



Stop It Now!®



Stop It Now!®

Together We Can Prevent the Sexual Abuse of Children

351 Pleasant St., Suite B-319
Northampton, MA 01060
413.587.3500

HELPLINE: 1.888.PREVENT
www.stopitnow.org
info@stopitnow.org

Prevent Child Sexual Abuse:

Facts about sexual abuse and how to prevent it

New Mexico Coalition of
Sexual Assault Programs, Inc.
3909 Juan Tabo NE, Suite 6
Albuquerque, NM 87111
(505) 883-8020 (within the Albuquerque Area)
(888) 883-8020 (outside of the Albuquerque Area)
e-mail: nmcsap@swcp.com
Web site: www.nmcsap.org
NMCSAP is a member of the Stop It Now! network.

To order additional copies, contact:
The Safer Society Press
P.O. Box 340
Brandon, VT 05733-0340
802.247.3132

© 2008 Stop It Now! All rights reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced without written permission from Stop It Now!



A HAPPINESS WORTH DEFENDING



Kids are terrific—happy, innocent, and free. They can remind us of what is best about ourselves. When they are sexually abused, that happiness is dimmed, sometimes for life. With your help, more kids will get to grow up full of light and life.

One in three girls and one in seven boys are sexually abused before age 18.¹

Kids shouldn't have to try to prevent sexual abuse all by themselves. We adults have to learn to recognize when people are acting inappropriately around our children...and to speak up before a child is harmed.

Thank you for all you already do to help our children grow up free from sexual abuse.

If you know of a child who is being sexually abused, call the Stop It Now!® Helpline at 1.888.PREVENT for information on how to report it or visit us on the web at www.stopitnow.org.

PREVENTION, TREATMENT AND RECOVERY RESOURCES

Stop It Now!®

351 Pleasant St., Suite B-319, Northampton, MA 01060
Office: 413.587.3500
Helpline: 1.888.PREVENT (1.888.773.8368)
Email: helpline@stopitnow.org
Website: www.stopitnow.org

Stop It Now! offers adults the tools they need to prevent sexual abuse before a child is harmed. We provide support, information and resources that enable individuals and families to keep children safe and create healthier communities. In collaboration with our network of community-based programs, we reach out to adults who are concerned about their own or others' sexualized behavior toward children. Contact our confidential, national toll-free HELPLINE (1.888.PREVENT) for support, resources and referrals or visit our website at www.stopitnow.org.

The Safer Society Foundation

P.O. Box 340, Brandon, VT 05733-0340
Office: 802.247.3132 Fax: 802.247.4233
Website: www.saferociety.org

Call for a referral to a local treatment provider for a child, adolescent or adult with sexual behavior concerns. (M-F, 9-4:30 p.m. ET). Also provides publications for youth or adults with sexual behavior problems, their families, survivors, treatment providers, and mandated reporters. Call for a free catalogue.

Child Molestation Research and Prevention Institute

P.O. Box 7593, Atlanta, GA 30357
Office: 404.872.5152
Website: www.childmolestationprevention.org

Online directory for sex-specific therapists for evaluation and treatment. Extensive reading lists for parents of children with sexual behavior problems and parents of victims, for professionals, adults with sexual behavior concerns, adults molested as children and their partners.

The New England Adolescent Research Institute (NEARI)

70 North Summer St., Holyoke, MA 01040
Office: 413.540.0712
Website: www.neari.com

Catalogue of publications for professionals and families addressing treatment and recovery for sexually aggressive youth and youth with sexual behavior problems.

The Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA)

4900 SW Griffith Drive, Suite 274, Beaverton, OR 97005
Office: 503.643.1023 Fax: 503.643.5084
Email: atsa@atsa.com
Website: www.atsa.com

A national organization developing and disseminating professional standards and practices in the field of sex offender research, evaluation, and treatment. Call or email for a referral to a local treatment provider.

National Center on Sexual Behavior of Youth

940 N.E. 13th St., 3B-3406, Oklahoma City, OK 73104
Office: 405.271.8858
Website: www.ncsby.org

Information concerning sexual development and youth with sexual behavior problems.

National Center for Victims of Crime (NCVC)

2000 M St., NW, Suite 480, Washington, DC 20036
Office: 202.467.8700 Fax: 202.467.8701
Toll-free: 1.800.FYI.CALL (1.800.394.2255)
TDD: 1.800.211.7996
Email: webmaster@ncvc.org or gethelp@ncvc.org
Website: www.ncvc.org

An information and referral center for victims. Through its database of over 30,000 organizations, NCVC refers callers to services including crisis intervention, research information, assistance with the criminal justice process, counseling, support groups, and referrals to local attorneys in victim-related cases.

