NESTLING MINDS

Tough Talks

Recognizing Unsafe or Confusing Touch (Ages 8-12)

Helping Your Child Recognize What Feels Right And What Doesn't



"It's not just about teaching kids what's wrong it's helping them listen to what their body is trying to say."

START HERE

This is **Mini Guide 4** in an 8-part series to help parents prepare their pre-teens for the real world — where not all touch feels good, and not all uncomfortable situations are easy to name.

This guide helps you teach your child:

- To notice how a touch feels, not just who it's from
- The difference between safe, unsafe, and confusing touch
- How to respond, speak up, and walk away — without guilt

By

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WHY THIS CONVERSATION MATTERS NOW

As your child's body grows, so does their interaction with the world — hugs from relatives, rough play with friends, even awkward moments at school. Not all touch is harmful, but not all of it feels good either.

Pre-teens need to know how to:

- Listen to their body when something doesn't feel okay
- Tell the difference between touch that's safe, unsafe, or just confusing
- Speak up confidently — even to someone they know

HOW TO EXPLAIN DIFFERENT TYPES OF TOUCH

Move beyond the old "good touch vs bad touch" which can feel too black and white. Kids need to understand how a touch makes them **feel,** not just who it comes from.

Use Three Simple Categories:

Type of Touch	What It Means	Examples	How It Feels
Safe Touch	Respectful, caring, and welcome	A hug from a parent, a pat from a coach with permission, medical check-ups with a parent present	Feels okay, comfortable, safe
UnSafe Touch	Hurts your body or makes you feel ashamed	Hitting, touching private parts, forced affection, or secret touch	Feels wrong, scary, painful, embarrassing
Confusing Touch	Unsure how you feel, or feels weird even if okay	A lingering hug, a tickle that goes too far, someone brushing against you and laughing	Feels weird, uncomfortable, hard to explain

WHAT YOU CAN SAY WORD FOR WORD

Start with a check-in:

"Has anyone ever touched you in a way that made you feel weird or unsure even if they said it was just a joke?"

If they say no:

"That's great. I want you to know that if it ever happens, you can always tell me. We'll figure it out together."

To explain the difference:

"Let's say someone gave you a high-five that's usually fine, right? But what if they kept holding your hand and it felt uncomfortable? That would be confusing touch and you're allowed to say, 'Please stop.'"

For Your Daughter:

"If a friend at school keeps touching your hair or sitting too close and you don't like it even if they say it's a joke you're allowed to say, 'I don't like that, please stop.' Your feelings matter more than their excuse."

For Your Son:

"Sometimes boys get pushed around or tickled in ways that don't feel right. If you feel annoyed, uncomfortable, or even angry — that's your signal. You can say, 'Stop it, I don't like this.' And if they don't stop, walk away."

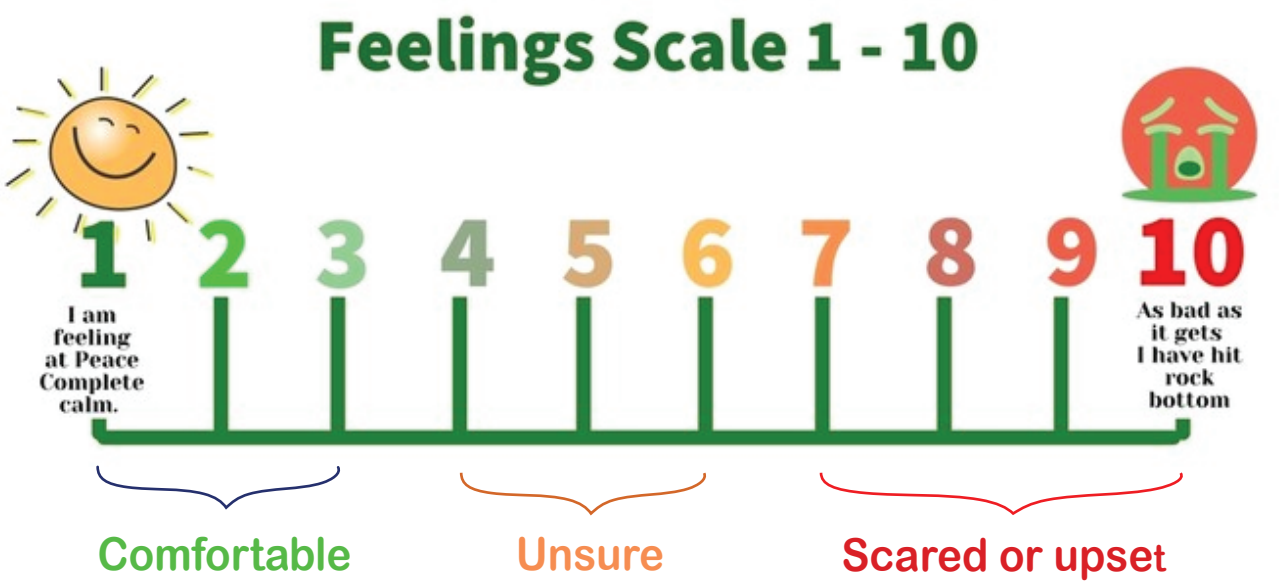
PRACTICE SAYING THESE TOGETHER



The more your child practices these phrases out loud, the more confident they'll be in the moment.

BONUS TIP: USE A FEELINGS THERMOMETER

Draw a scale from 1 to 10 with your child and use it to label feelings:



- 1–3 = Comfortable
- 4–6 = Unsure
- 7–10 = Scared or upset
-

Then ask:

"When your uncle gave you that big squeeze last time, where did that feel on your scale?" Let them think it through. Their answer tells you a lot and builds awareness.

LET'S TRY IT PRACTICE WITH ROLE PLAY

Try out simple, real-life scenarios with your child to practice what to say in the moment.

"Let's pretend I'm a classmate who gave you a hug that felt too long. What would you say?"
"Now let's say someone tickled you even after you said stop how could you respond?"

Make it fun and pressure-free. The more they rehearse, the easier it becomes.

IF THEY DIDN'T SPEAK UP THEN...

Sometimes a child might not say anything right away and that's okay.

someone else.

You can say:

"If anything ever happened before and you didn't say anything that doesn't mean it was okay. You can always tell me later. It's never too late."

Normalize delayed reactions. Safety starts when a child feels safe enough to speak.

FOR PARENTS: REFLECT ON YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE

Take a moment to think back:

- Was there ever a time you felt uncomfortable as a child but didn't know how to say it?
- What do you wish an adult had said to you?

This reflection helps you show up with more empathy, patience, and presence.

WHAT TO EMPHASIZE

- They don't need to explain or defend their feelings.
- Even if someone is "just joking," it still matters how they feel.
- Their body is never to be kept a secret if they're unsure, they can talk to you or a trusted adult.

ALSO IN THIS SERIES

This is just one part of the **Tough Talks** series from Nestling Minds. Look out for the other mini-guides:

Coming up next:

- Mini Guide 1: Understanding Your Pre-Teen
- Mini Guide 2: Talking About the Body Without Awkwardness
- Mini Guide 3: Teaching Consent Early
- Mini Guide 5: Protecting Your Child from Sexual Abuse
- Mini Guide 6: Keeping Your Child Safe Online
- Mini Guide 7: What to Say When They Ask “That Question”
- Mini Guide 8: Your Safety Net as a Parent

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Nestling Minds is an initiative dedicated to promoting emotional wellbeing, life skills, and safe conversations for children, parents, and educators. Through workshops, resources, and school partnerships, we help families navigate the real challenges of growing up together.

Stay Joyful, Stay Curious,

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