

Safe and Unsafe Bribes

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Although people who have bad intentions might try to coerce others by offering them bribes, just telling children not to take bribes can be very confusing.

A bribe is like a trade, where someone offers to do something you want to get you to do something in return. This trade might be in the form of a gift, use of something, a favor, money, or an activity. We offer bribes all the time that are not harmful, such as, "We'll have time to go to the park if you get your chores done quickly. Or, "As soon as you're quiet, I'll read you this story." The toys a child might get in a dentist's office are a form of a bribe, as are the promotional free gifts a store might advertise to get you to come in and see what else they have for sale.

These bribes are safe because everybody knows about them and because they are not being used to pressure anyone to do something that might be harmful or get anyone in trouble.

In order to make sure that younger children understand, use very specific examples from their daily lives. You might also have younger children repeat the Kidpower rules:

- "A gift should **not** be secret."
- "A favor should **not** be secret."
- "An outing should **not** be secret."
- "Touch should **not** be secret."
- "Problems should **not** be secrets."

You can then explain that, if someone is breaking these safety rules about bribes or about secrets, their safety plan is to say, "I don't keep that kind of secret. Stop or I'll tell!" And then their job is to come and tell you right away.

With older children, you can help them to develop assessment skills by explaining, "What makes a bribe unsafe is when someone tells you to keep a gift or a favor is a secret or when this person is using the bribe to pressure you to do something that will hurt someone, get you in trouble, or break our safety rules." Ask older children to point out examples in real life, movies, or books of safe and unsafe bribes and discuss these when you notice them yourself.