



KNOW



SEE



RESPOND

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL ABUSE





THANK YOU Thank you for taking action to protect children from sexual abuse! The Five Days of Action are about inspiring and educating adults to protect children. This booklet corresponds with each day of the week, focusing on raising awareness and inspiring adults to protect children. Here you will find tips and examples of everyday actions that you can do to help protect children. For more information on the Five Days of Action visit, www.fivedaysofaction.org.

exercise You probably already do things that protect the kids in your care. List what you do to protect children from abuse: (i.e. talk to your kid about their bodies)

01.



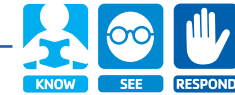
KNOW

If we don't understand child sexual abuse, we can't end it. Experts estimate that one in 10 children are sexually abused before their 18th birthday.¹

FACT: 10% of victims of child sexual abuse are abused by strangers.^{2,3}
That means the greatest risk to children doesn't come from strangers, but from friends, family, or people the family trusts. People who abuse children look and act just like everyone else. They often go out of their way to appear trustworthy, seeking out settings where they can gain access to children.

FACT: Nearly 40% of children are abused by older or larger children.²
When you think of child sexual abuse, you may not have ever considered that it happens between peers as well. Abuse happens whenever a stronger or more powerful person asserts themselves against another less-powerful person. Essentially, abuse is a boundary violation. One way to protect your children or the children in your care is to teach them about healthy boundaries, and discuss your boundaries with adults and other children.

Knowing that abuse starts with boundary violations, what are some ways to talk about boundaries with the kids in your care?



What are some steps you can take in your everyday life to enforce healthy boundaries?

TIP: Schedule time to speak with your kids' youth serving organizations about how they protect kids while in their care. Here are some examples of what to ask:

Ask them for a copy of their child protection policy. Does the policy include limiting isolated one-on-one situations?

How are employees and volunteers screened? Best practices include an in-depth application, personal and professional references, criminal background check, and an extensive interview.

Do older and young children interact? If so, how?

Are there clear procedures for reporting suspicions or incidences of abuse?

Are staff and volunteers trained in child sexual abuse prevention training?

Can parents tour the facilities?



exercise
02.

Write down the youth serving organizations your kids are involved in. Place a check next to each one as you have these conversations with them.

exercise
03.

Create a family code of conduct. You may even already have this, just not on paper. A family code of conduct is simply a set of guidelines that reflect the values of your family. It helps set protective boundaries for your children. As parents or caregivers, we are responsible for setting and enforcing those boundaries. It should be a living, breathing document; as kids grow, you will need to adjust some boundaries or add new guidelines. You should also get your kids input on the list. Ask them what they think and what they want to include. Having the written list will make it easier to communicate your rules to babysitters, youth serving organizations, and other adults. Here are some examples of topics you can include with space to add your own ideas and policies:

Play Dates: i.e. Who will be at the house? Will there be older siblings? How do they supervise? How well do you know the family?

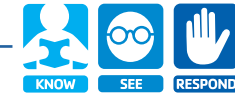
Photos: i.e. Is anyone allowed to post photos of your children?

Sleepovers: i.e. Will you allow your child to participate in sleepovers? What are the sleeping arrangements? These guidelines may overlap with play dates.

Babysitters: i.e. How do you choose who babysits? What are the rules for babysitters? What are the rules for evening sitting vs. daytime sitting?

Internet & Social Media Safety: i.e. At what age will they get a cell phone or social media? How will you monitor use? Where will devices live at night? Discuss what information should never be given out online.

Lessons & Camps: i.e. what are the safety policies? What does supervision look like? These guidelines will overlap with your youth serving organization guidelines.





SEE

Signs of Child Sexual Abuse

Signs of abuse aren't always obvious, but they are often there. There aren't usually external, physical signs that a child is being sexually abused. However, emotional or behavioral changes in a child are common. Trauma may be the root of what is typically labelled 'bad' or difficult' behavior.

TIP: Here are some signs to look for:

Behavioral problems, physical aggression, non-compliance, and rebellion

Anxiety, depression, fear, withdrawal, and suicidal thoughts

"Too perfect" or overly compliant behavior

Nightmare, bed-wetting, bullying, and cruelty to animals

Lack in interest in friends, sports, or other activities

Red Flag Behaviors

We learned that 90% of people who sexually abuse children are someone the child knows and trust.^{2,3} So how do you recognize if an adult is a danger to a child?

Offenders often operate through a process called "grooming." Child grooming is the deliberate process of gradually initiating and maintaining a sexual relationship with victims in secrecy. Grooming allows offenders to slowly overcome natural boundaries long before sexual abuse occurs. On the surface, grooming a child can look like a close relationship between the offending adult, the targeted child and (potentially) the child's caregivers. The grooming process is often misleading because the offender may be well-known or highly regarded in the community. As a result, it's easy to trust them.

