

TEN CONVERSATIONS

A Guide to the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse



ENOUGH
CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

**GREATER BAY AREA
CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION COUNCIL COALITION**

Alameda · Contra Costa · Marin · Monterey · Napa · San Francisco
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What is Child Sexual Abuse?

Defining the Problem

Conversation #1

To be effective in preventing child sexual abuse, we must have a clear understanding of what it involves. Here is how the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) defines child sexual abuse:

“Child sexual abuse involves any sexual activity with a child where consent is not or cannot be given. This includes sexual contact that is accomplished by force or threat of force, regardless of the age of the participants, and all sexual contact between an adult and a child, regardless of whether there is deception or the child understands the sexual nature of the activity. Sexual contact between an older and a younger child also can be abusive if there is a significant disparity in age, development, or size, rendering the younger child incapable of giving informed consent.”

(Handbook on Child Maltreatment, 2nd Edition 2002)

In studies of adults and college students, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men report having been sexually abused or exploited before the age of 18. The average age for reported sexual abuse today is nine; 20% of its victims are even younger. This means that infants, toddlers, young children and teens are all considered at risk.

While many people think that child sexual abuse always involves rape of a child, the truth is that child sexual abuse can include both touching and non-touching behaviors. Both are damaging to children and teens, and both are against the law.

Examples of abusive **touching** behaviors include:

- ♦ fondling of a child’s genitals, buttocks or breasts;
- ♦ penetration of the child’s mouth, anus, or vagina by the abuser or with an object;
- ♦ coercing a child to fondle him/herself, the abuser, or another child.

Examples of abusive **non-touching** behaviors include:

- ♦ exposing oneself to a child;
- ♦ viewing and violating private behaviors of a child or teen, e.g., undressing, bathing;
- ♦ taking sexually explicit or provocative photographs of a child;
- ♦ showing pornography or sexually suggestive images to children;
- ♦ talking in sexually explicit or suggestive ways to children in person or by phone;
- ♦ sending sexually explicit or suggestive messages to children by Internet or text message.

True or False

**Are child sexual abuse rates declining
or are they higher than ever and climbing?**

You decide.

A 2006 study by researchers Finkelhor and Jones found that substantiated or confirmed rates of child sexual abuse were down 49% from 1990 – 2004. However, this only included cases that were reported to authorities. It is estimated that 80% or more of child sexual abuse cases never come to the attention of law enforcement or child protective services. There are other troubling statistics that indicate children may be more at risk than previously thought. For example, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children reports that its “Cyber Tipline” currently receives 3,500 reports each week showing images and videos of children being sexually exploited. Since 2002, the Center has reviewed 18.5 million such images. Nearly 250,000 children each year are at risk of becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

What You Can Do

As a member of the Enough Abuse Campaign, **you are already taking the first step to prevent child sexual abuse by educating yourself about the problem.**

In subsequent weeks, you will learn about behaviors you should be aware of that might indicate that someone poses a sexual risk to a child and what to do if you see these behaviors. You will learn how to tell typical sexual behaviors in children from those that might pose a risk to others and how to respond to them appropriately.

We will continue to test your knowledge about whether popularly held views about child sexual abuse are true or false. Importantly, we'll be giving you some simple and clear tips that will help you feel comfortable speaking to your children about this major safety issue.

Until our next conversation, here are three things you can do:

1. **Speak** to your spouse or partner and to other family members and friends about what you have learned.
2. **Take the conversation** to the water cooler or lunch room and test the knowledge of your colleagues. Do they think child sexual abuse is decreasing or on the rise?
3. **Encourage** others to “Join the Movement” too, so that together you can continue the conversation that started here today.

Preventing the sexual abuse of our children means saying “**Enough**” to the silence and denial that for too long have allowed abusers to go unchallenged.

Reporting suspected child sexual abuse is everyone’s responsibility—whether a mandated reporter or private citizen. If you suspect a child has been sexually abused, contact your local child protective services. To locate the child protective services in your state, as well as other resources, call Childhelp at 800-4-A-CHILD.

Thank you for breaking the silence by adding your voice to this growing movement and for all your efforts to keep children safe!

Who are the Abusers?

Children are Often Abused by Someone They Know, Love or Trust

Conversation #2

Most people who sexually abuse children look and appear to act just like everyone else. If they didn't, we would all have an easier time identifying them. So what do we know about those who sexually abuse children and how can we use that knowledge to keep our kids safer?

First, it's estimated that a third or more of abusers are either immediate family members (i.e., parents and siblings) or other close relatives (e.g., uncles, aunts, grandparents, cousins). Others in the child's circle of trust may also be abusers. These include those with easy access to children because of their work in schools, child care centers, youth groups, sports teams, religious organizations, and in other settings where children live and play.

It's hard to face the fact that someone we know—and even like or love—might sexually abuse a child. But the truth is that in **90% of cases, the child knows and trusts the person who commits the abuse.**

According to actual reports received by law enforcement, 96% of offenders are male. Studies show, however, that women may account for 20 – 30% of cases of child sexual abuse. Fewer than 5% of abusers have an identifiable mental illness—about the same as for the general population.

Those who offend represent every ethnic group, and the vast majority are heterosexual. When compared to other American males, those who abuse look nearly the same in terms of whether they are high school graduates, have some college education, are married or formerly married, and even the degree to which they self-identify as being religious. More than half of abusers report committing their first offense before the age of 18.

True or False

Anyone who abuses a child is a pedophile.

False.

While the media often refers to any sexual abuser as a “**pedophile**”, the truth is that many who sexually abuse children do not meet the criteria for “pedophilia”, a recognized mental illness. A pedophile is defined as an individual who fantasizes about, is sexually aroused by, or experiences sexual urges toward prepubescent children (generally younger than 13 years of age) for a period of at least six months.

