to keeping your child with autism safe on the street.

Learning to navigate the real world involves a lot of complex skills that we sometimes take for granted. For example, learning to determine when it is safe to cross the street requires the ability to attend to your environment, the ability to identify moving cars from cars that are still, the ability to identify the signal at the cross walk that lets you know it is safe to cross, among many, many, more. In some cases even more advanced problem solving is required because if the sign says it is safe to cross and a motorist continues through the intersection we need to be able to identify the moving car is approaching and that we need to wait for it to pass before crossing the street. So where do we begin?



Tip #1: The Learner is Never Wrong

I love the saying "the learner is never wrong" because of what it implies. Whenever considering teaching a new skill to a child or student we need to focus on that unique child's strengths and weaknesses. Where do we need to boost up their skills and what do they already know so that we can capitalize on those strengths. Before going out to teach your child with autism how to cross the street safely, they should have some imitation skills, be able to respond to instructions and attend to you or a teacher amidst a lot of distractions (e.g., cars, background noise and pedestrians, just to name a few). Once you have determined they are ready to learn this important skill you would want to use things that are of interest to them and that you know align with their learning style. For example, are they a visual learner and if so, how can you incorporate visuals to maximize their learning potential in how you go out and practice crossing the street safely?

Continued on page 2.

5 TIPS ON TEACHING SAFETY SKILLS TO CHILDREN CONTINUED..

Tip #2: Simplify the Complex Skills

As mentioned earlier in the post, many of the skills that we use actually have many components, something we take for granted. In this case, teaching how to cross the street might involve the following steps:

1. Stop at the curb/crosswalk
2. Look at the crosswalk signal
3. Decide if it is safe to cross (e.g., does it say 'walk,' or does it say 'stop')
4. If the sign says walk, then look both ways
5. Decide if it is safe (e.g., is there a car moving or not)

Walk safely across the street (e.g., this means walking not running, perhaps holding your hand)

It is important to remember that these steps are just an example of what you might teach. You would individualize this based on the environment in which you live (e.g., if there is a crosswalk sign or crossing guard, or not) and the expectations you have as a family (e.g., to hold the hand or not). Teach this using tools that you know are effective with your unique child. For example, you may decide to print out a visual depiction for each of the steps and show them as you talk about it and practice. This depends on your child's unique learning style. As with every skill that that we teach, it is never enough to just tell someone or show someone how to do it. We need to actually go out and practice.

Tip #3: Practice, Practice, Practice

Use every opportunity that you have to go out and practice this very important skill. I would also recommend that you set up specific times to go out and practice. You can use the visuals that you printed and go through each of the steps while you are out. If you notice that your child is struggling on a particular step, then practice that particular step at home even more. For example, if your child is not identifying the walk signal when you are out on the street, set up times to go over that at home.

Tip #4: Monitor Progress

In order to see how your child is doing on each of the steps it is a good idea to record how they do on each of the steps. You might print off a checklist with each of the steps that looks something like this:

[See page 3 for this checklist](#)

You would calculate the number of times you recorded a Y over the total number of steps (e.g., in this case 6). For example, if I worked on this with my child and he did all of the steps he would get a 6/6. If he missed a step his overall score would be 5/6 or 83%. This score can then be used to monitor progress. I would also suggest that anytime you go out and practice you highlight whichever step(s) that they missed, if any. This will allow you to see if you need to work on something a little bit more before you go out and practice.

Tip #5: Notice the Good Stuff

Feedback is critical when you are teaching a new skill. Otherwise how is your child going to know how they are doing? This means that when they get it right we need to notice it and we need to be specific about what it is they did well. You can even use the visuals if you have them. You might say something like "I love the way you followed all of the steps of what to do when crossing the street safely! You stopped at the curb, looked at the signal...etc." You may point to the visual as you tell them. If they missed a step remind them that next time they should try to remember what it is that they missed. Anytime they do one of the steps spontaneously, point it out to them and give lots of praise. Over time we can fade the praise out but it is really important when teaching a new skill, especially at the beginning.

If you have any questions about any of the tips listed here feel free to contact me or a local Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA). I am passionate about keeping our kids safe! Sign up for my [newsletter](#) or follow me on [Twitter](#) for regular tips and strategies!

WRITTEN BY SARAH KUPFERSCHMIDT, MA, BCBA

Sarah Kupferschmidt is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) who has worked with hundreds of children with autism and their families across Ontario.

See checklist on page 3.

