

PRESIDENT'S Letter



Building Trust

Keep your children safe: this is perhaps the first rule from Parenting 101 and what we all worry about most. But where do we begin in a world rife with stories guaranteed to make any parent shudder — cyber bullying, sexting, celebrities behaving badly and scandals about adults in position of trust? How do we raise our children to be polite and respectful yet empower them with the confidence to speak out when they sense something isn't right? How can we help our children feel secure enough to confide in us?

The headlines today are chilling and though few kids will actually face a stalker or a Sandusky, bad things do happen to good people. I am reminded of a friend who, over 40 years ago, endured inappropriate advances from a teacher at a well-respected Midwestern private school. She had no way to share her experience because quite simply no one would have believed her, and she suffered in silence. Since then she has learned, in a more open society, that safety requires being open and honest about her experience, especially with her own children, and that awkwardness can be diffused through frank discussion.

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Maintaining open lines of communication is critical to building trust between parent and child. The gold standard includes: being an active listener, resisting the urge to instruct, and validating our children's feelings so they feel they are being heard. Kids need to know that they can confide in adults without fear of retaliation or criticism. They need to know they can share information and fully trust the listener.

At Parents in Action, communication is the bedrock of our organization. Effective communication, between parents and between parents and their children, is part of our mission statement. Make that communication a priority in your quest to keep your children safe. Open the door to “effective communication” by sitting down and talking about the things that feel uncomfortable or threatening. Watch the news with your child (in age-appropriate doses), and talk about it, especially if it is disturbing. Today is a good day to begin.

I write this while trying to absorb the untimely death of a dear friend. She leaves two children; her friends and family weep. Her loss reminds me that life is short and we never know when it will be taken away. Golden moments, many of them teachable, are fleeting. Capture some of them before it's too late. We will always worry about our children. But if we arm them with the defenses they'll need before they learn that bad things can happen to good people, we give them a gift that will serve them well, forever.

— LIB GOSS