



## TALKING TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE

Planning a big talk with your child about sexual abuse can be stressful. But there's no need to make it hard on yourself—it can be more effective to integrate this topic into your regular conversations about being safe around strangers or taking care of friends. The key is to start these conversations when your child is young and to have them often.

Teaching young children the language to talk about their bodies and to understand boundaries will help them understand what is allowed and what is inappropriate. Kids won't ask for help if they don't know that certain behaviors are wrong. Following these tips will help you train your kids to speak up and stay safe.

### STEP 1

#### **MAKE SURE THAT YOU'RE INFORMED.**

Read up to understand what exactly is child sexual abuse. Learn what the different types of abusive behaviors are and how to spot the warning signs.

### STEP 2

#### **TEACH CHILDREN THE PROPER NAMES OF THEIR BODY PARTS.**

When kids have the words to describe their body parts, it's easier for them to ask questions and express concerns about those body parts.

### STEP 3

#### **LET THEM KNOW SOME PARTS OF THE BODY ARE PRIVATE.**

Tell your kids that other people shouldn't touch or look at these parts of their body. Explain that they shouldn't touch other people's private parts, either. If a healthcare professional has to examine these parts of the body, be present and explain to your child the difference in this type of touch.

### STEP 4

#### **EMPOWER THEM TO SAY "NO".**

It's important to let children know they are allowed to say "no" to something that makes them uncomfortable. This message isn't obvious to children, who are often taught to be obedient and follow the rules. Support your child if they say no, even if it puts you in an uncomfortable position. For example, if your child doesn't want to hug someone at a family gathering, respect their decision to say "no" to this contact.

### **STEP 5**

#### **TALK ABOUT THE DANGER OF SECRETS.**

Perpetrators will often use secret-keeping to manipulate children. Let children know they can always talk to you, especially if an adult tells them to 'keep a secret.' Tell them that if they see an adult touching another child in a way that is inappropriate, they should tell you.

### **STEP 6**

#### **PROVIDE A SAFE SPACE FOR YOUR CHILDREN TO OPENLY SHARE WITH YOU.**

Reassure them that they won't get in trouble for asking you uncomfortable questions or sharing uncomfortable information. Let them know you will believe them. Young children often fear upsetting their parents by asking questions or talking about their experiences. Remind them they won't be punished for sharing this information with you.

### **STEP 7**

#### **MODEL APPROPRIATE AND KIND BEHAVIOR.**

Help an elderly person get off a bus or pick up change that someone has dropped on the ground. This is a way to model safe, appropriate interactions with other kids or adults.

### **STEP 8**

#### **TALK TO THEM ABOUT SAFETY AT DAYCARE, AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS, SUMMER CAMP, ETC.**

Start by learning what policies and protocols are in place at the organizations that care for your children (see our content on "How to Evaluate Youth-Serving Organizations"). Then, make sure that your kids understand the safety rules that adults and other children should be following. Tell them they can ask for help if they ever feel unsafe or uncomfortable.

### **STEP 9**

#### **WHEN THEY COME TO YOU, MAKE TIME FOR THEM.**

If your kid comes to you with something they feel is important, take the time to listen. Give them your undivided attention, and let them know you take their concerns seriously. They may be more likely to come to you in the future if they know their voice will be heard.