Childhelp USA

National Child Abuse Hotline: 1.800.4.A.CHILD (1.800.422.4453)
Website: www.childhelpusa.org

Provides a broad continuum of programs that directly serve abused children and their families. Adults and children can request local telephone numbers to report cases of abuse or access crisis intervention, information, literature, and referrals to thousands of emergency, social service, and support resources. All calls are anonymous and confidential.

The Child Welfare Information Gateway

Children's Bureau/ACYF
1250 Maryland Ave., SW, 8th Floor
Washington, DC 20024
Office: 703.385.7565 or 800.394.3366
Website: www.childwelfare.gov/

A resource and clearinghouse that collects, stores, organizes and disseminates information on all aspects

A CALL TO ACTION

WHY DO WE NEED TO LEARN ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN?

CONTACT
Stop It Now!®
Helpline
1.888.PREVENT

EMAIL
helpline@stopitnow.org

VISIT
our website at
www.stopitnow.org

Our silence allows people who sexually abuse children to get and maintain access to vulnerable children. We can all help prevent and stop the sexual abuse of children by speaking up and by learning some simple action steps.

If you know that a child has been sexually abused, you need to report it. You can call your local police department or your local child protective services office. You can also bring the child directly to a therapist or a doctor, both of whom are required to report the abuse.

More often, concerns lie in a “gray area” of vague uneasiness, sketchy details or uncertainty about what is actually happening. Sometimes concerns persist, even after an outside inquiry or evaluation fails to uncover abuse. There are still things you can do. Prevention is a process. Keep the conversation going.

If you do not know where to go **or** you are unsure of what you are seeing, you can call Stop It Now!’s confidential, toll-free, national Helpline at 1.888. PREVENT (1.888.773.8368) for supportive guidance, information and resources. Our Helpline is staffed by professionals who know about the issue. You can call to simply explore the situation and think through options for next steps. The Helpline staff is trained to assist with questions such as:

- What situations make kids vulnerable
- What are the signs of sexual abuse?
- What actions can I take to keep kids safe?
- How can I discuss my concerns with others?
- What kinds of help and treatment are available?
- How do I report sexual abuse when I know it has occurred?

Every day, adults miss real opportunities to prevent child sexual abuse because of misinformation and confusing stereotypes about sexual abuse. It is estimated that more than 300,000 children are sexually abused every year.² Chances are, you already know a boy or girl who has been sexually abused—and in all likelihood know someone who has abused a child. By educating yourself, you can become a powerful force in making the world a safer place for kids.

It’s only in the last few decades that we, as a society, have started to acknowledge how widespread child sexual abuse has been and how much it hurts children. One in five adults report that they were sexually abused as children, an experience that increases vulnerability to depression, substance abuse, aggression, and other difficulties.⁴ More than 85% of adults who were abused say they never reported the abuse to authorities.⁵

In response to this new awareness, lawmakers have focused on managing convicted sex offenders and publicizing their whereabouts. While these measures have increased community awareness, they address only a tiny portion of those who are at risk to sexually harm children—those who already have been caught and convicted.

Children are routinely taught to speak up if someone approaches them in a sexual way. But to make our communities safe, we need to do more. Kids shouldn’t have the burden of preventing sexual abuse by themselves.

Adults must act on their commitment to keeping kids safe by learning to recognize and respond to inappropriate behaviors around kids, before a child is harmed. And adults have to learn what to do when it seems like

In 90% of child sexual abuse cases, the child knows and trusts the person who sexually abuses them.³

someone may be sexually interested in children or is harming a child in a sexual way. As when you see someone who is drinking and planning to drive: you step forward and offer help so they don’t hurt someone.

This guidebook contains a lot of the information about how adults can step forward and help protect children. It describes what to look for and how to talk with other adults and with children about preventing sexual abuse. It offers guidance about what to do when you have a concern, even if you think, “Maybe I’m just over-reacting.” And most importantly, it offers information about who to call for advice, for help, or to report a case of abuse.

Citations

1. Briere, J., Eliot, D.M., 2003
2. Finkelhor 2004
3. Finkelhor 2004
4. Stop It Now! unpublished market research data 1997 to 2007
5. Hanson, Resnick, Saunders, Kilpatrick, 1999
6. Hunter, JA, Figueredo, A., Malamuth, NM, & Becker, JV (2003)

WHAT EXACTLY IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

If you're not sure exactly what child sexual abuse is, you're not alone.

