

# Stand Strong • Stay Safe<sup>®</sup>

EARLY CHILDHOOD • PRESENTER GUIDE

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## *Acknowledgments*

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The development of *Stand **Strong** • Stay **Safe*** was made possible by the generous support of the Fondren Foundation, the ChildBuilders Board of Directors, Houston-area school champions, and by the dedication of the ChildBuilders Team.

Special thanks to our Advisory Council and those who contributed to the content, design, graphics, and evaluation of this curriculum: Peggy Croke, Ralph Culler, Melissa Dryer, Rachael Frasier, Lauren Hall, Sheila Hutchings, Frances Jones, Trish King, Dena Kline, Jennifer Meehan, Janet Pozmantier, Jessica Pugil, Holly Rosado, Tangelo, Christa M. Tinari at Peace Praxis Educational Services, and educators from Neighborhood Centers, Inc., Gulf Coast Community Services Association, and Yellowstone Academy.

This curriculum was edited by Kelly N. Clody and printed by DiPuma Printing Company.

*Revised October, 2019*

# *Stand Strong • Stay Safe*

## *Table of Contents*

Introduction .....	1
Disclosures .....	13
Lesson 1: Assertiveness .....	23
Lesson 2: The Power of Kind Words (Emotional Abuse) .....	33
Lesson 3: Inappropriate Touch (Sexual Abuse) .....	43
Private Parts Activity - Alternate Text .....	57
Lesson 4: Neglect and Physical Abuse .....	59
Follow-Up Activities .....	67
Literature Connections .....	77
Materials .....	79
References .....	117

Preview Only

# *Introduction*

## *Stand Strong • Stay Safe*

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### *Overview*

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*Stand Strong • Stay Safe* offers a classroom-based early childhood curriculum that promotes antivictimization through assertiveness skill building. Four lessons use interactive presentations, skills practice, and role play (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1995; NSVRC, 2011) to teach kids how assertiveness can keep them safe from bullying, emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. Follow-Up Activities, including content-relevant literature recommendations, allow for ongoing practice and repetition to increase retention of the skills (Rispen, Aleman, & Goudena, 1997). Home Connections and a Parent Guide involve parents in ensuring their children’s personal safety, and support children’s retention of the material through repetition at home (Kenny, Wurtele, & Alonso, 2012).

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### *Why Is This Program Needed?*

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Childhood victimization is a complex problem with consequences that resonate deeply through society. Child abuse and neglect, as well as other forms of victimization, have significant physical and mental health consequences for children and families. It has been well established in the research literature (Fang, Brown, Florence, & Mercy, 2012) that lifelong consequences of childhood victimization include post-traumatic stress disorder, behavior problems in childhood and often persisting into adulthood, adult criminality, substance abuse problems, and reduced overall health throughout the life span. Researchers have found that adverse experiences such as emotional trauma associated with childhood victimization can affect physical health later in life and increase risks for obesity, heart disease, liver disease, diabetes, alcohol and drug abuse, intimate partner violence, unintended pregnancies, and depression (Felitti et al., 1998).

In addition to the significant physical and mental health costs, child abuse and neglect carries a significant economic burden that affects us all. Researchers estimate that the lifetime economic impact of child abuse and neglect cases occurring in 2008 will be, conservatively, \$124 billion. In 2012 alone, the direct and indirect costs of responding to child abuse and neglect are estimated to be over \$80 billion in taxpayer dollars (Gelles & Perlman, 2012). In other words, the United States pays \$220 million per day to deal with the consequences of child abuse and neglect.

Taken together, these facts put out a compelling call for a comprehensive approach to preventing the victimization of children.

Preview Only

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## *Stand Strong • Stay Safe: A Skills-Based Response*

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This curriculum is informed by research showing that children can learn skills to keep themselves safe when they are young (Rispen, Aleman, & Goudena, 1997). *Stand Strong • Stay Safe* focuses on building assertiveness skills, which are universally applicable to situations requiring self-protection. Assertiveness theory draws on the belief that every person has the right to be treated with respect. When children use assertiveness skills, they behave in a way that demands respect by asking for what they need, saying “no” when they are uncomfortable, getting help when they need it, and confidently standing up for their rights and the rights of others (Davies, 2007).

