

How Can I Protect My Child From Sexual Assault?

Parents are surrounded by messages about child sexual abuse. Talk shows and TV news warn parents about dangers at school, in the home and on the Internet. Despite all the media coverage, parents don't get much advice about how to talk to their children about sexual abuse and how to prevent it.

Talk to your children about sexuality and sexual abuse in age-appropriate terms.

- Talking openly and directly about sexuality teaches children that it is okay to talk to you when they have questions.
- Teach children the names of their body parts so that they have the language to ask questions and express concerns about those body parts.
- Teach children that some parts of their body are private.
- Let children know that other people should not be touching or looking at their private parts unless they need to touch them to provide care. If someone does need to touch them in those private areas, a parent of trusted caregiver should be there, too.
- Tell children that if someone tries to touch those private areas or wants to look at them, OR if someone tries to show the child their own private parts, they should tell a trusted adult as soon as possible.
- All children should be told that it's okay to say "no" to touches that make them uncomfortable or if someone is touching them in ways that make them uncomfortable and that they should tell a trusted adult as soon as possible.
- This can lead to some slightly embarrassing situations, such as a child who then says they don't want give a relative a hug or kiss! Work with your child to find ways to greet people that don't involve uncomfortable kinds of touch.
- Talking openly about sexuality and sexual abuse also teaches children that these things don't need to be "secret." Abusers will sometimes tell a child that the abuse is a secret. Let your children know that if someone is touching them or talking to them in ways that make them uncomfortable that it shouldn't stay a secret.
- Make sure to tell your child that that they will not get into trouble if they tell you this kind of secret.
- Don't try to put all this information into one big "talk" about sex.
- Talking about sexuality and sexual abuse should be routine conversations.

Be involved in your child's life.

- Be interested in your child's activities.
- Ask your child about the people they go to school with or play with.
- If your child is involved in sports, go to games and practices. Get to know the other parents and coaches.
- If your child is involved in afterschool activities or daycare, ask them what they did during the day.
- Talk about the media.
- If your child watches a lot of television or plays video games, watch or play with them.
- Many TV shows (for example, CSI or Law and Order) show sexual violence of different kinds.
- Some video games (for example, Grand Theft Auto) allow the user to engage in sexual violence.
- Use examples from TV or games that you have watched or played together to start up conversations about sexuality and sexual abuse.
- Know the other adults that your child might talk to.
- Children sometimes feel that they cannot talk to their parents.
- Know the other trusted adults in your child's life.

Be available.

- Make time to spend with your child.
- Let your child know that they can come to you if they have questions or if someone is talking to them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable.
- Be sure to follow up on this! If your child comes to you with concerns or questions, make time to talk to them.

When you empower your child to say "no" to unwanted touch and teach them that they can come to you with questions and concerns, you take critical steps to preventing child sexual abuse.