

Simple & Safe



Sexual Abuse Prevention Guide

PREPARED BY

Worldwide Organization for Women



SIMPLE & SAFE

A CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Defining the Problem and Providing Solutions

The first and best line of defense against child sexual abuse begins in the home with active parental involvement. Sexual abuse is a global problem that crosses social and economic demographics. The numbers are too many. One in six boys and one in four girls will experience sexual abuse before their eighteenth birthday.¹ Parents hold the greatest power of prevention. Parental involvement in safeguarding their children is simple and can be achieved through wise supervision, learning to recognize and sever a potential abuse situation, and teaching simple safety skills throughout various stages of their child's development. Worldwide Organization for Women is providing this resource to help parents confidently open the conversation and effectively instruct their children in the prevention of sexual abuse, while approaching the topic in a way that protects a child's conscience and natural modesty. It also includes what to look for when evaluating a sexual abuse prevention program provided by a school or other entity.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IS DEFINED AS

the whole range of sexual crimes and offenses against children under 18 years of age. The majority of sexual abuse crime involves molestation and rape, but the spectrum also includes statutory sex crime and non-contact offenses such as exhibitionism or internet based-activity.

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Gathering the Facts

The greatest risk factors for abuse occurs when the child lives with only one parent or when a family is characterized by parental hostility, divorce, violence and weak supervision.ⁱⁱ

Myth Schools are safe and an unlikely place for sex abuse to occur.

Fact

- ❖ Nearly 1 in 10 children will experience some form of sexual abuse or misconduct by an educator while in grades K-12 in the US.ⁱⁱⁱ

Myth Most sexual predators are strangers.

Fact

- ❖ 60% of perpetrators of sexual abuse are known to the child but are not family (e.g., friends, teachers, coaches, babysitters, neighbors.)^{iv}
- ❖ 30% of perpetrators are family members.^v
- ❖ 23% of reported cases of child sexual abuse are perpetrated by individuals under the age of 18.^{vi}

Myth Children will lie about sex abuse.

Fact

- ❖ “Research has consistently shown that false allegations of child sexual abuse by children are rare.”^{vii}
- ❖ It takes most children up to a year to disclose sexual abuse, some up to 5 years, while some never tell.^{viii}

For Parents Only

Grooming

The singular goal for a predator is to get secured private access to the child. Without secured private access, abuse won't occur. A sexual predator uses a process known as *grooming* to lure and secure victims. Grooming is psychological manipulation of the child. The predator works to gain a child's trust, the trust of parents, even a community if necessary. At the same time, the predator works to break down a child's defenses by pushing physical, mental, and moral boundaries intentioned to



desensitize the conscience and remove inhibition. There are many behaviors associated with grooming that a parent can learn to recognize.

Common grooming behavior may include:

- telling dirty jokes;
- bringing sex anatomy into the conversation;
- sharing a sexual fantasy; or
- sharing pornography via photos, cartoons, or drawings;
- watching sexual acts; or
- self-sharing of private parts.

Grooming may not appear sexual in nature, but is part of the deceit to ultimately lure the victim to a secluded place.

A perpetrator will:

- show intense interest in the child;
- probe into their likes, dislikes, hopes and fears;
- become their confidant;
- give gifts and praise; and
- require secrecy.

Parental grooming is used when a predator is known by the family. The perpetrator may be physical with the child, often right in front of parents. The predator may use hugs, tickling, putting an arm around the child's neck or shoulder, to desensitize a parent into believing that the predator is a really physical person. The predator may flatter the parents about how wonderful their child is, or be overly available to assist the parent in some form of care for the child. A child should never be allowed to stay the night alone with an adult or be in a situation where the child will have to change clothes. Unfortunately, digital technology has made the grooming process so much easier for predators because of its private nature. More information of digital grooming can be found in WOW's, mini guide, *Before They Connect*.

Parents carry the responsibility to stop suspected grooming behavior and should not worry about offending someone who crossed a boundary with their child. It can be firmly stated to the offending person that a specific behavior has crossed a boundary and they need to stop. If it feels like something is awkward, questionable, or uncomfortable for you or your child, stop the action and get away from the situation. If inappropriate language or conversation has occurred, do the same, and if



necessary eliminate future contact with the person. A passive, unresponsive parent is training the child to be passive, leaving the child vulnerable to abuse.

Preparing to Teach Your Child

As child mature, the conversation will mature, but (and it can't be emphasized enough) throughout their development, the conversation should always stay simple, non-graphic, and not overly explanatory in order to adequately protect the child's conscience and feeling of respect.

