

Sexual Abuse Prevention: What Parents Can Teach Their Children

Prevention of sexual abuse training for children is built on conveying the following ideas effectively to your children early on:

- Your body belongs to you
- You have a right to say who touches you and how
- If someone touches you in a way you don't like, in a way that makes you feel funny or uncomfortable inside, or in a way that you think is wrong, it's okay to say no
- If the person doesn't stop, you say, "I'm going to tell" and then you tell, no matter what
- If you're asked to keep a secret, you say, "No, I'm going to tell"
- If you have a problem, keep talking about it until someone helps you

Your body belongs to you

Kids should be taught where their "private zones" are. Say, "Show me where on your body you wear a bathing suit." Then tell the children that a person's private zones are the parts of your body a bathing suit covers. Let children know that their body belongs to them and that they have the right to say who touches them. Some parents say something like; "Your private parts are special parts of your body. You can touch yourself there in private times, but others shouldn't, except if you're sick or hurt or at the doctor. It's not okay for someone older than you to touch your private parts or to ask you to touch their private parts, especially if they ask you to keep it a secret."

The right to say who touches you and how

Prevention is based on allowing children to decide about touching for themselves and giving them permission and support to speak up for themselves. One of the worst consequences of abuse-prevention training would be the withdrawal of normal affection and play with children. It is important; however, to acknowledge and support their likes and dislikes especially when it comes to touching.

It's okay to say no

Give them ways to say no. Here are some examples:

- "Stop. I don't like that"
- "That's not fun anymore, and I don't want you to do it"
- "You shouldn't be asking me to do that. Leave me alone"
- "I'm not allowed to do things like that. Please take me home"

I'm going to tell/No secrets

Then they need to learn to say, "I'm going to tell if you don't leave me alone" immediately if their first request is ignored. Children need to be taught to tell their parents or someone they trust anytime they want someone to stop touching them. No matter how scared they feel, they need to tell someone who can help them. And they must know that they will be believed and supported no matter what the abuser has said. You may adopt a family agreement not to keep secrets. Then your child can say, "We don't keep secrets in our family. I'm going to tell."

Keep talking about it until you get help

It is essential that you never tell your children whom they can trust. An abuser can be anyone. Children need to make their own decisions about who they trust to tell. It is important to teach children to keep telling until someone hears them and helps with their problem. Children are not always clear in the ways they try to tell. If someone does not understand what the child has tried to say, it is important that the child try to tell someone else until she/he is understood and is helped. You can help your child problem-solve about whom they might tell if you are unavailable to them. ("Who could you tell if...?")

While adults can't always prevent sexual abuse, children may if they are given permission to think for themselves, the ability to speak up for themselves and the resources to get help when they need it.

(Adapted from Kraizer, Sherryl K. "The Safe Child Book")

Sexual Abuse Prevention: What Parents Can Teach Their Children *page 2*

ALERT LIST FOR KIDS

Be careful of someone who:

1. Treats you different from other kids (meaner or special).
2. Wants to spend time alone with you, making excuses to go places or have others leave you two alone.
3. Asks you to do things that involve physical contact, like give back rubs or wash his/her back in the bathtub.
4. Does things to you that involve physical contact, like gives back rubs, massages, or wants to help you wash.
5. Accidentally-on-purpose touches your private parts-brushes against your breasts while wrestling, or rubs his/her body against yours.
6. Wants to play "doctor", "house", or "Simon Says" and tells you to touch private parts or take clothes off.
7. Looks at or touches your body and says it is an "inspection" or it is to see how you are developing.
8. Puts lotion or ointment on your private areas when mother or others are not around or when nothing is wrong.
9. Accidentally-on-purpose comes into your room while you are undressed or in the bathroom when you are there.
10. Accidentally-on-purpose lets his/her robe fall open or walks around without clothes on.
11. Doesn't respect your privacy-comes into your room without knocking, doesn't allow you to close doors to your bedroom or the bathroom.
12. Asks questions or makes accusations about sexual things between you and your girlfriend/boyfriend.
13. Says sexual things about your body or how you dress.
14. Talks to you about sexual things he/she has done.
15. Tells you private things about his/her spouse or your parent.
16. Says you are special, different, the only one who really understands (better than his/her spouse).
17. Treats you like an adult, she/he acts like kid.
18. Gives you special privileges or favors, makes you feel like you owe something.
19. Teaches sex education by showing pornographic pictures, videos, showing his/her body or touching yours.
20. Tells you not to tell your mother or other people about things that happen between you (wants you to keep secrets).
21. Comes into your bedroom at night, watches or touches you, says he/she thought you were his/her spouse.

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Adapted from:

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