



If you know of or suspect someone you know has suffered from sexual abuse, what should you do as a concerned adult?

- 1. Talk to your kids early about their bodies and personal boundaries**, even as young as 4 or 5. Discuss “safe touch” vs. “unsafe touch.” Remind them that their bodies are theirs and it’s OK to say “No” to anything that makes them feel uncomfortable.
- 2. Build a trusting relationship with your child**, so they feel comfortable sharing concerns about their bodies or relationships with others. Discuss how to trust adults. Describe what a trusting adult look/acts like and remind them always to check with you if they have any doubts.
- 3. Discuss what sexual abuse and molestation mean**, regardless if this has occurred in the family even if they are close. Break down taboo topics to make them more approachable. Be sure to use age-appropriate language.
 - a. 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 20 boys is a victim of child sexual abuse;
 - b. Self-report studies show that 20% of adult females and 5-10% of adult males recall a childhood sexual assault or sexual abuse incident;
 - c. During a one-year period in the U.S., 16% of youth ages 14 to 17 had been sexually victimized;
 - d. Over the course of their lifetime, 28% of U.S. youth ages 14 to 17 had been sexually victimized;
 - e. Children are most vulnerable to child sexual abuse between the ages of 7 and 13.*
- 4. Upon any suspicion of child sexual abuse**, contact your/a child’s social worker or therapist (if you have one) and report it to the Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-252-2873). In an emergency contact your local police by dialing 911 to determine safety and precautions around next steps.
- 5. If abuse happens**, the most important message to communicate is that the child is never to blame- no matter what, provide encouragement and safety versus evoking shame or embarrassment. It’s best to connect the child to therapy services so they can process the traumatic event in a continued supportive place.

Help us raise awareness and take action to keep kids safe with these ten tips to prevent abuse:

- 1. Be informed.** Child sexual abuse is one of the most prevalent, most hidden risks that kids in our communities face. One in ten children in the United States will be sexually abused before turning 18, and still too few people know about the extent of the problem.
- 2. Keep your eyes and ears open.** Offenders operate through access, privacy, and control. Step back and consider whom your child interacts with, where they interact, and how your child responds to these interactions. Often it is people familiar to them, not strangers, who can present problems.
- 3. Teach children their boundaries.** Children have personal boundaries and violating them is a form of abuse. Be prepared to step in where necessary but, most important, empower your children to understand what their boundaries are:
 - a. Physical boundaries:** Who can touch them, how much, and where. Even a relative who kisses or tickles too much without meaning to can violate this boundary. A child should be allowed to say, “No,” or “That’s enough, I don’t like that.”
 - b. Emotional boundaries:** How close they are to a person, how much time they spend with that person, and what information they share can be signs of over-involvement, at least. If they seem withdrawn or are being encouraged to keep secrets from you, they may be being emotionally manipulated. Encourage conversation about what’s appropriate.
 - c. Behavioral boundaries:** What rules they are to follow, and what they should or should not do. If someone is encouraging them to not worry about what mom and dad say, respond to that immediately. That may require confronting the individual directly.
- 4. Set clear guidelines.** Make sure everyone in the family respects each other’s rights to privacy in dressing, bathing, sleeping, and other personal activities. Be clear about the difference between “okay” touch and inappropriate touch.

Use proper names for body parts so children have a clear understanding of their bodies and the correct language for asking questions or describing behavior that could be sexual abuse.
- 5. Know what “crossing the line” means.** Know what boundary violations can look like, so you can watch for red flags. Physical boundary violations can mean tickling, massaging, horseplay, or going overboard with affection. Emotional violations can include acting possessive, pretending to be the child’s friend on social media, or sending excessive or inappropriate text messages. Behavioral violations involve manipulating kids into doing things they wouldn’t normally do like keep secrets, looking at pornography, “sexting” or using drugs or alcohol.
- 6. Say yes to “no.”** Give children ways to say “no” if someone tries to violate a boundary. Teach them to yell “Leave me alone,” or “My body is private.” Role-play to help kids get comfortable saying no, and let them know they can use these phrases with other children as well as adults.
- 7. Let children get away.** Teach children to move away from anyone who is violating their boundaries and tell another grown-up what is going on. Let them know that no one should be making them feel uncomfortable or asking them to keep “secrets.”

8. **Start talking – and keep talking.** Take the lead in talking to your children about what is healthy sexual behavior and what is unhealthy. Let everyone in the family know they can ask questions and speak freely. Continue to bring up the conversation as children learn and grow, so they always understand what's appropriate and what isn't.
9. **Stay on top of your children's use of technology.** The Internet, email, instant messaging, webcams, social media sites, and cell phones create the illusion of anonymity. Monitor your child's online behavior, and make sure their interactions are visible and public. Also, teach your child never to give out personal information.

As early as possible, establish rules for Internet and phone use, including time spent online, hours to be on the phone, and where it's appropriate and inappropriate to

use technology. Do not permit young people to have a private computer; you should be able to monitor their usage at all times. Set up the monitor in an open space like the kitchen or dining area. Insist on knowing their passwords.

10. **Know your resources.** Learn more about the signs and symptoms of sexual abuse, prevention tips, and ways to intervene. If you do suspect abuse, know how to report it promptly and get the right support. Bookmark these resources to stay informed and take action:

References:

*<http://victimsofcrime.org/media/reporting-on-child-sexual-abuse/child-sexual-abuse-statistics>

*<https://www.denverymca.org/news/10-tips-prevent-child-abuse> **JPA**