SAFETY TIPS CHART AND AIRPORT PROGRAMS

STEP	Did they do it? Circle Y if they did the step; N if they did not.
Stop at the curb or crosswalk	Y / N
Look at the crosswalk signal and say "walk" or "don't walk"	Y / N
Decide if it is safe to cross	Y / N
If sign says "walk," then look both ways	Y / N
Decide if it is safe to cross	Y / N
Walk safely across the street	Y / N
TOTAL SCORE	

Chart goes to previous page article.



15 Airports That Offer "Rehearsal Programs" for Individuals With Autism

Flying. It's something we take for granted these days. 40 or 50 years ago flying was an experience. You prepared for it, you wore nice clothes, you told all your friends that you would flying on an airplane. It was an event. Today... Not so much. Flying is almost as pedestrian as taking a bus ride. No more fun or excitement, just part of the routine.

For children with autism and other special needs Flying is still an event. The change in routine, the noise, the unfamiliar surroundings, the crowds all contribute to an overwhelming and over stimulating experience that can cause some major meltdowns.

FLYING REHEARSAL PROGRAMS

Taking a child with autism on a plane requires some [advanced planning and preparation](#). Thankfully there are now programs in place at many airports that provide children with autism a flying experience without ever lifting off the ground. Participants pack their bags, ride to the airport, pass through security, and continue through the whole flying process including boarding, "flying" and deplaning.

These "dress rehearsals" help to prepare individuals with autism for [flying](#). When the time comes children with autism will know what to expect and the environment will not be as foreign to them. Hopefully over time the experience of flying will become as pedestrian as it currently is for most of us.

Here are 12 airports currently offering a Airport Rehearsal Program

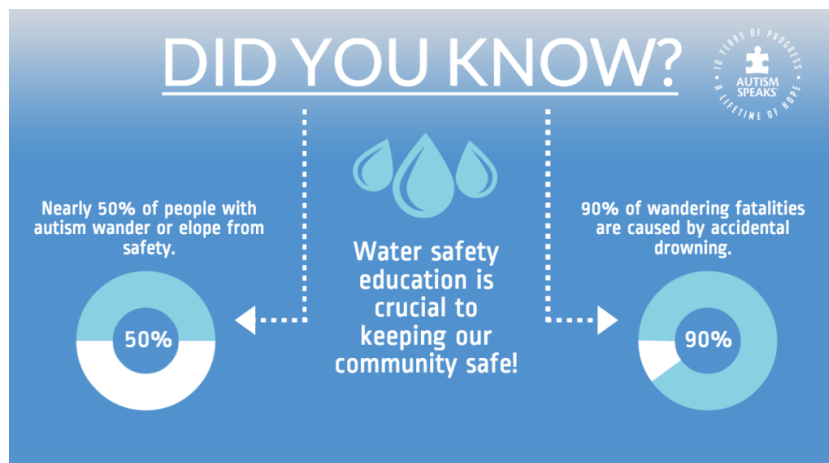
1. Boston Logan International Airport
2. Seattle– Tacoma International Airport
3. Philadelphia International Airport
4. Minneapolis– St. Paul International Airport
5. New York: JFK International Airport
6. Newark International Airport
7. Detroit International Airport
8. Phoenix: Arizona Sky Harbor International Airport
9. Atlanta: Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport
10. Washington D. C. Dulles International Airport
11. Washington D. C. Ronald Reagan National Airport
12. Tulsa International Airport

Spotlight on Autism Safety Awareness

As we count down the days until the world lights up blue for World Autism Awareness Day, we are thrilled to also shine a light on autism safety awareness all April long!

Safety is a critical part of all of our lives, whether we are at home or out in the community, alone or with loved ones. However, taking precautions to stay safe is even more important for individuals with autism and their families. Studies show there can be elevated risks for individuals with autism due to many factors, including communication challenges, an increased tendency to wander from safety, an inability to fully understand danger and a draw to water.

As a part of Autism Speaks commitment to promoting the safety of all people with autism, we have partnered with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Project Lifesaver International and the Alliance of the Guardian Angels to increase access to autism safety resources, raise awareness and enhance education of families and first responders on autism wandering prevention and response.



- Stay tuned for coverage of NCMEC's headquarters going blue this April! Learn more about our partnership with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.
- Stay tuned for coverage of the more than 20 Project Lifesaver International locations going blue this April! Learn more about our partnership with PLI.
- Over 30 chapters of the Guardian Angels across the country will be going blue by wearing Autism Speaks pins all April long! Learn more about our partnership with the Alliance of the Guardian Angels.