Pedophiles are also referred to as “preferential abusers” because they often target children specifically because of the child’s gender, age, appearance, hair color, etc. While the percentage of these abusers is relatively small within the general population, their compulsive behavior makes them a great risk to children. Pedophiles on average commit 10 times more sexual acts against children than other types of child abusers. They remain the most difficult group of abusers to treat and manage.

The largest group of sexual abusers is referred to as “**situational abusers**”. For these abusers, the child’s age, gender and appearance may be less important than their availability. The behavior of these abusers may be impulsive rather than compulsive. They may not be socially comfortable with adults and may indicate that stress played a part in triggering their behavior, e.g., loss of a job, unavailability of a spouse, etc. Those in this group, which include those who commit incest, are the most likely to benefit from sex offender-specific treatment. With monitoring and support, many can often be managed and their threat to public safety can be reduced.

Another category is the “**sociopathic or psychopathic abuser**”. These individuals have personalities which lead them to feel entitled to their behavior. While, fortunately, they also represent a small percentage of abusers, their lack of empathy or accountability for their victims can result in some of the most heinous acts, including kidnapping, torture and murder.

While there are different types of sexual abusers and different theories about the causes of these behaviors, one thing that experts agree on is that sexual

abusers represent a diverse group of individuals who commit a wide spectrum of different acts for a broad range of different reasons. One thing that parents agree on is that sexual abusers of any type must be identified and stopped from hurting our children any longer.

What You Can Do

In our next conversation, we'll be discussing the tactics sexual abusers use to gain the trust of children, their parents, families, schools and communities, and how parents and other adults can challenge them at their own game.

Meanwhile, until our next conversation, keep doing these three things:

1. **Speak** to your spouse or partner and to other family members and friends about what you have learned.
2. **Take the conversation** to the water cooler or lunch room and test the knowledge of your colleagues. Do they think all child abusers are pedophiles? Discuss the facts.
3. **Encourage** others to "Join the Movement" so together you can continue the conversation about how to prevent child sexual abuse in your community.

Reporting suspected child sexual abuse is everyone's responsibility—whether a mandated reporter or private citizen. If you suspect a child has been sexually abused, contact your local child protective services. To locate the child protective services in your state, as well as other resources, call Childhelp at 800-4-A-CHILD.

Behavior Signs of Abusers

Grooming Tactics Used by Sexual Abusers

Conversation #3

The next time you see a news story about an individual who was arrested for child sexual abuse or on child pornography charges, listen carefully to the words of neighbors and colleagues who are asked by the media for their reaction. You will often hear words like, “We are shocked. He was so nice.” or “All the kids liked him.”

Get rid of the notion that people who sexually abuse children look and act differently than you do. Individuals who sexually abuse children can be socially adept and even charming. Most are considered by those around them to be loyal friends, good employees and responsible members of the community. But remember, **public appearance does not always reflect private behavior.**

In a process called “**grooming**”, those who sexually abuse children often go to great lengths to appear trustworthy and kind, not only to the children they target and eventually victimize, but also to their parents and other adults around them. Grooming a child and family gradually over time allows them to build trust and gain access to their target while appearing to be above reproach or suspicion.

Because of their skills at manipulation and deception, there is no foolproof checklist of behaviors that will definitely spot a potential child sexual abuser. Contrary to popular belief, there is no one profile which fits all abusers. This makes it very difficult to immediately distinguish them from others who interact with your kids. However, by gaining insight into the ways abusers think and the strategies they use, parents, caregivers, and youth-serving professionals can learn to be more vigilant in protecting the children in their care.

Remember that these behaviors, when taken alone or together, don't predict sexual abuse. However, according to research conducted by the organization Stop It Now!, the behaviors described below were identified as warning signs or an indication that you may need to begin asking some questions.

Have you seen these behavior signs in adults who interact with your children?

- ♦ Doesn't appear to have a regular number of adult friends and prefers to spend free time interacting with children and teenagers who are not his own.
- ♦ Finds ways to be alone with a child or teen when adults are not likely to interrupt, e.g., taking the child for a car ride, arranging a special trip, frequently offering to babysit, etc.
- ♦ Ignores a child's verbal or physical cues that he or she does not want to be hugged, kissed, tickled, etc.
- ♦ Seems to have a different special child or teen friend of a particular age or appearance from year to year.
- ♦ Doesn't respect a child's or teen's privacy in the bathroom or bedroom.
- ♦ Gives a child or teen money or gifts for no particular occasion.
- ♦ Discusses or asks a child or teen to discuss sexual experiences or feelings.
- ♦ Views child pornography through tapes, photographs, magazines or the Internet. In addition to being an important behavioral sign, possessing, viewing and/or selling child pornography is a criminal offense and should be reported.

Important points to remember are that people who sexually abuse children are experts at gaining our confidence. They look for situations where they can have easy access to children. Sometimes, they do this by choosing work that will give them "cover" at schools, youth groups, sports teams and other places where children live and play.

Sometimes, they work to establish relationships with adults first so that they will eventually gain access to their children. Some abusers become involved with women just so they can gain access to their girlfriend's children. **Be careful and slow in choosing the people you allow into your family's circle of trust and be ready to exclude someone from that circle at the first indication they might be unsafe.**

True or False

There's little I can do to reduce the risk
my child will be sexually abused.

False.

Parents can definitely reduce the risk of sexual abuse by being educated about behavior signs in adults that might indicate they pose a risk to a child. Since more than 80% of sexual abuse incidents occur in one-adult/one-child situations, you can reduce the risk substantially by reducing opportunity. Carefully consider any situation that places your child alone with an adult in an unsupervised situation. Support activities for your child that can occur in a group setting where there are several adults present. If your child must be left alone with an adult while you're away, arrange for someone to drop in unexpectedly from time to time.

