



**Victoria Child Abuse  
Prevention & Counselling Centre**  
*Mary Manning Centre*

## **Safety Skills Handbook**

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# **Information for Parents of Young Children**

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## INTRODUCTION



In a perfect world there would be no sexually abused children. There would be no sexual predators, and parents wouldn't have to concern themselves with arming their children to help keep them safe from sexual abuse. But it isn't a perfect world and child sexual abuse occurs. So it is important for parents to teach children about self-protection and help them to feel safe again after being abused.

By teaching your children to recognize and respond to sexual abuse, you reduce their vulnerability and increase their chances for a safe, abuse-free life, or decrease their chances for re-occurrence.

However, it is very difficult for a child to stop a persistent adult. So remember that when sexual abuse does occur, it isn't the child's fault. A child should not be held responsible for being abused. As long as there are abusers in our society, sexual abuse will occur. As many as 1 out of 4 girls and one out of 6 boys will experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 18. Although, it is believed that the incidences of sexual abuse is dropping and has been since 2004, it is unclear whether this is a trend or that fewer cases are being reported. As a parent, it is impossible to always be in control of what happens to your child, or to never trust anyone with your child. That is why you need to teach your children about sexual abuse, and give them the tools and life skills to stop it from happening to them.

If sexual abuse has already happened to your child, then it is important that you teach them how to regain trust in themselves and others, and how to understand and interpret their own 'gut' feelings about people and situations. Children have a tendency to ignore uncomfortable situations, instead of recognising them as warning signals.

You can also help by teaching your children about body rights: that they have a right to decide who can or cannot touch their body. This is especially important for sexually abused children, because their personal boundaries have already been invaded, which means they do not have a clear understanding of their own boundaries.

This booklet is designed to aid parents in teaching prevention and safety skills to their children; and to help parents of sexually abused children be part of their child's recovery process.

## SOME FACTS ON SEXUAL ABUSE

What does society really know about sexual abuse?

In 1962, Henry Kempe and his colleagues published a paper in the USA that coined the term, "battered child syndrome." Kempe went on to establish one of the first national bodies to address child maltreatment, the National Centre for Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect in Denver, Colorado. He worked tirelessly to see the first federal child abuse legislation in the USA passed in 1974, with the determination that abused and neglected children deserved government protection. Since that time the literature and laws in many countries have also improved to provide legislation, laws and services for children who experience sexual abuse.

In recent years, much research has accumulated and child sexual abuse has been the subject of movies and literature.

DID YOU KNOW . . . ?

- Previously research indicated that as many as 1 out of 4 girls and 1 out of 6 boys will experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 18. Although there has been a steady decline in Canada and the USA of the number of confirmed sexual abuse cases, it is unclear whether this is a trend or due to fewer cases being reported or due to the increase in partial disclosure by younger children, where the abuse cannot be confirmed.
- In the majority of cases, the child is sexually assaulted in a familiar place (home, car, playground) by someone they know well, such as a parent, relative, older friend, baby-sitter or neighbour.
- Sexual abuse often occurs through manipulation of the child after gaining the child's trust. Since children, especially young children, look to adults for love, protection and guidance, they will often do as they are asked. This trust makes children particularly vulnerable to bribes and manipulation.
- Children are often persuaded by their abuser that the abuse is their fault. Consequently, many children remain silent despite repeated molestation. So it is not uncommon for the sexual abuse of a child to continue for a number of years. Because the offence creates a secretive nature in the child, sexual abuse is difficult to accurately assess. So it is quite likely that the known incidents of sexual abuse represent only a fraction of the overall problem.
- Sexual abuse is an emotional and physical violation of a person.
- Sexual abuse is often generational and cyclical. When we look at patterns of abuse, violence, etc. within a family, it is not uncommon to see these themes being repeated from one generation to the next.
- EDUCATION is a necessary part of prevention: children who are aware of the risks and their rights and body boundaries are less vulnerable to manipulation or assault.
- Sometimes, a younger child may be coerced into sexual touching with an older child and although this is not considered a crime when the child is under age 12; the child who was touched may feel they were abused and show symptoms and behaviours that indicate distress.

