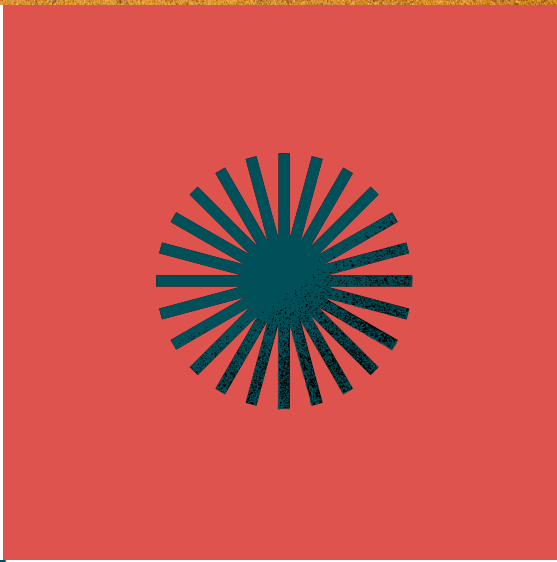




A SAFER FAMILY

A SAFER WORLD

A Resource for Parents and Caregivers
of Children Ages 0-12
on Preventing Child Sexual Abuse



Harborview Abuse & Trauma Center
www.uwhatc.org
206-744-1600

UW Medicine
HARBORVIEW
MEDICAL CENTER

HOW TO...



01

Support Sexual Development

02

Teach About Consent

03

Keep the Conversation Going

04

Notice Concerning Behaviors

05

Respond to Abuse

As parents and caregivers, you play an important role in helping prevent child sexual abuse. You are the best person to teach your children how they should be treated and how they should treat others. They see you doing it every day!

In this booklet, you will find ideas for talking and taking action. However, even when families do talk about these things, sometimes children still can be sexually abused. This booklet also talks about what to do if this ever happens.

We all play a part in creating safer families and a safer world. Please contact us if you need help. We are always glad to talk.

Harborview Abuse & Trauma Center



uwhatc.org



206-744-1600

Children between
the ages of

7 - 13

experience the highest
rates of child sexual abuse.

1 IN 5 GIRLS

1 IN 20 BOYS

experience sexual abuse
by age 18. This does not
include all of those who
did not report.

Source:
National Center for Victims of Crime



SUPPORT SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

“YOUR BODY BELONGS TO YOU. IT’S IMPORTANT TO CARE FOR YOUR BODY AND KEEP IT HEALTHY AND SAFE.”

“IT’S OKAY TO LOOK AT AND TOUCH YOUR OWN BODY. YOU CAN DO THAT IN YOUR BEDROOM OR IN THE BATHROOM.”

“WHEN A PERSON IS PREGNANT, THE FETUS GROWS IN THEIR UTERUS, (NOT IN THEIR STOMACH).”

“I’M NOT SURE HOW TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION BUT I’M REALLY GLAD YOU ASKED ME. I’M GOING TO GET US A BOOK ABOUT THAT SO WE CAN LEARN TOGETHER.”

- Sexual development is a normal part of growing up. Think about how you want your children to handle their personal health and relationships. Think about the **skills** they will need and how they can **learn them over time**.
- It is important to teach children the **proper names of body parts**, including genitals. By teaching these words, you let them know that it is ok to use those terms. Invite them to ask you questions or tell you if they have a concern.
- **Bodily autonomy** is when a person can make decisions about their own body. Talk about what this means for your family and for your child. Think about how you can support them as they grow up to be **self-advocates**.
- Children often have questions about where babies come from, toileting, bodies, and growing up. **They need these questions answered**. You can think ahead about how you want to answer questions in a way that is straightforward and age appropriate.
- How do you know when kids are ready to talk about these things? **If they are asking, it's a good sign they are ready!** It's ok to just give a little information to a younger child, then wait to see if they have more questions. It's important to make sure what you say is correct and honest.
- Occasional **sexual behavior and play** is common for young children, like acting out family roles or playing doctor. Exploring and touching their own body is also common. You can set limits and teach your family's rules. If you are not sure if a child's behavior is concerning, you can call our center.
- **Resources:** Check out our website at www.uwhatc.org [click on "Brochures and Resources"] for a recommended **book list**. Check out the **videos** at www.amaze.org. Your child's **doctor** can be a great resource too.

