



SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION INFORMATION FOR PARENTS OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Three steps can help keep your child safe.

STEP 1: KNOW THE FACTS

- In America, before reaching adulthood, one in four females and one in eight males experiences child sexual abuse.
- Preschoolers can be the victims of child sexual abuse. About 40% of the time the perpetrators of very young children are themselves minors; 60% of the time these perpetrators are adults.
- 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.
- Child molesters often spend time “grooming” their victims. This means that they get the child 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 a child will tell that he or she has been abused and, if they tell, that they will be believed.
- Common behavior in preschool children includes asking questions about gender differences, body parts, pregnancy, and birth. It is also normal for young children to look at, show, and touch their private body parts. It is NOT common for preschool children to have knowledge of specific sexual acts or language, or to simulate sexual acts with peers, dolls, or toys.

Warning Signs of Possible Sexual Abuse of a Young Child

- Draws artwork of sexual body parts and/or sexual acts
- Demonstrates age-inappropriate sexualized play with toys, dolls, self or others.
- Has odd or excessive itching or pain in their genital or anal body areas, with or without obvious injury
- Has frequent urinary or yeast infections
- Demonstrates inappropriate sexual knowledge or behavior
- Shows unusual fear of or has a sudden reluctance to be alone with a certain person
- Asks other children to behave sexually or play sexual games
- Thinks of self or his/her body as dirty or bad
- A sexually abused child may or may not show physical signs of injury from abuse.

STEP 2: EDUCATE YOUR 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 with children, particularly young children. 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. Show with your tone of voice that this is an important topic, but not a scary one. Remember, just as you would speak to your children about other safety issues regularly, this discussion should take place more than once!
- Teach your preschooler that he or she has body parts that are private. Teach your child that these parts are different for boys and girls, and the appropriate names for these body parts. Explain that no one besides a parent or medical professional should look at or touch your child on those areas because they are private.

- Educate your preschooler that other people have private parts to their bodies, too. No one should ask your child to look at or touch the private areas of the other person's body.
- Explain to your preschooler that these rules apply to everyone, no matter if they are a boy or a girl; if they are a child, a teenager, or an adult; and no matter if they are a stranger or someone known to your child.
- Share with your preschooler that you want him or her to do three things if someone were to break these touching rules:
 - 1) **Say NO! Use a big voice.**
 - 2) **Get away from that person, if possible.**
 - 3) **Tell you or their other parent.**
- Describe to your child the difference between a *secret* and a *surprise*. A secret is something you are never supposed to tell, where a surprise will be shared with everyone at a certain time (for example, at a party or on a holiday). 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 them not to tell.

Why don't children immediately tell when they have been sexually abused?

Many different reasons!

- They are afraid they won't be believed.
- They don't know whom to tell.
- They aren't sure that what happened was wrong.
- They don't want to get in trouble.
- They know and love the person who abused them.
- Their abuser is an adult and has power.
- They don't want to get the person in trouble.
- They are afraid their parents would be angry.
- The molester threatened to hurt them, their family or their pet.
- They feel guilty and believe they did something wrong.
- Their abuser is a family member or friend of their family.
- They feel scared...

STEP 3: TAKE ACTION

LOOK for the warning signs of an abuser. Adults who commit child sexual abuse often show these warning signs:

- wants to be alone with children
- gives gifts to children without their parent's permission
- wants to wrestle, tickle and touch children
- allows children to do activities their parents would not allow
- uses bad language, tells dirty jokes, or shows pornography to children
- looks for work and volunteer opportunities with access to children
- discourages other adults from participating, monitoring, or checking-in

SCREEN babysitters and caregivers. Be very careful who has access to your children. Check their references. Once you have chosen a caregiver, drop in unexpectedly to see how your children are doing. Ask your children how their experience with the caregiver was, and carefully listen to their responses.

RESPECT your child's fear of or discomfort around a certain person, even if this is a person you normally trust. Sometimes young children tell us with their behavior things they cannot tell us with words.

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 preschool or program involved. If you believe your child has been abused, contact your child's pediatrician or child protective services.

*Most importantly, **BELIEVE YOUR CHILD** if they report inappropriate behavior to you, even if they report someone you know and normally trust. Children must overcome a great deal of hurt and fear to report sexual abuse. If your child ever reports to you that someone has touched him or her inappropriately, *listen to them, believe them, show your love and support for them*, and report your concerns to the appropriate authorities at **1-800-392-3738**.*