

Abuse Prevention Information for Parents and Guardians

(-From Praesidium Inc.)

Information for Parents of Young Children

Even very young children can learn skills to help keep themselves safe from sexual abuse, but it is often up to parents/guardians to help them learn what they need to know. Here are some important things you can teach your child to stay safe.

Teach Your Children About Their Bodies

Names of all Parts of Their Bodies. Talk to your child about the proper names for body parts and use the proper name for private parts in that discussion. This will give your child the correct words to use when he/she needs to tell you anything about their body, like an injury or rash or other problem in that area.

Rules About Appropriate Physical Touch. Children understand the idea of rules. They know there are rules about hitting and biting, rules about playing nicely with others, and rules about being safe, like wearing seat belts. So, as you teach these rules, just add rules about appropriate physical touch. Say things like, "Never let other people touch your private parts," or "Never let anyone make you touch their private parts either."

What to do if Someone Tries to Break the Rules. Your children need to know what to do when someone breaks the rules about touching them. They need to know:

What to say to someone who breaks the rules about touching,

To move away from someone who is breaking the rules about touching, and

To tell you or another adult if someone breaks the rules about touching.

Teach your child to say, "No!" Or "No! Don't touch my private parts." Or "My body is private. You can't touch me there." Or "Leave me alone." Or simply "Don't do that." Teach your child to say this to other children as well as to adults. Practice saying phrases like these with your child.

Teach your child to move away from anyone who is breaking the rules about touching. Tell your child that it's ok to get out of someone's lap or pull away from a hug, even if an adult tells or asks you to sit on their lap or hug them.

Teach your child to tell you or another trusted adult, like a teacher or caregiver, if someone breaks the rules about touching them. Keep telling someone until they respond and does something about it.

How to Recognize Warning Signs in Your Child

No one knows your child better than you. So, as parents/guardians, watch for warning signs, listen for warning signs, and follow up when you see or hear warning signs.

If something is wrong, you may see a sudden change in your child's behavior, or you may hear unusual comments. If you see or hear these things, follow up. Find a relaxed time to talk one-on-one with your child.

Responding to Inappropriate Behavior or Touch Your Child Reports

If your child tells you about inappropriate behavior or you witness it, such as someone who is too physical with him/her or who makes him/her uncomfortable, ask him/her to give you an example. If the interaction was inappropriate, but not actual abuse - talk with their teacher or caregiver. Specify your concern and check back with your child and with the teacher. Abuse can be very private and embarrassing, so keep in mind that your child may not say anything at all.

How to Respond if Your Child Tells You About Sexual Abuse

Your response plays a big role in how your child understands the abuse and how he/she recovers.

How to Respond When someone Discloses Abuse

You may find yourself in a situation where a person confides in you that he or she has been sexually abused by a teacher, family member, another consumer, a coach, or other trusted adult. If this happens, follow these four steps:

Step 1: Listen.

- Do your best to stay calm and let the person talk. Don't pry but you can ask a few questions that will help you understand what happened.

Step 2. Reassure.

- The person may be scared, angry, confused and crying. You can reassure them with a few simple comments like:
 - "I know how hard this is to talk about." "You are very brave for bringing this out."
 - "Don't worry, you are doing the right thing by letting someone know." "This isn't your fault. You've done nothing wrong."
 - *"I'm very sorry this has happened to you."*

Step 3. Protect.

Make sure the person is safe. Do not let the accused person have any further contact with him or her and tell the victim-survivor you will do everything you can to keep him or her safe and/or supported. Let them know you must share what he or she has told you with others who can help.

Step 4. Report.

Write down as quickly as you can everything the person shared with you in as much detail as possible, using the person's actual words, not your own interpretation. To report concerns or suspected abuse, call your local police department.

It's up to us as adults to do all we can to prevent child sexual abuse. It's up to all of us, especially parents/guardians, to create safe environments for children. Teaching them about their bodies, recognizing warning signs, and responding to yours and your child concerns are important first steps.

Tips for Parents/Guardians When Talking with Children

This information is designed to help you talk to your child in situations where there is a possibility that he or she might reveal information about inappropriate boundaries they have experienced with an adult or another consumer.

It may be difficult to do but it's important to try to stay calm when you speak with your child. Your demeanor will communicate more than your words. Children can be traumatized by emotional, angry or accusatory reactions.