TEACH ABOUT CONSENT

Find opportunities to model consent. It can be helpful for children to have the chance to decide how (or if) they want to share their body.

"I hope you have a great day at school today. I would like to hug you, or we could high five. How do you want to say goodbye?"

"Is it ok if I send this picture of you to your aunties and uncles?"

Teach how to recognize a 'no' and a 'yes,' and how to respond.

"The cat usually likes to be petted gently. If she walks away, it means she doesn't like it and you need to stop."

"When you are wrestling with him, look at his face. Does it look like he is still having a good time? Is he smiling, laughing? If you are not sure, you can ask if he wants to keep wrestling."

Include body safety rules in your other family safety rules.

"It is not ok to touch another person's penis, vulva or bottom, or to show people yours. These body parts are private. Other people should be following these rules too."

"If you feel that something is unsafe or uncomfortable, it is ok to make up a reason that you need to leave."

Leave the conversation open for kids to report.

"If anyone ever touches your private parts, or breaks any of our rules, you can always talk to me about it. You will not be in trouble."

"My job is to help keep you safe. So you can always talk to me if anyone ever makes you feel hurt, sad, confused, or uncomfortable. Even if it's someone that I like or you like."

Tell others what you are teaching your child.

"We are trying to teach her about consent. We don't force her to hug or kiss anyone if she doesn't want to."

"We are teaching them about body safety rules. We have told them that they can talk to us if anything or anyone makes them uncomfortable."

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

CHILDREN HEAR AND SEE MANY THINGS THAT INFLUENCE THE WAY THEY THINK. HOWEVER, SOMETIMES THESE MESSAGES CAN BE HARMFUL. KNOW WHO YOUR CHILD SPENDS TIME WITH. LEARN HOW TO SET PARENTAL CONTROLS ON MEDIA TO BLOCK ADULT CONTENT. BE AWARE OF WHO CAN COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR CHILD THROUGH VIDEO GAMES, APPS, AND SOCIAL MEDIA. ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO PRACTICE WHAT THEY CAN DO WHEN THEY FEEL UNSAFE. IT'S IMPORTANT TO BE PROACTIVE! TALK TOGETHER ABOUT WHAT THEY SEE AND HEAR, IN PERSON AND ONLINE. TEACH THEM ABOUT YOUR FAMILY VALUES AND EXPECTATIONS.

PROMOTE RESPECT AND EQUALITY

An abuser can use power and control over another person to cause harm. Think about how children learn about power. Who is inferior and who is superior? These ideas can lead to disrespect, bullying or abuse. There are groups who experience abuse at higher rates. These include girls, young people, LGBTQ+, certain communities of color, immigrants, and people with disabilities. You can teach your children how to treat all people with respect and equality. When they say something concerning, use it as an opportunity to educate. (For example, if an older child thinks they are 'above' others, if they lack empathy, or if they think the 'rules don't apply' to them.) You can teach your family values from a young age. You can show them how you want them to treat others. You can show them how they should to be treated.

EMPOWER CHILDREN

Parents have the right to create rules for their children. It is also important for children to know that sometimes they can say no, and that their voice will be heard. This may help protect them. You can show your child you respect their opinions even when you enforce rules. You can allow your children to sometimes disagree with you. They may need to practice saying no and making choices for themselves. Children often learn that adults are in control and children must always do what adults say. If an adult abuses a child, the child might think it is ok, or be scared to tell someone. It's important for children to be able to speak up if they have a problem. You can give your children permission to tell you anything, even secrets and things that may be upsetting.



AS YOUR CHILDREN GROW, THINK ABOUT HOW YOU CAN CONTINUE TO BE SOMEONE THEY TALK TO WHEN THEY HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS. DISCUSS OTHER TRUSTED PEOPLE WHO THEY CAN ALSO GO TO FOR HELP.