When any adult engages in sexual activity with a child, that is child sexual abuse. It is a crime in all 50 states. When the sexual activity is between children or adolescents, it is not always so clear. Some kinds of sexual behavior between children might be innocent explorations rather than abuse. Check the section called "What About Children Who Sexually Interact With Other Children?" later in this guidebook for help in figuring out whether what you're seeing between children may be abuse, or see Stop It Now!'s guidebook, *Do Children Sexually Abuse Other Children: Preventing sexual abuse among children and youth*.

Who sexually abuses children?

People who sexually abuse children are likely to be people we know, and could even be people we care about. It would be easy to figure out who sexually abuses children if they were like the ones we see on TV—those strangers hanging around the edges of playgrounds, or the "monsters," who kidnap and kill children. But truthfully, they're hardly ever like that.

Most often people who sexually abuse children—both those who've been

reported and those who haven't—are fathers, mothers, step-parents, grandparents, and other family members (uncles, aunts, cousins). Or they're neighbors, babysitters, clergy, teachers, coaches, or anyone else who has close contact with our children.

We can't tell who they are by the way they look. What they have in common is that they think about sexual interactions with children and then they act on those thoughts by sexually abusing a child. We know that child sexual abuse happens every day across the country, with little regard for social classes, racial or ethnic groups, religious affiliations, or sexual orientation. That means that adults and youth who have sexually abused a child live in the same neighborhoods, shop in the same stores, and use the same parks that we do. We may know them personally as part of our family or extended family, or in our circle of friends and neighbors. But we may not know about their sexual interests in kids.

It's hard to face the fact that someone we know and like might sexually abuse children. But because it's true, we all need to know what to look for and how to make sure that everyone we know lives up to an expectation of safety in

It's hard to face the fact that someone we know—and even like—might be sexually inappropriate with a

sexual interactions with children and then they act on those thoughts by sexually abusing a child. We know that child sexual abuse happens every day across the country, with little regard

- **Notify the police if you see this person in a suspicious situation.** Avoid a hostile confrontation. Making threats or taking revenge may put you at legal risk. It's also important to avoid any action that may just push the person who has sexually abused into hiding, where normal life is almost impossible and it's easier to go back to old abusive ways. No matter how you feel about this person, if you see him or her in a suspicious or dangerous situation, call the police or probation/parole officer. Many people who have sexually abused go on to live productive, abuse-free lives. But not all will make the needed changes in their lives. Your supportive watchfulness may help the person who has abused keep himself or herself under control.

"Yet one more tragedy is that his kids are going to have to suffer for his actions with community notification following them everywhere he goes. They are going to unfairly bear the brunt."



Don't wait to be notified

What we do know is that there are people who have abused in our communities, some already identified, some not. Don't just wait to be notified about someone who has been convicted of a sexual offense. Talk to your family and friends now. Make the sexual safety of children a priority all the time with everyone in your community.

Remember: 88% of sexual abuse is never reported.⁵ Authorities can't notify you about most people who sexually abuse because they've never been identified.

Your safety action plans for your family and community are the same whether or not you've been notified about someone with an offense in your community. Think about those who may abuse in the same way that you stay aware of possible speeding cars, children in the streets, or drug dealers near your child's school.

If you know what to look for and how to take action, people who sexually abuse children will not have access to them. Their abusive behavior can be stopped when we are all aware. They can get help to prevent any further abuse.

COMMUNITY NOTIFICATION AND YOU (cont.)

sexually. Remember, abuse is most likely to happen with someone you already know. To download information about creating a family safety plan go to www.stopitnow.org/downloads/SafetyPlan.pdf.

- **Look for more information.** If there was a public notice, ask the contact person or organization on the notice for more information. There may be a public meeting, local resources, or other materials that would help you and your family. Information may be available on the state's sex offender registry.
- **Attend the public community notification meeting if there is one so you can learn more about this person, the risk level, and how he or she will be supervised in the community.** Learn about the restrictions placed on this person so if you see him or her doing something inappropriate you know how to report it.
- **Find out if a person convicted of a sexual offense is being supervised.** Ask the person or organization who has notified you if the person who sexually abused in the past is being supervised by a probation or parole officer. You should be able to get the name and telephone number of the probation or parole officer. This officer may be able to answer more complex questions about the risk this person may pose to your family.



