

# Family Safety Plan

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Evidence shows creating a family safety plan helps prevent child sexual abuse. By understanding what puts children at risk of sexual abuse, we can take action to counter those risks. When creating your plan remember that **90% OF ABUSE IS CARRIED OUT BY SOMEONE YOU KNOW, OR KNOWN BY THE FAMILY.**

## 1. KNOW THE SIGNS

A "Warning sign" is just another way of saying "opportunity for prevention" – a chance for caring adults to recognise possible risks, and to take action to protect children. Remember, the most effective prevention takes place before there's a child victim to heal or an offender to punish. We recommend that you refer to our infographic on warning signs, but some of the signs you need to be aware of include →

Signs that a child is being sexually abused are often present, but they can be indistinguishable from other signs of child stress, distress, or trauma. Physical signs of sexual abuse are not common, although redness, rashes/swelling in the genital area, urinary tract infections, or other such symptoms should be carefully investigated. Also, physical issues associated with anxiety, such as chronic stomach pain or headaches, may occur.



Emotional or behavioural signals are more common:

- Behavioural problems, physical aggression, non-compliance, and rebellion
- Anxiety, depression, fear, withdrawal, and suicidal thoughts
- Nightmares, bed-wetting, bullying, and cruelty to animals
- Lack of interest in friends, sports, and other activities
- Unaccountable fear of particular places or people
- Becoming secretive
- Becoming withdrawn or very clingy
- Outbursts of anger
- "Too perfect" or overly compliant behaviour
- Personality changes or suddenly seeming insecure
- Suddenly having nightmares or other sleeping problems
- Having unexplained gifts such as toys, money, mobile phone, expensive clothes.

Be aware that in some children there are no signs whatsoever.

If you find physical signs that you suspect are sexual abuse, have the child physically examined immediately by a professional who specialises in child sexual abuse.

## 2. EDUCATE EVERYONE IN THE FAMILY

Much abuse in the family remains undisclosed. Children may fear their abuser, not want their abuser to get into trouble, feel that the abuse was 'their fault', and feel responsible for what will happen to their family if they tell. Disabled, Special Needs and some ethnic minority children face additional barriers of family shame and denial.

- Teach children the proper names for body parts, and what to do if someone tries to touch them in a sexual way.
- Abuse by a family member is much more traumatic because it involves high levels of betrayal, secrecy and stigma.
- Think carefully about the safety of any isolated, one-on-one settings. Make sure interactions with children can be observed and interrupted. Choose group situations when possible.

Learn to recognise warning signs that a child may have been sexually abused, or that an adult, adolescent, or child may be sexually touching a child. Some abusive behaviours may not involve touching; for example, showing pornography to a child is abusive and grooming a child, even if the child is not touched.

Think carefully about the safety of situations in which older youth have access to younger children. Make sure that multiple adults are present who can supervise.

Safer environments can help reduce the risk for abuse. More than 80% of sexual abuse cases occur in isolated, one-on-one situations. If you eliminate or reduce isolated, one-on-one situations between children and adults, as well as children and other youth, you'll dramatically reduce the risk of sexual abuse.

Understand that abusers often become friendly with potential victims and their families, enjoying family activities, earning trust, and gaining time alone with children

Make sure young children know that no one has the right to touch their private parts (unless for medical reasons) and that they should not touch anyone else's private parts.

Make sure each family member knows what healthy sexual development in children is, and what sexual Behaviours might be of concern.



## 3. CIRCLE OF TRUSTED ADULTS

Create a **SECRET WORD** or **PHRASE** that your child can use if they are in fear, and want to be picked up, or have concerns they want to discuss.

**90% OF ABUSE** is carried out by someone the child knows, loves or trusts, so having the circle of trust in a prominent place in the house may make the perpetrator think twice.

Everyone on the trusted adult circle should be old enough to drive a car, so they can access the help required.

Be sure that no one in your family is isolated.

Identify a small number (3 or more) of trusted adults for each member of the family to talk to if there is a concern.

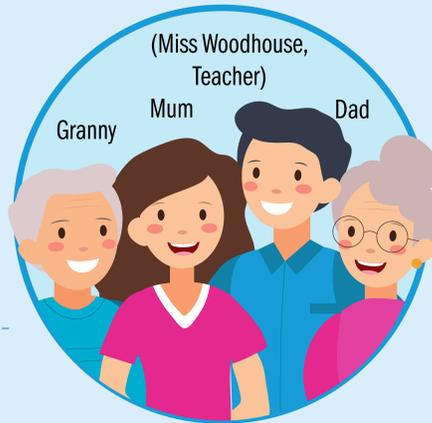
Research shows that having someone to talk with and confide in plays a key role in how well a child will bounce back from stressful events. Having a safe, responsible and consistent adult for a child or adolescent to turn to is critical.