Consistent with research showing the effectiveness of school-based programs focusing on skills (e.g., NSVRC, 2011), *Stand Strong • Stay Safe* facilitates the development of assertiveness skills with the following intended outcomes:

- Students will have increased knowledge of how others should treat them, including being able to identify physically and emotionally unsafe situations.
- Students will develop personal safety skills and be able to use them in real-world situations to prevent victimization.
- Students will be more open to discussing physical and sexual abuse, thus improving disclosure rates.
- In cases where victimization occurs, the duration will be shortened due to students’ self-protection skills.
- Students will have higher levels of confidence and be able to assertively ask for what they need, both in everyday interpersonal situations and in potentially unsafe situations.

Assertiveness skills provide students with a foundation for building positive relationships with other students and adults. Confident, assertive children who have a strong social support network and know how to get help are undesirable victims (NCMEC, 1999). Sexual predators are more likely to target children who seem like they will not stand up for themselves and will not get help (Rispen, Aleman, & Goudena, 1997). Bullies also prefer passive victims to assertive victims (Dominguez, 2013).

In addition to building students’ assertiveness skills, *Stand Strong • Stay Safe* aims to change the social dynamics within schools and classrooms by increasing the value placed upon kindness and empathy. Thus, through the presentations in this program, students are exposed

to the importance of empathy and practice the power of kind words to promote a positive sense of community and improve interpersonal relationships in the classroom. When a school emphasizes kindness, empathy, and community, that school becomes a place where students thrive and get help rather than a place where they feel threatened (e.g., Bailey, 2000; Beck & Malley, 2003; Dominguez, 2013; Gordon, 2009; Szalavitz & Perry, 2010).

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### *Alignment with Curriculum Standards*

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Lesson objectives are aligned both to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards and to the Prekindergarten Guidelines.

#### *Prekindergarten Guidelines*

1.B.1.c Child regulates his own behavior with occasional reminders or assistance from teacher.

1.B.2.a Child begins to understand difference and connection between feelings and behaviors.

1.C.5 Child initiates problem-solving strategies and seeks adult help when necessary.

1.C.6 Child demonstrates empathy and caring for others.

1.D.2 Child demonstrates an understanding that others have perspectives and feelings that are different from her own.

#### *Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills*

Health K.8 Personal/Interpersonal Skills. The student understands ways to communicate consideration and respect for self, family, friends, and others.

Health K.2 Health Behaviors. The student understands that behaviors result in healthy or unhealthy conditions throughout the life span. The student is expected to:

(D) identify ways to avoid harming oneself or another person.

(F) identify how to get help from a parent and/or trusted adult when made to feel uncomfortable or unsafe by another person/adult.

Health K.9. Personal/Interpersonal Skills. The student comprehends the skills necessary for building and maintaining healthy relationships. The student is expected to:

(A) identify and use refusal skills to avoid unsafe behavior situations, such as saying no in unsafe situations and then telling an adult if he/she is threatened.



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## *Implementation Guidelines*

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### *Core Concepts*

The *Stand Strong • Stay Safe* core concepts should be the focus of each lesson.

- » Know if it is safe or unsafe
- » Be assertive
- » Tell a trusted grown-up
- » Keep telling different grown-ups until you get help
- » It is not your fault if someone hurts you

### *Stick to the Script*

*Stand Strong • Stay Safe* has been carefully written to convey information consistent with current research on antivictimization and abuse prevention. Adherence to the script is essential for the effective delivery of the message. The repetition in the script is intentional and will help students retain the message (Kenny & Wurtele, 2010).

If the children do not answer a question correctly right away, ask the question again with slight rephrasing to make sure they understand the question properly. Then give them the correct answer and move on. Important content is repeated several times throughout the curriculum, so the correct information is reinforced.

### *Practice and Repetition*

Read the script several times before teaching the lesson to become comfortable with the content and words used. The presenter's familiarity with the script ensures that the message is delivered in a clear and appropriate way. Practicing with the puppets ahead of time helps presenters bring life to the puppets while presenting, thus increasing student engagement.

The script makes use of repetitive phrases in order to increase students' retention of the material; do not skip over opportunities for students to repeat key phrases. The skill-building portion of this curriculum involves giving students the language to use in various situations in order to keep themselves safe. Practice and repetition of the script are important for the children's understanding.

