

Children's Center

A place where healing begins

Teaching Touching Rules

Until recently, sexual abuse was a crime rarely discussed with children. Most of us heard vague warnings about “strangers” from our parents, and we have, perhaps, relayed these warnings on to our children. However, few of us received any specific information about sexual abuse. Thus, many conscientious caregivers hesitate to talk with their children about sexual abuse even though approximately one out of four will be sexually abused prior to age eighteen. In addition, it is not strangers, but people we know and trust that most often offend.

Suggestions

Start with reading a book to your child: For young children, good choices include *My Body Belongs to Me* (available at the Children's Center) or *It's My Body* (by Lory Freeman). For school-age children, try *My Body Is Private* (by Linda Walvoord Girard). Afterwards, allow time for your child to respond to the book.

Teach touching rules: Private body parts are the parts we cover with a swim suit. Private body parts are special, that's why we keep them covered. It's not okay for another kid or an older person to touch you on your private body parts except for people whose job it is to keep you clean and healthy. Examples of “clean” would be when a young child needs diapering or help in the tub. Examples of “healthy” would be having a doctor or nurse check your privates. It's also not okay for another kid or an older person to ask you to touch or look at their private body parts. Your body belongs to you. You have a right to say “no” if someone breaks the touching rules. It's also important to tell a safe grown-up.

Help your child identify at least two other safe people besides yourself that they could tell if someone broke the touching rules.

If your child makes a disclosure: See separate handout *How to Respond When a Child Reports Abuse* (attached). Call the **Child Abuse Hotline** right away at 971-673-7112 or your local law enforcement agency.

If you have questions or concerns, contact family support services through the Children's Center at 503-655-7725. The Children's Center can also refer you to counselors who specialize in working with children and families in regard to child sexual abuse.

Children's Center

A place where healing begins

How to Respond If a Child Reports Abuse

It is important for caregivers to plan ahead how they might respond if a child or youth discloses abuse. Disclosure is usually a process for children, not a one-time event. Therefore, children may “test the waters” to see if the listener can handle what they might say. It is up to the caregiver to let the child know that s/he is able to hear more and can handle hearing anything the child wants to say. Caregivers need to remember that their job is to be approachable, calm and supportive.

Do: Deliberately remain calm (showing rage for the offender may result in the child trying to protect that person).

Say: I'm glad you told.
I'm proud of you.
I believe you.
It wasn't your fault.
You're not the only one this has happened to.
I feel sad/angry that this happened to you.
I will work to keep you safe; you will be taken care of (if you are a care giver).

Do not ask the child why s/he didn't say “no” or tell sooner, because that can cause guilt.

Do not ask questions.

Do not urge the child to forget it.

Do not talk about the details of your own abuse history.

Do write down the entire conversation, capturing the child's exact words as closely as possible.

Do call the **Child Abuse Hotline** right away at 971-673-7112 or your local law enforcement agency. If indicated, they will arrange for the child to be interviewed by someone specially trained.

Do not alert the person the child talked about. Work to keep the child safe from further abuse.

Do explain to the child that other grown-ups may need to know and that it is okay to talk to the helper adults.