- **If circumstances seem right, consider joining another neighbor in approaching the person with an offer of support, perhaps through the probation or parole office.**

Remember, you may already know this person or his or her family and friends. Even if this person is new in your community, he or she is a part of it now. If the person who sexually abused is open and honest about the past, he or she may really be trying to change and live a different life. Show your support for this person's willingness to live a different life that keeps children safe. Your support and watchfulness can help in his or her recovery. It is also a chance to alert this person that you know about his or her past and are aware of his or her actions today.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE INCLUDES TOUCHING AND NON-TOUCHING BEHAVIORS

Touching behaviors include:

- Touching a child's genitals (penis, testicles, vulva, breasts, or anus) for sexual pleasure or other unnecessary purpose.
- Making a child touch someone else's genitals, or playing sexual ("pants-down") games.
- Putting objects or body parts (like fingers, tongue or a penis) inside the vulva or vagina, in the mouth, or in the anus of a child for sexual pleasure or other unnecessary purpose.



Non-touching behaviors include:

- Showing pornography to a child.
- Exposing a person's genitals to a child.
- Asking children to interact sexually with one another.
- Online enticement of a child for sexual purposes.
- Photographing a child in sexual poses.
- Exposing a child to adult sexual activity in person or through the use of technology.
- Watching a child undress or use the bathroom, often without the child's knowledge (known as voyeurism or being a "Peeping"

If you see behaviors that concern you, please call Stop It Now!'s confidential toll-free Helpline at 1.888.PREVENT for supportive guidance, information or resources, or visit us on the web at www.stopitnow.org.

BEHAVIORAL SYMPTOMS OF POSSIBLE SEXUAL ABUSE

Some of these behavioral signs can show up at other stressful times in a child's life such as divorce, the death of a family member, friend or pet, or when there are problems in school, as well as when abuse is involved. Any single sign doesn't mean the child was abused, but several of them mean that you should begin to explore the situation more fully.

Do you notice some of the following behaviors in a child you know

- Nightmares, sleep problems, extreme fears without an obvious explanation
- Sudden or unexplained personality changes; seems withdrawn, angry, moody, clingy, "checked-out" or shows significant changes in eating habits
- An older child behaving like a younger child (for example, bedwetting or thumb-sucking)
- Develops fear of certain places or resists being alone with an adult or young person for unknown reasons
- Shows resistance to routine bathing, toileting or removing clothes even in appropriate situations
- Play, writing, drawings or dreams of sexual or frightening images
- Refuses to talk about a secret he or she has with an adult or older child
- Stomach aches or illness, often with no identifiable reason
- Leaves clues that seem likely to provoke a discussion about sexual issues
- Uses new or adult words for body parts
- Engages in adult-like sexual activities with toys, objects or other children
- Develops special relationship with older friends that may include unexplained money, gifts or privileges
- Intentionally harms himself or herself, for example, drug/alcohol use, cutting, burning, running away, sexual promiscuity
- Becomes increasingly secretive around use of the Internet or cell phone
- Develops physical symptoms such as unexplained soreness, pain or bruises around genital or mouth, sexually-transmitted disease, or pregnancy

If you see behaviors that concern you, please call Stop It Now!'s confidential toll-free Helpline at 1.888.PREVENT for supportive guidance, information or resources, or visit us on the web at www.stopitnow.org.

COMMUNITY NOTIFICATION AND YOU

What is community notification?

All states have enacted sex offender registration laws as a means of providing law enforcement with an additional investigative tool. Community notification laws authorize the public release of information about certain registered sex offenders. You may be notified by a law enforcement officer when a convicted sex offender has moved into your neighborhood. In many communities, notification includes a community education meeting where you can learn more about methods you can employ to prevent sexual abuse of children.

Since the registry lists represent a small proportion of sex offenders in any community, we don't know how useful community notification actually is for protecting children. To learn more about how registration and community notification are handled in your state, visit Dru Sjodin National Sex Offender Registry at www.nsopr.gov.

If you have learned that someone convicted of sexual abuse of a child is living in your community, you might feel angry, scared, and

unsafe. Sometimes, just having more information can diminish those feelings and help you recognize that the situation is manageable. Remember, supporting this person to become a safe member of your community is in everyone's best interest. It may help you to find out more about the person and share what is helpful with your family.

Some things you can do if someone with a sexual abuse conviction is living in your community

- **Don't panic.** Respond calmly. Act with thought. Many people with a history of sexually offending are motivated to succeed when they re-enter society. Contrary to conventional wisdom, specialized counseling can be effective. Re-arrest rates for sexual offenses are actually very low. When given steady support, counseling and supervision they often pose little threat to anyone in the neighborhood.
- **Create a family safety plan.** Your children and your family need to know what to do if anyone—family, friend, acquaintance, neighbor, or



"Unless there is help available, why would an offender admit his crimes? None of us wants to expose our darkness, especially when there is no light to shine down and heal it."