## **INDICATORS OF ABUSE IN CHILDREN**

Below are some possible indicators of sexual abuse in a child. On its own, any one indicator is not evidence or proof of sexual abuse. As well, it is important to remember that every child is unique and will respond differently to a particular situation; and such factors as age, family values, religion also need to be taken into consideration before determining that sexual abuse has occurred to the child. However, an accumulation of indicators is certainly something to be concerned about, and professional help should be sought. The following indicators are listed by age grouping and are to be used as *guidelines* only.

### ***INFANTS – TODDLERS***

With pre-verbal children, the indicators tend to be both physical and behavioural:

- Unusual or extreme fear of certain places in the house or people with whom they were previously at ease with
- Feces smearing
- Frequent angry outbursts
- Regressive behaviour
- Red, sore genital area
- Venereal disease, vaginal or anal trauma
- Painful urination or defecation
- Frantic behaviour during diaper changing
- Nightmares

### ***PRESCHOOL CHILDREN***

- Noticeable changes in behaviour such as suddenly avoiding a certain person, place, room, or shrinking away from normal physical contact
- Comments that make sense only in a sexual context, or pictures which have a sexualized theme
- Sexual acting out such as inserting objects into the vagina or excessive masturbation (i.e. occurring with notable frequency)
- Regressive behaviour such as reverting to thumb sucking, baby talk, clinging etc.
- Attempting sexual behaviour with other children, particularly with younger children, and perhaps in an angry or controlling way

#### ***ELEMENTARY SCHOOL –AGED CHILDREN***

- Pseudo-mature behaviour
- Drawings or comments which make sense only in a sexualized context or which contain sexualized themes.
- Sexually abusive behaviour such as putting objects into their vagina (or doing this to someone else) and sexual exploration that goes beyond normal peer inquisitiveness
- Depression
- Self-abusive behaviour
- Sudden drop in school performance or frequent absences
- Fearful of going home after school
- Isolation from peers, characterized by withdrawn, avoidance types of behaviour

#### ***ADOLESCENTS***

- Self-abusive behaviour such as alcohol and drug abuse
- Running away (physically and emotionally)
- Emotional dependency
- Prostitution
- Sexual experimentation with inappropriately-aged partners
- Sleep and eating disturbances

## NORMAL SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT BY AGE

Normal sexual expression	Indicators of sexual abuse
<p><b>BIRTH</b>            Infant penis and clitoral erections during nursing are normal. Nursing is a pleasant, warm experience, and the arousal is a normal reflexive reaction that the infant is unaware of.</p> <p><b>AGE ONE</b>            Infant's motor systems are developing; and they will begin exploring their genitals. Very much into touching, sucking and pleasurable touch. Learning self-acceptance and trust.</p> <p><b>AGE TWO</b>            Children are usually walking and talking; beginning to notice the differences between male and females. They can see the difference in body parts. Children should be showing signs of natural curiosity. Not aware at this stage of public's need for discretion with bodily functions.</p>	<p><b><i>Behavioural</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ extreme fears, sleep disturbances, over or under eating, fear of a particular person or place</li> <li>➤ bizarre behaviour, smearing of feces</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Evidence Of Physical Trauma</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ red, sore, hurting in genitals and genital area</li> <li>➤ pain while urinating or defecating</li> <li>➤ bruising or "hickeys" in genital area</li> <li>➤ sore throat/mouth without cold or flu</li> <li>➤ unusual or offensive order</li> <li>➤ venereal disease</li> </ul> <p>If a child shows any of the above symptoms, a medical check is necessary</p>
<p><b>AGE TWO – FIVE</b>            Children are interested in their own genitals and those of others. They explore each other through games such as "doctor and nurse" or playing "house". Masters &amp; Johnson's studies indicate a desire to look, touch and sometimes insert objects into body openings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ children often into experimenting with "pee" and "poop"</li> <li>➤ learning how to control body functions</li> <li>➤ accept literally what parents tell them</li> <li>➤ show signs of "bathroom humour"</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Behavioural</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ child is preoccupied with sexual acts or language</li> <li>➤ ongoing sexual acting out; sexualized drawings, bizarre drawings</li> <li>➤ regressive behaviour, such as thumb-sucking, baby talk, loss of language, bed wetting, clinging</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Physical</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ vaginal or anal trauma</li> <li>➤ walks "funny"</li> </ul>