What You Can Do

1. **Learn how sexual abusers think** and become familiar with the tactics they use.
2. **Increase supervision** and reduce one-adult/one-child situations.
3. **Don't become anxious or paranoid**—that won't do you or your child any good. Instead, be quietly vigilant and observe the behavior of adults around your child. Notice if his or her behavior changes, e.g., gets upset or gets quiet or withdrawn, when they are around a particular person.
4. **Remember to look** beyond the individual who may appear nice, friendly, or trusting, and focus instead on their behavior.
5. If you get an uneasy or nagging feeling, **don't dismiss it**. Trust your instincts. Ask your child how they feel when they are around that person. Let the adult know that you don't take your child's safety for granted. When you do that, you send a message to potential abusers that your child is not an easy target.

Reporting suspected child sexual abuse is everyone's responsibility—whether a mandated reporter or private citizen. If you suspect a child has been sexually abused, contact your local child protective services. To locate the child protective services in your state, as well as other resources, call Childhelp at 800-4-A-CHILD.

Behavior & Physical Signs that Might Indicate Sexual Abuse

Conversation #4

It's important for parents to know that while some of the physical and behavior changes listed below can be present in cases of sexual abuse, sexual abuse may or may not be the source of those changes. For the most part, these changes are signs that a child or teen is under stress or has experienced some sort of trauma. In any case, when you spot any of these changes, take them seriously and try to understand what is causing them.

Physical Changes:

Any irritation, abrasions, swelling, skin tears, bleeding or infection of the child's genitals or anus, or any unexplained injuries around the mouth, should be brought to the immediate attention of the child's pediatrician. In babies and young infants, any roughened or calloused area between the baby's buttocks may signal chronic rubbing of the area from sexual abuse. Confirmation of a sexually transmitted disease in a child is a strong sign of sexual abuse, as is pregnancy in a young teen.

Headaches, stomach pain, loss of appetite, bathroom accidents, and sleeping problems are some of the ways children may respond physically to the anxiety, confusion, anger, fear and shame that can be brought on by sexual abuse. These physical symptoms, however, can also be associated with many other stresses that children experience as a result of family or school problems, e.g., bullying, divorce, custody issues, etc. So if you see these signs, don't immediately conclude that sexual abuse has occurred.

Behavior Changes:

Changes in a child's or teen's behavior can sometimes be clues that sexual abuse has occurred. However, just like physical signs, these changes can be brought on by other stresses and events. Again, there is no foolproof checklist of signs that will flag for you whether a child has been sexually abused. Still, vigilant parents and caretakers should be aware of some of the behaviors that have been reported in children who have been previously sexually abused.

Have you seen these behaviors in children?

1. Expressed unwillingness or fear to be left in the care of a particular person, babysitter, etc., or to play with a particular child;
2. Change in the child's behavior when a particular person is present, e.g., a usually outgoing child becomes quiet or withdrawn, or an easy-going child becomes agitated or unruly;
3. The use of new words to describe genitalia or sexual behavior;
4. Involving other children in sexual behaviors or using toys or dolls to act out sexual scenarios;
5. In young children, chronic masturbation that is not easily redirected;
6. Having money, new clothes, electronic or other personal items, and you are unaware how the child or teen received these and from whom;
7. Discomfort or reluctance to give details about time spent with another adult or child.

True or False?

Child sexual abuse almost always leaves physical signs.

False.

As we learned in Conversation #1, child sexual abuse can include a variety of touching and non-touching behaviors. Even many touching offenses don't leave physical signs, so we cannot reliably tell when a child is being sexually abused unless there has been penetration that has resulted in tears, abrasions, bleeding, etc. Sexual behavior with a child, whether it includes rape or non-touching offenses, is abusive and damaging to children.

What You Can Do

If you see any of these signs in your children, **don't panic**. Remember, it doesn't mean that he or she is being or has been sexually abused. It may mean that your child is experiencing stress or trauma related to something happening at home, in school, or with their friends.

1. To understand what may be causing these changes in behavior or physical signs, find a quiet moment and place. Ask your child in a gentle, supportive tone, how they are feeling. Even if they are not ready to tell you what is upsetting them, it will let them know that you care, are interested in their well-being, and are there for them when they are ready to talk.
2. If you suspect that your child may have experienced sexual abuse, you may want to ask them in a caring tone, “Is someone hurting you?” Again, if they are not ready to speak about it, they will know that you are there for them when they are ready to tell you.
3. If they disclose, remain calm. Your child will be greatly reassured if you don’t react in an angry or excited way. Don’t press for details immediately. Reassure the child that you believe him or her. Make sure the child understands that it was not their fault. Let them know that you will get help to deal with the problem. Make sure the child is safe from the alleged abuser.
4. Reporting suspected child sexual abuse is everyone’s responsibility—whether a mandated reporter or private citizen. If you suspect a child has been sexually abused, contact your local child protective services. To locate the child protective services in your state, as well as other resources, call Childhelp at 800-4-A-CHILD.
5. Finally, **get support for yourself**. Remember, you do not have to handle this on your own. Go to the “Get Help” section of the Enough Abuse Campaign website where you will find resources for you and your child.

Sexual Behaviors of Children

What's Typical? What's Problematic?

Conversation #5

Parents and professionals who work with children are aware that most children, at various ages and stages of their development, are involved in behaviors that explore their bodies and their sexuality. This is normal and a healthy part of growing up.

Some sexual behaviors between and among children, however, are inappropriate, coercive, abusive, or illegal, and should be stopped. In fact, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, 40% or more of cases of child sexual abuse involve children or teens who sexually offend against their peers or younger children.

This is new information for most people and can seem quite alarming. However, experts believe this gives parents and the professionals who supervise children and youth an important prevention opportunity. By being vigilant and learning how to identify and respond to these behaviors early on, adults can actually help prevent the future abuse of children and the likelihood that a child will grow up to be a sexually abusive adult.