WORDS FROM A SURVIVOR OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

SIGNS THAT AN ADULT MAY BE AT-RISK TO SEXUALLY ABUSE A CHILD

Someone you care about may be acting in ways that worry you. These behaviors may indicate a risk to sexually abuse a child or may be a way for this person to ask for help. Many people with sexual behavior problems wish someone had asked them what was going on or had told them where to call. Inappropriate behaviors may become abusive if the individual does not get the help he or she needs.

- Misses or ignores social cues about others' personal or sexual limits or boundaries?
- Spends most of spare time with children and shows little interest in spending time with another adult?
- Links sexuality and aggression in language or behavior, for example, sexualized threats or insults, like "whore" or "slut"?
- Makes fun of children's body parts, describes children with sexual words like "stud" or "sexy" or talks again and again about the sexual activities of children or teens?
- Has an interest in sexual fantasies with children or is unclear about what's appropriate with children?
- Minimizes hurtful or harmful behaviors when confronted; blames others or denies harmfulness of actions or words despite impact?
- Often has a "special" child friend, maybe a different one each year?
- Encourages silence and secrets in children?
- Masturbates so often that it gets in the way of important day-to-day activities?
- Was physically, sexually or emotionally mistreated or abused as a child and has not adequately addressed the possible effects?
- Downloads/views Internet pornography and is not willing to show if children are involved?
- Becomes so pre-occupied with the Internet sexual activity that it starts to impact family and/or work life.
- Asks adult partners to dress or act like a child or teen during sexual activity?

While single behaviors, in themselves, do not indicate that an individual is likely to engage in sexually-harmful behaviors, these behaviors, especially in combination, may strongly suggest that an adult or adolescent needs help. If you see behaviors that concern you, please call Stop It Now!'s confidential toll-free Helpline at 1.888.PREVENT (1.888.773.8368) for supportive guidance, information or resources, or visit us on the web at www.stopitnow.org.

WHY DO PEOPLE SEXUALLY ABUSE?

There is no "usual" pathway to a sexual offense. Each person who sexually abuses a child is motivated by issues that are unique to that individual. Media images of "child molesters" and portrayals of their personalities may actually make it more difficult to recognize inappropriate behaviors in those we know.

Sometimes, people who are attracted to adults and have intimate sexual relationships with other adults may sexually approach children when they are under unusual stress, like losing a job or getting a divorce.

Some people's primary sexual attraction is children. (Some never act on those feelings.)

Some people who sexually abuse children were victims of abuse or neglect as children; it's not an excuse, just a fact. Although having been abused as a child heightens the risk for becoming someone who sexually abuses children, the vast majority of sexual abuse victims live their lives without ever sexually abusing others.

Some people act impulsively, when presented with an unexpected opportunity to sexually abuse a child. Others, particularly youth with high social status or with social or emotional delays, may not even fully understand the harmful impact of their abusive actions.



"I turned myself in two and a half years ago. I pled guilty because I wanted help to stop molesting children."

WORDS OF A MAN IN PRISON FOR SEXUAL ABUSE

Easy access to child pornography online and sexually-oriented online chat groups have eliminated many of the hurdles that previously discouraged some people from acting on their sexual interests in minors. Viewing sexual images of children and participating in forums that support sexual interactions involving children may make sexually abusive behavior seem "normal" or "acceptable" and thereby may increase the risk for hands-on offenses.

Some adults sexually abuse a child to feel the power and control they don't feel in their relationships with other adults.

These are just a few of the many reasons why someone may choose to sexually abuse a child. No reasons excuse or justify sexualized behaviors involving a child. No matter what the reason for the abuse, the effects on children may be severe and may last a lifetime.

CAN PEOPLE WHO SEXUALLY ABUSE CHILDREN STOP IT?



“Twenty-five years ago I was a respected member of my community, publisher of our local paper, and a sexual abuser. Being arrested was the best thing that could have happened to me at the time. I was lucky to get treatment... and it worked. I have now been back in society for nearly 17 years and have not abused again. I have been given a second chance and I will not throw that away.”

WORDS OF A PERSON WHO COMPLETED TREATMENT

Yes! In order to stop, people who sexually abuse children must want to change and must be able to get specialized treatment. Adults, adolescents, and children with sexual behavior problems can change their abusing behavior. They can learn to live healthy, productive lives in which they no longer harm innocent children.

