

New Mexico Sexual Abuse Program Coordinators (Continued)

Roswell Turquoise Health & Wellness 575-625-1095 Esperanza House, Inc. 575-625-1095 Susan Wilson, L.I.S.W. 575-623-9385 Ruidoso La Frontera NM 575-257-5038 575-437-8680 crisis 800-634-3666 crisis Santa Fe Santa Fe Community Guidance Center 505-986-9633	Solace Crisis Treatment Center 505-988-1951 • 505-986-9111 or 800-721-7273 crisis Silver City La Frontera NM 575-388-2693 • 800-426-0997 crisis Silver Regional Sexual Assault Support Services 575-388-2693 • 800-426-0997 Socorro Socorro Mental Health 575-835-2444 Taos Community Against Violence 575-758-8082 • 575-758-9888 crisis Tri-County Community Services, Inc. 575-758-1125	Truth or Consequences La Pinon Sexual Assault Recovery Services 575-526-3437 (Las Cruces) Sierra Vista Hospital 575-894-2111 Tucumcari Mental Health Resources, Inc. 575-461-3013 800-432-2159 crisis
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Talking to Your Children About Sex

How to use open discussions about sex, privacy, respect and values to prevent the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and teens.

Written by Gail Santilli, ACSW

New Mexico Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner’s Unit

Alamagordo SANE Program of Otero and Lincoln County 575-430-9485 (Emergency and Administrative) Albuquerque Albuquerque SANE Collaborative 505-883-8720 • 505-884-7263 Emergency Para Los Ninos, Pediatric Sex Abuse Exams 505-272-6849 Farmington Sexual Assault Services of Northwest New Mexico 505-325-2805 • 505-326-4700 or 866-908-4700 Emergency	Las Cruces Las Cruces La Pinon SANE Project 575-521-5549• 575-312-7780 or 888-595-7273 Emergency Las Vegas Las Vegas, SANE Alta Vista Regional Hospital 505-718-8215 Portales Arise Sexual Assault Services 575-226-4665 • 575-226-7263 Emergency Roswell Esperanza House SANE Project 575-625-1457 • 575-625-1095	Santa Fe Christus St. Vincent Regional Medical Center SANE Program 505-913-4999 • 505-989-5952 Emergency Silver City Silver City/Gila Regional Medical Center SANE Program 575-313-9978 Taos Taos/Holy Cross Hospital SANE Program 575-751-8990 • 575-758-8883 Emergency
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New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, Inc.

Introduction

Humans are sexual beings from birth to death: Sexuality is a normal, healthy aspect of everyone’s life. However, for most parents, talking with their children about sexual issues is difficult. The purpose of this brochure is to help parents think about the information, values and beliefs that they wish to convey to their children about sex.

The Foundation

Children’s earliest concepts of themselves evolve from the reactions and responses of those around them, usually their family, extended family and friends. When families respect children as people who have value, the children will learn to respect their own thoughts, feelings, intuition and bodies. This is a gift that any family can give to a child: It is the best tool a child can have to make good choices about themselves and others. It is also a powerful force in preventing a child’s exploitation or abuse by others. Families show this by living it every day: Talking to the children with respect; Handling their bodies with care; Giving attention to their needs for affection, comfort and guidance.

Children should also be taught concepts of privacy - that they have a right to private time, private space, private thoughts, and private belongings. They should be taught that there are parts of their bodies that they are not expected to share with others and that others do not have the right to ask them to share. This, too, can be made evident in family life by acknowledging privacy - undisturbed time for toileting or thinking, a special toy that doesn’t have to be shared.

The Specifics

Children benefit from very specific information about their bodies. In the same way we would want to explain the correct names and function for their eyes, hearts and bones, children need

Additional Brochures

The following brochures about sexual abuse are also available from the New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, Inc.:

- # 'Safe, Strong and Free', for young children (Spanish and English)
- # 'Top 10 Questions for Kids', for mid-school aged children
- # 'Talking To Your Children About Sex': How to use open discussions about sex, privacy, respect and values to prevent the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and teens.' A booklet for parents
- # 'Male Victims of Rape' , 'From Victim to Survivor' (Spanish and English), 'Rape in Marriage' , 'Overcoming Painful and Past Experiences' , for adults.