In fact, the Enough Abuse Campaign's two main goals are to prevent adults from sexually abusing children today, and to prevent children from developing sexually abusive behaviors in the future. As we learned in Conversation #2, most adult abusers report having committed their first act of sexual abuse before the age of 18. So if we focus our efforts only on adults after they've abused, we will never reach our vision of a sexual abuse-free society.

Typical or Problematic?

Because some sexual behaviors of children are in fact expected at different ages and stages of their development, parents, child care professionals, educators and other youth-serving professionals need to learn how to tell these typical behaviors from those that might actually cause a problem for the child or other children. Here are some tips to help you better learn the differences:

Obvious Differences:

A sexual behavior is considered problematic and may be abusive if there is a difference in power or authority in the relationship between the participants. Sometimes, the difference in power or authority is obvious, for example, when there is a difference in:

- ♦ Age—one child is 3 or more years older than the other.
- ♦ Size—one child is physically larger, or one is small for his/her age.
- ♦ Strength—one child is physically strong, or the other slight.
- ♦ Development—one child may have mental or physical disabilities that set them apart.

Subtle differences:

Sometimes the differences in power or authority among children are not always obvious to adults. When evaluating the sexual interactions of children, it is important for adults to understand the ways children think about themselves in relation to their peers and older children. Some of the factors that can greatly influence children's behaviors can be more subtle, for example, when there is a difference in:

- ♦ Popularity—one child's popularity gives him influence over others.
- ♦ Self-image—one child has low-self esteem and little confidence.

Temporary differences:

In addition to these obvious and subtle differences, there are also temporary differences in power or authority that can result from the actions of adults or through child play. For example, when:

- ♦ An older child is put in charge of another child, such as when babysitting; or,
- ♦ Children are playing a game where someone is made the "king" or the "leader".

Test Your Knowledge

You walk in the room to find your child and two friends with their pants down, showing each other their genitals. What if ...

- ♦ The children are about the same age and developmental levels and they giggle and whisper when they are discovered.
- ♦ One of the children is developmentally several years younger than the other two. The younger child appears relieved when he sees you come in the room and seems confused by what is happening.

What You Can Do

1. If you suspect the behaviors you have seen are the **typical behaviors** of children who are exploring their bodies and their sexuality, don't panic. Calmly interrupt the behavior, and redirect the children to another activity. You may also want to speak privately to your child later about the behavior and discuss your family's rules or beliefs about it. It is important to stay calm and not to confront your child in an angry or shaming way.
2. If you suspect a child has been sexually abused, contact your local child protective services. To locate the child protective services reporting number in your state, as well as access to other resources, call Childhelp at 800-4-A-CHILD.
8. If you are unsure about what you would do, you're not alone. Most parents and many professionals have not been trained to handle these situations. In Conversation #6, we will discuss specific things you can do and say that will give you the confidence to address both typical and problematic situations with confidence should they come up.
3. Check with your local Enough Abuse Campaign site to learn about free workshops in your community for parents and professionals on this topic. If your community is not yet an Enough Abuse Campaign site and you wish to help organize such a workshop, contact us at info@enoughabuse.org.

Responding to Sexual Behaviors of Children

Skills You Can Learn to Respond Appropriately

Conversation #6

In Conversation #5, we discussed ways to distinguish “typical sexual behaviors” of children that are a common and expected feature of normal child development from “problematic sexual behaviors” that are inappropriate, coercive or abusive. We also indicated that in over 40% of child sexual abuse cases, older children or teens are involved in committing these offenses. So it’s important for parents and those who supervise children not only to know how to distinguish these behaviors from each other but also how to respond appropriately when witnessing either type.

1. **Do not ignore** what you have witnessed. If you see children engaged in typical or problematic sexual behaviors, don’t pretend you didn’t see it, don’t walk out of the room, or wait for your spouse to deal with it later. Children expect and want adults to correct, validate or help them interpret what is happening around them. By refusing to ignore what you have witnessed, you can help children feel safe and protected.

While we learned in Conversation # 3 that those who sexually abuse children can be socially adept, in fact, many have deficits in their ability to communicate feelings that are not superficial. Modeling good communication for our children, therefore, can help them gain these skills and protect them, not only from being victims of sexual abuse but from developing behaviors that could lead to the abuse of others.

2. **Remain calm.** This can be challenging, given that most of us are uncomfortable witnessing sexual behaviors in children and probably haven’t had much practice talking about them. In fact, depending on the situation, you might have very strong feelings about what you have observed. No matter what you feel, however, approach the situation with

calmness. This will send the message that you are in control of the situation, willing to understand what is happening, and able to respond in the right way.

3. **Avoid shaming.** Don't begin the conversation with statements like: "What on earth are you doing!" "Get out of here right away!" "You are bad to do something like this!" "Wait until I tell your parents!" First, you really can't assess the situation until you ask about it and get more information. Secondly, whether the behavior is typical or problematic, it is important not to shame the children involved. Shame is when a person does something wrong and is made to believe, therefore, that he or she must be bad, too. Children need to know that even if the behavior is wrong or bad, it doesn't mean that he or she is a bad person.
4. **Describe what you are seeing.** Begin the conversation by simply stating what you see. Don't be afraid to use the correct names of private body parts. For example, from a parent: "I saw you showing Johnny your penis." From a teacher: "I saw that you and Jenny pulled down your pants near the tree in the school yard." From a school bus driver: "I see that the two of you are making out on the back of the bus." From a principal: "I see that you are in the girls' bathroom and looking at girls from under the stalls."
5. **Label your feelings.** It's okay to say: "I am very confused by what I'm seeing." "I am uncomfortable..." "I'm embarrassed..." By accurately labeling how the sexual behavior is making you feel, you let the child or children know that their behavior can have a strong affect on others. By labeling and expressing your feelings, you provide the opportunity for the child or children to modify their behavior in response to those feelings.
6. **Foster empathy.** Point out how the behavior affects other bystanders. If there is another child or children involved who seem/s upset or uncomfortable, point out what you observe that leads you to that conclusion. For example, "I think that Johnny is uncomfortable. He seems confused and upset seeing your penis." or "I was alerted to this behavior at the back of the bus because others were very uncomfortable and embarrassed by what they saw."