Autism Speaks is also proud to work with the NYPD to provide ongoing autism safety training opportunities to many of their 35,000 active duty officers in NYC precincts, as well as support officers in all ranks who have children with autism.

On March 17, Autism Speaks staffers participated in the NYPD's Autism Seminar at 1 Police Plaza open to all NYPD officers and staff who have a child with autism to provide them with information and resources to access services and autism safety resources. Over 150 NYPD officers, staff members and their spouses attended this informative event which kicked off with an inspiring talk from [Jesse A. Saperstein](#), autism advocate and motivational speaker, and was followed by two informational panel discussions, one for parents of young children, and another for parents planning for their teen or young adult with autism.

Following the event, an officer stated, "I have felt so isolated over the last few months since my daughter was recently diagnosed, but was moved to near tears when I looked around and realized how many other NYPD families are affected by autism." Autism Speaks commends the NYPD for their demonstrated efforts to increase autism awareness and offer their employees affected by autism support and opportunities to learn about the resources available to them.

Continued on page 5.

SAFETY AWARENESS CONTINUED...

For our families living with autism, a multi-faceted approach to safety is best, with steps taken to prevent and respond to wandering emergencies, including efforts by both families and local first responders to work together on an ongoing basis.

The importance of increasing autism awareness among first responders through training is apparent in recent interactions between police and people with autism, as a result of wandering emergencies, highlighted by the story of a [10-year-old boy with autism who was found safely](#), thanks to Project Lifesaver officers quick ability to locate him. Or a [Jeffersonville Police officer's quick thinking](#) that led to the rescue of a 4-year-old with autism who was found clinging to a ladder in a water treatment pool.

For more information about Autism Speaks first responder training contact Outreach@autismspeaks.org

You can find additional Autism Speaks resources for families and first responders to help prevent wandering [here](#). [Visit this page](#) to report an active case of wandering.



Teaching water safety is important! The [Autism Speaks Swimming and Water Safety Scholarship Fund](#) selects eligible programs and organizations providing swimming and water safety instruction to individuals with autism to provide scholarships for financially disadvantaged children and adults to attend.

If you are seeking additional safety information or resources, the **Autism Response Team** is happy to help! Call us at 888-288-4762 (en Español 888-772-9050) or email us at familyservices@autismspeaks.org!

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/2015/03/27/spotlight-autism-safety-awareness>



PLAN FOR AN ADULT WITH AUTISM

It's Important -- But Tricky -- To Plan for (and with) an Adult with Autism

Once your child with autism is past the age of 18, he is an adult. At 22, the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) no longer applies. Your child is no longer your legal dependent, and fewer options are available for education, therapy, and parental support. What's more, the parents of grown children with autism may be older, and concerned about what will happen to [their adult child](#) once they're gone.

It can be tricky, though, to plan for an adult on the autism spectrum. Adults with autism can be complicated people, and [many are bright and capable](#). Yet with all their intelligence and ability, some adults with autism have a very tough time handling the day to day challenges of paying bills, cleaning house, cooking meals, and all the details that go with managing a household.



Mary Anne Ehlert, founder and president of Protected Tomorrows, is an expert in planning for the future of adults with special needs. She offers hints and tips to parents concerned with providing their adult child with autism with the money and support they need to succeed -- with or without their parents' involvement.

Options for Managing Your Child's Legal and Financial Matters

To begin thinking about your options and your child's needs, says Ehlert, "You have to be really candid with yourself. What will this person really be able to do on his own?" Depending upon your answer to this question, you have three general options for moving forward.

Option 1: Do Nothing. Of course, parents can do nothing at all, and assume that their adult child will be able to manage his or her life as well as anyone else.

For some parents of children with Asperger syndrome or [high functioning autism](#), this is a reasonable choice: their adult child may have the skills and ability to handle daily life and money management. Or, that child may have decided they want no help or support from their parents.

Option 2: Request that Your Child Grant You [Power of Attorney](#). Once children are 18, explains Ehlert, "they are legal adults and make their own decisions.

You don't have the right to talk to their doctors, teachers, etc. You can do nothing -- unless your child signs a power of attorney granting them access. But they can only sign power of attorney if they have the capability of doing so." In some cases, adult children with autism are glad to sign over power attorney to one (or, better, two) trusted family members or friends. In other cases, they may choose not to do so. Or, they may not have the capacity to fully understand what a power of attorney entails.