Normal sexual expression	Indicators of sexual abuse
<p>AGES FOUR – SIX</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ may masturbate</li> <li>➤ entering a school system that structures their behaviour more; begins to learn society’s restrictions.</li> <li>➤ need for privacy is developing</li> <li>➤ game playing continues: “house”, “show &amp; tell” etc.</li> <li>➤ sex roles starting to be ingrained</li> </ul>	<p><b>Behavioural</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ child shrinks from touch; goes rigid when touched</li> <li>➤ pseudo maturity</li> <li>➤ wants to move or wants to leave home</li> <li>➤ has unusual responses to medical exams</li> </ul> <p><b>Physical</b></p> <p>Similar to those listed earlier</p>
<p>AGES SIX – TEN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ at ages 6 and 7, children have a better understanding of the physical differences between the sexes; modesty becomes stronger.</li> <li>➤ some exploration-type activities with same sex or opposite sex is normal. However, when one child becomes coercive with the other, in a manner that goes beyond natural curiosity, then the activity becomes abusive.</li> <li>➤ by ages 8 and 9, children are becoming aware from the media of what is considered “sexy”. Television shows, movies and the behaviour of adults around them set the standard for sexualized behaviours between males and females.</li> <li>➤ experimentation will go “underground” as children realize that there are social rules for sexual behaviour</li> <li>➤ experimentation will continue but is more likely to be with same sex friends</li> <li>➤ mutual masturbation between boys may occur</li> <li>➤ misinformation and myths about sex and sexuality are common. This will be carried into adolescence if accurate information is not provided</li> <li>➤ internal development of secondary sex characteristics; hormones become active</li> <li>➤ begins to have crushes</li> </ul>	<p><b>Behavioural</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ runs away, self-mutilation, bizarre behaviour, fire-starting, sex with animals, violence to others, drug involvement, poor school performance, unwillingness to undress in gym or at the doctor’s.</li> <li>➤ detachment of cognitive from emotional functioning, i.e., lack of appropriate response to emotional circumstances.</li> <li>➤ lying, stealing, seductive, provocative, frequent absences from school</li> <li>➤ depression</li> <li>➤ extreme behaviour or attitudes, i.e., hate, perfectionism, etc.</li> </ul>

Normal sexual expression	Indicators of sexual abuse
<p>AGE TEN -TWEL VE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ physiology begins to affect self image</li> <li>➤ some changes, such as some girls begin to menstruate</li> <li>➤ child shows signs of sexual development.</li> <li>➤ child experiences intellectual growth and has know-it-all attitude</li> <li>➤ establishes sexual identity</li> <li>➤ loses internal controls and needs support and guidance</li> </ul>	<p><b>Behavioural</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ psychosomatic complaints, suicide attempts, pregnancy; venereal disease</li> <li>➤ “sex role” confusion</li> <li>➤ “homophobia”</li> <li>➤ reliance on alcohol and drugs to get by</li> </ul>
<p>AGE THIRTEEN – SIXTEEN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ physiological development underway</li> <li>➤ girls generally get their "periods", boys have "wet dreams"</li> <li>➤ emotions are up and down as secondary characteristics to develop</li> <li>➤ dating begins</li> <li>➤ pregnancy and VD rates high age group.</li> <li>➤ need information that is geared to their interests and frames of reference vulnerable to peer pressure</li> <li>➤ need to test limitations by trial error</li> </ul>	<p><b>Behavioural</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ promiscuity; provocative dress</li> <li>➤ prostitution</li> <li>➤ unwillingness to be touched</li> <li>➤ criminal acts</li> <li>➤ sexual experimentation with much younger children</li> <li>➤ alcohol and drug abuse</li> <li>➤ running away, physically or emotionally</li> <li>➤ self-abusive behaviour</li> </ul>
<p><b>Additional Information</b>  These phases are guidelines. Each child's maturation rate is dependent on the interplay between heredity and the environment.</p>	<p>One behavioural indicator alone will not necessarily mean that sexual abuse has occurred. Generally, a combination of behaviours and statements will be seen in sexually abused children.</p>

