



SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION INFORMATION FOR PARENTS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

Today your child was provided an important safety program presented by a teacher, administrator, or counselor who works at your child's school or PSR program. This program reminded students that no one has the right to touch them inappropriately or to pressure them into inappropriate or unsafe behavior. Your child was taught three steps to take if anyone tries to touch the private areas of his or her body or tries to get your child to touch the other person's private body areas. These steps are:

- 1) **Say NO or STOP using a strong voice.**
- 2) **Get away from the unsafe person.**
- 3) **Tell a safe adult, such as a parent or teacher that they trust.**

In addition, information was presented regarding online safety, encouraging your child to make safe and appropriate choices on the internet.

This information sheet is provided in order to assist you in your role as primary educator of your child. Please review the information. Your child was also provided a handout of safety rules that you may wish to review with him or her.

STEP 1: KNOW THE FACTS

- In America, before reaching adulthood, one in four females and one in eight males experiences child sexual abuse.
- Youth ages 12-17 are at increased risk for sexual abuse and assault.
- Youth can experience sexual victimization from adults, from older teenagers, or from youth their own age.
- Studies show that about 10% of child sexual abuse is committed by strangers, 30% by family members, and about 60% by others known to the child or family.
- Sexual predators often spend time "grooming" their victims. This means that they get the youth accustomed to non-sexual touches; develop a special, friendly relationship with the child; and get to know and earn the trust of the child's family. Grooming is aimed toward lessening the chances that an adolescent will tell that he or she has been abused and, if they tell, that they will be believed.
- Today, grooming is often accomplished online. Child predators collect information via youth's social media profiles and begin the process of building an online relationship with the adolescent. Predators may send their targets online "gifts," such as game credits, and ask for online favors, such as photographs and personal information from the youth.
- Child sex trafficking can happen to any youth. It can start online, as youth are pressured to provide photos, videos, or webcam access of themselves, sometimes in exchange for cash, gifts, or game credits.

Warning Signs of Possible Sexual Abuse of an Adolescent

- Nightmares; difficulty sleeping
- Self-harm, sometimes called self-injury or "cutting"
- Odd or excessive itching or pain in their genital or anal body areas, with or without obvious injury
- Recurrent urinary or yeast infections
- Unusual sexual knowledge or behavior
- Unusual fear of or sudden reluctance to be alone with a certain person
- Sexually-transmitted disease
- Significant changes in appearance; lack of attention to hygiene
- A sexually abused child may or may not show physical signs of injury from abuse.

Warning Signs of Possible Child Sex Trafficking

- Having multiple cell phones, large amounts of cash or hotel keys
- Having a history of running away or current status as a runaway
- Communication with a controlling older boyfriend or girlfriend
- Increased webcam activity, or leaving their webcam open during dressing or showering

STEP 2: EDUCATE YOUR ADOLESCENT CHILD

For many people, it is not easy to have a discussion about personal body safety with their children. If this is true for you, then you are not alone! It can feel awkward to discuss these issues, but doing so is very important. It could save your child from sexual mistreatment and the physical and emotional damage that comes from it.

- Choose times to speak to your child that are relaxed and unhurried. Remember, just as you would speak to your children about other safety issues regularly, this discussion should take place more than once!
- Be honest with your child that there are some adults who are inappropriate toward young people. These adults may try to touch youth on the private areas of their bodies or get youth to touch them. Sometimes these adults may show inappropriate photos or videos, such as pornography, to youth.
- Educate your adolescent to beware of anyone online who asks to meet them or offers to pay them cash, gifts, or game credits for your child to provide photos, videos, or webcam access of him or herself. This can be the start of child sex trafficking.
- Share with your child what to do if anyone tries to touch or interact with them in a way that makes your child feel uncomfortable. The three steps he or she should take are:
 - 1) **Say NO or STOP using a strong voice.**
 - 2) **Get away from the unsafe person.**
 - 3) **Tell you or another trusted adult what happened.**

Share with your child that these steps apply no matter the other person's age or gender, and no matter if the child knows the person or if they are a stranger.

- Teach your child that no one should ever ask them to keep a secret from you. Share that they can always tell you anything, even if someone else told of threatened them not to tell.
- Explain to your child that unsafe adults sometimes use tricks to lure kids into going with them. Safe adults never ask children whom they don't know for help or directions. Your child should never go with someone they don't know, even if the stranger uses a common lure such as:
 - The stranger has lost his or her pet and needs your child's help to find it.
 - The stranger is lost and needs directions.
 - Your child's mom or dad is hurt or sick and told the stranger to pick up the child.
 - Your child has won a contest or is invited to a "modeling tryout."

STEP 3: TAKE ACTION

SUPERVISE your middle school child well, both online and in "real life." Know where your child is at all times, who they are with, and when they are expected home. Frequently supervise your child's online activities and remove technology if your child is making unsafe or inappropriate choices.

RESPECT your child's fear of or discomfort around a certain person, even if this is a person you normally trust.

REPORT any suspicions immediately. If you notice an adult with suspicious behaviors, like the warning signs listed above, report your concerns to someone in charge of the school or program involved. If you believe your child has been abused, contact your child's pediatrician, law enforcement, or child protective services. The Missouri Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline number is **1-800-392-3738**.

*Most importantly, **BELIEVE YOUR CHILD** if he or she reports inappropriate behavior to you, even if they report someone you know and normally trust. Adolescents must overcome a great deal of hurt and fear to report mistreatment. If your child ever reports to you that someone has mistreated him or her, *listen to them, believe them, show your love and support for them*, and report your concerns to the appropriate authorities.*