By doing this, you help children learn that their behavior affects others and that it's important to pick up visual cues about other people's feelings. In addition to deficits in communication, those who sexually abuse children often have deficits in empathy. They dismiss or don't care that their behavior

hurts others, only that it satisfies themselves. By pointing out how a child's behavior affects others, you set the expectation, because of empathy for those around them, that children should be deterred from public displays of private behaviors (e.g., masturbation in children, making out in teens) or from inappropriate, coercive or abusive behaviors.

7. **Hold children accountable.** In responding appropriately to children's typical or problematic sexual behaviors, remember that it's not about blaming or shaming. It's not about finding out why or even about breaking rules. It is about helping the child own their behavior, feel responsibility for the impact it has on others, and change the behavior so others won't be hurt.

Getting More Information is a Good Thing

A kindergarten teacher walked into the boys' bathroom to discover one child standing and another kneeling with his hands inside the other boy's pants. She stopped for a minute and then calmly described what she saw: "I see, Johnny, that you have your hands inside your classmate's pants. I am confused about this. Can you tell me what is happening?" The child then went on to say that Johnny had gotten his shirt stuck inside his pant zipper and that he was trying to help get it unstuck.

Melanie's teachers were becoming upset about her constantly rubbing her genitals in school. At first, they tried to redirect her to other activities. It wasn't working. They called her parents to say that her behavior was starting to affect other children and that if it didn't stop, she would have to stay home from school until it was resolved. Instead of shaming the child, her parents calmly asked her about the behavior. She complained about being itchy and uncomfortable. A visit to the pediatrician confirmed a common urinary tract infection. After a bout of antibiotics the child was fine and returned to school.

What You Can Do

If you suspect a child has been sexually abused, contact your local child protective services. To locate the child protective services reporting number in your state, as well as other resources, call Childhelp at 800-4-A-CHILD.

If you suspect or know that your child is exhibiting problematic sexual behaviors, you should be aware that there is help available to your child and family. For information about the assessment and treatment resources available in your state, go to the “Help” section of the EAC’s website—www.enoughabuse.org.

Check out the “Event” section of your local Enough Abuse Campaign site for free workshops in your community for parents and professionals on this topic. If your community is not yet an Enough Abuse Campaign site and you wish to help organize such a workshop, contact us at info@masskids.org.

Talk to Your Children

Start Early and Communicate Often

Conversation #7

As we have learned, child sexual abusers frequently groom children gradually over time. As a result, a child will often not fully understand what is happening until the abuse is well underway. At that point, the child may believe—in fact, will most likely have been told by the abuser—that they are to blame for what is happening, and that, if they tell, they will get into a lot of trouble.

As adults, it is our responsibility to communicate to children that it is okay to talk to us or ask questions about any situations that make them feel confused or uncomfortable. We need to help children understand that, no matter what, their feelings will be respected and taken seriously.

There are key prevention messages we can share with children about their bodies and their rights that will help them feel more confident, and that may reduce their risk of abuse. Sharing these messages with your child will make it more likely that he or she will talk to you about anything confusing that might happen to them in the future, including any behaviors that might lead to sexual abuse.

You can begin sharing these concepts with children as early as three years of age. Remember these are prevention messages. It's easy when you start early and reinforce these messages often. Don't postpone speaking to your child until they are "just a little older". The most frequent age of child abuse victims is nine and nearly a quarter of victims are under eight years of age.

What You Can Do

Here are some **"Parent Talking Points"** that you can use to increase your child's safety. Practice saying them, and then share them with your child.

1. *"All the parts of our bodies are good and special and they deserve care and respect. Just like knees and noses, all body parts have their own*

names. We can refer to them by those names without feeling embarrassed. The names for what some people call 'private parts' are penis, vagina, breasts, and buttocks."

Talk to your child about these body parts in an open and relaxed way. Mentioning the correct names for private body parts during your child's bath time can be a comfortable and natural occasion to share this information. Remember, when we purposely avoid mentioning private body parts, we send our children the message that these parts are not to be spoken about and mentioning them makes us uncomfortable. Sexual abusers count on children to follow their parents' lead not to bring up matters involving private body parts. If they know that children will be reluctant to bring up any issue about private body parts, the abuser gains confidence they can abuse without being found out.

2. *"Grown-ups and older children have no business 'playing' with a child's private body parts. Sometimes grown-ups need to help children with washing or wiping these body parts, but that's not the same as playing with them. Sometimes doctors need to examine these body parts if there is a problem. But they never do that without a nurse or parent present and it's never a secret."*
3. *"Grown-ups and older children never, ever need help from children with their private body parts. If any grown-up or older child should ask for this kind of help, you can come and tell me right away, even if it's someone in our family or someone we know. Also, if any grown-up or older child shows you their private parts or pictures of private parts, you can come and tell me. I promise I will listen and I will not be angry. If you are ever feeling 'mixed up' about anything, including secrets, feelings, or private body parts, you can tell me and I promise I will help you."*
4. *"Children, and adults, too, have body boundaries that you should not cross. So it's important to follow the bathing suit rule—never touch other children on the parts of their bodies that would be covered by their bathing suit. It will be upsetting to them and to their parents, teachers, and friends. It will be a problem for you, too. If you are curious about all this, come and tell me and we can talk about it. Remember, if you are ever feeling 'mixed up' or confused about anything, including secrets, feelings, or private body parts, you can tell me and I promise I will help you."*