You’ve probably heard or read the misinformation that all people who have sexually abused will abuse again. With all those stories on TV and in the papers, it’s not easy to remember that the people who abuse hundreds of victims are only a few, really extreme cases. Most people who sexually abuse children are not like those you see on TV.

Treatment works. Many people who abuse will learn to control themselves around children if they are offered specialized treatment and appropriate community oversight. When people with sexual behavior problems have support and are accountable to their friends and families, they are more likely to complete their treatment programs and live productive, abuse-free lives. Again, when we confront these behaviors at the earliest stages, especially in children and teens, they are most likely to change and not abuse again.

If you are concerned about your own or someone else’s sexualized behaviors towards children, please call Stop It Now!’s confidential toll-free national Helpline at 1.888.PREVENT (1.888.773.8368) for supportive guidance, information or resources, or visit us on the web at www.stopitnow.org.

who to talk with when you see something you are unsure about and who to call if you believe there is a need to report sexual abuse. Teach children about what to do and who to talk with if they are sexually threatened or touched by someone.

- **Make a list of people and organizations you can call**

for advice, information, and help. (Check the resources at the end of this booklet.) Even if you do not have children of your own, you can be a resource about how to report and how to get help for everyone involved. If you know that a child has been sexually abused, be sure to get help for the child quickly, so the harm can be healed.

PHYSICAL WARNING SIGNS THAT A CHILD MAY HAVE BEEN ABUSED

Does a child close to you have:

- Unexplained bruises, redness, or bleeding of the child’s genitals, anus, or mouth?
- Pain at the genitals, anus, or mouth?
- Genital sores or milky fluids or repeated infections in the genital area?

If you said “yes” to any of these examples, bring your child to a doctor or emergency room. A doctor can help you understand what may be happening and test for sexually transmitted diseases. If you have any questions about these or other signs and symptoms or see behaviors that concern you, please call Stop It Now!’s confidential toll-free national Helpline at 1.888.PREVENT (1.888.773.8368) for supportive guidance, information or resources, or visit us on the web at www.stopitnow.org.

DEVELOP A SAFETY ACTION PLAN FOR YOUR FAMILY (cont.)

anyone else—touches your private parts.” Also teach kids that it is not okay to use manipulation or control to touch someone else’s body.

- **Explain to the adults and children you know about the difference between a secret and a surprise** and show them how secrets may make kids unsafe. Surprises are joyful and generate excitement in anticipation of being revealed after a short period of time. Secrets exclude others, often because the information will create upset or anger. When keeping secrets with just one person becomes routine, children are more vulnerable to being abused.

- **Make it clear that children will be supported when they request privacy or say “no”** to an activity or a kind of touch that makes them uncomfortable.
- **Give kids permission to tell anyone they trust** if they feel scared, uncomfortable or confused by someone’s behavior toward them.

Make a plan

- **Create a family safety plan that is clear to everyone and easy to follow** (www.stopitnow.com/downloads/SafetyPlan.pdf). Make sure that as adults, you know how to challenge each other when you see any inappropriate behaviors. List



WHAT ABOUT CHILDREN WHO SEXUALLY INTERACT WITH OTHER

When children or adolescents interact in a sexual way, it is sometimes difficult to tell the difference between natural sexual curiosity and potentially abusive behaviors.

More than a third of all sexual abuse is committed by someone under the age of 18.⁶

Some sexual activities are normal for children at certain ages. Children, particularly younger

children, may engage in inappropriate interactions without understanding the hurtful impact it has on others. For this reason, it may be more helpful to think in terms of a child’s sexually “harmful” behavior rather than sexually “abusive” behavior.

But there are some features of interactions that should raise concerns if you see children involved in sexual play. Consider:

Size: Is one of the children/teens involved much larger or stronger than the other?

Status: Does one of the children/teens have more power in the relationship — for example, a babysitter, a club or team leader, a socially popular child who bullies others?

Ability: Does one of the children/teens have greater mental, emotional, or physical ability than the other? Is the possible victim disabled or developmentally delayed?

Power: Is one of the children/teens using tricks, threats, bribes, or physical force?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, the sexual activity may be abusive and a report to child protective services may be appropriate. If you have any questions about what you are seeing, or if you need support, please call Stop It Now!’s confidential toll-free, national Helpline 1.888.PREVENT (1.888.773.8368). You can speak confidentially with a professional about your concerns, and learn what options and local resources are available to you. Remember, you do not need to be sure that it is abuse to call. By calling, you learn how to get help for all of the children involved.

