



SAFEGUARDING NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the Mayfield Parents Safeguarding Newsletter

Hello and welcome to the latest edition of our Parents Safeguarding Newsletter. This week we are looking at 'personal space and consent'. Personal space refers to the physical distance we maintain from others. When someone intrudes on our personal space, it can make us feel uncomfortable or uneasy.

Personal space preferences vary between individuals and can depend on the situation or relationship. For instance, someone might be comfortable standing close to a stranger on a crowded train but prefer more distance at the shops. Similarly, a close friend might be allowed closer physical proximity than a casual acquaintance.

Teaching personal space can be challenging for children who struggle to interpret social cues. A helpful starting point is to use the length of your arms as a general guideline, as illustrated in the image.



Personal Space Etiquette

This picture shows a clear boundary for personal space using the cartoon's arms. Remember the 1.5-metre social distancing rule? That's a good guide for personal space too!

When teaching about consent, emphasise that your personal space is yours. Nobody should enter it without your permission.

Helping your child recognise the signs

It is important to teach your child to recognise some clear signs of when they are standing too close in someone's personal space. When a person's space is being invaded, they might:

- Step or lean back
- Cross their arms
- Look upset
- Turn away
- Leave the situation
- Ask you to go away

Your child might need help recognising these signs. You can support your child to learn by asking people to be clear and direct with your child when their space is being invaded. This will also help your child to learn verbal and non-verbal responses for when their space is being invaded.

Respecting Personal Space

Personal space is important for healthy relationships. When someone invades your personal space without permission, it can make you feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

Teaching your child about personal space from a young age helps them develop skills like consent, healthy relationships, appropriate touch, and public and private behaviors.

People with intellectual disability or autism may need extra support to understand that social expectations about personal space change over time. Different people have different preferences for personal space, and it can vary depending on the situation or relationship.

Measure personal space in a concrete way

If your child finds it difficult to know if they're too close to somebody, ask them to hold their arms out to see if they are inside or outside the personal space bubble. You could also try equipment like a hula hoop or drawing a circle on the ground to create a visible boundary.

Use Teachable Moments

Is there a character in your child's favorite show or movie who gets too close to others? Use these clips to start a conversation about what went wrong in the interaction. This can help you see what your child understands about social boundaries. The ['Who's in My Orbit?' activity sheet](#) can help you support your child to understand the types of touch that are appropriate in different relationships.

Decision Making and Consent

Children need support to develop decision-making skills, even those with intellectual disability or autism. Some will become independent decision-makers, while others may always need support. That's okay. Everyone needs help sometimes.

Supported decision making helps parents and caregivers foster their child's independence safely. It builds decision-making skills and confidence.

Supported Decision Making Principles

1. **Autonomy:** Everyone has the right to make decisions about their own lives and have those decisions respected.
2. **Support:** Everyone should have access to appropriate support to make informed decisions.
3. **Respect:** Decisions, arrangements, and interventions must always respect the individual's wishes.

Strategies to Try

Modeling Personal Space

Show your child how to respect others' personal space. If your child gets too close, say something like, "You're standing too close. I'm stepping back so we both feel comfortable."

Supporting Decision Making

Involve your child in decision-making from a young age. Offer choices like outfits, movies, or snacks. Gradually increase the complexity of choices as they become more comfortable.

Involve Your Child in Healthcare

Ask healthcare professionals to address your child directly and involve them in decisions. This helps them feel confident and empowered in their healthcare.