If someone seems "too good to be true," ask more questions. Even a close friend or relative may not be a safe person to trust with your child.

At least one of the trusted people must be someone outside of your family because if a child is a victim of incest or abuse from a family member, the child needs to be able to tell someone outside the family.

Many children will pick their teacher as one of their trusted adults. This should be encouraged as teachers are mandated for child safety, and evidence shows children are more likely to disclose to a teacher compared to other adults.

Children should update their trusted adults at least once per year, as the people may change, and teachers may move, also this is a great regular reminder to again discuss each part of your family safety plan.



## 4. SET CLEAR FAMILY BOUNDARIES

Set clear family guidelines for personal privacy and behaviour. Discuss them with all members of your family and model respecting these guidelines.

Discuss these guidelines with any other adults who spend time around or supervise the children (e.g., if a child does not want to hug or kiss someone hello or goodbye, then they can shake hands instead).

Let children know that if they are not comfortable being around a particular adult or older child, then you or another adult will let that person know this (e.g., tell them that you don't want your child to sit on their lap).

As a child matures, boundaries may need to change (e.g., knock on the door before entering the room of an adolescent).



## 5. TALK ABOUT IT

Talking openly breaks down barriers and reduces stigma. Have open conversations with children about our bodies, sex, and boundaries.

When we talk to children in age-appropriate ways about our bodies, sex, and boundaries, children understand what healthy relationships look like. It also teaches them that they have the right to say "NO". They become less vulnerable to people who would violate their boundaries, and are more likely to tell you if abuse occurs.

Let everyone in the family know it is OK to ask questions. It is important for adults to set the tone for everyone by talking about the range of healthy sexual behaviours and speaking up about sexual abuse.

Talk **MORE THAN ONCE** with all family members - Children, teenagers, and adults about appropriate and inappropriate sexualised Behaviours to ensure that they understand and Remember the information.

One of the best protections against abuse is our relationship with children.

Be sure to mention that the abuser might be an **ADULT FRIEND, FAMILY MEMBER, or OLDER YOUTH.**

Adults need to take the lead by opening the discussion about what is healthy sexual behaviour and what is abusive sexual behaviour

Remember to teach children that their body belongs to them, they have a right to say no, and that they should tell a safe adult if they're upset or worried.

Remind your children that **NOBODY** should be asking them to keep **SECRETS**, especially if it is about **PRIVATE PARTS**, or anything that makes them feel yucky or uncomfortable.

## 6. CARE ENOUGH TO REACH HELP

If you are concerned about the sexualised behaviours of a new partner, parent, step-parent, uncle, cousin, sibling, or any family members, care enough to talk with them and **SEEK IMMEDIATE ADVICE** from a helpline.



Make sure everyone knows that they can talk with you about any inappropriate behaviour that may already have occurred; that you love them, and will work to get them help.

## 7. KNOW WHERE TO REPORT & SEEK HELP AND ADVICE

### DON'T OVERREACT

If a child breaks an arm or runs a high fever, you know to stay calm and where to seek help because you've mentally prepared yourself. Reacting to child sexual abuse is the same.



Disclosure of sexual abuse means a child has chosen you as the person he or she trusts enough to tell. It is the moment when children learn whether others can be trusted to stand up for them. When you react to disclosure with anger or disbelief, the child will likely: Feel even more ashamed and guilty, Shut down, Change or retract the story, when, in fact, abuse is occurring. They are then likely to change the story to match your questions so future telling appears to be "coached." This can be very harmful if the case goes to court.

EVIDENCE SHOWS THAT **OVER 95% OF SUSTANTIATED REPORTS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE ARE TRUE.**



Believe the child and make sure the child knows it.



Thank the child for telling you and praise the child's courage



Encourage the child to talk, but don't ask leading questions about details. Asking about details can alter the child's memory of events. If you must ask questions to keep the child talking, ask open-ended ones like "What happened next?"

Learn about the agencies in your area. Know who to contact to make a report if you know or suspect that a child has been sexually abused, or you are worried about someone's behaviour towards a child, you can:

Immediate Help  
Contact the **Police**  
on **999**

Contact the  
**NSPCC Helpline**

Contact your **local Social Services**

Report online to the **Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre**

#CHILDABUSEHELP  
CHILD ABUSE RESOURCES  
WWW.CHILDABUSEHELP.ORG.UK

NSPCC HELPLINE  
0800 800 5000

NNECA  
NATIONAL NETWORK FOR CHILD ABUSE  
WWW.NNECA.ORG.UK

