

Child Abuse – Back To Basics:

What is Child Sexual Abuse?

A guide for parents to teach their children personal safety rules to reduce the risk of sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse includes:

- ; Fondling or touching the child's genitals or forcing the child to touch another's private parts
- ; Exposing children to adult sexual activity or pornographic materials
- ; Having children perform in pornographic movies or pose for pornographic materials
- ; Sexual intercourse

Physical Indications Of Sexual Abuse:

A sexually abused child may have torn, semen-stained or bloody underclothing. The child may have painful bruises, itching, swelling, or bleeding in the genital or anal regions of the body. In some cases, the child may contract venereal disease or even become pregnant.

Behavioural Indications Of Sexual Abuse:

Throughout the child's life, certain behavioural patterns develop as a result of sexual abuse. These patterns may remain with the child from one developmental stage to the next, or may be replaced with more age-inappropriate behaviours:

Infancy

- ; Excessive masturbation or insertion of objects into orifices
- ; Difficulty sleeping, relaxing, and or eating
- ; Passive and withdrawn, or clingy and fussy

Latency

- ; Excessive masturbation or insertion of objects into orifices
- ; Bed-wetting
- ; Eating disorders (bulimia, anorexia, obesity)
- ; Avoidance of sports or games
- ; Seeking out or avoiding adults
- ; Mentioning a "secret" in the family
- ; Sexual behaviour with other children
- ; Overly knowledgeable about specific sexual acts

Adolescence

- ; Obsessive behaviour (e.g. eating disorders, cleanliness, extreme defiance or compliance)
- ; Self-destructive behaviour (e.g. self-mutilation, drug/alcohol abuse, suicidal tendencies)
- ; Isolation, fearfulness, or excessive anxiety
- ; Promiscuity or prostitution
- ; Running away

Adulthood

- ; Sexual difficulties
- ; Insecurity, impassivity, low self-esteem
- ; Eating disorders
- ; Drug/alcohol abuse

Statistics:

- ; 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 5 boys will be sexually assaulted before age 18,
- ; 85 – 90% of child sexual abuse is committed by relatives, close family friends, or an adult that the child knows and trusts,
- ; The median age at the Kidz Clinic that girls and boys are sexually abused is 8 years old.

Teach your child these personal safety rules:

- ; The difference between safe and unsafe touches; what is appropriate physical affection.
- ; The proper names for all their private parts; many children are not able to tell about the abuse because they don't know the words to use.
- ; Their bodies belong to them and it is not okay for another person to touch their private parts.
- ; It is okay to say no if someone tries to touch their body or do things that make them feel uncomfortable; no matter who the person is
- ; They should not keep secrets about touching, no matter what the person says; if someone touches them, tell and keep telling until someone listens!

Very NB...

- ; Safety rules apply to **all** adults; not just strangers.

Note:

Parents may want to include their conversation about personal safety rules when teaching their child about fire safety, bike safety, or traffic safety.

You should role-play the above rules (lessons) several times. Do not expect your child to memorize them.

Signs of Possible Abuse include:

*These signs are **possible** indicators and do not necessarily mean sexual abuse has occurred.*

- ; excessive clinging or crying
- ; sleep disturbances, nightmares
- ; fear of particular adults or places

- ; bedwetting
- ; problems with school (refusal to attend or a drop in grades)
- ; depression; withdrawal from family and friends
- ; alcohol or drug use
- ; change in eating habits
- ; frequent touching of private parts
- ; unexplained bleeding, pain, irritation of mouth or private parts
- ; any unexplained change in behaviour or development of new behaviours

Ways to support you child if s/he has been abused:

- ; Believe your child.
- ; Reassure your child that her or his safety is important.
- ; Assure your child that she/he is not to blame for the abuse.
- ; Remember that how you respond to your child is critical to his or her ability to deal with the trauma of the abuse.
- ; Get your child medical help
- ; Explain to your child what you need to do to help him or her
- ; Get support for yourself; this is a very difficult issue for any parent to handle.

What Parents Should Know:

- ; Every child is vulnerable to sexual abuse regardless of cultural background or income level.
- ; Children need to feel loved, valued, and protected.
- ; Giving them the knowledge and skills necessary for their safety and well being best protects children.
- ; Often there are no physical signs of sexual abuse.
- ; Many cases of child sexual abuse go unreported because the child is afraid or ashamed to tell anyone what has happened.
- ; The offender may have threatened to hurt a family member, or the child feels that s/he is to blame for the abuse.
- ; It is important to show interest in your child's activities; let her/him know that you are available to talk and listen; allow your child to share thoughts and feelings with you.
- ; The child is never to blame for the abuse; children cannot prevent abuse, only the offender can.
- ; Studies suggest that personal safety rules can be taught and understood by children age 3 and up.
- ; There is little evidence that children make false allegations of abuse; what is more common is a child denying that abuse happened when it did.

**Wo+men Against Child Abuse – Fighting For Their Rights
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