These charts were adapted from:

Project Backdoor (Parents group for parents of sexually abused children)

When Your Child Has Been Molested, by Kathryn Hagans and Joyce Case.

## TALKING TO YOUR CHILD

As soon as your child is old enough to understand, you should begin teaching your child how to protect themselves from being sexually abused. Be sure to talk to boys as well as girls, because boys are also vulnerable and as likely a target for abuse as girls. Begin by teaching your children about safety rules, such as traffic safety and safety in the home. Then begin talking to your child about personal safety.

- ✓ Explain to them that they need to know how to protect themselves from certain kinds of touching. Tell your child that sometimes adults or teenagers try to touch children's private parts.
- ✓ Explain to your child that it is wrong for an adult or a teenager to touch the private parts of a child. Explain that an adult should only touch a child's private parts for medical and cleanliness reasons. Also, tell them that it is wrong for an adult to ask a child to touch their private parts.
- ✓ Teach your child the names for the private parts of the body, so that a child can accurately describe in the appropriate language a sexually abusive event.
- ✓ Explain to your child that sometimes adults try to trick or bribe children into letting them touch him or her. These adults can seem very nice; they may even be a relative or friend, someone that the child likes and trusts.
- ✓ Teach your child how to say "no" to inappropriate touching or touching that they don't like. Role plays can be used to help illustrate this. Start off by teaching your child to how to say "no" to non-sexual types of touching when they don't want to be touched, such as hugging, kissing, tickling, etc.

Phrases to teach your children:

"Don't touch me. I don't like it."

"Don't touch me. It's my body and I don't want you to touch it."

"Please don't hug me right now."

"Don't do that. I don't like to be tickled."

- ✓ If your child understands that they have the right to say who they want to touch them and when or how they want to be touched, they are less likely to be a victim of sexual abuse.
- ✓ Teach your child to tell you or another adult immediately if someone tries to touch them. Discuss some of the people your child may go to for help.
- ✓ Tell your child that you will always believe them if they say that someone has touched them in their private parts. Also tell them that, no matter what, it is not their fault.
- ✓ Tell your child never to keep a secret about touching.
- ✓ Tell your child to trust in their feelings, especially if they get a "yukkie" feeling about the way someone is touching them or acting towards them. Tell them to always tell you if they have a "yukkie" or "funny" feeling about the way a person touches them.

## **EXTRA NOTES FOR PARENTS**

- Develop an atmosphere of openness and trust with your child so that they feel safe about coming to you and discussing sexual matters or anything unusual they are feeling.
- Check the references of your babysitters.
- Be aware of how your child interacts with adults. If your child seems afraid of someone, or really doesn't seem to want to be around someone, talk to them about it. Find out why.
- Watch for symptoms of sexual abuse, e.g. behavioural changes, physical complaints, unhappiness, regression, withdrawal, difficulty at school, indirect messages, seductive behaviour, self-destructive behaviour.

## **BODY INTEGRITY**

The relationship between a child, their parents and the community is the most important aspect of child safety and the prevention of child sexual abuse. As a society we must respect children's right to autonomy and help them to develop individuality.

### ***BODY INTEGRITY BEGINS BY:***

- Teaching that a child's body belongs to them and that your body belongs to you.
- Teaching your children the rules of how to look after their body as soon as they are able to understand. For example, we brush our teeth to keep them clean, we wash our hands after using the toilet, we feed our body to keep it strong. We don't purposely hurt ourselves or others (e.g. slapping, hitting, pinching), and these behaviours are not acceptable in our house.

### ***ROLE MODEL***

- Parents should model the behaviours they wish to see in their children.