Examples of Physical Boundary Violations

- Tickling,
- Horseplay,
- Hugging,
- Massaging,
- Wrestling, and
- Going overboard with affection.

Examples of Emotional Boundary Violations

- Making them feel overly important, cared about, understood,
- Spending too much time with them,
- Choosing favorites,
- Giving gifts, and
- Acting possessive.
- Sending excessive or inappropriate text messages,
- Pretending to be the consumer's friend on social networking sites like Facebook,
- Sharing personal information to make the consumer feel like they have a special relationship, and

- Promising extra coaching time, a college scholarship, a place on a national team, or even a spot on the Olympic Team

Examples of Behavioral Boundary Violations

Offenders manipulate kids into doing things they would not otherwise do, such as:

- Sneaking around by saying they will be in one place when they are in another,
- Keeping secrets with the offender,
- Looking at pornography, and
- Using drugs or alcohol.

Things to consider before talking with your child about sensitive subjects:

- Timing and atmosphere are very important. Choose a calm, unhurried, private time to talk with your child.
- Before beginning this type of conversation, be sure you're ready. Be calm, emotionally controlled and confident. You want to communicate to your child that you are open to discussing this topic and that you can handle whatever they need to tell you.
- If this is difficult for you to talk about, practice first with a friend, your spouse or in a mirror.
- Use simple, conversational language, gauged to your child's level of understanding.
- Do not make the talk scary or gloomy. Self-protection is an issue to discuss with children on a regular basis. Conversations such as this should be a positive learning experience for children so that they feel comfortable talking about their bodies. This also increases the chances that your child will seek your advice in the future. Remember, "If you can't talk about it, you can't protect it."
- If your child shares difficult information, stay calm. Do not say, "Why didn't you tell me?" Do let the child continue to talk. Say that you are proud that he or she found a way to get help. If you are at all agitated, it may be best to wait until you have a chance to contact a local resource to continue the discussion. Tell your child, "I'm really proud that you've shared this with me, and I think we should continue this discussion when we can get some extra help from a counselor who has helped other children with these things. How does that sound?"

How to begin:

Start the conversation casually.

"How was your day? Or "What did you do at school today?" or "It's nice to have a chance to sit and talk for a minute, isn't it?"

Identify the circumstances in question.

"How is everything going at camp?" "What is your favorite thing to do there?"; "What is your least favorite thing to do?"; "Has anyone made you feel uncomfortable?"

“Remember that if anyone makes you feel uncomfortable you should tell mommy, daddy, a teacher or another grown up you trust.”

“You know it’s very important that if anything like that happened to you that you tell me right away, right? That way I can make sure you are safe.”

Questions if you and your child want to continue to talk.

“Tell me more, I’m listening.”

Your child may be uncomfortable so you will want to do what you can to put him or her at ease. Sitting close, using a calm voice tone, giving a hug, or keeping your arm around him or her will help.

You can also say something like, “Honey, you know I love you very much and I’m concerned that you might be upset about something. Can you tell me what you’re thinking?”

If your child stops talking or gets upset, continue comforting him or her.

If your child does disclose that something happened:

“I’m really glad you told me about this. You did the right thing by telling me. I know you are upset but you know I am here for you. are here for you.”

After the conversation:

Write down notes about the conversation while it is fresh in your mind. If applicable, report boundary violations to the YMCA director or to hr@myy.org.

Tips for Parents/Guardians When Talking with Children

This information is designed to help you talk to your child in situations where there is a possibility that he or she might reveal information about abuse or exploitation.

It may be difficult to do but it's important to try to stay calm when you speak with your consumer. Your demeanor will communicate more than your words. Young adults can be traumatized by emotional, angry, or accusatory reactions.

Things to consider before talking with your consumer about sensitive subjects:

- Timing and atmosphere are very important. Choose a calm, unhurried, private time to talk with your consumer.
- Before beginning this type of conversation, be sure you're ready. Be calm, emotionally controlled, and confident. You want to communicate to your consumer that you are open to discussing this topic and that you can handle whatever they need to tell you.
- If this is difficult for you to talk about, practice first with a friend, your spouse or in a mirror.
- Use simple, conversational language, gauged to your child's level of understanding.
- Don't make the talk upsetting or anxious. Self-protection is an issue that should be discussed in a calm manner with an open atmosphere. Conversations such as this should be a positive interaction for young adults so that they feel comfortable talking about their experiences. This also increases the chances that your child will seek your advice in the future. Remember, "If you can't talk about it, you can't protect it."
- If your child shares difficult information, stay calm. Do not say, "Why didn't you tell me?" Do let the child continue to talk. Say that you are proud that he or she found a way to get help. If you are at all agitated, it may be best to wait until you have a chance to contact a local resource. Tell your child, "I'm really proud that you've shared this with me, and I think we should continue this discussion when we can get some extra help from a counselor who has helped other young adults with these things. How does that sound?"

