

Information for Parents of Young Children

Even very young children can learn some skills to help keep themselves safe from sexual abuse, but it's up to parents to help them learn what they need to know. Here are some important things you can teach that will help you help your child stay safe.

Teach Your Children About Their Bodies

Names of all Parts of Their Bodies

Talk to your child about body parts, and name private parts in that discussion. This will give your child words to use when he/she needs to tell you anything about his/her body, like an injury or rash or other problem in that area.

Rules About Touching Their Bodies

Preschoolers understand the idea of rules. They know there are rules about hitting and biting, rules about playing nicely with others, and rules about being safe, like wearing seat belts. So as you teach these rules, just add rules about touching their bodies. And add rules about private parts, too. Like, "Never let other people touch your private parts unless Mommy or Daddy knows about it."

What to do if Someone Tries to Break the Rules

Your children need to know what to do when someone breaks the rules about touching with them. They need to know:

- What to say** to someone who breaks the rules about touching,
- To move away** from someone who is breaking the rules about touching, and
- To tell you** or another adult if someone breaks the rules about touching.

Teach your child to say, "No!" Or "No! Don't touch my private parts." Or "My body is private. You can't touch me there." Or "Leave me alone." Or simply "Don't do that." Teach your child to say this to other children as well as to adults. Practice saying phrases like these with your child.

Teach your child to move away from anyone who is breaking the rules about touching. Tell your child that it's ok to get out of someone's lap or pull away from a hug. Even if an adult asks them not to.

Teach your child to tell you or another adult, like a teacher or caregiver, if someone breaks the rules about touching them.

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How to Recognize Warning Signs in Your Child

Now let's talk about what you can do if someone is breaking rules about touching your child. No one knows your child better than you. So, as parents,

**Watch for warning signs,
Listen for warning signs, and
Follow up when you see or hear warning signs.**

If something is wrong, you may see a sudden change in your child's behavior, or you may hear unusual comments. If you see or hear these things, follow up. Find a relaxed time to talk with your child.

How to Respond if Your Child Tells You About Inappropriate Behavior

If your child tells you about inappropriate behavior, such as someone who is too physical with him/her or who makes him/her uncomfortable, ask him/her to give you an example. If the interaction was inappropriate, but not actual abuse - talk with his/her teacher or caregiver. Specify your concern and check back with your child and with the teacher.

How to Respond if Your Child Tells You About Sexual Abuse

Your response plays a big role in how your child understands the abuse and how he/she recovers.

First: Stay calm.
Second: Comfort your child.
Third: Listen carefully.
Fourth: Do not threaten or criticize the person your child is accusing.
Fifth: Report. Call child protective services, or call the police.

It's up to us as adults to do all we can to prevent child sexual abuse. It's up to all of us, especially parents, to create safe environments for children. Teaching them about their bodies, recognizing warning signs, and responding to your concerns are important first steps.