### ***INTERVENE***

- whenever inappropriate behaviour occurs.

### ***ESTABLISH PRIVACY BOUNDARIES***

- Teach children to close doors when using the bathroom.
- Allow children to undress and dress in privacy unless help is requested. Respecting your children's boundaries and personal space gives them a clear understanding of what the appropriate boundaries are so, that if someone crosses them without permission, they will recognize that behaviour as a warning signal.

### **TEACH**

- Provide the correct names for all the body parts.
- Discuss the function of all the body parts.

### **OBSERVE**

- The specialness of your child – their athletic, musical, creative ability, etc. – and point out these areas of skill to them.

### **COMMENT**

- Provide verbal support for your child when you see the changes in their body skill and development.

## **FEELINGS**

It is important to teach your children about the concept of feelings at an early age, and how to identify and express their own feelings.

- Teach them to trust their feelings. If someone is making a child feel uncomfortable, the most important thing they can do is pay attention to their feelings about that person.
- Consider how you as a parent identify your own feelings, and give your children that skill and the right language to communicate those feelings.
- Encourage your children to name and express feelings.
- As your children get older, help them to broaden their emotional range.
- Tell your children that all feelings are okay, but teach them that they must be responsible for the actions they take based on their feelings, such as hitting.

## **COMMUNICATION**

In order to help children trust in their own feelings about feelings about people and situations, they need to know they can trust those who treat them with respect. So it is vital that parents create an open dialogue with all family members, which allows and accepts different views.

- Listen to what your child says to you; and learn to reframe their thoughts so that they feel understood by you.
- Ask about and clarify areas that do not seem clear.
- Create an atmosphere where difference of opinion can be freely expressed.
- Provide your child with new information so that their understanding increases as they develop. Define and explore the issues of safety, sexuality, body awareness, etc.
- Use age-appropriate language when talking with your children.
- Give and receive feedback from your children.

## **DECISION MAKING**

Teaching your children to make independent decisions is an important aspect of helping to keep them safe. Start when they are young with simple decisions such as allowing them to choose what they wear. Decision-making is developed in children by giving them choices, explaining the choices, and allowing them to follow through with their decisions. By allowing children to make some of their own decisions, you help to develop their self-awareness, and these assessment skills help them to make safe choices.

## **EMPOWERMENT**

The literal definition of empowerment is to authorize or delegate to someone; to enable and permit. With a child, the concept of empowerment means simply providing them with the power to say yes or no. By allowing your child to experience empowering situations, they will develop an increased sense of positive self-worth and self-esteem, and an enhanced sense of autonomy. By providing your child with choices and skills in decision-making, their confidence will grow with every positive decision they make.

## **ASSERTIVENESS**

Assertiveness should be seen positively as "making one's needs known and attempting to get those needs met in a confident way." It will develop through the confidence a child gains in decision-making and choices in life. By allowing and teaching a child assertiveness skills, the parent may have to redefine society's concept of how a child should act, i.e. seen but not heard, or the expectation that children should obey adults. In order to properly teach your child sexual abuse safety skills, your children must be encouraged to be assertive with children and adults.

## **STREET-PROOFING YOUR CHILD**

Having to tell your children about the disturbed men and women that prey on unwary youngsters is one of a parent's more distasteful tasks. It is a hard subject to think about, let alone discuss with your child but it is a necessary part of being a parent. There is an overwhelming desire to tell your children that they can trust the world they live in and all the people they may encounter; and this desire conflicts with the need to warn children of the dangers in the streets.

Parents naturally worry over their children and fear they may be hurt if they are not taught to be aware of the potential dangers. But most parents are also sensitive to the underlying message that goes with teaching their children to be vigilant. They worry that by telling their children the world is a hostile and dangerous place, they are implying that the only safe place is withdrawing into their shells.