The following is a list of mental health agencies with counselors trained to help survivors of sexual abuse. You may decide you want to talk with someone over the phone before you can go in to see them. You may want to join a group for incest survivors. Either way, find a therapist who believes your feelings and memories. Give yourself the time and compassion. You will need both.

'No matter what is true of your past, the world is in need of your best contributions. You can only give your best by becoming your best self; and this is only possible if you consider yourself deserving of emotional healing.' (Betty Caponera , Ph.D., Overcoming Painful Past Experiences')

New Mexico Sexual Abuse Program Coordinators		
Alamogordo La Frontera NM 575-437-7404 Albuquerque Rape Crisis Center of Central NM 505-266-7711 Para Los Ninos 505-272-6849 Agave Health 505-338-3320 Programs for Children & Adolescents 272-2190 • 272-2800 After 5pm Sequoia Adolescent Treatment Center 505-344-4673 Anthony Valle del Sol 575-882-5101 Artesia Counseling Associates 575-623-1480 Bernalillo Valle del Sol 505-867-2383 Carlsbad Carlsbad Mental Health 575-885-4836 Clayton Tri-County Community Services, Inc. 575-374-2032 Clovis Mental Health Resources, Inc. 575-769-2345 • 800-432-2159 Deming La Frontera NM 575-546-2174 800-426-0997 crisis	Espanola Ana Guldán 505-927-6587 PMS Valley Community Health Center 505-747-7400 Tewa Women United 505-747-3259 Estancia Valle del Sol 505-384-0220 505-865-4739 crisis Farmington Desert View Family Counseling Center 505-326-7878 Farmington Community Health Center (PMS) 505-566-0345 Sexual Assault Services of Northwest New Mexico 505-325-2805 Ft. Sumner Mental Health Resources, Inc. 575-769-2345 877-579-8001 crisis Gallup Western NM Counseling Services 505-863-3828 800-649-0181 crisis Grants Valle del Sol 505-287-7985 • 800-287-0212 Hobbs Guidance Center of Lea County 575-393-3168 575-393-6633 crisis 575-392-0966 for adolescents Las Cruces La Fontera NM 575-647-2830	La Piñón Sexual Assault Recovery Services 575-526-3437 888-595-7273 crisis Las Vegas NM Behavioral Health Institute at Las Vegas Community Based Services 505-454-5134 • 505-425-1048 Lordsburg La Frontera NM 505-542-3804 Los Alamos Los Alamos Family Council 505-662-3264 • 505-662-4422 crisis Los Lunas Agave Health 505-866-2300 Valle del Sol 505-865-3350 • 505-865-3359 crisis Lovington Guidance Center of Lea County 575-396-3818 Portales Arise Sexual Assault Services 575-226-4665 • 575-226-7263 Mental Health Resources, Inc. 575-769-2345 (Clovis) • 800-432-2159 crisis Raton Tri-County Community Services, Inc. Mental Health Clinic 575-445-2754 Reserve Border Area Mental Health Services, Inc. 575-533-6649 Rio Rancho Rio Rancho Family Health Center 505-896-0928 • 888-920-6333 crisis Rio Rancho Valencia Counseling 505-891-2990

The Peace of Wild Things

*When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

--Wendell Berry



accurate labels for their sexual parts. From the earliest age, they need to know that girls have a vulva where all of their sexual parts are located; a urethra where their urine comes out; a uterus where babies are made and grow inside women, and a vagina which is the opening in their bodies leading to their uterus. They need to know that boys have a penis from which their urine comes out, and testicles where semen is stored. Children need to know that for moms and dads to make a baby, the dad's semen comes through his penis into the mom's uterus.

Children need to know that boys and girls both have an anus or rectum where bowel movements come out; they both have nipples and breasts. They both begin to experience many body changes when they get to be in Junior High (or even earlier for some girls): hair on their bodies and private parts; girls get breast budding and menstruate; boys' testicles drop; they have lots more sexual thoughts and feelings. Children need to be told at least all of this information and more (for instance; how a penis gets into a vagina; wet dreams; ejaculation; orgasm; how diseases are sexually transmitted).

