

Tips For Parents on Sexual Abuse Prevention Education

General considerations:

Teach children in the context of personal “safety skills”, to avoid scaring or horrifying them. For example when teaching home fire safety or traffic safety we don’t describe to kids what being in a fire or hit by a car is like. In the same way we don’t want to give frightening details about possible abuse to children but instead talk about uncomfortable situations that they may be in and brainstorm and practice safety skills.

For younger children these skills can be taught in the context of matter-of-fact “rules” for touching and body safety, much in the way children learn fire safety rules and practice skills such as “Stop, Drop and Roll”.

Remember you know your child best, their temperament, personality, and how they learn best, let that knowledge guide you in how to approach teaching prevention skills to your particular child. For example; some boys and girls will need more assertive skill help, verbal practice and confidence building; others who may be more social or out-going, may need more help with trust issues and paying attention to and heeding uncomfortable feelings and remembering safety rules, or learning personal boundaries and limit setting. The best protection is to prepare a child to *help him or herself* to improve personal safety. Parents need to work toward building on-going, open communication with children about anything that could make them feel uncomfortable or afraid.

Concepts to teach:

Children should be taught special body rights that all children have, these are:

The Right to Be Safe

The Right to Say “NO” and

The Right to Ask Questions about Touches

Younger elementary age children can have sexual abuse defined for them as forced, tricked, or bribed touches to private parts of your body or another person’s body.

Parents and care givers should identify, use and practice correct names of private body parts for boys and girls.

Next children are taught about 3 kinds of Touches and Touching Safety. Teach that there are comfortable touches that children like (“OK” or “heart touches”), uncomfortable touches they don’t like (“No” touches) and those that are confusing (“?” question mark touches).

Older elementary children can do role-play practices or skits and vote on the types of touches, which can include hitting and other hurting “No” touches as well.

As Children master the above sections they next are taught touching safety skills. Teach and practice:

Saying: “No!” or “Stop!”

Running away and

Telling someone the child trusts.

These three skills when practiced are very empowering for children and should be repeated frequently. Remember, you wouldn't tell children just once about fire safety and then never hold a fire drill, nor would you teach multiplication tables once and then expect children to have them mastered!

Children should be taught in a matter-of-fact way that sexual abuse (as defined above) could happen anywhere, at any time to any child. It could be a stranger or more likely someone that the child knows who might try to touch their private parts. Help children to learn the idea of listening to their "inside voice", intuition or "funny feeling" that warns if something uncomfortable is happening.

Use age appropriate practices, demonstrations or read together using child-level books to help children practice and master skills in different situations. Parents and caregivers should also discuss tricking and bribery and practice saying "No", "**getting away**" and "**telling skills**" for those examples.

It is very important to emphasize repeatedly that *if a child cannot stop an uncomfortable touch of any kind it is never the child's fault!*

Additional guidelines:

Pre-school and early elementary children: Tie abuse education to other safety education, such as answering the door or phone or tornado safety. Keep concepts, words and examples simple. Find opportunities to support the child's esteem and increase self confidence. Develop an actual list of safe people to tell or talk to, plan what to do if the first person they tell doesn't do anything.

Late elementary and early middle-school: Children are now having more social contacts and activities, including outside the home or school, especially team sports and extra-curricular school or church events, but these activities still have "rules" so this teaching style remains useful. Include education about other social problems like bullying and harassing behaviors and other peer related issues. Remember to review all safety topics taught earlier. Emphasize and support issues of non-violence, "telling" if they see others being abused or bullied. Teach through examples and moral choice scenarios which support healthy choices and decision making. Educate about substance abuse.

Late middle-school: Maintain open communications, ask what they think about things they see or hear in the news or are talking about in school, and ask their ideas and opinions about what might be good choices or what might be done in different situations? There is likely much greater peer pressure happening at this time. Begin talking more about inappropriate or uncomfortable contact and healthy boundaries in relationships. Safety is still of primary importance especially regarding bullying and sexual harassment, but the skills are only slightly more sophisticated. Talk about individual and group situations that can feel uncomfortable or pressured. Be open and introduce talk about sexuality, sexually transmitted diseases, alcohol and substance abuse. Continue to support their esteem and promote confidence in themselves and their ability to make good choices.

Additional guidelines:

High school: Open communication continues to be and is really *even more* critically important in high school. Remember that boys and girls equally need education about both safety and abuse /

harassment prevention. This age, as well as late middle school, is often the time when boys begin to experience more pressure to exhibit physically and sexually intimidating or aggressive speech and behaviors and they need education that addresses the risks, consequences and impacts on others of such actions. Parents must place more emphasis on “healthy choice” decisions, goals and values, making healthy personal and safety choices in relationships and group activities.

Parents and adult leaders must open or maintain continued dialogue about substance abuse, driving safety, romantic relationships, and sexual behavior issues. Pay close attention to friends and peer groups. Talk frequently about dating safety, and setting limits and boundaries. Emphasize that no matter what happens or what they are concerned or worried about that they can always talk to you. Reinforce to teens that they should not be afraid of getting in trouble because talking to you or another adult; especially about things that they can be scared or worried about; talking about it is always the right thing. Help to create a climate in which they can feel confident that if they do come to you, that you will listen to them and support them, and always want them and their friends to be safe. Observing their behavior and asking appropriate questions has been show to have positive preventative outcomes with teens. When they participate in outside the home activities ask:

Who will you be with?

Where are you going?

Will there be adults present?

What time will you return?

Establish matter-of-fact, clear limits and expectations and follow-up as needed.