Parents know their child best and should be the child's most trusted source for learning about life, love, safety, and values. When this type of relationship is cultivated, children and youth will accept and expect active supervision and guidance from parents as to whom they may associate with, and material that is watched, read, or played. Caring, concerned, and open parenting builds trusting relationships; these relationships enable the child to go to parents when questions or disclosures arise.

Four Simple Lessons for the Child

There are four lessons to teach and practice for sexual abuse prevention to be effective.

1. Teach that there are private body parts no one gets to see or touch.
2. Teach about boundaries with touch, relationships, conversation, technology, media, etc.
3. Teach how to say "NO" and get away.
4. Teach NOT to keep secrets from Mom and Dad.

Teaching the 4 Lessons

Teach that there are private body parts no one gets to see or touch.

It's natural for most children to want to keep their bodies protected and private. Parents can honor that by encouraging children to practice modesty at a young age. When children have a healthy desire for



modesty from the time they are young, then they're prepared to keep their bodies private and safe throughout their lives.

Children enjoy learning about their bodies. Teach children they have private body parts that everyone can see, like their hands, feet, arms, and faces, but that there are parts of their body no one gets to see, their bottoms and chests, called *private parts*. In recent years, sexual theorists have promoted teaching detailed, anatomic names of sexual physiology to children. This is unnecessary and potentially harmful, especially if illustrations are used which can cause the child stimulation and desensitization, influencing them the same as sexual grooming does. Use of the words *private parts* is adequate and healthy and respects a child's desire for modesty. Make sure the child understands occasional exceptions for a doctor and/or the parent when something is hurting the child or an examination is necessary. As children learn and are supported by the parent to naturally guard what belongs to them privately, they will not be so easily persuaded or tricked into sexual abuse, and will have the words to communicate if someone has tried to hurt them in this way.

A discussion about private parts doesn't need to be complex or lengthy. Decide ahead of time what terms will be used according to what your family feels is appropriate. End the discussion with a reminder that only Mom, Dad, and the doctor get to see a private part, and that if anyone else ever wants to see or touch their private parts, then you tell them 'NO.'

Teach about boundaries with touch, relationships, conversation, technology, media, etc.

When the parent tells the child that it is only appropriate for Mom, Dad, and the doctor to see a private part, the parent is teaching the child a boundary. A boundary explains when something can and can't occur, who can or can't do something, where a person can or can't go, or what a person can or can't do.

Children are naturally curious about boundaries and are constantly trying to define them, which is a natural part of development. They want to know what is right and wrong, and they like to point out when someone isn't observing a boundary correctly. Some parents may tire of this natural behavior, but wise parents use this to their advantage by talking about boundaries in all situations and making what is right and what is wrong clear in the mind of the child. Chances of sexual abuse decrease if the child and parent together define and guard boundaries set by the family and stay watchful for grooming situations like those mentioned above.



Teach how to say “NO” and get away.

Once children can identify their body parts and appropriate boundaries, then they can learn to sever a potential abuse situation. Children need to know that they can tell other children and adults, “NO” if someone asks or tries to cross a sexual boundary. It’s helpful to practice saying, or yelling, “NO” and getting away.

After the children have learned and practiced saying no and getting away quickly, they need to be taught who they should go to for help. In an emergency situation, the nearest safe-feeling adult is always the best source to turn. Look for a grandma, mother with children, police officer, neighbor, etc.

Teach NOT to keep secrets from Mom and Dad.

Skill three leads into the lesson of NOT keeping secrets. Parents should begin open and honest dialogue with their children starting from infancy. This will help the habit of secret-keeping from developing. Children should see their parents as the people to whom they can tell everything to. Having a weekly one-on-one meeting with each child to talk about friends, school, church, family, and relationships is helpful. Whether formal or informal, open conversation in regular meetings lays a foundation of safe and positive communication between parent and child. This is a time for the parent to listen, and when dialogue should stay calm and positive. Lack of communication can translate to the child as disinterest. If there is poor communication between parent and child, it is not likely a child will disclose if something sexual has happened.

If an assault has occurred, children need to know that the safest people to tell are their parents or guardians. Disclosing sexual abuse is very difficult for a child. It should get discussed in advance that disclosure to a parent will be safe, and that telling a friend is not the best way to report, because other children don’t often know what to do. It should also be discussed that if another child tells your child about a personal situation that has crossed a sexual boundary, the best thing your child can do to keep the friend safe is to tell a parent or guardian.



