

Signs of Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse of a child can take place within the family, by a parent, step-parent, sibling or other relative; or outside the home, for example by a friend, neighbor, child-care person, teacher or random molester.

However, when the sexual abuse has occurred, the child develops a variety of distressing feelings and thoughts. Often, there are signs that only a physician can detect or no physical signs of child abuse.

The behavior of sexually abused children may include:

- Unusual interest in or avoidance of all things of a sexual nature
- Sleep problems, nightmares
- Depression or withdrawal from family, friends
- Sexual promiscuity, pregnancy at an early age
- Refusal to go to school, delinquency
- Anxiety, suicidal behavior
- Eating disorders
- Low self-esteem
- Physical complaints
- Aspects of sexual molestation in drawings, games, fantasies
- Unusual aggressiveness
- Secretiveness and other severe behavior changes

Grooming is the deliberate process used by an offender to break down the natural boundaries with a child, family or community, for the purpose of victimizing a child.

RED FLAGS RED FLAGS RED FLAGS

- Seeking out an approachable child - Abusers usually pick children who are easy to get to (relatives, friends, and neighbors). They may also seek children who have emotional needs for friendship and attention.
- Establishing a relationship with a child: Abusers often seek ways to build trust and friendship with children. They may spend time playing with them, volunteer for child care duty, become their "buddy", or even buy them treats or gifts.
- Breaking down the child's resistance to touch - Abusers may find ways to touch children a lot. As a result, the children are often confused when the touch becomes sexual. The abusers may play games with a lot of physical contact, like wrestling, and they may tickle children and sneak sexual touches.
- Finding ways to isolate a child - Abusers find excuses to be alone with children so they can molest them. For example, they may baby-sit, invite them to sleep over, or take them camping.
- Blaming the child and keeping the secret - Abusers try to make the children feel responsible so they won't tell. They use statements like these:

- "If you tell, people will think you are bad."

- "If you tell our 'special secret,' I will go to jail."

(Information courtesy of CVAC)

PROTECTING YOUR CHILD AGAINST ABUSE AND VICTIMIZATION

This guide is to help parents protect their children from becoming one of the millions of American children who are abused or victimized either emotionally or physically each year. In this guide you will find information on prevention, recognition and reporting.

BE RESPONSIBLE

Report Your Suspicions to
NYS Child Abuse and
Maltreatment Register

1-800-342-3720

24 Hrs a day, 7 days week, 365 days a year



Partnership for Safer Families

THE FIRST STEP TO PROTECTING YOUR CHILD IS COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION:

1. Have family discussions often. Talk about safety.
2. Encourage your child to talk openly.
3. Be patient and listen to what your child says when he or she is upset. Do not interrupt. Sense the feelings behind the words.
4. Establish family rules about personal safety and repeat them often., include touching rules when you discuss other types of safety.
5. Teach your children that it is ok to say no.
6. Use proper language to identify body parts.
7. Play the "What If" game.

The "What If" Game

One way to help children protect themselves is to practice responses to potentially dangerous situations.

Q: "What if something was bothering you and you didn't know what to do about it? Who might be able to help you?"

A. Parents, teachers, relative, school nurse, police officer, clergy.

Q. What if someone touched you in a way you didn't like and offered you a candy bar, a new doll or something else you really wanted to keep a secret?"

A. Say "NO" then tell someone.

Personal Safety 10 Things to Teach Your Child to Help Protect Them from Being Victimized by Adults.

1. Know who they are and where they live.
2. Know what to do when lost in a store.
3. Children must be able to identify their own body parts using the right words- no nicknames!
4. Always check with parents first before accepting a gift or a ride.
5. Children must trust their inner voice – if something doesn't feel right they must tell an adult.
6. Don't be too polite. Don't teach your children to do everything an adult says.
7. Have a "no secrets" rule. Surprises have an ending date and can be shared with everyone.
8. Say "NO" and tell someone when touch is not ok.
9. Do not give out personal information on the Internet.
10. Take action and get help. Teach your child to take action when they are uncomfortable or when they have a "yucky" feeling about something.
11. Identify FIVE trusted adults in your child's life that your child can talk to if someone is breaking their safety rules or making them uncomfortable. These should adults at home, daycare, school, and outside locations.

If your child trusts you enough to tell you about ABUSE....

DO:

- Keep calm; disclosing (the act of discussing abuse) can be traumatic. If adults loses their cool, this could scare a child from continuing to discuss the abuse.
- Believe the child; there is no need to question or begin interviewing the child. Believe what they are telling you.
- Give positive messages; make sure the child knows you respect what they've told you, you still love them, and are committed to their safety.
- Assess the situation to determine your next steps. Those steps may include:
 - Contacting local Law Enforcement
 - Seeking emergency medical care
 - Calling the NYS Child Abuse Register
- The Child Advocacy Center is a support for families navigating this process, they offer free of charge services.

Child Advocacy Center: 607-722-4256

NYS Child Abuse Register: 1-800-342-3720

DO NOT:

- Panic or overreact;
- Pressure the child to discuss details, this should be done in a place such as the Child Advocacy Center.
- Confront the offender, if Law Enforcement is to be involved, confronting the offender could ruin evidence.
- Blame the child, abuse is never child's fault!
- Make any promises; your role is to act calmly and report the incident.