5. *“Surprises are good for children but secrets are not. Surprises are secrets that are meant to be fun when they are told, like a surprise party. But secrets that are not supposed to be told can be dangerous because they don’t let me know if you are safe. For example, if a friend is playing with matches, someone offers you drugs, or someone is playing with your private body parts or asking you to help them with theirs, I won’t be able to keep you safe if I don’t know about it.”*
6. *“You are a special person and deserve to be treated with love and respect. You are special in so many ways. You are ...”*

Children with a strong sense of self-esteem and who are confident and assertive may be less likely to be targeted by a sexual abuser. Find ways and words to express love to your child every day. Spend quality time with your child and always provide appropriate supervision. Just as parents have to remind children regularly to do homework, clean their rooms, brush their teeth, etc., parents need to have ongoing communication with their children about these important body safety messages.

Avoid a one-time lecture or discussion about child sexual abuse. Instead take the opportunity to weave these simple prevention messages into everyday conversations and situations. Let your children know that talking to them about these issues means you are serious about your responsibility to protect them.

**REMEMBER—it’s easy, if you
start early and communicate often.**

We hope these tips have helped you better understand the nature and scope of child sexual abuse. If you are interested in speaking with other parents, concerned adults, and trained professionals about this information, go to www.enoughabuse.org and check out events in your community where you can gain more information and skills about how to reduce the risk of abuse for your child. Working together, we as parents, adults and communities can prevent the sexual abuse of our children.

If you suspect a child has been sexually abused, contact your local child protective services. To locate the child protective services reporting number in your state, as well as other resources, call Childhelp at 800-4-A-CHILD.

The Impact of Child Sexual Abuse on Children

Tactics Abusers Use So Children Won't Tell

Conversation #8

Children who are sexually abused or exploited often experience feelings of confusion, guilt, shame and anger about what happened to them. As adults, they often relate feeling robbed of their right to a safe and healthy childhood. They describe feelings of hopelessness, difficulty trusting others, low self-esteem, and self-destructive behaviors. Without help, many can suffer into adulthood with depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, relationship problems, and further physical or sexual victimization.

It's important to recognize that with support from loved ones and/or help from professionals, many children, adolescents and adult survivors can and do find hope and healing. However, children who are sexually abused and who can't tell anyone or don't receive appropriate help when they do tell are at far greater risk than the general population for emotional, social and physical problems. When they do face these problems, like all human beings, they look for ways to cope so they can get through each day and try to lead a normal life,

Some of these coping behaviors may appear to ease the trauma, but only temporarily. Ultimately, they become problems in themselves. Some of these include turning to alcohol and drugs to help numb the emotional pain they feel. Some use food to give themselves comfort, and overeat to the point of becoming obese, often in an unconscious attempt to appear less desirable to an abuser. Others engage in promiscuous sexual behaviors in desperate attempts to feel loved and accepted. According to the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study, these attempts to cope with past trauma are also *high-risk health behaviors* that can cause diseases that are among the most frequent causes of

death and premature death in our country, including heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.

To significantly change these outcomes for children, therefore, our principal goals must be to prevent child sexual abuse from *ever happening in the first place* and to identify early children who have been sexually abused.

Tactics Abusers Use to Keep Kids from Telling

Most parents believe that their children would tell them if someone tried to sexually abuse them. Parents and children with a strong relationship built on trust and good communication might make some kids feel more comfortable telling their parents about the sexual approaches of an adult or older child. However, you should know that abusers often use both subtle and overt tactics on children so they won't tell and ruin their cover.

Here are some of the things abusers can say that make it difficult for children to tell:

“If you tell anybody...”

- ♦ *I will not be able to take you on special trips and do fun things.*
- ♦ *I will not be able to give you any more great gifts, like video games and money.*
- ♦ *I will not be able to be your friend anymore or be around to give you any special attention.*

Or

- ♦ *Your family will be angry and disgusted with you.*
- ♦ *They'll stop loving you.*
- ♦ *You'll get into a lot of trouble with your parents and teachers.*
- ♦ *All your friends will think you're weird.*

Or

- ♦ *Nobody will believe you, anyway. It's my word against yours and nobody thinks I would be involved in something like this.*
- ♦ *I will be sent to jail and I know you don't want to be responsible for that.*
- ♦ *You know it's your fault that this happened.*
- ♦ *You're in this just as much as I am. I can tell from the way your body reacts that you like it.*

Or

- ♦ *I will find you and you'll pay for it.*
- ♦ *I just might have to see to it that your dog disappears.*
- ♦ *I just might have to hurt your parents and your brothers and sisters.*

Children Rarely Lie About Sexual Abuse

When children do have the courage to tell someone, they must be believed and supported. Children rarely lie about sexual abuse. In fact, when they do tell, they often only reveal some of what happened. They need reassurance that their disclosure won't result in what the abuser has told them—that everyone will be angry, disgusted or won't believe them.

Often children test adults first to see their reaction. If parents react in an upset and emotional way or begin questioning the child's truthfulness, some children will simply recant. In other words, they may take back what they said or minimize what happened. But that's not the same as lying about it. So if a child discloses, it's important to stay calm and be supportive. Tell the child you believe them, it was not their fault, they are brave for telling, and you will protect them and get help to make sure it never happens again.

So think before you say:

- ♦ *"This couldn't happen to my child. All the people we know are nice."*
- ♦ *"I don't have to worry. My kids tell me everything."*

- ♦ *“I can’t talk to my kids about this. I wouldn’t even know where to begin.”*
- ♦ *“I don’t know what I would do if it did happen, so I’d rather not think about it.”*

Use the information in this and previous “Conversations” to get familiar with the facts about child sexual abuse.