NOTICE CONCERNING BEHAVIORS

Talking to kids is just one part of prevention. It is also important to notice and respond to **concerning behaviors from adults, teens and children**. Get to know who your children spend time with. Avoid having older children watch younger children for long periods of time with little supervision. **Abuse usually happens by someone the child knows**. It usually happens in secrecy.

Children can be abused by other children and by adults. This can include people living in the home, or even people working at schools and youth programs. If someone's behavior makes you uncomfortable, **trust your instincts**. Don't let your child spend time alone with that person. Adult abusers often seem very nice, so that they can develop a close, trusting relationship with a child.

EXAMPLES OF CONCERNING BEHAVIORS IN ADULTS

- **Special treatment:** giving a child special attention, gifts or special privileges, or letting them break the rules
- **Child-focused:** touching them frequently while playing; seeming to relate to children better than adults; developing a close relationship with a child without including the parents or caregivers
- **Poor boundaries:** not stopping when child looks uncomfortable or when asked to stop; talking about sexual things or personal relationships
- **Secrecy:** asking the child to keep secrets; looking for places and situations to be alone with the child

TALKING TO SOMEONE WHO HAS CONCERNING BEHAVIORS

"It looks like he is not really enjoying that game anymore."

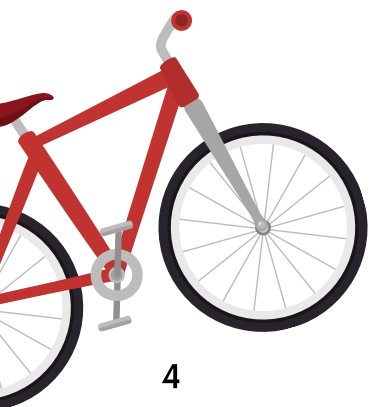
"I feel uncomfortable when you talk to the kids about _____"

"Please have the door open when you are playing. I still need to see them."

"It really bothers me when you talk about their bodies and call it 'flirting.'"

FOLLOWING UP

One way to prevent sexual abuse is to speak up when you see concerning behaviors and boundaries. This can be a great example for your child to see you do this. Most people will be understanding and will stop the concerning behavior. On the other hand, an abuser might get defensive or say you are being too sensitive. They might continue the behavior, or get more secretive. If this happens, watch this person if they are around children. Talk to a friend or family member. Call our center (or your local sexual assault center) for advice.




RESPOND TO ABUSE

Resources for children and families

You can start NOW. Show your children you are there for them any time they have a question or a concern, no matter how small. When they do come to you with a problem, tell them first that you are glad they told you. They may feel more comfortable going to you with a big problem if they felt you heard them in the past with little problems.

Despite our best efforts to protect children, sexual abuse can still happen. Your response and support is very important. **Children can, and do, recover from sexual abuse.** There is help for your child, and for you too.

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- If you suspect your child has been sexually abused, but you are not sure, supervise them closely. Watch for changes in their moods. Try to leave the conversation open: "you can always talk to me if anything is bothering you." Call our center (or your local sexual assault center) to get advice.
 - If your child tells you that they have been sexually abused, it's normal to feel upset or in disbelief. It's important to stay calm and support them. You can tell them that you are glad they told you. You can provide them comfort and safety.
 - When abuse has been reported by a child, do not allow unsupervised contact with the abuser. You can call our center (or your local sexual assault center) for help. Seek support from the child's doctor, a trusted friend, or a family member. You can call local police or Child Protective Services to make a report. You can seek a medical exam to make sure the child's body is okay and to collect evidence.
 - If you are worried about your child acting out sexually or touching others inappropriately, seek professional help. Talk to the child about the body safety rules and what kinds of touch are ok and not ok. Teach and enforce the rules as you would with any other rules about safety and respect. Call our center at 206-744-1600 (or contact your local sexual assault center) to get advice.

To find your local sexual assault center:
National Sexual Violence Resource Center
www.nsvrc.org/find-help





WE ARE HERE TO HELP

Harborview Abuse & Trauma Center
Offices in Seattle, Bellevue, and Shoreline

Services include: crisis support, medical
exams, advocacy, and trauma counseling

www.uwhatc.org

206-744-1600

UW Medicine

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