Tip sheet 1:
Talking about safety



1.1 Why this matters

- Young people need help to understand what feels safe and what doesn't.
- Naming feelings helps them notice their warning signs.
- Most young people need support to think things through. They don't need adults to decide everything for them.
- Choice, control and time limit is a simple way to talk about safety.
- Calm, supportive adults help young people speak up.
- Feeling safe is as important as being safe. Both matter.

1.2 What you might notice

Young people may show warning signs through their behaviour. You might notice them:

- acting jumpy or on edge
- avoiding school, friends or new places
- trying very hard to please others
- crashing or acting out after a long day.

These are protective responses. They are not misbehaviour.

1.3 What helps

Being a 'safety co-pilot'	A calm adult helps a young person make sense of what's happening. You might say: *'On a scale of 1-10, how safe does this feel for you right now?'* Then explore gently: • *'What is happening that made you able to say that number?'* • *'What would move it up one number?'* • *'What is your body noticing?'*
Normalising without dismissing	*'It's normal to feel nervous when something is new. Let's look at the facts together.'*
Using side-by-side conversations	Talking while walking, driving or doing an activity often feels safer than face-to-face.

These approaches help build confidence and shared understanding.

1.4 What to avoid

Brushing off feelings	Avoid: '*You're fine, don't worry.*' This can make a young person doubt their warning signs.
Rushing to fix the problem	Jumping to solutions too quickly can shut down sharing. Listen first. Move at their pace.
Reacting with panic	Strong reactions can make a young person shut down.
Sharing adult problems	Sharing your own hard experiences can feel too heavy and shift the focus away from them.
Promising to keep secrets	If a young person is at risk, you must act. Be honest from the start. You can say: *'I want to support you, but I have to make sure you are safe.'*

1.5 Quick responses

These are suggestions. Use your own words and adapt them to suit you and the young person.

If the young person…	You can say or do…
Downplays a risk	*'Let's check what's going on together.'*
Feels unsafe in a safe situation	*'New things can feel weird. We can go slowly.'*
Feels safe in a possibly unsafe situation	'Let's look at who has the choice and the control in this situation. Could you leave if you wanted to?'
Freezes or shuts down	*'I'm here. You don't have to talk until you're ready.'*
Says "I'm fine" but looks stressed	*'I hear you saying you're fine. I also noticed you seem a bit tense. I'm just checking in.'*
Asks for a secret	*'I will always listen and support you. But if I'm worried about your safety, I'll need to bring in someone else to help us. I can't keep you safe and keep a secret at the same time.'*

Choice, control, and time limit are explained in the Young Person's Guide to Personal Safety. Adapt the words to suit the young person's age, culture, identity and communication style.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People (WA) advocates for the rights and wellbeing of all young people in Western Australia. They provide resources to help adults understand what young people are thinking and what their rights are under the law.

If the young person shares something that feels unsafe, stay calm and follow the steps in **How to respond: The 6-step-framework**. If you're unsure what to do, check in with another trusted adult or a professional. You don't have to do this alone.

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