10 Tips for Protecting Children from Sexual Abuse

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About Me

• Child Forensic Interviewer
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Knowing the facts...

- 1 in 4 girls are sexually abused by their eighteenth birthday
- 1 in 6 boys (Centers for Disease Control)
- Over 90% of children are sexually abused by someone they know
- Children who are sexually abused are at an increased risk for:
  - Drug and alcohol abuse
  - Eating disorders
  - Behavioral problems
  - Prostitution
  - Depression
  - Other physical health issues (ACE Study)
Knowing the facts...

- Most children are sexually abused in a residence (84% for children under 12, and 71% for children 12-17) * Snyder, 2000
- As many as 40% of children who are sexually abused are abused by older, or more powerful children * Finkelhor, 2012
- An estimated 1 out of 10 K-12 students will experience school employee sexual misconduct during their school career *sesamenet.org, 2016
- Sexual abuse is rarely reported and when it is, reports are often not believed (true when offender is an educator and otherwise)
So what can you do to prevent this?
1. Make your home a “No Secrets Zone.”
No Secrets

- Secrets are the fuel that keeps sexual abuse going
- Monitor yourself and others for times when you are inadvertently reinforcing secret-keeping (“don’t tell your dad I gave you that candy”)
- Make “secret” a buzzword
- Define the terms
  - “Secret”- secrets are something you are never supposed to tell and can make you feel bad
  - “Surprise”- surprises are things that don’t make you feel bad and can be revealed at a certain time
  - “Personal matters”– can be discussed with some people but maybe not everyone
- Make a rule (“We don’t keep secrets from each other in this house.”)
2. Respect your child’s personal boundaries.
Personal Boundaries

• Many kids do not want to give hugs or kisses
• Don’t force them when they don’t want to (“Come on, give Grandpa a kiss”)
• Forcing unwanted contact teaches kids that adults do not have to respect their physical boundaries and leaves them vulnerable to abuse situations
• Suggest other ways of greeting that are respectful but do not give the wrong message (high five or handshake instead of hug)
3. Teach proper names for body parts.
Correct names for body parts

- Resist the temptation to use nicknames for genitalia.
- Nicknames limit child’s ability to communicate effectively with others if something is going on.
- Teach correct names for these parts and use them consistently when kids are young (teach names when you teach names for other body parts).
- Identify private parts that people are not supposed to touch and that you should not touch on other people.
- Practice and show kids you are comfortable talking about those parts and using the names.
4. Monitor “one-on-one” situations.
Monitoring 1 child 1 adult contact

- One on one seems good (individual attention) but leaves kids at risk
- Many offenders only need access to offend
- Not realistic to completely avoid this but stay vigilant
- Keep blinds and doors open (viewable by you or others)
- Check in at irregular intervals
- Give the message to an offender that someone is always watching
- This should be policy in all settings (check to make sure it’s the case for schools, lessons, camp, etc.)
5. Recognize that sexual offenders come in all shapes and sizes.
What does a child molester look like?

• They look like anyone else you know!
• People want to believe they can pick someone out because the offender looks “creepy”
• If that were the case, sex abuse would never happen because no one would allow their kids near that person
• Teach kids how to respond to any situation or person that makes them uncomfortable
• “Stranger Danger” is not enough and leaves kids unprepared
6. Take advantage of opportunities to discuss the topic with kids.
Talk about it!

• Estimates vary but the majority of children do not disclose abuse during their childhood, if they ever disclose at all.
• Many do not tell because they are never asked.
• Don’t ask your child repetitively but when the topic comes up, ask!
• Teaches kids that if something is going on, they can come to you.
7. Not all background checks are created equal.
Background Checks

• Get personal information for anyone watching your child
• Get references
• Require background checks when possible and always for schools/daycare settings/camps
• Make sure they include FBI finger printing (full criminal history nationwide)
• And Childline (State child abuse registry–lower burden of proof)
8. Avoid “Good Touch/Bad Touch.”
No “Good Touch/Bad Touch”

- What????
- Most children associate “bad touch” with something painful
- Sexual abuse often does not cause pain (fondling) because if there is physical pain or injury, offenders are at risk for getting caught
- Most children associate “good touch” with something that feels good
- Sexual abuse may stimulate genitalia and feel “good”
- Terms are confusing to kids and may not apply to what has happened to them
- Replace with “safe/unsafe” touches
9. Be clear and cover all bases.
Talking to kids

• Most parents say, “no one should touch your private part” but this does not cover everything and kids are literal

• They do not often instruct about touching other people or seeing something

• Kids who are asked to touch someone else, etc. may be unprepared so talk about many different kinds of contact that are not “okay.”

• Start young!
10. Understand the Role of the Internet and Social Media
Mediating Online Risk

- “Grooming” has changed
- Relationships develop much faster and with greater perceived intimacy online
- Sexual abuse is not always hands on (child pornography, enticement, sextortion are becoming more and more prevalent)
- Talk to kids about online dangers and “tricky people”
- Keep all devices in plain sight (no laptops, etc. in bedrooms with closed doors)
Bonus Tip: If you don’t know, ask!
Ask!

• This is hard but it’s too important to avoid.
• Be a crazy person like me and ask what policies are in place.
• If you don’t know what to say, ask someone who does.

Some Resources:
• Local Child Advocacy Center or National Children’s Alliance (www.nca-online.org)
• Darkness 2 Light (www.d2l.org)
• SESAME (Stop Educator Sexual Abuse Misconduct & Exploitation, www.sesamenet.org)
• Stop It Now (www.stopitnow.org)
• National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (www.missingkids.org)