Prior to presenting this curriculum, learn the names of school personnel who the students trust and can turn to for help. Write down the names of the classroom teacher, school counselor or social worker, school nurse, principal, and any other trusted adults in the school so you can mention them throughout the script.

### *Engaging Students and Maintaining Attention*

1. Keep your tone and demeanor calm and patient when talking with students. The topics covered in these lessons are sensitive and can raise emotions and questions in many students. Invite students to talk with you after class if issues arise that are outside the scope of the lessons or that are too personal to discuss in front of the class (see Disclosures tab for more information).
2. Speak in short, simple sentences.
3. Have students sit on the floor in a circle in order to engage all students equally.
4. Presentations should be limited to one classroom. This prevention program is effective due to its ability to involve students in interactive learning and provide opportunities to practice personal safety skills (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1995). Large-group presentations may diminish this effect.
5. Attention span and ability to wait are very limited for this age group; use the following prompts to regain the group's attention:
  - “Let’s put our listening ears on.”
  - Have Penguin “talk” in your ear if children get rowdy; then tell them, “Penguin tells me that...”
  - Highlight the behavior you want to see. For example, encourage students to be quiet and ready by saying, “Thank you for sitting quietly and being ready to listen.”

### *The Classroom Teacher Should Stay in the Room*

When the presenter is someone other than the classroom teacher, it is important for the classroom teacher to stay in the room during the presentation. Classroom management is easier for the presenter if the classroom teacher can hold students accountable to classroom rules, and it is useful for the teacher to understand how the information is presented. Concepts introduced during the lessons need to be reinforced daily, and classroom teachers who experience the program are better prepared to support the knowledge and skills gained during the presentations. Limit interruptions and distractions during the presentation, and discourage school staff and visitors from entering and leaving the classroom during this time.

## *Handling Puppets*

*Stand Strong • Stay Safe* comes with prepackaged puppets designed to fit with the program. Assemble puppets prior to teaching the lessons by attaching the cutouts to the sticks provided using strong glue or strips of tape.

The character cutouts provided are designed specifically to fit with the *Stand Strong • Stay Safe* curriculum. Depending on your group's dynamics and the availability of other types of puppets, you may use your own puppets, if necessary. When using your own puppets, it is important to keep the puppets gender neutral. Avoid changing puppet roles, ages, or the puppets' relationships to each other as this may cause confusion and misinterpretation of curriculum concepts.

When the puppets are not actively involved in the presentation, make sure they are stored in a resting place where it is convenient to grab them as you present the story. Standing the characters up in a jar or a piece of clay allows the puppets to remain part of the action, so the characters stay alive while your hands are free to do other things.

During the presentation:

1. Face the puppets to the audience.
2. The puppets, not the presenter, are the focal point of the presentation.
3. Before each story, make sure to identify the puppets and their relationship to each other as the script instructs. In some cases (such as Fox in Lesson 3) the relationship and personal details about a character are left intentionally vague. In Lesson 3, do not give Fox a gender, age, or specific relationship to Panda (such as parent, babysitter, uncle).
4. Treat the puppets respectfully, as if they are really guests in the classroom. This will make them seem more real to students and communicate the message more effectively.
5. Demonstrate all parts of the script so children understand fully what is being described.
6. Change your tone of voice and body language to show the characters' personalities and emotions. For example, a tone for an aggressive character could be loud and intimidating or sarcastic. For a passive character, use a soft or weak voice, and don't face the audience directly. Use a firm, clear, and confident tone of voice for an assertive character, and face the audience squarely.
7. Use props as needed to engage the students and make the action more realistic, such as crayons, coloring paper, or a soccer ball.

### *Lesson Sequence and Timing*

Lessons in *Stand Strong • Stay Safe* are designed to stand on their own, with each lesson addressing a specific kind of safety risk. This is so that teachers may choose to teach individual lessons several times, as the need arises throughout the year. Repetition helps students retain information and develop ownership over skills, so it is appropriate to teach each lesson more than once. Ideally, lessons will be taught in order of appearance over the course of four weeks. Between lessons and during the year following presentation, the Follow-Up Activities will reinforce the curriculum messages. Lessons will be revisited so students could gain practice in certain areas or because certain situations arise, such as an increase in bullying in the classroom.