Option 3: Seek [Guardianship](#) of Your Adult Child. If your adult child is not capable of signing a power of attorney, a parent can go to court to become an adult child's guardian or "limited guardian." If this seems like the best choice, it's important to name a guardian to take over care in case of your death.

Options for Financial Planning

Apply for and Protect [Social Security](#). Once you've set up your adult child's overall care, it's important to think about his financial future. Social Security and [Medicaid](#) benefits may be available -- but only if your child makes UNDER \$940 per month AND has virtually no assets. In fact, says Ehlert, though it's legal for your child to own a car and house, it's best to even those items under someone else's name. That's because, if they're sold, your child will suddenly have assets totaling more than \$2,000 -- and thus become ineligible for federal programs.

[Set Up a Special Needs Trust.](#) To ensure that your adult child with autism really does have enough money to pay bills and enjoy life, Ehlert recommends that parents set up a Special Needs Trust.

Continued on page 7.

PLAN FOR AN ADULT WITH AUTISM CONTINUED....

The Special Needs Trust, says Ehler, "is a document created by the parent -- and anything you put into the trust is usable for supplemental care (clothing, medical care like dental, vacation, recreation). You could buy a condo, have it owned by the trust, and use Social Security money to pay rent and help support other needs." You can create and fund a Special Needs Trust at any time.

When you die, the Special Needs Trust goes to another person of your choice who will manage that trust for your autistic child.

Choose a Special Needs Trustee. Of course, it's critically important that whoever takes over the Special Needs Trust be the right person: someone whom your child knows, trusts, and can confide in. It's also very important that your successor fully understand and agree to the responsibilities of the trust.

Because Special Needs Trusts are complex documents, it's important that families work with a specialist to set one up. Special needs lawyers and even the IRS may be able to provide you with the support you need to create a proper Special Needs Trust for your child with autism.

SAFETY PLANS

Creating Safety Plans for Individuals with Autism

When it comes to identifying safety risks and preventing emergencies for an individual with autism, you and your family are the best advocates, and most likely the people responsible for taking the necessary steps to develop a safety plan.

A safety plan should include key participants - school personnel, daycare providers, neighbors, caretakers, and extended family; anyone involved in your network that has daily contact with the individual at risk.

It is critical to take the time to evaluate what your family member needs to be safe and protected at home, school and in his or her community. Preventative measures are critical in order to help ensure the wellbeing of individuals with autism.

Be Prepared with Emergency Information at your Fingertips!

[Emergency Information at a Glance](#)

[Emergency Information for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)

Top Safety Risk for Individuals with Autism:

- Wandering
- Pica
- Drowning
- Household toxins

Safety Plan Checklist:

- Does the individual with autism tend to wander, run away or get lost in a crowd?
- Have your home, school and community activities been evaluated for safety? Have preventative measures been put into place in each of these areas?
- Does the individual ALWAYS wear identification with a contact number listed?
- Have you let your neighbors/community know about your child with autism?
- Are safety skills included in the Individual Education Program in your school district?
- Have you contacted your local 911 call centers?



<https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/autism-safety-project/community/creating-safety-plans>



IPAD APPS FOR AUTISTIC CHILDREN

5 iPad Apps for Autistic & Developmentally Disabled Children

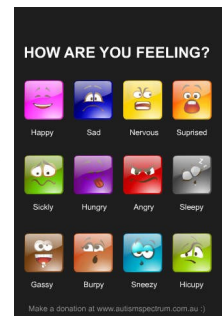
<http://assistivetechtechnology.about.com/od/ATCAT3/tp/5-Ipad-Apps-For-Autistic-And-Developmentally-Disabled-Children.htm>

Apps on portable devices such as the [Apple iPad](#) can help non-verbal children to communicate basic needs. Intuitive apps that employ colorful images and sounds can also hold a child's attention long enough to learn and offer effective tools to build vocabulary and reinforce word knowledge.

The following iPad apps are designed to augment self-expression among children with [autism spectrum disorders](#) and other cognitive impairments. Becoming more comfortable with language may also encourage more safe social interaction among family members and classmates.

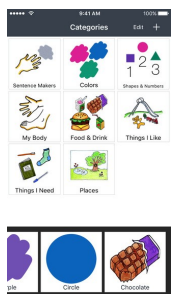
1. Autism Xpress

Autism Xpress is a free app that encourages people with autism to recognize and express emotions. The app displays 12 buttons, each a cartoon caricature of a facial expression of how one feels: happy, sad, hungry, etc. Pressing a button creates a full-screen image of that emotion. The app is designed to help teach recognition of emotions and facial expressions—a challenge for most autistic children.



