

## REDUCING THE RISK: RECOGNIZING PROBLEM BEHAVIOR

IF YOU FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE WITH AN ADULT'S BEHAVIOR around children, trust your instincts. Learn as much as you can about problem behavior.

Adults or older children who sexually abuse or are looking to sexually abuse may:

- Seek to get time alone, or insist on time alone, with a child.
- Refuse to let a child set their own limits.
- Insist on physical contact (hugging, kissing, tickling, etc.,) even when the child does not want the attention.
- Be overly interested in the sexuality of a particular child or teen.
- Spend all or most of their spare time with children and have little interest in spending time with adults.
- Regularly offer to baby-sit or take children overnight.
- Buy children expensive gifts or give them money for no apparent reason.
- Frequently walk in on children or teens in the bathroom.

## OTHER PRECAUTIONS

In addition to background checks, day care centers and other child-centered facilities should have clear guidelines about preventing sex abuse, including protocols on one-adult/one-child situations and specialized staff training on the recognition and prevention of sex abuse.

There are many sexual abuse prevention training programs that educate adults to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse.

For more information about these trainings or to find treatment and support for a child who has been sexually abused call:

### PREVENT CHILD ABUSE NEW YORK'S PARENT HELPLINE

1-800-244-5373

Portions of this brochure have been adapted from the Stop It Now! Web site at [www.stopitnow.com](http://www.stopitnow.com) and from Darkness to Light's 7 Steps to Protecting Our Children, available at [www.darkness2light.org](http://www.darkness2light.org).

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# Preventing Sexual Abuse

## TIPS FOR PARENTS



Experts estimate that one in four girls and one in six boys are sexually abused before their 18th birthdays.

67 percent of all reported sexual assaults happen to children ages 17 and under. The good news is that sexual abuse is largely preventable. This brochure includes steps you can take to reduce your children's risk of being sexually abused.



## REDUCING THE RISK: KNOW THE FACTS

SEXUAL ABUSE IS a sexual offense against a child, such as rape, sodomy, engaging a child in sexual activity, or engaging a child in, or promoting a child's, sexual performance.

THE GREATEST RISK COMES FROM FRIENDS AND FAMILY, not strangers. 93 percent of victims know their abusers: 34 percent are abused by family members; 59 percent are abused by someone trusted by the family.

THE MAJORITY OF SEXUAL ABUSE CASES happen in one-adult/one-child situations.

ALTHOUGH MOST SEX OFFENDERS ARE MEN (about 85 percent), some are women, and some are children.

### TIPS FOR PROTECTING YOUR CHILDREN:

- More than 80 percent of sexual abuse cases happen in one-adult/one-child situations. Think carefully before leaving your child alone with one adult. If possible, seek out group situations instead. If you can't avoid a one-adult/one-child situation, be sure it is observable and interruptible and drop in unexpectedly as often as you can.
- Abusers often try to earn the trust of potential victims and their families. This enables them to more easily gain time alone with the children. Abusers are drawn to settings where they can easily gain access to children: schools, sports leagues, clubs, etc.
- Monitor your children's internet use. Although recent studies suggest the risk from strangers over the internet may be overblown, this is still a good safety precaution.



## REDUCING THE RISK: COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR CHILD

OPEN, HONEST COMMUNICATION MAY BE THE BEST SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION TIP. Communication, early and often, about sex and sexual abuse may decrease your child's vulnerability to abuse and increase the chance they will tell you if they are abused. Here are some tips:

- Always talk to your children about their daily activities. Show interest in their feelings. Encourage them to share their concerns and problems with you.
- Teach your children about the body, what abuse is, and about sex. Teach them words that will help them feel comfortable discussing sex with you.
- Explain that no one has the right to touch them in a way that makes them uncomfortable, including adults whom they know and trust.
- Teach your children that it's your job to protect them, and that you can protect them only if they tell you when something is wrong. Explain that people who hurt children may tell the children to keep it a secret. They may tell the children their parents will not believe them. They might threaten to hurt the parents if the child shares the secret. Teach your children that adults who say that are wrong, and that your children can share anything with you.
- Make sure your children understand that if someone makes them feel uncomfortable or confused, you will not blame them. Reassure your children that sexual abuse is never the fault of the children.

## REDUCING THE RISK: UNDERSTAND CHILDREN

CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN ABUSED OFTEN KEEP IT A SECRET. The more you know about why children keep it a secret and how they communicate when they do try to tell, the easier it will be for you to break down barriers to communication.

### UNDERSTAND WHY CHILDREN KEEP IT A SECRET:

- They are afraid of upsetting or disappointing their parents. They may be too embarrassed to tell their parents.
- The abuser may threaten to hurt the child or the child's family.
- Children who do not disclose after the first encounter may be afraid or ashamed to tell when it happens again.
- Young children may not understand there is something to tell. They are taught to respect and obey adults, and many abusers tell children the abuse is "OK" or a "game."

### UNDERSTAND HOW CHILDREN COMMUNICATE:

- Children may communicate in a roundabout way by saying something such as, "I don't like to be alone with Mr. Jones." They may tell parts of what happened or pretend it happened to someone else to test an adult's reaction.
- Children who disclose abuse may tell an adult other than a parent.
- If adults respond emotionally or negatively to a disclosure, children will stop talking.

