

Information about sexual abuse



Preventing sexual abuse

It is estimated that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 7 boys will be victims of sexual abuse before reaching adulthood. Sexual abuse occurs in all social, ethnic and economic groups and to children of all ages.

Sexual abuse is not about sex or desire. It is about an abuse of power, both in terms of physical strength and authority. Sexual abuse relies on secrecy, so it is important that your child be able to talk to you about his or her body and feelings.

Though most parents teach their children about “stranger danger,” it is important to note that the offender in sexual abuse cases is more likely to be someone the child knows well.

What parents and caregivers can do

- Parents need to trust their instincts about other adults or children that may appear threatening or just too interested in their child.
- Keep the lines of communication open with your child. Talk to your children everyday and listen to their problems and concerns.
- Make sure that your child knows the difference between good and bad secrets.
- Encourage your child to trust his or her intuition. Intuition will alert a child when someone has touched them inappropriately.
- Parents need to pay attention to their child’s change in behavior toward an adult or child. There might be something going on and your child may be in danger.
- Learn everything you can about age-appropriate sexual development. All children are curious about their bodies and parents should teach them about appropriate boundaries of behavior.
- Educate your children about the “uh-oh” touch. This is when a child is touched in such a way that leaves a feeling of “uh-oh, this isn’t right.”
- Be cautious about any adult who has unsupervised access to your child.
- Let your child know that he or she has the right to say no to any unwanted touch, even if that means refusing to hug or kiss a friend or relative when asked. The choice should belong to the child.