Children should be taught specifically to NOT keep secrets from Mom or Dad. Secrets are generally not nice, inappropriate or harmful, and sometimes just silly, but even silly secret keeping can lead to habit. If someone, even a sibling, tells the child not to tell Mom or Dad, that is when it is important to tell Mom or Dad. For the young child, make sure to distinguish secrets from family privacy and safety rules that aren't shared such as the garage code or where valuables are kept.

The four lessons in this guide are geared toward younger children, but the principles apply to all ages. The key is to keep the dialogue going, beginning at a young age.

Guidelines for School-Based Sex Abuse Prevention Programs

The first thing a parent should know about sex abuse programs administered in the schools is that

Studies are inconclusive about whether educational programs reduce victimization... No strong scientific evidence points as yet in the direction of one strategy or program to prevent sexual abuse.^{ix}

Children should learn about sexual abuse, maturation, stranger danger, drug addiction, etc. from their parents first, and school programs should only be supplemental. Evidence shows that where sexual abuse education such as "Erin's Law Task Force" are taught, sexual abuse prevention is most effective if parents are actively involved in the process^x.

School-based programs should include skills similar to the four in this guide. Some may also teach how to recognize a dangerous situation, but this is too cognitively complex for young children. It may also promote disclosure if a child has already been victimized and guidance to not self-blame.

Steps of inquiry to take if your child is enrolled in public education:

"Studies are inconclusive about whether educational programs reduce victimization," and, "No strong scientific evidence points as yet in the direction of one strategy or program to prevent sexual abuse."



1. Find out if sex abuse prevention is taught at your child's school and at which grade/grades.
2. Request an opt-out form until you have the chance to review all the material.
3. View all content material children will be exposed to, and request teacher material as well. This should be available at the school or district office, or possibly the state office of education. Some red flag terms to look for include: *pregnancy prevention, sexual health, sexuality, gender ideology, masturbation, consent*, any graphic language or diagrams, describing or acting out abusive acts, detailed terminology of reproductive parts, or any idea that may conflict with your family values.
4. Find out the length of the instruction and who will be presenting it. WOW recommends a simple program of short duration.
5. Find out if the curriculum is stand-alone or incorporated into another a broader safety or health program such as healthy relationships, anti-bullying, suicide prevention, etc. WOW cautions to carefully examine all content if incorporated into another program, because it may contain inappropriate material that is more easily obscured. WOW does not support any abuse prevention program that is taught as part of comprehensive sexuality education.
6. Request parent material for discussion with your child. This is not a topic to be taught in isolation of family, but should be expected to extend to the home. Evidence does show parental involvement is key.
7. Find out if the school or classroom encourages parental involvement and provides for parental attendance to student class during the instruction

A healthy sex abuse program at school should include something equivalent to the Four Simple Lessons, taught in a modest, simple, and non-graphic way that protects a child's conscience and does not scare, or force the child to process cognitively complex information, make them feel the weight of responsibility toward prevention, or conflict with any family or religious values.



Protecting Religious Rights and Parents' Rights in Sexual Abuse Prevention Education

WOW takes the position that discussion of sexuality is a private matter, but not taboo and best approached in the home.

In recent years, it has become increasingly common for schools to adopt sex abuse prevention programs. Regrettably, abuse prevention is not often taught within a stand-alone safety program, but as part of a broader sexuality education curriculum.

Sexuality education from the school often infringes on a student's personal and religious freedom by teaching behavior and concepts contrary to personal values and religious standards in regard to appropriate and inappropriate sexual behavior and marriage.

WOW recognizes the Constitution of the United States of America as well as over 120 other national constitutions that include protections of religious freedom.

WOW recognizes and supports the parental responsibility regarding the protection of their children over and above any other institution or persons, including sexual abuse prevention education programs, curriculum, and instructors.

WOW's fourth position states:

We respect and support the role of parents in providing for the spiritual, physical, intellectual, social, and emotional needs of their children, and in teaching their children moral principles.

WOW's Advocacy in Sexual Abuse Prevention for Women and Children

WOW advocates for the protection of women and children against all forms of abuse; emotional, physical, and sexual. WOW has advocated against sexual abuse including: child trafficking, FGM (female genital mutilation), and forced child marriage.

Women are historically the ones who teach other women and children how to keep safe and healthy. WOW regards the mother, as the caretaker of children, the safest person for a child to come and talk to about anything relating to the child's health and body.



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