

PREVENTION

COMMUNITY PROTECTION & SAFETY TIPS

There are no perfect protection strategies that will eliminate risk for sexual assault. However, knowledge is power.

Protecting Yourself / Your Children

- Avoid high risk situations (drugs/alcohol are often involved in the facilitation of sexual assault)
- Be observant of your surroundings
- Many victims of sexual assault report when they reflect about what occurred they were too polite and did not act on feelings of discomfort or a gut feeling that something was wrong. Trust your instincts!
- Be thoughtful and use good judgment when choosing friends/partners
- Be cautious about making personal contact with those you meet on the internet
- Listen to your child to help him/her feel safe to tell you anything and believe them when they do
- Give your children quality love, time and attention so he/she does not seek it elsewhere
- Know the people who are involved with your children who are in a position of trust, including friends and relatives
- Be aware of any adult or older child/teen who is spending a significant amount of time with your child or seems focused on your child
- Check the sex offender registry before you allow children to attend an overnight, birthday party, etc. (Ultimately, however, because the

majority of offenders are undetected, it is best for parents to be cautious with everyone children are spending time with out of parental presence.)

Things to Teach Your Children

- Appropriate social behaviors and boundaries
- The correct names for body parts
- Adults are not always right
- The importance of honesty and the danger of keeping secrets
- Not to get rides from people without your permission
- To tell a safe adult if anyone acts inappropriately (e.g. creepy, too friendly, threatening, not respecting the child's boundaries, makes the child feel uncomfortable)

Communicating with children about sex offenders

- Avoid scary details
- Use language that is honest and age-appropriate
- If you know of an identified offender, teach your children not to visit the offender's home or yard, but also not to harass the offender
- Pay attention to your child's thoughts/feelings
- Role play with your child by acting out how they can best respond in high risk or dangerous scenarios
- If you suspect that your child has been abused, ask questions in a caring non-judgmental manner

Stranger Danger

- Most victims know their offender and most sexual offenses occur in the victim's or the offender's home. The offender to be most aware of is one the victim knows.

- Parents should not only talk to children about "stranger danger", because abusers can also be someone the child knows, loves, and trusts.
- Children should be taught to communicate with parents if anyone touches them in areas where their bathing suit covers, or makes them feel uncomfortable in any way (regardless of whom it is).

Warning Signs in Children Indicative of Abuse

Presence of one of the following does not necessarily mean a child has been victimized but may prompt you to question your child. If several of the following are present you may consider taking your child to a physician.

- Nightmares, trouble sleeping, fear of the dark, or other sleeping problems
- Extreme fear of monsters
- Spacing out at odd times
- Loss of appetite or trouble eating or swallowing
- Sudden mood swings (e.g. rage, fear, anger, or withdrawal)
- Fear of certain people or places or a distinct behavior change around a particular person
- Stomach illness all of the time without an identifiable reason
- Regression in behavior (e.g. thumb sucking or bed wetting)
- Displaying sexual behavior through the use of toys or with other children
- Using new words for private body parts
- Refusing to talk about a secret he/she has with an adult or older child
- Talking about a new older friend
- Suddenly having money

- Self destructive behavior (e.g. cutting or burning) from teens
- Unexplained bruises, redness, or bleeding/pain from genitals, anus, or mouth
- Sores or milky discharge in genital area

Red Flags Indicative of Unhealthy Interest in Children

This list is not all inclusive and is not intended to identify child molesters. However, it is meant to assist parents or others in protecting their children and loved ones.

- Refuses to let a child set any of his or her own limits
- Insists on expressing physical affection towards a child or teen even when it is unwanted
- Overly interested in the sexuality of a child or teen or talks repeatedly about the sexual activities of children or teens
- Insists on time alone with a child without interruptions
- Spends most of his/her spare time on activities involving children/teens or with children/teens and has little interest in spending time with someone his/her own age
- Regularly offers to babysit many different children for free or takes children on overnight outings alone
- Buys children expensive gifts or gives them money for no apparent reason
- Frequently walks in on child/teen in the bathroom or violates other boundaries
- Allows children or teens to consistently get away with inappropriate behaviors
- Talks about sexual fantasies with children and is not clear about what's okay with children
- Makes fun of a child's body parts or calls a child sexual names (e.g. stud, slut, whore)

- Encourages silence and secrets from a child/teen
- Looks at child pornography
- Asks adult partners to dress or act like a child or teen during sexual activity
- Often has a "special" child friend, possibly a different one from year to year

The above Information comes from Joan Tabachnick's book, "*Stop it Now!*" This book and others like it can assist you in preventing child sexual abuse.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONTACT:

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