In all cases, **Lesson 1: Assertiveness** must be taught first. The skills of assertiveness presented in this lesson, which include knowing when assertiveness is needed, what to say, and how to say it, lay the groundwork for the rest of the lessons. Assertiveness skills, on their own, can help children stay safe in many kinds of situation. Whether the problem is bullying, risky playground behavior, physical abuse, or neglect, assertiveness lets students know how they should be treated, take action that will keep them safe, and get help when they need it. The following are a few examples of scenarios of students using assertive behavior:

- A student was pushed in the bathroom line by a friend. The student knows the rule and stands up for himself by saying “Stop! I don’t like that.”
- A student is being called names. After saying, “Stop! I don’t like that,” the name calling didn’t stop. The student told an adult she trusted in order to get help for the name calling.

### *Communicate with Parents and Caregivers*

Check with the school for policies determining how parents and caregivers should be informed about special programs their children are receiving. When parents and caregivers are informed in a timely manner, they can support and reinforce the message at home, increasing students’ retention of the material. Home Connections are included with every lesson to facilitate this support. Additionally, a Parent Guide accompanies this curriculum (see Tab), which may be photocopied and sent home to parents. The Parent Guide is also available online at the ChildBuilders website in a format that is accessible on all personal computer and hand-held devices: <http://childbuilders.org/parents>. Below is suggested language to send home:

*“In our classroom over the next few weeks, we will be using the **Stand Strong • Stay Safe** curriculum to teach students assertiveness skills that they can use to stay safe—at home, at*

*school, and in the community. We will be learning what to do when faced with a potentially dangerous situation, and how to get help. Home Connections will be sent home with your child, and we hope that you will help your child retain the information by reviewing these activities with your child. More information is available in the Parent Guide, which is available on your computer or smartphone at <http://childbuilders.org/parents>. You may also access more information about ChildBuilders programs through that website.”*

### ***Character Descriptions***

**Panda:** Panda is a child about the age of the students receiving the lesson. Panda is assertive and offers a role model for the students. When operating Panda, hold your body in the assertive stance by standing tall, shoulders back, chin up, and making eye contact with the students; use a confident tone of voice.

**Puppy:** Puppy is also a child about the age of the students, but Puppy is passive. Puppy doesn't like to stand up for self or others, and lacks self-confidence. Puppy is learning assertive behavior, so some students may identify with this character. When operating Puppy, show passive body language such as looking down at your feet, turning your body away from the students, and hiding Puppy behind other characters. Use a quiet or weak tone of voice.

**Monkey:** Monkey is an aggressive child. Monkey has not learned how to be kind to others or to consider their feelings, and demonstrates bullying behaviors. However, Monkey is learning how to be kind and thoughtful. Use aggressive body language and tone of voice when operating Monkey, especially a loud, threatening, or sarcastic tone.

**Penguin:** Penguin is a teacher or trusted adult whom Panda, Puppy, and Monkey can turn to for help. Maintain a calm, in-control demeanor when operating Penguin.

**Tiger:** Tiger is an adult who is responsible for taking care of children. Tiger forgets to be safe by leaving the children alone too long (neglect) and physically abusing them. There are many reasons that Tiger may be unable to care for the children well, and Tiger may behave similarly to some of the students' parents, so it is important not to refer to Tiger as bad or to think of Tiger as beyond redemption.

**Fox:** Fox is a character who sexually abuses one of the children in the story. Fox is someone the victim knows and likes. They have a positive relationship before the abusive incident—this is intentional because effective prevention programs must acknowledge the possibility of known perpetrators (Kenny & Wurtele, 2010). Fox has no gender, age, or relationship to the victim. Be careful to stick to the script so as not to artificially impose one of these criteria—it is important to leave open the possibility that a perpetrator may be of either gender and any age.

### *Symbols Used in the Script*

Normal Text: Normal text indicates the presenter's script. These are the words that the presenter speaks to the students.

Bulleted Text: Bulleted text indicates questions that the presenter asks of the students.

Asterisks: Indented text with an asterisk indicates suggested student responses.

Italicized text: Italicized text tells the presenter what to do.

Gray Boxes:

The story appears in gray boxes.



The words that characters speak are indented with an image of the character at the side. (*Character actions are italicized.*)

### *Guide to the Curriculum Binder*

The curriculum binder is separated into three tabbed sections: Presenter Guide, Parent Guide, and Classroom Resource. The information in each tab is intended for a distinct audience, and so between the tabs information is repeated as appropriate. To avoid confusion, an explanation of how to use each section is described here.