Try to teach your children in a non-alarmist, reasonable manner. Don't bombard them with a lot of facts and information all at once. By pouring out an overwhelming number of facts and rules, you run the risk of scaring your child. Your goal should be continuous communication, not

a one-time subject. Remember that you are not just transmitting information, you are dealing with attitudes about life and the world. It is best to accent what a child can do to protect themselves, not what will scare them. Stress the positive aspects of safety and make your children feel competent at an early age.

Basically, parents should treat the threat of street dangers as something for their children to master. Then their children will develop a more savvy and self-confident approach to the streets. Remember, it is possible to warn your children of the dangers without scaring them half to death.

#### ***FAMILY SAFETY POLICY***

Begin to establish family safety policies when your children are young. Start with the rules about water, fire, traffic, etc., then move on to personal safety rules. For example, if your child wishes to play outside alone or walk to a friend's house, always make it clear what the boundaries are. These kinds of activities are not unconditional privileges.

#### ***WHAT YOUR CHILD SHOULD BE TAUGHT***

- What sexual abuse is.
- Not to wander off alone.
- Never go anywhere with a stranger.
- Never run into the street.
- Always ask mom, dad or an adult guardian before going off with a known person.
- Their address and phone number.
- The people in the community they can go to for help.
- Establish a family "code word" to be used by members of your family as a safety signal. If someone approaches your child and does not know the safety word, tell your child not to go with that person and to tell someone about the incident.
- Older children should be taught the three Stranger Questions used in the video "Feeling Yes Feeling No" to assess the safety of a situation.

#### ***THREE STRANGER QUESTIONS:***

1. Do I have a 'yes' feeling or a 'no' feeling?
2. Does someone I trust know where I am?
3. Can I get help if I need it?

It is important to tell your children that if they answer "no" to any of these questions, they should not go with the person. A vital goal of teaching personal safety is to foster and develop your children's basic instincts for self-preservation. You want to help them develop respect for their own "funny feelings" or "hunches" about people situations. This instinct is their best protection.

While your child is learning to identify their feelings, they should also be taught basic assertiveness skills, especially in relation to adults.

We live in a society where children are taught to OBEY adults because that is what good boys and girls do. In a sense, society teaches them to be passive. As responsible parents, it is your job to help your children unlearn this attitude in order for them to protect themselves adequately. It is vital that a child be allowed to develop the capacity to say: "No, I don't want to." Many children have been victimized because they were afraid to say no to an adult.

A child should be allowed to freely express if they do not like a particular person, place or touch. For example, if a child does not want to kiss Uncle Harry, then that child's wishes should be respected.

### ***STRANGER DANGER***

There is probably no parent in the world who has not taught their child such warnings as "never take candy from a stranger" or "don't ever get into a car with a stranger". Most parents begin their safety training with these sorts of warnings about strangers. But contrary to popular opinion, this is far from the perfect opening.

Experts point out that most young children are uncertain about the meaning of the word "stranger." Some young children can confuse the idea of stranger with a monster, a person wearing a mask, a TV cartoon bad character, or someone who looks unfriendly. Therefore a better beginning in safety training is to ask your child what a stranger is. Children often assume that a bad person will be easily identifiable by looking bad. So as a parent, your first task is to make sure your children really understand what a stranger is.

Teach your children that the word 'stranger' means any person they do not know. Explain to your child that a stranger who might hurt them will often appear friendly. Alerting children to the idea that some people might harm them can be painful for parents. However, keep in mind that telling your child about people who might hurt them is very different from telling them the world is a bad place. You must balance your warning with some positive statements such as: "Most people will treat you well, but there are a few who will not", or "When we don't know a person, we don't know how they will treat us."

After you are sure that your child understands what a stranger is, go on to discuss the possible lures or bribes a stranger might use and how they should respond to these tactics. Tell your children that strangers may try sweets and nice talk rather than threats and violence to gain their attention and confidence. Be specific about what kinds of bribes a person might use and what that person might want from them.

Teach your child what the correct response is to lures and bribes from strangers, and do it over time and repeatedly. Do not expect a child to remember the warnings about strangers after being told only once or twice.

### **THE "WHAT IF" GAME**

One of the best ways to teach children what to do in a given situation is to play the "What If" game, or tell stories that demonstrate what children can do for themselves.

