



Everyone plays a role in keeping kids safe.

All adults share the responsibility to protect children from sexual abuse. We can all help create respectful, healthy, and safe practices for children. Below are some suggestions for parents and caregivers.

Protecting Children from Sexual Abuse

Who sexually abuses children?

In almost 90 percent of child sexual abuse cases, the person who abuses the child is known to the victim (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, n.d.). Most people who commit sexual offenses are in the personal social circles of the victim or the victim's family. They are known and trusted, and often welcomed into the home.

Grooming

Child abuse is often a gradual process, with the adult deliberately testing the child's boundaries using his or her familiarity with the child, social status, or power to take advantage of the child.

Grooming often happens by building trust of the child and adults responsible for the child's welfare, giving gifts or favors, separating the child from others, creating a norm of secrecy for other activities and violating boundaries. The adult will often use grooming techniques to create opportunities to commit sexual acts on a child.

Boundaries

Let your children know no one has the right to touch them or make them feel uncomfortable — this includes hugs from grandparents or even tickling from mom or dad. Let your children know their body is their own. Just as importantly, remind your child they do not have the right to touch someone else if that person does not want to be touched.

Bodies

Teach your children how to talk about their bodies. From an early age, teach your child the names of his or her body parts. Teaching a child these words gives them the ability to come to you when something is wrong.

Be Okay

Let them know they won't get in trouble. Many perpetrators use secret-keeping or threats as a way of keeping children quiet about abuse. Remind your children frequently they will not get in trouble for talking to you, no matter what they need to say. When they do come to you, follow through on this promise and avoid punishing them for speaking up.

Be Available

Set time aside to spend with your child where they have your undivided attention. Let your children know they can come to you if they have questions or if someone makes them feel uncomfortable. If they do come to you with questions or concerns, follow through on your word and make the time to talk.

Be Open

Give them the chance to raise new topics. Sometimes asking direct questions like, "Did you have fun?" and "Was it a good time?" won't give you the answers you need. Give your child a chance to bring up their own concerns or ideas by asking open-ended questions like "Is there anything else you wanted to talk about?"

Be Calm and Believe Them

Learning about abuse is startling, but try to keep outwardly calm. Avoid expressing strong emotions that may scare or confuse the child. Make it clear that you are glad the child told you and that the abuse is not his or her fault.

What do perpetrators look like?

As mentioned, the majority of sexual abuse perpetrators are someone the child or family knows. A perpetrator does not have to be an adult to harm a child. They can have any relationship to the child including an older sibling or playmate, family member, a teacher, a coach or instructor, a caretaker, or the parent of another child.

How can I protect my child?

Create a dialogue. There is no foolproof way to protect children from sexual abuse, but there are steps to reduce the risk, including:

- Be actively involved in the child's life.
- Get to know the people (kids and adults) in your child's life. Choose caregivers carefully.
- Know the warning signs. Notice any changes with your child, no matter how small. Whether it's happening to your child or a child you know, you have the potential to make a big difference in that person's life by stepping in.

What are the warning signs?

Child sexual abuse isn't always easy to spot. The perpetrator could be someone you've known a long time or trust, which may make it even harder to notice.

Examples of physical signs:

- Bloody, torn, or stained underclothes
- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Frequent urinary or yeast infections
- Pain, itching, or burning in genital area

Examples of behavioral signs:

- Develops phobias
- Exhibits signs of depression or PTSD
- Inappropriate sexual knowledge
- Overly protective and concerned for siblings, or assumes a caretaker role

Visit Rainn.org for more physical and behavioral warning signs.

Peace River Center Victim Services
Rape Recovery Program

1831 North Crystal Lake Drive
Lakeland, FL 33801

Office: 863.413.2708

24-Hour Sexual Assault Crisis Line: 863.413.2707

Toll-free: 877.688.5077



United Way
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SEXUAL ABUSE

