

Child sexual abuse happens.
Start the conversation.



WCSAP
Washington Coalition of
Sexual Assault Programs

**You are your child's
primary educator.**



Preparing to Talk to Your Child About Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse is an epidemic problem in our society that affects families from all backgrounds and socioeconomic status. As caregivers of children, you play an important role in helping end sexual violence. It is adults' responsibility to protect children. When you learn the facts and talk to your child openly about sexual abuse and their rights, you break the silence and promote their safety.

Talking to your child shows them you care, and that you are a resource for questions and a safe person to come to if something happens. Children also deserve information about sexual abuse so they can know their resources and how to respond if they are feeling unsafe or uncomfortable.

Talking about sexual abuse may seem overwhelming but you can do it.



It's never too early
to start talking
to your children –
they will listen.

Start the Conversation

This isn't a one-time conversation. You don't have to talk about everything at once. Have an open and ongoing dialog with your child about their bodies, their boundaries and their rights.

Use natural moments in the day to broach these topics, such as a song on the radio, something you see on TV, or an interaction you observe. Provide guidance and give them a chance to share what they know and ask questions.

Having general conversations about boundaries and the rights they have over their body will provide an opportunity to include more specific information about sexual abuse when it feels appropriate.

With younger children, use moments when you are engaged in an activity such as coloring to bring up a conversation about body parts and different types of touch.

It is important for your child to know the correct names for their private parts. Use proper terms when assisting with changing diapers, clothes, or bathing.

You can also practice "what if" scenarios with them, such as "What if someone wants to play a special touching game with you?" or "What kinds of touch are okay from a teacher? A parent? A neighbor?"



Learning the Facts

Broadly, child sexual abuse is using children for sexual gratification. This can include sexual touching, penetration and sexual acts such as flashing, masturbation or exposure to pornography that may not involve touching. Child sexual abuse can be perpetrated by older youth as well as adults.

Emotional manipulation is one of the most common strategies used by perpetrators. They often groom victims and their families - a process of earning trust.

It is often believed that strangers pose the greatest danger to children; however, acquaintances and family members perpetrate most child sexual abuse.¹

Children may not tell anyone about abuse for many reasons including:

- ▶ They know the person and don't want to get them in trouble
- ▶ They don't have the words to tell what happened
- ▶ Fear of retaliation
- ▶ Fear of not being believed
- ▶ Shame
- ▶ They blame themselves
- ▶ They believe the offender's behavior is normal

¹ Douglas, E. and Finkelhor, D. (2005). Childhood Sexual Abuse Fact Sheet. *Crimes Against Children Research Center*.

Talking Points

- ▶ ***Tell your child you are there for them anytime*** – and follow through. Child abusers often tell children that no one will believe them. Show your child otherwise by always being open for discussion and validating their thoughts and feelings.
- ▶ ***Let your child know through actions and words*** that they deserve to be respected. Let them know it is ok to be assertive. Respect their physical boundaries and insist that others do so as well.
- ▶ ***Teach them that they control their body and have the right to say no*** if someone is doing something that makes them uncomfortable.
- ▶ ***Talk about healthy and unhealthy touches*** with your child. Let your child define what types of touches they do and do not like.
- ▶ ***Talk about trusting their instincts*** and what they can do or say if something doesn't feel right.
- ▶ ***Talk to your child about feelings*** and what makes them feel safe, happy, or scared.
- ▶ ***Talk about the differences between surprises and secrets.*** Children should never be asked to keep secrets from adults.
- ▶ ***Create touching rules with your child.*** Discuss who can touch them, what touches are ok and what to do if someone breaks these rules. Reinforce that it's not ok for anyone to break these rules – even if they know or like them. Explain that adults should never need help with their bodies from children.
- ▶ ***Emphasize that it is never their fault*** if someone does sexually abuse them and that they should tell an adult they trust. Identify who they could talk to.
- ▶ ***Let them know*** if they tell an adult and that adult doesn't say or act like they believe them, to keep telling until they get help.



Beyond Words. . .

Other actions you can take to protect your child and support their healthy development

- ▶ *Foster an environment of trust* in your household by being consistent and responsive to your child's needs.
- ▶ *Be an active listener and ask open-ended questions* to build strong communication with your child.
- ▶ *Model healthy boundaries and caring* for your own body, and model consent with your child. For example, do you ask your child before you touch them? How do you respond if they tell you no?
- ▶ *Respect your child's need for privacy.*
- ▶ *Pay attention to your child's environment* and who is in their life.
- ▶ *Pay attention to your child's behaviors.* Check-in with them if you notice that they are acting out or see a dramatic change in their personality.
- ▶ *Talk to babysitters* and other caregivers about your expectations for how they interact with your child.
- ▶ *Pay attention to older youths' and adults' behaviors around children.* Are they overly interested in children's activities? Do they try to create opportunities to be alone with children? Do they disregard children's wishes and personal space? Ask questions and intervene if you see "red flag" behaviors.
- ▶ *Learn about the technology* that your child uses in their daily life. Talk about privacy, respect and safety in the social media world.



If Your Child Tells You About Abuse

- ▶ *Listen without interrupting.*
- ▶ *Let them know you believe them* and you are glad that they came to you. What happened to them is not okay. It is the fault of the abuser.
- ▶ *Stay calm.* Your child bravely came to you for guidance and support and they need your comfort.
- ▶ Talk about how you can help them *feel safe*.
- ▶ *Seek support.* Help is available for you and your child.

Remember that
children are resilient.
With your support and
help from others,
your child can heal.

Start the conversation.

For additional information and support
regarding child sexual abuse
contact your local program.



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