You begin by asking something such as: “What if you were in the street and someone you did not know asked you to come to their house and see their new kittens?” Do not be alarmed if your child gives you the wrong answer. Better that they give you the wrong answer now than in a real situation.

This game or story format is good for a number of reasons:

- It provides an opportunity to make clear that you want to know what is bothering your child.
- It provides a favourable context for communication about potentially difficult subjects.
- It encourages children to think for themselves. Knowing what you want them to do will increase their confidence in their own ability to keep themselves safe.

Games are an interesting way to find out what your child already knows and what needs to be learned. They may also provide some insight into fears your child finds hard to express.

### **SAFE PEOPLE**

You can help your children deal with potentially difficult situations if you let them know there are people they can call if they think they are in trouble. With your child, compile a list of safe people that they can call on for help. Also, point out those helpful people that your child knows and who know your child. Identify any block parent houses in the neighbourhood and take the time to identify such helpful people as police officers, movie ushers, shopping centre security guards, etc.

Parents need to think about all the potential dangers and situations their children may encounter. Forethought is the first step in teaching personal safety. Taking the time to think over what to do in an emergency while still safe at home will lead to better decisions in a real situation. If you instruct your children beforehand, they won't be frantically trying to figure out what to do under the stress of an actual encounter.

### **WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR CHILDREN**

Sometimes it is difficult to know exactly the right things to say to your child, especially if they have already been abused. Helping a child to feel safe, to trust, and to understand their body rights and privacy can be determined by what you teach them. The following are some ideas about what you can say.

#### ***TRUST:***

The people you know you can't trust:

- People who ask you to keep secrets - not just private stuff like surprises, but secrets.
- People who try to come into the house when there isn't another adult home.
- Kids who drink and drive; adults who drink and drive
- Adults who tell you something is all right when you've been taught it is wrong.

- People who ask to take your picture without your clothes on.
- People who offer you drugs.
- People who try to blackmail or trick you by saying they will tell your parents if you don't do something.
- People who do you special favours and try to get you alone.

***BODY RIGHTS:***

- Your body belongs to you.
- You can make decisions about your body.
- If someone wants to pat your bottom, you can tell them 'no'.
- Your feelings will usually tell you when things don't seem quite right. Listen to your feelings.
- You deserve privacy when you need it.
- I'll stop tickling you when you ask me to stop.
- I'll tell you when I don't like certain touches, and you can tell me too.
- You are safe with me. I'm not going to abuse you.

***PRIVACY***

For children who are old enough to bathe and keep themselves clean on their own, there are some ways you can teach privacy during bath and bedtime. This is especially important for children who may sleep over at a friend's house:

- No one can come in while you are taking a bath unless you say it's okay. You can ask for help washing your back but no one should wash other parts of your body.
- No one should come in just to watch or peek.
- Goodnight kisses happen before lights are out. If someone comes in after that, come tell me.
- What would make you feel safer? Would you like bells on your door? A lock? Would you like other rules?
- It isn't polite to stare at someone.
- Do you know what staring is?
- If someone stares or peeks at you when you are undressing, in the bathroom, in your room, in the locker room, please tell me. That is an invasion of your privacy.

## **YOU CAN SAY NO**

If someone tries to touch you, you can say no.

- Stand tall, square your shoulders, look them in the eye and say “Stop that” or “I don’t like that.”
- Saying no may be too much for you to do. But you could try saying “I have to go to the bathroom – alone”, or “I have to go home now.”