Remember: Together, we can prevent the abuse of our children and give each child the safe and healthy childhood he or she deserves.

Reporting suspected child sexual abuse is everyone’s responsibility—whether a mandated reporter or private citizen. If you suspect a child has been sexually abused, contact your local child protective services. To locate the child protective services in your state, as well as other resources, call Childhelp at 800-4-A-CHILD.

Internet Safety

Keeping Your Children Safe Online

Conversation #9

We are all surrounded by technology—the internet, cell phones, texts, instant messaging services, chat rooms, emails, gaming consoles and social networks. And it is constantly evolving.

While there are a great many benefits, there are also associated risks. Unfortunately, children and teenagers are often not aware of these risks or don't fully understand the real-life implications of what they do while online. Don't be uninformed. Understand the scope of the problem of child sexual exploitation while online, learn how to reduce your child's risk and what you can do to protect them.

You should know that:

- ♦ Only 1/3 of households with Internet access are proactively protecting their children using filtering or blocking software. (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children)
- ♦ 75% of children are willing to share personal information online about themselves in exchange for goods and services. (eMarketer)
- ♦ 71% of all parents reported that they stop monitoring their child's use of the Internet after the child turns 14, not knowing that most of all Internet-related missing children are 15 years of age or older. (Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office)
- ♦ One in 33 youth received an aggressive sexual solicitation in the past year. According to the survey, these young people are called on the phone or asked to meet somewhere by a strangers who use correspondence, money, or gifts via the U. S. Postal Service to contact them. (Youth Internet Safety Survey)

According to the University of New Hampshire's Crimes Against Children

Research Center:

- ♦ One in five U. S. teenagers who regularly log on to the Internet said they have received unwanted sexual solicitation via the Web. Solicitations are defined as requests to perform sexual activities or sexual talk, or to give personal sexual information.
- ♦ 77% of the targets for online predators were age 14 or older. Another 22% were under 13.
- ♦ Only 25% of solicited children were distressed by their encounters and told a parent.
- ♦ Only 17% of youth and 11% of parents could name a specific authority, e.g., police, FBI, the Cyber Tipline, and Internet Service Providers, to which they could report an Internet crime.

True or False?

Very few teens would ever send suggestive photos or images of themselves to their friends.

You decide. One in five teens between the ages of 13 and 19 have shared nude or semi-nude images of themselves either via text or by posting online; over 1 in 10 have shared suggestive photos of themselves. Teen girls are only slightly more likely to do this than boys. (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, and Cosmogirl.com)

Sexting is sending sexually explicit messages via cell phone or instant messenger. As technology has advanced and cell phones have the capability to record and send photos and video, the practice of sending suggestive and explicit pictures has increased, especially among teens.

You should be aware that sexting involving minors may violate laws in your state and, in some states, is legally considered child pornography. In many cases the legal ramifications for a minor sexting, either pictures of him or herself or passing along the sexts of another minor, are quite serious. For more information regarding the laws on sexting in your state, call or visit your local District Attorney's office.

What You Can Do

1. **Educate yourself** about technology and the Internet.
Go to www.enoughabuse.org and browse our list of state and national resources and links.
2. **Supervise your child** when on the Internet and help them become responsible users.
3. **Start a conversation** with your child about the benefits and risks of using technology. Work together to establish age-appropriate ground rules for Internet usage. By involving your children in discussions about rights, responsibilities, privacy, and personal safety, they will be more likely to follow your family's rules and establish their own personal standards of Internet safety.
4. **Keep the conversation going.** As technology changes and your children grow older, you will want to revisit your family's ground rules and continue educating your child or teenager on how to protect themselves, their private information, and how to be responsible users of technology.

To significantly change these outcomes for children, therefore, our principal goals must be to prevent child sexual abuse from *ever happening in the first place* and to identify early children who have been sexual abused.

Reporting suspected child sexual abuse is everyone's responsibility—whether a mandated reporter or private citizen. If you suspect a child has been sexually abused, contact your local child protective services. To locate the child protective services in your state, as well as other resources, call Childhelp at 800-4-A-CHILD.

The Public's Opinion on Child Sexual Abuse

The Public Believes Prevention is Possible

Conversation #10

Ever wonder what other people are thinking and saying about child sexual abuse? In 2003, the newly established Enough Abuse Campaign conducted a statewide public opinion poll to help understand the public's level of concern and knowledge about the problem. We hoped the results would help us develop an effective set of strategies to prevent it.

We were not disappointed. An overwhelming majority of those surveyed identified child sexual abuse as a serious or very serious problem in the state of Massachusetts. Importantly, nearly half said they would participate in local community educational programs to learn more about it. That feedback provided the impetus for the Campaign's development of a comprehensive educational program that would break the silence, shame, and confusion about child sexual abuse and encourage dialogue and action to prevent it.

In 2007, we completed our second statewide public opinion survey of Massachusetts's residents on the topic. A total of 650 telephone surveys were conducted by MC Squared Consulting. Statewide interviews were completed with 350 randomly selected Massachusetts residents over 18 years of age; 300 were completed in three selected areas of the state where the Enough Abuse Campaign has been implemented—the North Quabbin region, Gloucester, and Newton.

Key Results

- ♦ 8 out of 10 residents believe child sexual abuse is a serious problem in the Commonwealth; more than 3 out of 4 citizens believe it is preventable.
- ♦ Respondents believe that children are most at risk from abuse by adult family members (58.2%), adult non-family members, friends and neighbors (31.7%), adult strangers (3.4%), and another child or teen (1.2%).