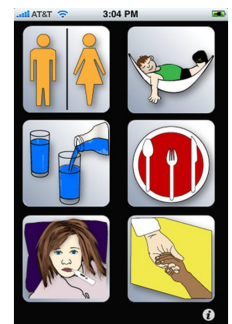
2. Grace App

Grace is a picture exchange system designed to encourage independent social interaction among people with autism. With Grace, users select pictures to form and semantic sentences others can read on the iPad screen. Grace comes with a basic picture vocabulary. Stored images can be added to each category. With practice, users can attempt their own speech and use the pictures as a back up. The Grace App Manual, an introducing to augmentative communication is also available free on the site. Grace App costs \$37.99.

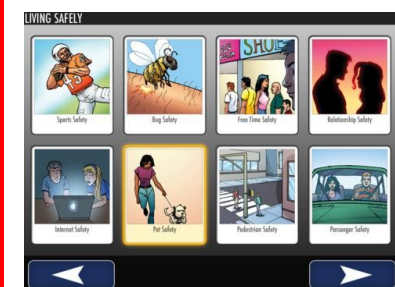


3. iConverse

iConverse is designed for children with autistic and other communicative disabilities who have not yet mastered basic speech. The app has six communication tiles representing needs such as food, break, bathroom, etc. When touched, the icons give an auditory and visual representation of the specific need or want. Built-in text-to-speech enables parents to customize the app by recording their own voice. iConverse costs \$9.99



4. Living Safely



Living Safely provides self-paced learning on 27 safety skills for individuals with autism and developmental disabilities. Living Safely also uses the AbleLink Instructional Media Standard (AIMS) that provides step-by-step multimodal instruction using visual and auditory media. The cognitively accessible learning sessions include home and personal safety, strangers, and sun and cold-weather safety. Living Safely costs \$29.99.

5. Story Builder

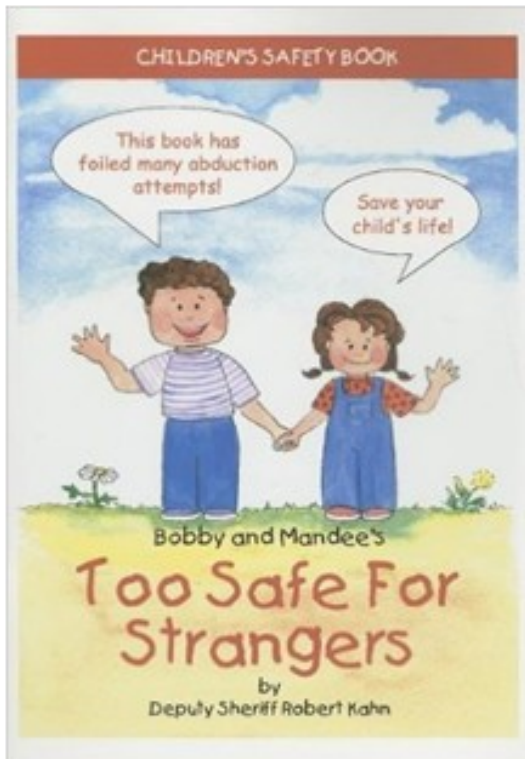
Story Builder enables children to create, record, and share narratives in their own voice. The app includes 50 form-generating story lines and 500 audio clip questions to guide narrative development. Each student gets their own archive page and can share stories via email. Story Builder is designed to help children form paragraphs, integrate ideas, and make higher-level abstractions from inferences

LBLESD does not endorse, suggest or require individuals or families to purchase the above apps. This is an article shared to inform the families of autistic individuals as to what resources are available.



Too Safe for Strangers

by Robert Kahn



Most children, especially children on the autism spectrum, accept adults' friendliness at face value. Written by a Deputy Sheriff, this book is written for elementary-age children, and is credited with foiling at least 22 stranger abductions. Characters Bobby and Mandee explain stranger danger in a way that is accessible, but not frightening, for children. The book reinforces key concepts such as:

- Not all strangers are men
- You don't have to be polite or nice to everyone
- The difference between bad strangers and good strangers, grown-ups who will help in emergencies
- If something bad happens – run away and yell – go to get help from a good stranger
- Adults do not ask children for help finding a lost pet; bad strangers do ask children
- Adults do not give gifts or candy; bad strangers try to trick you by giving gifts
- NEVER reach out to take something for a stranger
- NEVER get into a car with a stranger
- Have a family CODE word

The book includes role plays, tips for parents, and a safety test to make sure your child understands the exact responses to make. Arm your child with the knowledge that may save his or her life. Check out other safety-related books by this author: *Good Touch/Bad Touch*, *Too Smart for Bullies*, and *Don't Hide Abuse*.

