



Have questions?

Need resources?

**Get Help Now!**

Online Help Center  
<http://GetHelp.StopItNow.org>

**Stop It Now!** prevents the sexual abuse of children by mobilizing adults, families and communities to take actions that protect children before they are harmed.



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### ***Don't Wait: Everyday Actions to Keep Kids Safe***

The most effective prevention happens before a child is harmed. Kids are immediately safer when parents and caregivers take the time to learn about sexual abuse and its warning signs. Parents and caregivers who make a commitment to speak up as soon as they have a concern, instead of waiting for certain evidence of harm, play an even more crucial role in a child's safety.

Here are some things that you and your family can do to protect children from sexual abuse, right now.

#### **Set and respect clear guidelines**

- 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 enforce the family rules.
- Demonstrate boundaries by showing 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, too, that Grandma understands why a child's ability to say 'no' is important for the safety of the child.
- 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 the correct language for understanding their bodies, for asking questions 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 inappropriate touch. For younger children, teach more concrete rules such as "talk with me if anyone – family, friend or anyone else – touches your private parts." Also teach kids that it is unacceptable to use manipulation or control to touch someone else's body.
- Explain the difference between a secret and a surprise. Both the adults and children in your life need to know 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 abuse.

#### **Watch out for signs**

- 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 on top of your children's use of technology – Internet, email, instant messaging, webcam use, peer-to-peer/social networking sites, and cell phones, including photo exchanges. The illusion of anonymity on these electronic mediums often leads to a breakdown of social rules and expectations, ones that would be assumed if the interactions were face-to-face. Whenever possible, make sure the child's interactions are visible and public. Kids, and even adults, can easily stumble into inappropriate or even dangerous situations and exchanges.

### Speak up

- Practice talking before there's a problem. Say the "difficult" or "embarrassing" words out loud so that you become more comfortable using those words, asking those questions, and confronting those behaviors. Having stress-free conversations about difficult issues with both the adults and children in your life gets everyone in the habit of talking openly and honestly. Show those people in your life that you will listen to anything they have to say, even if it's about something embarrassing or something they've done wrong.
- Speak up when you see, or are subject to, any inappropriate behaviors. Interrupt and talk with the person who is making you uncomfortable. If you feel you can't do this, find someone who is in a position to intervene. The person behaving inappropriately might 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.

### Support your kids

- Make it clear that you will support your children when they request privacy or say "no" to an activity or a kind of touch that makes them uncomfortable.
- Talk to your kids about who you/they trust. Give your kids permission to talk to these trustworthy adults whenever they feel scared, uncomfortable or confused about someone's behavior toward them.

### Be prepared

- Create a clear and easy-to-follow Family Safety Plan ([www.StopItNow.org/family\\_safety\\_plan](http://www.StopItNow.org/family_safety_plan)). Make sure that as adults, you know how to challenge each other when you see any inappropriate behaviors. Create a list noting both who to talk to when you see behavior you are unsure about and who to call if you believe you need to report sexual abuse. Teach the 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. For ideas, explore the Online Help Center at <http://GetHelp.StopItNow.org>. You can be a resource to your family and friends about how to report abuse 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 stopped and healed.
- Understanding the tools of sexual abuse prevention builds your confidence that you have the power and knowledge to keep your kids safe. Remember, the most effective prevention involves taking action before any abuse occurs. Prevention can start in your home today. You can start it now.



# Stop It Now!<sup>®</sup>

Together We Can Prevent the Sexual Abuse of Children

## PREVENTION TOOLS

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### Create a Family Safety Plan

The guidelines below can help you create an environment to better protect your family from sexual abuse. By understanding what puts children at risk of sexual abuse, we can take actions to counter those risks. Together we can create a community safety net with information and assistance to protect children from being sexually abused.

#### Educate everyone in the family

- Make sure each family member knows what healthy sexual development in children is, and what sexual behaviors might be of concern.
- Learn to recognize warning signs that a child may have been sexually abused or that an adult, adolescent or child may be touching a child in a sexual way. Some abusive behaviors may not involve touching; for example showing pornography to a child is abusive, even if the child is not touched.
- Teach children the proper names for body parts and what to do if someone tries to touch them in a sexual way.
- Make sure young children know that no one has the right to touch their private parts (unless for medical reasons) and that they should not touch anyone else's private parts.

#### Start talking with your family about sexual abuse

- Adults need to take the lead by opening discussion about what is healthy sexual behavior and what is abusive sexual behavior.
- Talk more than once with all family members—children, teenagers and adults—about appropriate and inappropriate sexualized behaviors to ensure that they understand and remember the information.
- Let everyone in the family know they can ask questions during the discussion, or talk further about any of these issues in private, at a later time.

#### Set clear family boundaries

- Set clear family guidelines for personal privacy and behavior. Discuss them with all members of your family and model respecting these guidelines.
- Discuss these guidelines with any other adults who spend time around or supervise the children (e.g., if a child does not want to hug or kiss someone hello or goodbye, then he or she can shake hands instead).
- Let children know that if they are not comfortable being around a particular adult or older child, then you or another adult will let that person know this (e.g., tell him or her that you don't want your child to sit on his/her lap).
- As a child matures, boundaries may need to change (e.g., knock on the door before entering the room of an adolescent).

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### Get safe adults involved

- Identify one or more support person for each member of the family to talk to if there is a concern. Be sure that no one in your family is isolated. Research shows that having someone to talk with and confide in plays a key role in how well a child will bounce back from stressful events. Having a safe, responsible and consistent adult for a child or adolescent to turn to is critical.
- If someone is “too good to be true,” ask more questions. Even a close friend or relative may not be a safe person to trust with your child.

### Know your local resources and how to use them

- Learn about the agencies in your area. Know who to contact to make a report if you know or suspect that a child has been sexually abused.
- Make a list of resources you can call for advice, information and help and include the phone numbers. Start with our list of helpful resources ([www.StopItNow.org/help](http://www.StopItNow.org/help)).

### Care enough to reach out for help

- If you are concerned about the sexualized behaviors in a parent, cousin, sibling or other family member, care enough to talk with them. Read our Let’s Talk guidebook ([www.StopItNow.org/guidebooks](http://www.StopItNow.org/guidebooks)). If you are concerned about your own thoughts and feelings towards children, help is available (<http://GetHelp.StopItNow.org>)
- Make sure everyone knows that they can talk with you about any inappropriate behavior that may already have occurred; that you love them and will work to get them help.

*Original content by Joan Tabachnick*