## **SEXUAL ABUSE ALERT LIST FOR CHILDREN**

### **Be on alert for any person who:**

- Treats you different from other kids.
- Wants to spend time alone with you, makes excuses to go places or have others leave.
- Asks you to do things that involve physical contact like giving back rubs or washing their back.
- Does things to you that involve physical contact like back rubs or washing your back.
- Accidentally-on-purpose touches your private parts, like brushing against your breasts while wrestling or rubbing their body against you.
- Looks at or touches your body and says it is an inspection to see how you're developing.
- Puts lotion or ointment on when your mother or others are not around or when there is nothing wrong.
- Accidentally-on-purpose comes into your room while you are undressed, or comes into the bathroom when you are in there.
- Doesn't respect your privacy, by coming into your room without knocking, or by not allowing you to close the door to the bedroom or bathroom.
- Asks questions or makes accusations about sexual things between you and your boyfriend or girlfriend.
- Teaches sex education by showing pornographic pictures, or shows their body parts or touches yours.
- Says sexual things about your body or how you dress. Talks to you about sexual things they have done. Tells you private things about their current partner.
- Says you are special, different, the only one who really understands them, better than their current partner.
- Treats you like an adult while they act like a child.
- Gives you special privileges or favours and makes you feel obligated.

- Treats you meaner than others.
- Does not let you have friends or do things that other kids your age do.
- Tells you not to tell your parents or other people about things that happen to you.
- Comes into your bedroom at night.
- Accidentally-on-purpose lets their robe come apart or walks about without clothes on.

### THE WAYS PEOPLE MANIPULATE US

<i>Method</i>	<i>Example</i>
<b>SPEED</b>	Do it right now! You don't want to miss out!
<b>DEFINING</b>	You're the kind of child... People like you want...
<b>HAPPINESS</b>	You would make me happy.... It would kill your mom... Your mom would love it if...
<b>SICKNESS</b>	I'm sick. You have to help.
<b>UNFAIR TRADE</b>	If you will...I will...(or won't)
<b>FLATTERY</b>	You are so good at this. Will you...?
<b>GUILT</b>	What's the matter? Don't you like me?
<b>YOUR OWN GOOD</b>	I want you to know...No one else would tell you this.
<b>LABELLING</b>	You're so stupid. You're just a troublemaker.
<b>OVER KILL</b>	If you don't buy this... If you don't do this... I'll never come over again if you don't....
<b>GIFTS (GUILT)</b>	After all I've done for you, the least you can do is...
<b>HELPLESSNESS</b>	Oh, I didn't mean to do that.

## BABY SITTER CHECK LIST

- ✓ Ask for names and telephone numbers of other parents who have used the sitter. Also run a criminal record check on the potential sitter, or contact the registry for baby sitters in your area. Find out what ages the children were. Explain to your potential sitter that you will be contacting these references
- ✓ What age of children does the sitter prefer to care for? And why? What other experiences do they have of this age group, apart from baby-sitting (do they have younger siblings or cousins? etc.) *The alert is if the sitter seems focused on a particular age group.*
- ✓ What other interests does the sitter have besides looking after children? Do they have friends of their own ages, sports or other social activities, etc. Where young children are not involved? *The alert here is if the person has few other interests. You want to find a person who has well-rounded interests and is not fixated on children.*
- ✓ Why does the sitter want to baby-sit? Do they have any plans for the future that involve training, getting registered, a career which involves children? How do they feel about children in general?
- ✓ If the sitter is a teenager, check out what their parents think about their baby-sitting. Do they encourage it? Are they willing to provide back up for support if there are any difficulties? Are they within easy reach?
- ✓ What kinds of discipline does the baby-sitter use? What way works best for them? How helpful does the sitter find it to offer children candy as a reward or to make them do something? How often does the sitter use this technique? Give clear expectations of what kind of discipline is acceptable to you. *(Note: rewards should not be acceptable, as they get a child used to taking bribes.)*
- ✓ What would the sitter do in an emergency? Has the sitter ever dealt with a situation where a child is sick or hurt? Who does the sitter contact in an emergency? Be really clear about what you expect to happen:
  - Phone the police/ambulance/doctor immediately
  - Phone me to let me know what is happening
  - Phone the other parent if I am unavailable
- ✓ Be concerned if there have been multiple situations of accidents or injuries when a child was in the sitter's care. It could be a sign that the sitter does not pay close enough attention to the children or, even worse, is a possible abuser.
- ✓ Give the baby-sitter some examples of real situations and ask them to explain what they would do. Find out if they have proper life-saving skills and how recent these skills are.