Online Safety for Children and Teens on the Autism Spectrum

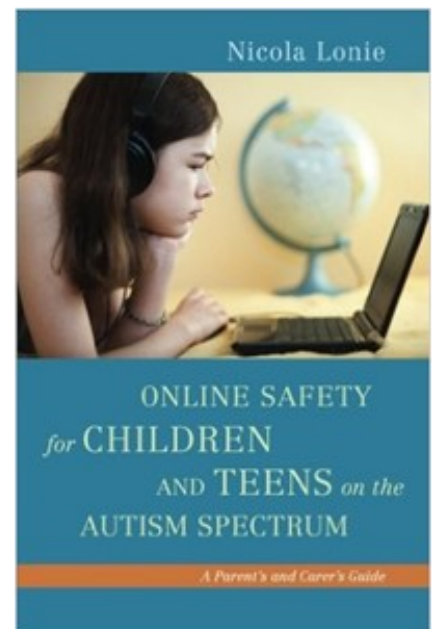
by Nicola Lonie

Children and teens with autism can be particularly vulnerable to online dangers. This practical handbook explains how you can help your child to navigate websites, chat rooms and social media safely.

Providing all the information needed to monitor, educate and guide your child's computer use, the book discusses key concerns such as parental control, social networking, grooming, cyberbullying, internet addiction and hacking. The risks and the warning signs to look out for are clearly explained alongside useful advice and examples from real-life experiences. A Digispeak Dictionary is included that decodes the cryptic language of online slang and there are downloadable forms to help record your child's internet use.

The practical solutions in this book will give you peace of mind and ensure that your child can enjoy the educational and social benefits of the internet in safety.

For kid-friendly educational videos and printable resources related to internet safety and etiquette, check out NetSmartz Kids: <http://www.netsmartzkids.org/>



INTERNET APPS AND PROGRAMS

ZacBrowser

<https://zacbrowser.com/>

Zac Browser Gold is a free program especially designed for children with autism. It allows your child to access games, activities, videos that encourages children to talk. Your children can sing, play and discover the best that the Internet has to offer.



Net Nanny

<https://www.netnanny.com/>

Net Nanny is a world leader in Internet filtering. Net Nanny checks each web page you visit, in real time, and will allow or block a webpage based on your preferences. Net Nanny provides monitoring features that are pre-set, which can be changed to suit the unique needs of each member of the family. You have the flexibility to determine the type of content you feel is appropriate for each Net Nanny user.

Mobicip

www.mobicip.com

Mobicip's main features include:

- Real-time Internet content filtering
- Data encryption for added security over public WiFi
- Simple setup using predefined web filter configurations used in schools
- Easy, intuitive filtering administration
- Support for 3G, EDGE, Home WiFi, Public WiFi (including hotspots that require purchase or agreement)
- Safari-like User Interface, including pinch and zoom, bookmarks, tabs, landscape view, etc

Operates with no load on the device and no noticeable delay.



My Body Safety Rules

My body is my body and it belongs to me!

I can say, 'No!' if I don't want to kiss or hug someone.
I can give them a high five, shake their hand or blow them a kiss.
I am the boss of my body and what I say goes!



I have a Safety Network

These are five adults I trust. I can tell these people anything and they will believe me.
If I feel worried, scared or unsure, I can tell someone on my Safety Network how I am feeling and why I feel this way.



Early Warning Signs

If I feel frightened or unsafe
I may sweat a lot, get a sick tummy,
become shaky and my heart might
beat really fast.

These feelings are called my Early Warning Signs. If I feel this way about anything, I must tell an adult on my Safety Network straightaway.



Secrets

I should never keep secrets that make me feel bad or uncomfortable. If someone asks me to keep a secret that makes me feel bad or unsafe, I must tell an adult on my Safety Network straightaway!



Private Parts

My private parts are the parts of my body under my bathing suit. I always call my private parts by their correct names. No-one can touch my private parts. No-one can ask me to touch their private parts. And no-one should show me pictures of private parts. If any of these things happen, I must tell a trusted adult on my Safety Network straightaway.





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VISUALS