Children also need to know that some adults and bigger children, even people in their own families who they love, may try to be sexual with them. They need to know that if this occurs, the bigger person is not acting in a right way and the child should tell about it. Parents can give examples about the kind of activity that is unacceptable: "If anyone shows you pictures of people without their clothes..."; "If anyone asks you to touch their penis/vulva..."; "If anyone wants to kiss you and you don't want them to... (this includes relatives)". Children should be told what to do in these situations. Try to say no. If you can, get away. Tell someone (parent, teacher, minister, police) right away. Keep telling different people until you get help. And - even if you weren't able to tell about it before, it's okay to tell now.

Parents can give this information in bits and pieces as the child ages, starting from when the children are toddlers all the way into their adolescence, as their child is ready for it. They

can mention it over and over again through the years in different ways. Children learn concepts best through repetition. Preparing a child adequately to keep themselves safe (whether it's crossing streets, sexual abuse, or even being around horses, fire or deep water) consists of supervision and instruction, using examples to reinforce the ideas that the parent wants the child to learn.

Values

Sexual thoughts, feelings and actions that are a normal part of child development must be acknowledged and accepted by parents as signifying healthy development. Almost all children show interest in their own and other people's genitals, they masturbate, and they are curious about what mommy and daddy

do together. Parents can help children with their normal sexual development by showing that these topics can be discussed within the family. They can also convey their sexual values non-verbally by the way they conduct their own lives as well as through direct verbal guidance. Information about sex and sexual abuse are not enough - parents need to transmit their moral standards and values to their child. In doing so, the child will be better able to understand how to manage their sexual behavior. Adults should remember that if their own values and sexuality are out of control, the child will have a much greater struggle with these issues.

Sexual Abuse Prevention

Unfortunately, even children with the most vigilant, caring parents can be abused. It is helpful for parents to be aware of the nature of sexual abuse, and to have some thoughts on how to lessen a child's vulnerability to it.

Many children do not report incidents of sexual abuse, so it is difficult to know the full extent of this problem in New Mexico or in the United States. One study estimates that one out of every four girls and one out of every six boys will have an inappropriate sexual experience before the age of 18 (Finkelhor, et al, 1992). Many people think that these estimates are conservative,

signs on a child's body. Finally, a child may use words to give out information in bits and pieces so they can see how the adult will react before continuing. They often talk about 'a friend' with a problem when it is really their own problem.

Parental / Care Giver Response

If you suspect a child has been abused, first, **STAY CALM**. Gently but persistently ask questions and let the child know that this information is something that you are willing to hear and believe. Let the child know that this is a subject which concerns you deeply and his well being is important to you. Many children who attempt to tell about abuse begin by first asking you to keep a secret if they tell you something. Let her know that you may need to get the help of other people to deal with her problem. Know what the community resources are so you can turn to individuals or agencies for assistance. It is both Federal and State law that require any adult who has knowledge about the sexual abuse of a child (or physical abuse or neglect) to report it to social services or to the police. (See Child Abuse Reporting Hotline number on page 9.)

If you know of a child who has experienced confusing or abusive sexual events, get help for that child and for yourself to be able to give guidance and support. It is important for kids to receive help - they need to know that with help, what happened to them will not hurt them for life. Insist that competent mental health resources be available in your community for children and parents who have questions about sexuality or sexual abuse. (See page 9 for a list of agencies throughout New Mexico.)

Sexuality is a difficult subject for most people. Discussing it with our children is often awkward and certainly forces us to look at our own attitudes and feelings. We may think that modesty or avoidance are the best course, but we should remember that our child's physical, emotional and spiritual well-being are involved. Our ability to share conversation and information with our child on this topic will be of great benefit to him.

Any extremes of behavior are concerning:

- withdrawal
- depression
- injuring oneself
- suicidal thoughts or acts

Or the opposite extreme when the child:

- hurts others
- is violent
- is destructive
- breaks the law
- uses alcohol and other drugs
- is involved in 'early' sexual behavior

There is a close link between abuse and the use of alcohol and drugs in children and teens. Children who are sexual with younger or smaller children or who become sexually active with peers at young ages may have had an abusive experience themselves.

