

Take Action to Prevent Abuse

You are your child's best advocate and there are many ways you can proactively work to prevent child abuse. The most important child abuse prevention strategy is keeping the lines of communication open with your child. Become a keen observer of not only his or her activities, but also their feelings. And, encourage them to share concerns and problems with you. And, that no matter what, always listen.

Secondly, teach your children the correct names for their private parts, and that some areas of their bodies are indeed "private." No one should touch them without permission unless you or a doctor is in the room. A good rule of thumb is to explain that private areas are generally those covered by a swimming suit. Many well-meaning adults tell children to "do as they are told" which can make them vulnerable to a sexual predator. This is why it is so important for children to have the freedom to say "no" to a relative or adult they may not know well who wants a hug or a kiss. Saying no and your supporting their decision gives children control over their bodies and sets healthy boundaries.

Studies consistently show that children are most at risk of being harmed by someone they know. For this reason, be aware of all the times your child might be in situations alone with one adult, and take steps to limit those interactions where appropriate. During family gatherings, more than one adult can be charged to watch the children or take them to a public venue like a swimming pool. Soccer practice can consist of two coaches instead of one, or parents can be on-hand to watch. In situations where children are behind closed doors one-on-one with adults such as with a music lesson or tutoring session, consider the simple step of insisting they use a room with a door that has a window. Or, make a point to drop in now and again to check-in. All these measures reduce the opportunities an adult might have to take advantage of a child.

Lastly, encourage your child to tell you about any time an older child or adult asks them to keep a secret. Any secret. And be on the lookout for any changes in behavior. If your child does disclose something upsetting that may require a report to the authorities, keep your cool. An emotional reaction may seem very scary to a child, even though you may not be angry with your child. The good news is that help is available.

<http://www.centerforchildprotection.org/helpForFamilies/preventabuse/>