

## How to Educate Children about Abuse

Parents, teachers and other caring adults often teach children guidelines for bike, water and street safety. Children do not become fearful of bicycles, swimming pools and crosswalks as a result of this instruction.

Teaching children about sexual abuse is the best way to help keep them safe.

### Teach them:

- The real names for their body parts, including their private parts, so they can talk about things that happen to their bodies in a way others will understand.
- Not to keep secrets. Tell your children to let you know if a child or adult plays secret games or tells them something bad will happen if they don't keep the secret.
- That adults are not always right. Tell your children to come and talk to you if they don't feel right about something a grown up says or does.
- To tell if something happens. Let your children know that if they say someone has touched them, you will believe them and not be mad at them. Tell them that you love them and will help keep them safe.

Touching safety can be approached in the same straightforward, matter-of-fact manner.

### Repeat simple safety guidelines often.

- "If you are touched by a person in a way that you don't feel right about, tell me about it. I will believe you and help you."
- "Grownups don't need to touch children in private areas unless it's for health or hygiene reasons."
- "Never go away or get into a car with a grownup you don't know, no matter what they tell you."
- "Trust your inner voice (instincts, judgments) if it's telling you something doesn't seem right."

### Establish your own set of family rules.

- "Do not let others know if you are home alone."
- "Your opinion is important when we try a new babysitter or have a problem with a babysitter."
- "You can say 'no' to anyone who wants you to break one of the family rules. I will back you up."
- "You can ride in a car with \_\_\_ or \_\_\_, but not with anyone else without asking first."

### Play "what ifs" to practice decision-making.

- "What if you were playing (someplace you aren't supposed to play) and a man or woman tried to make you get into their car?"
- "What if you and I got separated at the shopping mall?"
- "What if someone we know really well touched you in a confusing way and asked you to keep it a secret?"
- "What if an older person offered you money (or something you really wanted) if you would break our family rules?"

**Help children develop assertiveness skills. Teach them to respond verbally.**

- "I don't tell people that."
- "I don't want to be tickled. Could we take a walk instead?"
- "Leave me alone. I'll tell."
- "I'm not allowed to do that."
- "No."

Practice responding non-verbally: taking someone's hand off them, running away, moving away, standing tall, shoulders back, looking the person in the eye, shaking their head.

**Teach children that adults aren't always right.**

- "Most adults touch children in appropriate ways, but some adults are mixed up and don't make good decisions about touching children."
- "If you aren't sure about something a grownup says or does, ask me to help explain it."

Teach children that there are certain things that adults, older children and babysitters shouldn't do. "No one has the right to put their hand down your pants, force you to touch them, touch your body if you say 'no' or touch your private parts."

Help children develop a dignified vocabulary for parts of the body. Most people learn names for body parts and body functions in this order: Family words ("pee-pee"), slang ("piss"), neutral ("go to the bathroom") and, finally, medical terminology ("urinate").

Children with no words other than slang or family names might be embarrassed to ask for help with a touching problem. The correct terms for body parts (breast, penis, vagina) are dignified and enable children to express themselves clearly.

A good substitute for medical terminology is "private parts."

Teach children that touching safety rules apply all the time, not just with strangers or men or babysitters. While rules about strangers are important in safety instruction, it is uncommon for a child to be sexually abused by a stranger. Most children are sexually abused by someone they know and trust.