**Presenter Guide:** Everything that a presenter needs to teach this curriculum to a group of students is contained in the Presenter Guide. It includes an overview of the curriculum, information on handling disclosures, scripts for each lesson, Home Connections, Materials, and Follow-Up Activities. This section is intended for use by the person who is actually teaching the lessons.

**Parent Guide:** This section is designed to be photocopied in its entirety and distributed to parents. Copies may be left with the school counselor and in the front office for parents and caregivers to review while they are in the building. If it is not possible to make photocopies for every student to take home, the entire resource is freely available online at <http://childbuilders.org/parents>. Note that this website is optimized for viewing on smartphones and computers.

**Classroom Resources:** If the person presenting the lessons is not the regular classroom teacher, use the Classroom Resources to leave information and Follow-Up Activities with the classroom teacher. The Classroom Resources may be photocopied as a packet and left with the classroom teacher at the start of the program.

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## *Special Notes on Lesson 3: Sexual Abuse*

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Talking about the private parts of the body is central to the lesson on sexual abuse. Researchers on child sexual abuse agree that providing children with the medically accurate terms for their genitalia strengthens prevention efforts. This effect is two-fold. First, when children are taught the specific terminology, they are better able to identify inappropriate touches when they occur. Second, communication about inappropriate touch increases when specific terms are discussed with children: children are more likely to disclose sexually abusive events and better able to provide authorities with clear information about the event (see Boyle & Lutzker, 2005; Tharinger, 1988; Wurtele, 1987). Furthermore, children who hear adults use euphemisms when referring to genitalia may lack the language to discuss sexually abusive events and may feel an increased sense of shame due to the secrecy surrounding discussions of private parts.

If your school policies and comfort level allow, when teaching the *Private Parts Activity* please use the alternate script containing medically accurate terminology found at the end of lesson 3.

Stick to the script as closely as you can when teaching this lesson. If students raise questions that are not addressed in the script, handle them with respect and sensitivity. Some issues that occasionally arise are outlined below, along with suggestions for how to handle them. Throughout these discussions with young children, be aware of your cultural bias, and do not let it influence your responses.

- Can grown-ups touch each other's private parts?
  - » *Sometimes grown-ups touch each other's private parts, but it is something that grown-ups do, only when they both agree to it.*
- My mom took a picture of me in the bathroom and sent it to my grandma.
  - » *Talk to your mom about what we have learned in class today, and share with her the information that we are sending home.*
- I saw my brother's private parts last night when we were changing into our pajamas.
  - » *It is normal for brothers and sisters and people who live in the same house to see each other's private parts briefly when they are changing or bathing. Anytime you are uncomfortable, talk to an adult you trust. You may talk to me more after class.*
- My aunt was feeding her baby, and I saw her private parts.
  - » *Breastfeeding is the way the baby eats, and that's how the baby survives.*

- My mom and dad sometimes walk around the house naked.
  - » *Different families have different rules about what is appropriate to wear at home. You can talk to your parents about what we've learned today. I would be happy to talk with you more after class if you would like.*

The two most important rules about private parts are: (1) no one is allowed to look at your private parts or make you look at their private parts unless you need help; and (2) never keep secrets about private parts (Wurtele, 1987). Perpetrators of child sexual abuse often take advantage of a child's trust (Tharinger, 1988), so it is very important that students walk away knowing that they are in control over whether anyone looks at or touches their private parts. The mere presence of a doctor or a parent or any other trusted adult does not justify touching or looking at a child's private parts. The child must **need help** for this to be okay.

Examples:

- If you are at the doctor's office, is it okay for the doctor to look at or touch your private parts?
  - » **Correct Answer:** *"Yes, because I need help, and it is not a secret."*
  - » **Incorrect Answer:** *"Yes, because it's the doctor," or "Yes, because my mother is there with me."*
- If you are at a friend's house and have a bathroom accident, is it okay for your friend's parent to see your private parts while helping you to clean up and change?
  - » **Correct Answer:** *"Yes, because I need help, and it's not a secret." (It would also be correct to answer, "No, because I don't need help changing.")*
  - » **Incorrect Answer:** *"Yes, because I like my friend's parent."*