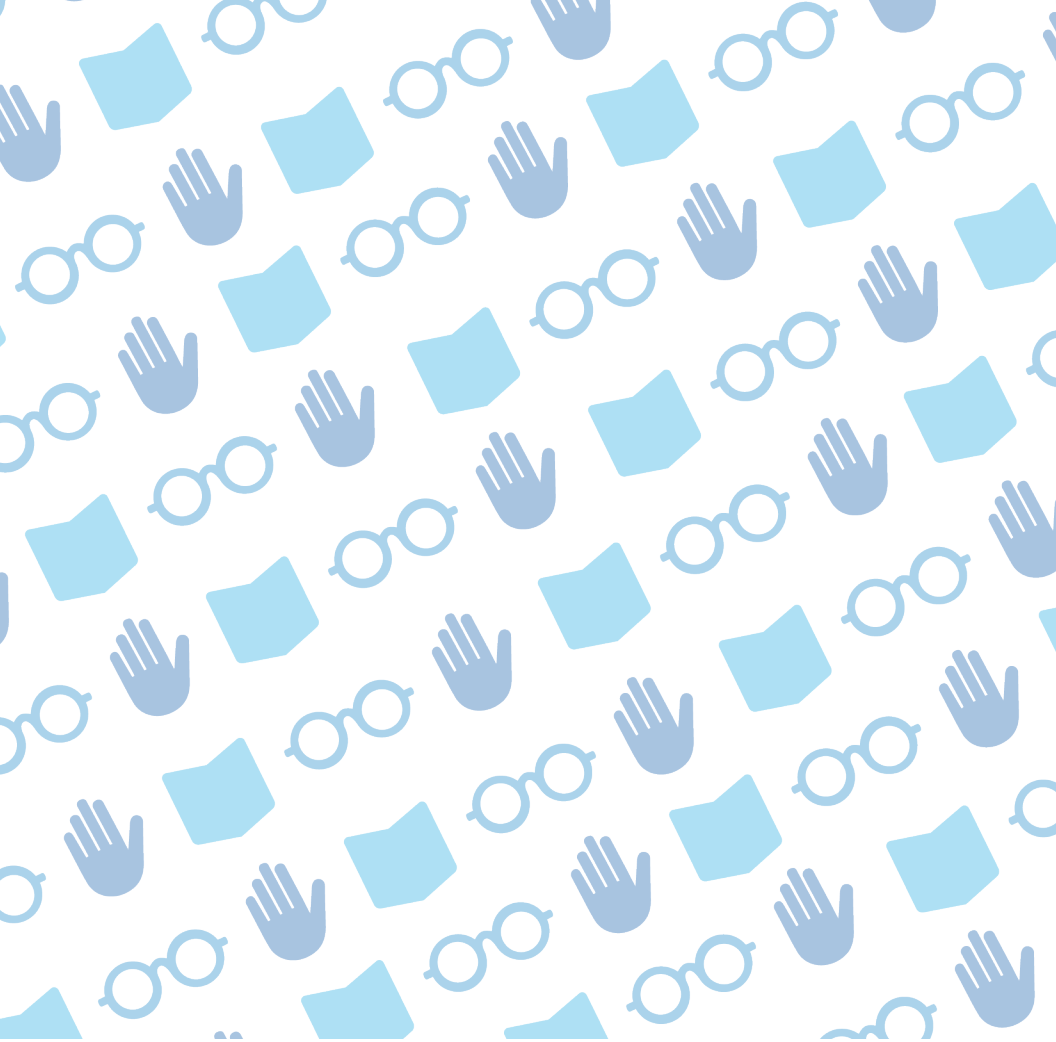


TIP: If you know what red flag behaviors to look for you can take action and be an active bystander when a child is vulnerable or uncomfortable. Here are some examples of red flag behaviors and examples of how to intervene:

Special Attention/Preference to a Child – Offenders are often seen pressing boundaries and breaking rules but are rarely caught in the act of abuse. When you see a boundary being crossed, describe the inappropriate behavior to the person who crossed the boundary. Have family rules about when and how adults engage when your children (great to add to your family code of conduct). i.e. *"We don't let Jimmy go to the movies alone without a parent."*

Gift Giving – Gift giving of any expense – large or small – is a grooming technique used to flatter children and their families into trusting the individual. If another adult is overly interested in your child and family, consider this a red flag. i.e. *"It is so generous that you gave Chole this jewelry, but we only allow gifts on birthdays."*

Touching or Hugging the Child – Offenders will test the limits by starting to introduce touch into the relationship. They might put their arm around the child or ask for a hug to see how the child reacts. They may do it in front of other adults. If the caregiver does not intervene or object, and the child is uncomfortable, it can confuse the child on what type of touch is appropriate. When you defend your child from uncomfortable touches, you build trust with the child and dissuade the offender. i.e. *"It looks like you are forcing Annie to hug you. She looks uncomfortable, please stop. We let Annie decide if and how she wants to show affection."*



References:

1. Townsend, C. Rheingold, A.A., (2013) *Estimating a child sexual abuse prevalence rate for practitioners: A review of child sexual abuse prevalence studies*. Charleston, S.C., Darkness to Light. Retrieved from www.D2L.org.
2. Finkelhor, D. (2012) *Characteristics of crimes against juveniles*. Durham, NH: Crimes against Children Research Center.
3. Julia Whealin, Ph.D. (2007-05-22). "Child Sexual Abuse." National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, US Department of Veterans Affairs.

Materials are derived from YMCA of the USA's "Know. See. Respond." copyrighted in 2020. Content provided by Darkness to Light. To learn more or get trained to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse visit www.D2L.org