“I made the most difficult decision of my life—I decided to report my son for sexually abusing another child. But our lives are better in many ways. He is getting the help he needs to stop.”

MOTHER OF TEEN WITH SEXUAL BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS



WHAT IS AGE-APPROPRIATE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR?

While learning about their bodies and sexuality, children may behave in ways that seem out of sync with their age or developmental stage. The chart below describes kinds of behavior that are common and less common in a given developmental stage. Many factors—for example, having an older sibling or unsupervised exposure to certain television, films, games or song lyrics—may increase a child’s awareness of knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of an older age group.

Usually, unexpected behavior can be redirected with a simple instruction. Of particular concern are uncommon behaviors that a child seems unable to control after being asked to stop.



Preschool (0 to 5 years of age)

Common: Sexual language relating to differences in body parts, bathroom talk, pregnancy and birth. Genital stimulation at home and in public. Showing and looking at private body parts.

Uncommon: Discussion of specific sexual acts or explicit sexual language. Adult-like sexual contact with other children.



School-age children (6 to 12 years of age)

May include both pre-pubescent children and children who have already entered puberty, when hormonal changes are likely to trigger an increase in sexual awareness and interest.

Before puberty

Common: Questions about relationships and sexual behavior, menstruation and pregnancy. Experimentation with same-age children, often during games, kissing, touching, exhibitionism and role-playing. Private genital stimulation.

Uncommon: Adult-like sexual interactions, discussing specific



Learn, teach, and practice

- **Practice talking with other adults about difficult topics.** Say the words out loud so that you become more comfortable using the words, asking questions, and confronting behaviors.
- **Be receptive with both the adults and the children in your life about their difficult issues.** Help them get comfortable talking with you. Show them that you will listen to anything they have to say, even if they talk about something embarrassing or something they’ve done wrong.
- **Use the proper names of body parts.** Just as you teach your children that a nose is a nose, they need to know what to call their genitals. This knowledge gives children correct language for understanding their bodies, for asking questions that need to be asked, and for telling about any behavior that could lead to sexual abuse.
- **Be clear with adults and children about the difference between okay touch and touch that is not okay.** For younger children, teach more concrete rules such as “talk

- **Set and respect family boundaries.** All members of the family have rights to privacy in dressing, bathing, sleeping, and other personal activities. If anyone does not respect these rights, an adult should clearly tell them the family rules.
- **Speak up when you see any inappropriate behaviors.** Interrupt and talk with whoever is making you uncomfortable in a situation or with someone in a position to intervene. They may need help to stop these behaviors.
- **Report anything you know or suspect might be sexual abuse.** If nobody speaks up, the abuse will not stop.

DEVELOP A SAFETY ACTION PLAN FOR YOUR FAMILY

It is important to teach children about safety. It is more important to teach ourselves what we need to know in order to keep our children and communities safe. Here are some things that you and your family can do to prevent the sexual abuse of children. Adults need to:

Take responsibility

- **Adults must watch for any inappropriate behaviors** in other adults or older youth because children, especially young ones, are not as able to recognize these behaviors or to protect themselves.
- **Stay attuned to your children's use of technology** – Internet, email, instant



messaging, webcam use, peer-to-peer and social networking sites, and cell use, including photo exchanges. Model safe choices and behavior. The illusion of anonymity on these electronic mediums often leads to a breakdown of social rules and expectations that would be assumed if the interactions were face-to-face. Whenever possible, keep the interactions visible and public. Kids, and even adults can easily stumble into inappropriate or possibly dangerous situations and exchanges. Educate yourself. Establish clear, firm guidelines and stick to them.

- **Show in your own life how to say “no.”** Teach your children that their “no” will be respected, whether it’s in playing or tickling or hugging and kissing. For instance, if your child does not want to give Grandma a kiss, let the child shake hands instead. And, make sure Grandma understands why this is important for the safety of the child.

After puberty begins

Common: Increased curiosity about sexual materials and information, questions about relationships and sexual behavior, using sexual words and discussing sexual acts, particularly with peers. Increased experimenting including open-mouthed kissing, body-rubbing, fondling. Masturbating in private.

Uncommon: Consistent adult-like sexual behavior, including oral/genital contact or intercourse. Masturbating in public.