Physical complaints such as:

- vaginal or anal bleeding or soreness
- discharges from the vagina or penis (which may indicate the presence of STD's)
- any bruising, scratching or redness which could be an indicator of force

Any of these physical indicators should be carefully evaluated by a qualified physician. It's important to know that sexual abuse (even penetration) often does not leave physical

particularly regarding males; boys are more likely not to report victimization because of the shame they may feel. Children are much more likely to be abused by people they know very well - people in their immediate family and households or circle of friends, neighbors or care givers. These are the people who have access to them and who children trust. They are usually not abused in a single incident, but more often repetitively over long periods of time, even into adolescence and adulthood. The sexual contact can range from sexual talk or harassment, to fondling, to oral-genital contact to invasive penetration of a child's mouth, vagina or anus using a penis, finger or object.

Finally, some method of coercion, force or 'trick' usually occurs to keep the abuse a secret or to prevent the child from telling. Some examples of this are: an offering of attention or rewards (a trip to town, a toy or money); statements that no one will believe the child if he tells; threats of physical harm or other consequences (You'll be sorry... I'll stop giving your family money..."), or actual physical force (holding a child down, using a weapon).

Teaching concepts of respect, privacy and sex education are the building blocks of any prevention effort. In addition, there are several other ideas which may be woven into family life.

Children need not be afraid of touching or affection if a family chooses to show their love in this manner. Parents can maintain physically close contact with their children while providing specific information in a matter-of-fact way about what the parent considers inappropriate.

Parents can make their children aware of different kinds of touching through using stories, books and games. Parents should respect their children's choices about touching or other activities. For example, if a child does not want to stay with a certain relative or sleep with a favorite cousin, it is the parents'

responsibility to explore the child's reasons for any possibility of inappropriate activities. The parent should also go a step further and show respect for the child's feelings on this matter even when abuse is not present; it conveys a message to the child that his/her statements will be listened to by important adults as well as reinforcing that the child can trust his/her own feelings about people. The trust and communication between you and your child are more important than any hurt feelings by adult relatives which may result.

Informing your child that while you expect him to obey and respect adults, you do not tolerate behavior by adults toward children which is wrong. Be specific about what behaviors you consider an exception to obedience, for example, if a baby-sitter wants you to lie, or an adult asks you to keep a secret that is about sexual touching.

Placing a value on 'doing for oneself' is also helpful in preventing abuse. A child benefits from the belief that he is a capable, competent human being who can take care of his own body, his own needs.

Being physically and emotionally available to your child is crucial. Children who have been abused, sometimes report that they felt lonely or unloved and responded positively to the attention and nurturing that they received from an adult or older child who later molested them. Spending time with and talking to your child is an important abuse prevention method.

Adolescence

Adolescence can be a difficult, exciting time for both teen and the parent. The hormonal changes your child is experiencing are increasing his anxiety about his body, his sexual identity, his struggle with independence and saying good-bye to childhood.

The risks of teenagers having sex are high: pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) - (including fatal AIDS), and the emotional stress, confusion and fear that most youth experience do not usually make sex the wonderful thing teens are led to believe it is. Adults owe it to youth to be honest about all aspects of sexuality - the pleasures and the risks. Young teens should be told that they have an obligation to make responsible decisions and choices about the type of sexual contact to engage in (kissing/hugging? fondling? intercourse?); and the circumstances in which they wish to be sexual (never when under the influence of alcohol or other drugs; in a 'steady' relationship?; in a marriage?; not while I'm still in high school?).

Young people need to understand that love relationships are not based on pressure and sex, but on friendship and caring.

Parents should always discuss these issues with their teenager:

- The relationship between alcohol/drugs and pressured sex;
- Date rape, which happens when one person doesn't want sex and the other pressures or forces them anyway;
- A 'Dating Plan' - deciding *before* going out on a date what your teen wants to do physically with their date and then be able to stay sober and assertive enough to stick to the plan.

Clues:

If You Think Your Child Has Been Sexually Abused

Childhood sexual abuse is a disruptive experience to the physical, emotional and spiritual well being of children. Consequently, they often give clues through their behavior and words that things are not well in their lives.