

Sexual Abuse Prevention Tips

UUA Safe Children Manual

A child who understands that their body belongs to them and that no one else should touch any part of it without their consent and permission is less likely to be vulnerable to an adult. Every child, from the age of three onward, can learn “No, Go, Tell” – say no to the abuse, leave the situation immediately or as soon as possible, and tell a parent or care giver if someone tries to hurt them or asks them to keep a secret about touching.

Age appropriate messages for a pre-schooler include:

- Your body belongs to you.
- Other children’s bodies belong to them. You should not touch another child’s body in any way without their permission.
- Tell your parent if any other person makes you feel bad or funny or does something that makes you think, “uh-oh.
- You can tell someone, even a grown up and even a relative, not to touch your body if you don’t want to be touched.
- If someone touches you and tells you to keep it a secret, tell a parent or other grownup anyway.

Age appropriate messages for an early elementary school-age child include:

- No adult should touch a child’s genitals except at a doctor’s office.
- Sexual abuse occurs when an older, stronger, or more powerful person looks at or touches a child’s genitals for no legitimate reason.
- A person who is sexually abusing a child may tell the child to keep the behavior secret.
- Tell a parent right away if unwanted or uncomfortable touching occurs.
- Most adults would never abuse children.
- Both boys and girls can be sexually abused.³

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How to keep children safe from abuse: (modified pg. 18)

Healthy messages for parents about sexuality that are age appropriate.

Recognize the signs of possible child sexual abuse.

Parents need to know that:

1. While sex play between children of similar ages is often healthy curiosity, sex play between children more than three years apart in age is most often problematic,
2. It is expected for children to play doctor or “you show me yours, I’ll show you mine”, but that any type of penetration, whether with fingers, objects, or penises, is not typical but a sign to be concerned, and
3. It is important to screen childcare workers and babysitters for histories of sex offenses and to ask that day care and nursery school caregivers, coaches, scout leaders, after school workers, etc. be screened by the sponsoring agency.

Possible Signs of Childhood Sexual Abuse:

(Adapted from Debra W. Haffner, From Diapers to Dating: A Parent’s Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Children, Newmarket Press, 2004, used with permission.)

- A child with an unusual discharge from the penis or vagina
- A child who compulsively masturbates in public, after being told repeatedly that this is private behavior
- A child who tries to get other children or adults to touch his or her genitals
- A child who is more interested in sex play than playing with friends, going to school or other activities
- A child who manually stimulates or has oral or genital contact with pets
- A child who repeatedly draws pictures with the genitals as a primary focus
- A child who engages in sex play with a child more than 3 years apart in age
- A child who engages in penetrative behaviors during sex play

All of these behaviors could also arise from other causes. If you see these behaviors, stay calm but do make an appointment as soon as possible with your child’s pediatrician or a mental health professional that specializes in child sexual abuse and assessment.