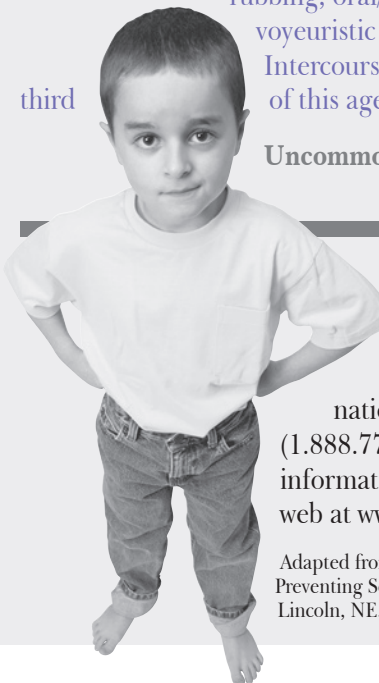
Adolescence (13 to 16 years of age)

Common: Questions about decision making, social relationships, and sexual customs. Masturbation in private.

Experimenting between adolescents of the same age, including open-mouthed kissing, fondling and body rubbing, oral/genital contact. Also, voyeuristic behaviors are common.

Intercourse occurs in approximately one-third of this age group.

Uncommon: Masturbating in public and



If you see behaviors that concern you, please call Stop It Now!’s confidential toll-free national Helpline at 1.888.PREVENT (1.888.773.8368) for supportive guidance, information or resources, or visit us on the web at www.stopitnow.org.

Adapted from Wurtele, S.K. and Miller-Perrin, C.L. Preventing Sexual Abuse. University of Nebraska Press. Lincoln, NE. 1992.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Everyone needs to speak up.

When we don't take the keys from a drunk friend who's about to drive, we're risking that friend's and other people's lives on the road. When we don't question a friend's sexualized comments or behaviors toward a child, we're risking the well-being of our children and the future of the friend.

People who sexually abuse children rely on our confusion and on our reluctance to acknowledge discomfort. Adults – all of us—need to talk together about sexual abuse and to learn what to do to keep children safe. The first steps are setting clear boundaries and limits with everyone involved in our family and social circle and speaking up when any of those rules are broken.



“My brother-in-law Harry was touching his eleven-year-old daughter. She was clearly uncomfortable with his attention. ‘Don’t worry about it,’ I told her. ‘Your dad doesn’t mean anything by it.’

I wish I had told Harry, in front of my niece, ‘I see Janice is uncomfortable. You should stop touching her like that.’ This would let my niece know that it is okay to say ‘no’ to him. It would let Harry know that someone is watching and noticing and not afraid to speak up.”

AUNT OF A CHILD WHO WAS ABUSED

Often, families whose kids were sexually abused wish that they had talked more openly beforehand with their children in ways that would have made them less vulnerable when someone tried to approach them sexually. By getting comfortable using words like “penis”, “vagina”, or “penetration,” we adults can teach our sons and daughters how to talk about it when they are made uncomfortable. When adults and kids have the right words, it's easier for kids to tell us when they are sexually approached or harmed. Shyness or embarrassment about sexual behaviors can also make it more difficult to talk with someone who may be acting inappropriately toward a child.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR WHEN ADULTS ARE WITH CHILDREN

Have you ever seen someone playing with a child and felt uncomfortable with it? Maybe you thought, “I’m just over-reacting,” or, “He/She doesn’t really mean that.” If you are uncomfortable, but don’t see specific signs, trust your instincts and ask more questions. Below is a list of behaviors that might be cause for concern.

Do you know an adult, adolescent or older child who:

- Makes others uncomfortable by ignoring social, emotional or physical boundaries or limits?
- Refuses to let a child set any of his or her own limits? Uses teasing or belittling language to keep a child from setting a limit?
- Insists on hugging, touching, kissing, tickling, wrestling with or holding a child even when the child does not want this physical contact or attention?
- Frequently makes sexual references or tells sexual or suggestive jokes with children present?
- Exposes a child to adult sexual interactions without apparent concern?
- Has secret interactions with teens or children (such as games, sharing drugs, alcohol, or sexual material) or spends excessive time emailing, text messaging or calling children or youth?
- Seems “too good to be true,” for example, baby sits different children for free; takes children on special outings alone; buys children gifts or gives them money for no apparent reason?
- Allows children or teens to consistently get away with inappropriate behaviors?

If you answered “yes” to some of these questions, talk to that person. For more information and supportive guidance about starting a conversation with someone, see our *Let’s Talk* guidebook on our website at www.stopitnow.org or please call Stop It Now!’s confidential toll-free national Helpline at 1.888.PREVENT