

Preventing Child Sexual Abuse

What Parents & Caregivers Can Do

Below are several steps you as a parent or caregiver can take to reduce the likelihood of abuse. Taking steps to prevent child sexual abuse is an important part of protecting children and keeping them safe.

- 1 Know the facts about child sexual abuse.** Sexual abuse is more common than people think. In fact, approximately 1 in 10 children will be sexually abused by the time they turn 18. Sexual abuse can happen to both boys and girls of all ages, races, ethnicities, and family backgrounds. Children are often too scared, confused, or embarrassed to report sexual abuse right away, so it often continues without parents or caregivers knowing about it.
- 2 Know the facts about perpetrators.** Many parents or caregivers already warn their children to be careful around strangers; however, sexual abuse is usually committed by someone that the child knows and trusts. Perpetrators are often family members or close friends of the child's family. Perpetrators can also be older children or youth.
- 3 Talk to your child about their body, about boundaries, and about sexual abuse.** The other side of this resource contains information and tips for talking to your child about these important topics.
- 4 Support your child's participation in school-based safety and prevention programs.** Many schools offer safety and prevention programs to children. You can increase the effectiveness of these programs by getting involved and talking to your child about what they have learned.
- 5 Take steps to increase safety in your child's environment.** Understand that most sexual abuse occurs when a child is alone with an adult or older child. Consider minimizing situations in which your child is one-on-one with an adult (other than a parent or caregiver) or older child. Choose group activities or activities in public places when possible. Conduct background checks, interviews, and reference checks when choosing a childcare provider. Drop in unannounced when other people are caring for your child.
- 6 Teach your child about internet safety.** Teach your child about online predators who target children. Instruct them not to give out personal information or exchange photos over the internet. Teach your child that they should never take photos of their private parts. Monitor your child's internet use and apply parental controls.
- 7 Be familiar with signs and symptoms of abuse.** Knowing the signs and symptoms of abuse may help you recognize abuse if it does occur. Visit cactx.org to learn more.
- 8 Know how to respond to disclosures of abuse.** If a child discloses that abuse has occurred, always believe the child. Listen to them in a calm and supportive way. Responding emotionally may cause the child to think that you are upset with them, that they did something wrong, or that they should not have told you. Remaining calm is important. Let the child know that they did the right thing by telling you. Always report the abuse.

Talking to Your Child

Talking to your child is an important step in preventing child sexual abuse. It not only provides them with needed information, but also promotes healthy development, increases self-esteem, and fosters a positive relationship between you and your child.

- 1 Talk to your child about their body.** Teach your child the correct names for body parts, which parts of their bodies are considered “private,” and that other people should not touch or see these parts of their bodies, except when it is appropriate (such as a parent helping with hygiene or at a doctor’s appointment).
- 2 Talk to your child about boundaries.** Teach your child that their body is their own and that they have a right to say “NO” when they don’t want to be touched. Explain to your child that it is not okay for others to touch your child’s private parts or for someone to ask your child to touch their private parts. Do not force your child to hug or kiss family members or friends.
- 3 Talk to your child about what to do.** Explain that sometimes, people who abuse children might be people they trust, such as family members, friends, or even older children. Teach your child to say “NO,” go to a safe place, and tell a trusted adult if something happens.
- 4 Talk to your child about keeping secrets.** People who abuse children often ask them to keep secrets. Teach your child that they should NEVER keep secrets from their parents or caregivers.
- 5 Talk to your child about disclosing.** Let your child know that they should always tell you if something happens that makes them uncomfortable. Instruct your child to tell you immediately if anyone tries to touch their private parts or engage in any inappropriate activity with them.
- 6 Begin having these conversations with children at a very young age.** Even very young children can be abused, so starting these conversations early is important. Be sure to use terms that are appropriate for your child’s level of development.
- 7 Encourage open communication with your child.** Speak to your child in a way that is warm, open, and supportive. Important conversations like these should take place in the context of a supportive, trusting relationship.

Remember, you are obligated by law to report suspected child abuse.

If you suspect a child is in immediate danger, call 911.

For all other cases in Texas, call the abuse and neglect hotline at 800.252.5400.



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Children’s Advocacy Centers™ of Texas

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