

KEEPING COMMUNITIES SAFE

TALKING TO A 3- TO 9-YEAR-OLD ABOUT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

What is child sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse is any form of sexual activity imposed upon a child by an adult or another child in a position of power, authority, or influence. Child sexual abuse can involve touching the intimate parts of a child's body, enticing or forcing the child to have sexual relations, or making obscene phone calls or taking pornographic photos.

How can I talk to young children without scaring them?

Young children receive many rules regarding safety at a young age. Child sexual abuse can be mentioned with the other safety messages you already share. When you have discussions like, "Look both ways before you cross the street," or "Wear your helmet when you ride your bike," this is a prime opportunity to continue the discussion about keeping their bodies safe. Try sharing some of the ideas listed below with your children.

- Your body belongs to you. You can keep it safe and private.
- It's not OK for anyone to touch the private parts of your body and tell you to keep it a secret.
- It's not OK for you to be told to keep a secret that makes you feel uncomfortable. If someone tells you to keep a secret, tell your parents, a teacher, or another trusted adult. (*Parents, help your children come up with names of adults they can trust at school, at church, and at after school activities.*)
- If you ever feel unsafe or get a feeling in your belly that something is not OK, tell your parents, a teacher, or another trusted adult and keep telling until you get the help you need.
- It is never too late to talk with parents or trusted adult about anything that makes you feel uncomfortable.

What do the statistics say?

Statistically speaking, as many as *one in three girls* and *one in five boys* will experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 16. Typical sex offenders who molest children share certain common traits, listed below. An offender:

- can be a child, adolescent, or adult.
- is usually someone you and your child know and like.
- can be a man or a woman, married or single.
- can be of any race, hold any religious belief, and have any sexual preference.

- can be a parent, stepparent, relative, family, friend, teacher, clergyman, babysitter, coach, or student—anyone who comes in contact with your children.
- is likely to be a stable, employed, and respected member of the community.

An offender's age, education, and intelligence **do not** prevent him or her from molesting a child.

Why is it so hard to start this discussion with kids? How can I inform them without frightening them?

Just as adults are sometimes scared to discuss other matters of the body ("Where do babies come from?"), it's not always easy. Relax. It is not a one-time discussion. If you're nervous, check out a book or video about safety from the library. The children's librarian can help you locate an age appropriate book. Kids will naturally have questions and learn by role-play. Read the sample dialog below to get you started.

ADULT: You know how I always say you're special? Well, your body is special, too, and it's *never* OK for anyone to make you feel uncomfortable. If anyone, even a friend, a coach, a babysitter, or a teacher makes you feel uncomfortable—

CHILD: You mean like Coach Smith or Mrs. Ryan? They both seem really nice. They'd never hurt me.

ADULT: Many people we know *are* very nice. But some people who seem nice really aren't nice. We can't always tell who's nice and who may just "being" nice. That's why if anyone ever makes you feel weird and asks you to keep it a secret, I need you to tell me or another safe adult (name some safe adults a child could tell) right away. What are some things you can say to keep safe when I'm not nearby?

CHILD: I can say "I'll tell!" or "Stop that!"

ADULT: That's good. And you can shout, "No! This is not my mom or dad!" and run away.

CHILD: Even if it's a grown up?

ADULT: Even if it's a grown up! And if anybody ever did try to make you feel uncomfortable, you can come to me and say, "I'm worried about something. Will you listen to me?" And I will.

What if...? A safety exercise adults can play with children.

Young children are concrete thinkers, which means they may think *only strangers* are unsafe. They may also think they are too smart to be fooled by a possible child molester. Children may believe they are more powerful than they really are ("I could outrun the bad guy," or "I'd just karate chop someone if they tried to hurt me."). Here are some "what if...?" scenarios to discuss with children.

- What if you see an elephant in the back yard? What would you do?
- What if you got lost in the store? What would you do?
- What if a friend brings a weapon to school? What would you do?
- What if someone you know and trust makes you feel uneasy? What would you do?
- What if someone you like asks you to do something you think is not right? What would you do?
- What if someone asks you to keep a secret that makes you feel funny? What would you do?
- What if you go to an adult with your questions and nothing happens? What would you do?

LIST OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES ON LAWS AND INFORMATION SOURCES REGARDING SEX OFFENDERS

Where can I find more information?

