

Talking to your child

ABOUT PERSONAL SAFETY

As a parent or other caregiver there are things you can do to help keep your child safe from sexual abuse. Children as young as 3 or 4 years old can be taught basic messages and rules about personal safety – keeping their private parts safe.

Over 90% of child victims are sexually abused by someone they have a relationship with (e.g. a family member, neighbor, babysitter, staff member of a youth serving organization). Many children do not report the sexual abuse because of shame, confusion and manipulation by the abuser. However, if a caring adult talks to a child about unsafe, secret touching and what to do if it ever happens to them, that child if abused is much more likely to tell someone and get help.

HELPFUL GUIDELINES:

- ✓ **Before talking to your child** about personal safety, prepare by reviewing the Key Messages below. Decide how and what you'd like to cover.
- ✓ **Set time aside to talk to your child** or look for ways to weave the conversation into everyday activities— bath time, changing clothes, doctor visits, during car drive time, etc.
- ✓ **Be matter of fact and calm** as you speak with your child. A serious, fearful tone may scare your child or convey to him or her that there is something wrong or bad about their body.
- ✓ **You can refer to genitals as “private parts”** (the parts covered by a bathing suit) or better yet use the accurate terms (vagina, penis, breasts). Using these terms conveys to your child that you are comfortable talking about their body and personal safety and it gives your child the vocabulary to use should they need to report abuse.
- ✓ **Use “What if” scenarios** to ensure your child understands what to do should they experience unsafe touching (refer to “Key Messages” below). For example say, “What if a grown-up touched your breasts and asked you to keep it a secret, what would you do?” Or “If someone touched your body and it made you feel uncomfortable or confused, what would you do?”
- ✓ **Talk about this topic more than once.** Revisit it periodically, adjusting the language and approach to be more age appropriate as your child gets older.

KEY MESSAGES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN:

✓ Your body belongs to you.

✓ No one should touch your private parts unless it's to keep you healthy.

(health related examples: a doctor examines a child's genitals; a child asks for help cleaning a hard-to-reach place, such as his or her lower back or bottom). Private parts: areas covered by a bathing suit; penis, vagina, breasts, bottom.

✓ It's okay to say "no" to showing or touching of private parts. If it happens to you, it's not your fault.

✓ Touching should never be a secret.

✓ If someone asks you to keep a secret about touching you should tell me or another grown-up right away.

✓ You can always talk to me – about someone touching your private parts or anything else that bothers you.

Pay Attention To The People In Your Child's Life:

- Screen babysitters or other adults who spend one-on-one time with your child. Drop in unexpectedly during their time together.
- Ask your child for details regarding their activities with the adults and older children in their life - ask them how they feel about spending time with them and listen closely to what they have to say.
- Visit and monitor your child's activities whenever possible (e.g., sports and church youth activities, recreational and enrichment program activities, sleepovers, campouts).

Helpful Websites:

www.stopitnow.org

www.darkness2light.com

www.kidpower.org

OLDER CHILDREN & TEENS

Keep the lines of communication open and supportive with your older child or teen. This will encourage them to share with you what is going on in their life and what may be bothering them, including sexual abuse.

Periodically check in with your child about the peers, teachers, coaches, and other adults in their life, and listen closely to what they have to say.

Talk about the qualities of safe, healthy peer relationships (e.g., trust; honesty; mutual respect in language and behavior, free of pressure, threats or intimidation).

KEY MESSAGES FOR YOUTH:

- ✓ You deserve to be safe and respected in your relationships.
- ✓ Anyone who tries to pressure or force you into any form of sexual activity is an unsafe person.
- ✓ Sexual activity without mutual consent is a crime.
- ✓ Respect a “no” when another person doesn’t want to engage in physical or sexual contact or communication (including texts, e-mails, photos).
- ✓ No one has the right to sexually harass or abuse another person no matter what that person is doing or wearing.

Helpful Websites:

These sites help young people identify abusive partners, learn how to protect themselves, and establish safe and rewarding relationships.

www.loveisrespect.org

www.giverespect.org

www.teenluresprevention.com