

Child Sexual Abuse – What Parents Need to Know

1. Talking to your child before an assault happens is the best prevention:

- Children are best protected by giving them the knowledge and skills necessary for their safety.
- Let your child know that safety rules apply to all adults including family members.
- Encourage your child to tell someone about secrets that are making her/him feel bad.
- Let your child know that you are available to talk and listen; allow your child to share thoughts and listen closely to what they are telling you.
- Help your child understand who they can trust. Talk with your child about this and listen to their input.
- Tell your child that if someone touches her/him to tell and keep telling until someone listens.
- Instilling a sense of strong self-esteem in your child may help your child avoid feelings of responsibility and guilt if they are victimized.
- Open sexual communication at home can make it easier for children to disclose sexual abuse by minimizing discomfort.
- A child is never to blame for the abuse; children cannot prevent abuse, only the offender can.

2. Knowing perpetrator tactics and how a child may react can help you detect sexual abuse:

- Offenders may threaten to hurt the child or a family member of the child if they tell anyone about the abuse. This is common regardless of whether the perpetrator is a family member, friend, acquaintance or stranger.
- A child often feels that she/he is to blame for the abuse. The offender may reinforce this by using guilt tactics on the child.
- Offenders often follow-up abusive incidents with treats or gifts for the child. This is very confusing for the child, and may make her/him feel guilty for accepting the gifts and/or for feeling bad about the abuse.
- Be aware if your child talks a lot about a particular adult or older person.
- Be aware of individuals (family member, friend, neighbor) who spend an inordinate amount of time with your child.
- It is common for a child to deny that abuse happened when it did or tell about the abuse and then recant their original statement. There is little evidence that children make false allegations of abuse.

3. Responding appropriately when your child is victimized can make all the difference in her/his healing process:

- If you think abuse is going on, act on that feeling or instinct.
- Believe your child when they tell.
- Don't force a child to talk or stop talking about the abuse. Allow them to go at their own pace. Be patient.
- Remind your child how strong she/he was for telling about the abuse.
- Getting your child involved with a support group of peer survivors can help eliminate feelings of isolation.
- Get support for you and your child; this is a very difficult issue for any one person to handle.