

Child Abuse Prevention Information for Parents

Who should talk to my youth about safety?

A parent is the best person to teach a youth about personal safety. However, the staff at the organization will also be communicating similar messages. It is important for adults to be delivering a similar message.

When should I speak with my youth about safety?

While age and maturity matter and will impact the information you provide, as well as the manner in which it is provided, much of the content will be repeated for years to come. Start teaching very young children the correct names for their body parts.

What else can I do to help keep my youth safe?

Listen to your youth.

- Know your youth's daily activities and habits.
- Listen to what they like and what they don't like.
- Encourage open communication. Let your youth know they can talk to you about any situation,
- Reassure your youth that their safety is your number one concern.

Teach your youth.

- Set boundaries about places they may go, people they may see, and things they may do.
- Reinforce the importance of the buddy system.
- Tell your youth to trust their instincts – it's OK to say no.

Get involved.

- Know where your youth is at all times.
- Your youth should check in with you if there is a change in plans.
- There is no substitute for your attention and supervision.

Practice safety skills.

- Rehearse safety skills so that they become second nature.
- Walk the route to and from your youth's favorite place (school, neighborhood friends, park), pointing out landmarks and safe places to go if someone is following him or her or if he or she needs help. Make a map with your youth showing acceptable routes (to school, to the organization), using main roads and avoiding shortcuts or isolated areas.

What personal safety skills should my youth have?

- Knows his or her full name, address, telephone number, and parent's names.
- Always checks first with parents or person in charge before going anywhere or getting into a car, even with someone he or she knows.
- Always checks first with parents or a trusted adult before accepting anything from anyone, even from someone known to him or her.
- Always takes a friend when going places or playing outside without parents or supervision.
- Says NO if someone tries to inappropriately touch him or her.
- Leaves the area if someone behaves in a manner that makes him or her feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused.
- Knows it's okay to say NO.
- Knows who can help him or her if someone tries to inappropriately touch him or her or behaves in a manner that makes him or her feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused.

The parent role in the prevention partnership

- Familiarize yourself with organization policies
- Learn the basics of youth physical and sexual abuse.
- Talk to your youth about sexual abuse.
- Participate in program monitoring.
- Contact the organization with any concerns.

What to discuss with youths about sexual abuse

- Parents should provide youths with an age-appropriate definition of abuse.
- Parents should tell their youths that if someone tries to touch them or abuse them in any way, they should get away from that person as soon as possible.
- Parents should encourage youths to tell them immediately if they have a problem or someone makes them feel uncomfortable.
- Parents should assure youths that they will not get in trouble if they tell about abuse.

Warning signs that a youth feels uncomfortable

- Withdrawal from typical childhood activities
- Bed-wetting
- Inability to control bowels
- Preoccupation with sexual matters
- Increased masturbation
- Increased aggressiveness
- Nightmares and sleep disturbances

Common Reasons youths do not report abuse

- Fear of rejection. No one will believe me
- Fear of punishment. I'll get in trouble
- Fear of abandonment. I'll have to leave home
- Fear of retaliation. He'll hurt me if I tell
- Fear of re-victimization. They'll think they can abuse me
- Shame. I was aroused, what's wrong with me?
- Loyalty. He may get in trouble
- Confusion. What did I do to attract him
- Guilt. It was my fault. Mom and Dad told me not to do that

Ten Ways to Protect Your Youth from Abuse

- Give your youth special attention
- Know your youth's friends. Take special note of any adult your youth describes like a peer.
- Know your youth's activities.
- Routinely talk to your youth to let them talk to you.
- Inform your youth about sexual abuse.
- Take note if adults show unusual interest in your youth and want to spend time alone with them.
- Question youths who arrive home with toy's, jewelry, or clothing you did not buy.
- Take note if an adult has asked your youth to keep a secret.
- Periodically ask youths if anyone has made them feel uncomfortable or afraid.
- Be sensitive and follow up on vague disclosures such as "Mr. Billy acts weird."

How to respond if a youth discloses abuse

- Listen
- Be sensitive to vague disclosures
- Avoid expressing shock or outrage
- Don't threaten or condemn the alleged perpetrator
- Let the youth know you believe him or her
- Tell the youth he or she was right to disclose
- Assure the youth the abuse was not his or her fault
- Reassure the youth that he or she will be safe
- Avoid questions that could make the youth feel responsible
- Get as many details as the youth is comfortable disclosing
- Write down exactly what the youth said
- Contact authorities

Red flags for identifying youth molesters

- An adult enjoys being with your youth more than you do.
- A much older youth or adult spends excessive amounts of time with your youth.
- Your youth has new toys or gifts that you did not purchase.
- Your youth speaks knowledgeably of the places or activities that you did not approve.
- A person continually offers to care for your youth so as to give you a breather or time to yourself. Often this person wants no money for helping.
- A person comes to your house regularly to spend time with or transport your youth to activities.
- A person engages in activities that involve only your youth and that do not require the presence of others.
- A person wants to take individual pictures of your youth.
- An adult seems to spend all his or her time with youths and doesn't have adult peer relationships.
- A person wants to "bend" some rules to spend time with your youth.
- A person videotapes youth activities and does not have a youth involved in the activity.
- Your youth would rather spend time with a specific adult than with peers.
- Your youth tells jokes containing sexual innuendo and says he/she heard them from an adult.