How to begin:

Start the conversation casually.

"How was your day? Or "What did you do today?" or "It's nice to have a chance to sit and talk for a minute, isn't it?"

Identify the circumstances in question.

“Do you remember going to summer camp?”; “What was your least favorite thing to do”; “Had anyone made you feel uncomfortable when you were there?”

“If anyone made you feel uncomfortable you should tell mom, dad, a teacher or another trusted adult.”

“You know it’s very important that if anything like that happened to you that you tell me right away, right? That way I can make sure you are safe.”

Questions if you and your child want to continue to talk.

“Tell me more, I’m listening.”

Your child may be uncomfortable so you’ll want to do what you can to put him or her at ease. Sitting close, using a calm voice tone, giving a hug or keeping your arm around him or her will help.

You can also say something like, “Honey, you know I love you very much and I’m concerned that you might be upset about something. Can you tell me what you’re thinking?”

If your child stops talking or gets upset, continue comforting him or her.

If your child does disclose that something happened:

“I’m really glad you told me about this. You did the right thing by telling me. I know you’re upset but you know Mom and Dad are here for you.”

After the conversation:

Write down notes about the conversation while it is fresh in your mind. Report concerns to your local police department. If applicable, report to the YMCA director or to hr@myy.org.

How to Support a Loved One Who Has Experienced Abuse

It can be hard to know what to do to help a friend, family member, or student who is a survivor of abuse or exploitation. Victims of abuse and/or exploitation may experience a range of emotional responses after an incident. Please read below for some helpful hints for parents/guardians or partners/friends of those who have experienced abuse and/or exploitation. Here's how you can help:

What to say to a survivor:

- I'm sorry this happened to you.
- It wasn't your fault.
- Thank you for telling me.
- I'm always here if you want to talk.
- Can I do anything for you?

What parents/guardians can do:

The process of recovering from abuse and/or exploitation takes time. As a parent/guardian, your help during this process is essential. Survivors need a great deal of support and caring as they begin to address and survive a very frightening and sometimes violent experience. Parents/guardians can help by:

- Listen and be available
- Believe and do not judge
- Recognize that recovery takes a long time
- Respect the decisions that the survivor makes
- Be gentle, sensitive, and respectful of the survivor's wishes for closeness and affection
- Find your own support

What NEVER to say to a survivor:

- It was your fault.
- You could have avoided it had you...
- It's been so long! Get over it!
- You wanted it / You were asking for it.
- It's not that big of deal; it happens to lots of people.
- I don't believe you.

What friends and partners can do:

Friends and partners play a key role in both preventing abuse and exploitation from occurring as well as lending support to a survivor. They are often the first people in whom a survivor might confide. Here are a few things to keep in mind to support your friend.

- Believe your friend / partner. People rarely lie about sexual assault, intimate partner violence, stalking, or harassment.
- Listen to your friend/partner and concentrate on understanding their feelings.

- Ask how you can help... and do it.
- Offer to accompany your friend/partner in seeking medical attention, counseling, or reporting to law enforcement.
- Help the friend/partner regain a sense of control by supporting her or him in making decisions about whom to tell and how to proceed.
- Remind your friend/ partner that sexual violence is NOT their fault!
- Offer shelter or companionship so that she/he doesn't have to be alone.
- Be available and supportive.

There's no "right way" to heal from trauma. Be there to listen, to care, and to help!

How to Cope with the Effects of Abuse

Recovery from psychological trauma is often a difficult and gradual process. When a trauma survivor takes direct action to cope with problems, they often feel a greater sense of personal power and control. Positive coping actions are those that help to reduce anxiety or other distressing reactions and improve the situation in a way that does not harm the survivor further.

Positive coping methods can include:

- Learning about trauma and its effects
- Talking to another person for support
- Practicing relaxation methods
- Challenging negative thoughts and beliefs
- Increasing positive and enjoyable activities
- Calling a therapist for help