- ♦ 93% believe adults and communities, rather than children, should take prime responsibility for preventing child sexual abuse. This is up from 70% who believed this in the first Enough Abuse Campaign survey conducted in 2003.
- ♦ 64% of citizens surveyed said they would be willing to participate in local trainings to learn more about child sexual abuse and how to prevent it; this is up significantly from 48% in the 2003 survey.
- ♦ 50% of those surveyed ranked protection from child abuse, including child sexual abuse, as the most important to a child's well being; quality education and quality medical care were ranked next at 20% and 15% respectively. Economic security and quality childcare were ranked last at 7% and 1.5%.
- ♦ 36.6% said that any state funds allocated to combat child sexual abuse should first be spent to educate adults and communities about how they can prevent the problem; better police and child protective service investigations was ranked the second priority at 35.4%; more publicity about the Sex Offender Registry was ranked next at 20.5%. Only 7.5% rated more treatment for convicted sex offenders as a priority.

Since then thousands of parents, youth, teachers, child care workers, clinicians, social workers, and other youth-serving professionals have participated in free community workshops and presentations conducted by local volunteers trained by the Campaign. Feedback has been consistently good.

- ♦ 95% said that the trainings helped them identify problem or abusive behaviors in adults;
- ♦ 94% said they learned how to assess unhealthy sexual behaviors in children and to respond in clear and non-shaming ways to address them;
- ♦ 95% learned where to go or who to talk to if they suspect someone is sexually abusing;
- ♦ 98% would recommend the training to others.

The Enough Abuse Campaign has made progress on many fronts. Since its launch in late 2002 when it was awarded a grant by the U.S. Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention (CDC) to build adult and community responsibility for preventing child sexual abuse, the Campaign has:

- ♦ **Assessed public opinion**
- ♦ **Organized for community change**
- ♦ **Educated adults and professionals**
- ♦ **Tested our model, and**
- ♦ **Documented success**

Our task now is to “Build the Movement” by educating and enlisting concerned citizens and communities all across our state. As a member of the Enough Abuse Campaign, you are an integral part of that movement. Through your involvement, you are helping take the public’s belief about child sexual abuse and transforming it into a tangible and achievable plan of action by:

- ♦ **Educating** those you know about the nature and scope of the epidemic and equipping them with useful and specific skills to confront it;
- ♦ **Communicating** to others key prevention messages they can share with their children to strengthen parent/child bonds and reduce the risk that children will be targeted for abuse;
- ♦ **Advocating** for prevention trainings and policies for a wide range of youth-serving organizations and groups that can protect children by strengthening the circle of safety around them so they can go about their job of “just being kids.”

Reporting suspected child sexual abuse is everyone’s responsibility—whether a mandated reporter or private citizen. If you suspect a child has been sexually abused, contact your local child protective services. To locate the child protective services in your state, as well as other resources, call Childhelp at 800-4-A-CHILD.

*Thank you for all your efforts
to keep children safe
and your community strong!*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Greater Bay Area CAPC Coalition began in 2000. It is comprised of ten county-based Child Abuse Prevention Councils:

Alameda	San Francisco
Contra Costa	San Mateo
Marin	Santa Clara
Monterey	Solano
Napa	Sonoma

The purpose of the CAPC Coalition is to bring awareness of child abuse to the community and provide strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect. We host conferences and trainings both individually and as a region. The Enough Abuse Campaign is one of our regional approaches to help prevent child abuse. Most counties provide mandated reporter trainings. Our members share knowledge and resources to better serve children and families in the Greater Bay Area. If you would like more information about the Coalition, please go to our website:

www.bayareapreventchildabuse.org

or call 888-904-2272, or contact any individual Child Abuse Prevention Council.

The "Enough Abuse Campaign" name, logo, materials and website are the property of the Massachusetts Citizens for Children (MCC) as the legal entity representing Massachusetts Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Partnership (MCSAPP). They may not be altered or adapted without MCC's permission.

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Greater Bay Area Child Abuse Prevention Councils

ALAMEDA COUNTY

To Report Child Abuse: 510-259-1800
Child Abuse Prevention Council:
510-780-8989
Parental Stress Hotline: 510-893-5444
[http://alamedasocialservices.org/
public/services/community/partners/
accapc/about.cfm](http://alamedasocialservices.org/public/services/community/partners/accapc/about.cfm)

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

To Report Child Abuse: 877-881-1116
Child Abuse Prevention Council:
925-798-0546
www.capc-coco.org

MARIN COUNTY

To Report Child Abuse: 415-473-7153
Marin Child Abuse Prevention Council:
415-507-0181
www.marinadvocates.org

MONTEREY COUNTY

To Report Child Abuse: 831-755-4661
Child Abuse Prevention Council:
831-755-4474

NAPA COUNTY

To Report Child Abuse: 707-253-4261
Child Abuse Prevention Council:
707-252-1123 ext. 106
www.copefamilycenter.org

SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY

To Report Child Abuse: 415-558-2650
Child Abuse Council:
415-668-0494
TALK Line: 415-441-KIDS
www.sfcapc.org

SAN MATEO COUNTY

To Report Child Abuse: 650-595-7922
24-Hour Parent Stress Warmline:
1-888-220-7575
www.smcccat.org

SANTA CLARA COUNTY

To Report Child Abuse:
San Jose Area: 408-299-2017
Gilroy/Morgan Hill Area: 408-683-0601
Palo Alto Area: 650-493-1186
Child Abuse Council: 408-293-5450
Parental Stress Hotline: 408-279-8228

SOLANO COUNTY

To Report Child Abuse: 800-544-8696
Child Abuse Prevention Council:
707-421-7229
Solano Safequest: 866-4UR-SAFE or
707-422-7345

SONOMA COUNTY

To Report Child Abuse: 707-565-4304
or 800-870-7064
Prevent Child Abuse-Sonoma County:
707-585-6108
[www.preventchildabuse-
sonoma-county.org](http://www.preventchildabuse-sonoma-county.org)

