

TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE

It's hard to imagine what conversation could be more difficult than talking to your child about sexual abuse. It's an uncomfortable topic for us as adults; it's scary to admit that we're concerned for our children about such a thing. Yet silence works to make this problem more difficult to address. And, just as we need to understand this topic to be better parents, so too we need to be sure our children understand our concern so they can be safer.

From the beginning...

One of the most important things that parents must do is establish an atmosphere of trust and acceptance. Your children need to know that you are comfortable with the topic and that you are comfortable with whatever questions they might raise.

It's also important for children to know that you will do everything you can to keep them safe: that is why you are having this conversation and that is why your family has rules about ways to do things.

Your own attitudes about your body and the way you respect each other's privacy and rights are important clues for your child.

- Stress that one's body is a very special gift from God, a gift to be cared for because God made us.
- Help children feel comfortable with their own bodies.
- Teach them about good touch and bad touch.
- Teach them vocabulary for the parts of their bodies.
- Teach children the difference between a bad secret (one that makes them or would make others feel bad) and a good secret (one that would make them and others happy).
- Answer their questions about sex and sexual activity honestly and in an age-appropriate way.
- Let them know they can tell you anything.
- Help them trust their own instincts about people.
- Teach them to tell and to keep telling if there is a situation that makes them uncomfortable or that hurts them.

What do you say to children about sexual abuse?

Depending on the age of the child, there are basic things to know.

- Some people want to touch children, hurt them or make them keep secrets they don't want to keep. No one has the right to do that.
- Some people may behave in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable. Pay attention to those feelings and call for help if someone won't leave you alone.
 - Someone sitting or standing too close to you.
 - Someone who blocks your way.
 - Someone who invites you into a private place by yourself.
 - Someone who touches you in a way that makes you sad, angry, confused or uncomfortable.
 - Someone who shows you videos or books or movies or internet materials that your teacher or parents wouldn't show you.
 - Someone who doesn't listen or disregards you when you say "no."

No one has the right to make you do things that make you feel unsafe or uncomfortable or to make you keep secrets from your parents.

Remind your child that they can tell you anything and you will always help them.

Remind your child to use the buddy system and always to let an adult know where they are going. It's a way to help them stay safe.

www.kidshealth.org

www.darkness2light.org

www.preventchildabuse.org

www.missingkids.com

www.childhelpusa.org

AT A GLANCE

Teach your children well...

- Teach your child what kind of behaviors they should be suspicious about.
- Teach them to turn to you or to another trusted adult when they have concerns.
- Teach your children to say "no" to activities that make them uncomfortable, that cross boundaries you have helped them learn, or that feel unsafe to them.
- Teach your children that secrets about touching and their body are not okay.
- Teach your children the difference between good secrets (surprises) and bad secrets (things that make them feel sad, angry, confused or scared.)
- Be sure your children know what will happen and who will contact them or pick them up in case of an emergency.
- Remind children and teens who use the internet not to give personal information or to arrange to meet someone they have "met" in cyberspace.
- Teach them about safe or okay touches and unsafe touches.
- Practice "What to do if..."

What Children Can do...

Move quickly away from the person who is frightening you.

Get angry when someone does something to you that you don't want the person to do.

Say "no" if you feel threatened or speak loudly and say "Stop that. I don't want to do that."

If an adult's behaviors or words feel funny or seem strange to you, tell your parents or someone you trust.

Stand up for yourself even if you are concerned about hurting another's feelings.

Yell or scream to alert others that you need help.

Always find a responsible adult right away and tell that person what happened.

Practice! Practice! Practice!

Talk to your child about “what if” situations. Practice how they should respond. Use these suggestions to start your conversations and together with your child, think up other situations they might encounter.

For Teens: You are at the mall waiting outside the media store to meet your friends. A good looking guy comes up and offers you the opportunity to win some free CDs if you will participate in a survey. You need to accompany him to the parking lot where he has his gear. What do you do?

For All Ages: You and your buddies are playing ball at the park. A guy you have seen around the park with a puppy comes over and asks you to help him look for his lost dog. What do you do?

For All Ages: As you leave school, a woman with a badge approaches you and calls you by name. She tells you your parents have been in an accident and she’s been sent to bring you to the hospital. What do you do?

For Pre-Teens/Teens: You have been talking to someone on the internet for a long time. She says she is coming to town to visit relatives and would love to meet you at the mall. What should you do?

For All Ages; At the family’s big Thanksgiving dinner celebration, an older cousin touched you in a way you found uncomfortable. He threatened that he will steal your new puppy if you tell. You know he’s mean enough to do it. What should you do?

Some Behavioral Signs of Sexual Abuse

It is important to remember that these signs can indicate many different things, including normal behavioral reactions to change. Be alert for a pattern of behaviors and speak to your doctor if you observe several of these behaviors.

- -Nightmares, fear of the dark, sleeping problems
- -Loss of appetite
- -Trouble eating or swallowing
- -Mood swings
- -Spacing out at odd times
- -Fear of certain people or places
- -Stomach illness
- -Regressive behavior: an older child acting like a younger child
- -New words for private body parts
- -Sexual play with dolls or other children.
- -Talking about a new older friend
- -Suddenly having money

Prayer for Families

O Lord, bless our family today and everyday,

Guide us in our comings and goings.

Help us be examples of your love and will.

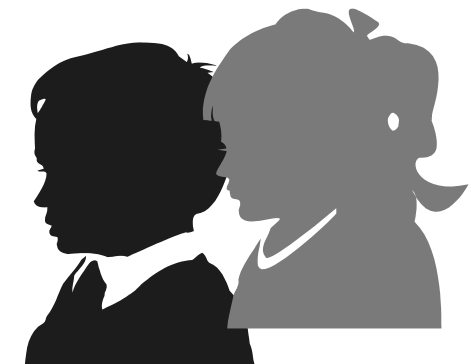
Help us forgive those who have hurt us.

Protect us everyday and

Grant us your peace.

In Jesus name, Amen

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The Office of Child Protection, Archdiocese of Portland, Oregon gratefully acknowledges the Diocese of Rochester for permission to reprint this brochure.