STATE

- Official State Government Website <http://access.wa.gov/>
- Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs: <HTTP://WWW.WCSAP.ORG/HELP.HTM>
- Washington Department of Corrections: <http://www.doc.wa.gov/>
 - Offender Transition: <http://www.doc.wa.gov/cpu/>
- Washington Juvenile Rehabilitation Association (JRA): <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/jra/>
 - Juvenile Sex Offender Treatment: <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/jra/SOTreatment.shtml>
- Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs: <http://www.waspc.org/index.php>
 - WASPC's Sex Offender Information Center: <http://ml.waspc.org/>
- Health Profession Quality Assurance (can be used to check if licensed practitioner has had license suspended or revoked due to sex offense): https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/hpqa1/Application/Credential_Search/profile.asp

LOCAL

- King County Sexual Assault Resource Center (KCSARC): <http://www.kcsarc.org/>
 - KCSARC's Education And Prevention Department 425.226.5062
 - KCSARC's 24-Hour Sexual Assault Resource Line 1.888.99.VOICE

- General Sex Offender Information:
http://www.kcsarc.org/sex_offenders_safety.htm
- King County Sheriff's Office <http://www.metrokc.gov/sheriff/>
- Seattle Police Department's Sex Offender Website <http://www.seattle.gov/police>

FEDERAL

- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA):
<http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa>
- Center for Sex Offender Management: <http://www.csom.org/>

PUBLICATIONS

- Training for School Staff on Juvenile Sex and Kidnapping Offenders: Legislative Report – House Bill 2101:
<http://www.k12.wa.us/InstitutionalEd/pubdocs/FinalTaskForceReportHB2101.pdf>
- Notification to Schools of Registered Juvenile Sex or Kidnapping Offenders: Legislative Report – Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 6580:
<http://www.k12.wa.us/InstitutionalEd/pubdocs/FinalTaskForceReportHB2101.pdf>

LEGISLATION

- Senate Bill 6580: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/billinfo/summary.aspx?bill=6580&year=2005>
- House Bill 2101: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/billinfo/summary.aspx?bill=2101&year=2005>

AS AN ADULT, SHOULD I BE CONCERNED FOR MY OWN SAFETY?

Children are not the only ones who need to be aware of the dangers of sexual assault. Unfortunately, even a seemingly nice, normal person you know can turn violent. However, some people are more likely to be sexually coerced than others. To keep yourself safe, pay close attention to the following behaviors in people. Traits you should watch for include:

- Individuals, who do not listen to you, ignore what you say, talk over you, or pretend not to hear you. Such individuals generally have little respect for others and would be more likely to hear your “no” as meaning, “convince me.”
- People who ignore your personal space boundaries (like standing too close or touching in a nonsexual way).
- People who express anger towards other people. Hostile feelings can easily be translated into hostile acts. Such individuals often get hostile when they hear “no.”
- People who do what they want regardless of what you want. If a person does this in little ways (for example, if (s)he makes all the decisions about what to do and where to go without asking your opinion), then (s)he may also be likely to make the decision about whether you are ready to have sex.
- People who try to make you feel guilty or accuse you of being “uptight” if you refuse their sexual overtures.
- Individuals who are excessively jealous or possessive.
- Individuals who have wrong or unrealistic ideas about intimate relationships (for example, it is a partner’s “duty” to have sex). Such partners are not likely to take your objections to sex seriously.
- People who use alcohol or drugs heavily.

As an adult, how can I reduce my own risk of sexual assault?

- **Be aware of your surroundings.** Take note of threatening situations or behaviors that intimidate you or make you feel uncomfortable. Remember that relationships can be abused. If someone stops respecting your wishes or limits, they may be the kind of person who would take advantage of you.
- **Plan ahead.** Always let someone know where you are, where you are going, and when you expect to return. Arrange to have someone available to help you in case of an emergency.
- **Trust your instincts.** Don’t second-guess your gut feelings. If a situation does not feel right, leave. Remember that even people you know well may try to coerce you.
- **Be confident.** Stay alert. Make eye contact. Be assertive.
- **Take action.** If you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, speak out immediately. Name the behavior and say you want it to stop (For example, “You’re standing too close. Move away.”). In a strong clear voice say, “No,” “Enough,” or “Stop.” Call out for help. It’s your right to fight back if you feel safe enough to do so.