



KNOW



SEE



RESPOND

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL ABUSE





THANK YOU for taking action to protect kids from sexual abuse! The Five Days of Action are about inspiring and educating adults to protect children. This booklet will take you through the basics of “Know. See. Respond.,” and can be used as a resource beyond the Five Days. It offers tangible steps for preventing and intervening in abuse. You will find tips, exercises, and examples of everyday actions that you can take to create a safer environment for the children in your life. For more information on the Five Days of Action visit, www.fivedaysofaction.org.

exercise You probably already do things that protect the kids in your care. List some of the things you currently do to protect children from abuse: (i.e. talk to your kid about their bodies)

01.

take notes here:



KNOW

If we don't understand child sexual abuse, we can't end it. Experts estimate that one in 10 children are sexually abused before their 18th birthday.¹

FACT: 10% of victims of child sexual abuse are abused by strangers.^{2,3}
That means the greatest risk to children doesn't come from strangers, but from friends, family, or people the family trusts. People who abuse children look and act just like everyone else. They often go out of their way to appear trustworthy, seeking out settings where they can gain access to children.

FACT: Nearly 40% of children are abused by older or larger children.²
When you think of child sexual abuse, you may not have ever considered that it happens between peers as well. Abuse happens whenever a stronger or more powerful person asserts themselves against the will of another less-powerful person. Essentially, abuse starts as a boundary violation. One way to protect the children in your care is to teach them about healthy boundaries, and discuss your boundaries with adults and other children.

exercise 01. Knowing that abuse starts with boundary violations, list some ideas for talking about boundaries with the kids in your care:
take notes here:

exercise List three boundaries you can model this week:
take notes here:

02. 1 2 3

exercise 03. What are some steps you can take in your everyday life to enforce healthy boundaries?
take notes here:

TIP: FOR PARENTS:

Schedule time to speak with your kids' youth serving organizations (YSO's) about how they protect kids while in their care.

Here are some examples of what to ask:

- Ask them for a copy of their child protection policy. Does the policy include limiting isolated one-on-one situations?
- How are employees and volunteers screened? Best practices include an in-depth application, personal and professional references, criminal background check, and an extensive interview.
- Do older and young children interact? If so, how?
- Are there clear procedures for reporting suspicions or incidences of abuse?
- Are staff and volunteers trained in child sexual abuse prevention training?
- Can parents tour the facilities?

take notes here and on the next page:

exercise
04.

Write down the YSO's your kids are involved in. Place a check next to each one as you have these conversations with them. If your YSO answers "no" to any of these questions, you can find templates to help them create child protection policies at www.fivedaysofaction.org

TIP: FOR YSO EMPLOYEES:

Do you know the answers to the questions listed on the previous page? If not, ask your supervisor for a copy of your child protection policy and discover how your organization responds to these issues.

take notes here:





TIP: FOR FAMILIES

You may already have this, just not on paper. A family code of conduct is simply a set of guidelines that reflect the values of your family. As parents or caregivers, we are responsible for setting and enforcing those boundaries because they help protect your children. This should be a living, breathing document; as kids grow, you will need to adjust some boundaries or add new guidelines. Make sure to discuss the guidelines with your kids and get their input. Ask them what they think and what they want to include.

Having the written list will make it easier to communicate your rules to babysitters, youth serving organizations, and other adults. Here are some examples of topics to include:

- **Play Dates:** i.e. Who will be at the house? Will there be older siblings? How do they supervise? How well do you know the family?
- **Photos:** i.e. Is anyone allowed to post photos of your children?
- **Sleepovers:** i.e. Will you allow your child to participate in sleepovers? What are the sleeping arrangements? These guidelines may overlap with play dates.
- **Babysitters:** i.e. How do you choose who babysits? What are the rules for babysitters? What are the rules for evening sitting vs. daytime sitting?
- **Internet & Social Media Safety:** i.e. At what age will they get a cell phone or social media? How will you monitor use? Where will devices live at night? Discuss what information should never be given out online.
- **Lessons & Camps:** i.e. What are the safety policies? What does supervision look like? These guidelines will overlap with your youth serving organization guidelines.

exercise Create a family code of conduct.

05. *take notes here:*

OUR CODE OF CONDUCT



TIP: FOR YSO EMPLOYEES

Your organization should have a pre-existing code of conduct for child safety. This code of conduct is a document that describes how staff, volunteers, and older youth will interact and conduct themselves with children. A good code of conduct is balanced. It allows for interactions that are warm, encouraging, and appropriate; it clearly prohibits interactions that are dangerous, inappropriate, and harmful. It should contain descriptions that reflect the values and activities within the YSO.

Review your code of conduct and ask these questions, taking notes on the page to the right for future reference:

- Is your code of conduct shared with parents and children, and/or available on a website? Sharing creates transparency. It helps everyone cooperate with and support the guidelines that staff and volunteers must follow.
- Is the code of conduct posted publicly? Where can you find it?
- Are staff, volunteers, and participating members required to review and sign the code? An in-person review can help everyone remain on the same page about the YSO's safeguarding goals.
- What are the organization's guidelines around appropriate and encouraged interactions with children?
- What are the organization's guidelines around harmful and prohibited interactions children?
- What is the organization's policy on one-on-one situations with children?

exercise

Review your code of conduct.

05.

take notes here:

OUR CODE OF CONDUCT

SEE

Signs of Child Sexual Abuse

The signs of abuse aren't always obvious, but they are often there. There aren't usually external, physical signs that a child is being sexually abused. However, emotional or behavioral changes in a child are common. Trauma may be the root of what is typically labelled 'bad' or difficult' behavior.



Here are some signs to look for:

- Behavioral problems, physical aggression, non-compliance, and rebellion
- Anxiety, depression, fear, withdrawal, and suicidal thoughts
- Too perfect" or overly compliant behavior
- Nightmare, bed-wetting, bullying, and cruelty to animals
- Lack in interest in friends, sports, or other activities

Red Flag Behaviors

We know that 90% of people who sexually abuse children are someone the child knows and trust.^{2,3} So how do you recognize if an adult is a danger to a child?

Offenders often operate through a process called "grooming." Child grooming is the deliberate process of gradually initiating and maintaining a sexual relationship with victims in secrecy. Grooming allows offenders to slowly overcome boundaries long before sexual abuse occurs. On the surface, grooming a child can look like a close relationship between the offending adult, the targeted child and (potentially) the child's caregivers. The grooming process is often misleading because the offender may be well-known or highly regarded in the community. As a result, it's easy to trust them.

TIP: If you know what red flag behaviors to look for you can take action and intervene when a child is vulnerable or uncomfortable. Here are some examples of red flag behaviors and examples of how to intervene:

Special Attention/Preference to a Child – Offenders are often seen pressing boundaries and breaking rules but are rarely caught in the act of abuse. When you see a boundary being crossed, describe the inappropriate behavior to the person who crossed the boundary. Have family rules about when and how adults engage when your children (great to add to your family code of conduct).

i.e. "We don't let Jimmy go to the movies alone without a parent."

Gift Giving – Gift giving of any expense – large or small – is a grooming technique used to flatter children and their families into trusting the individual. If another adult is overly interested in your child and family, consider this a red flag.

i.e. "It is so generous that you gave Chole this jewelry, but we only allow gifts on birthdays."

Touching or Hugging the Child – Offenders will test the limits by starting to introduce touch into the relationship. They might put their arm around the child or ask for a hug to see how the child reacts. They may do it in front of other adults. If the caregiver does not intervene or object, and the child is uncomfortable, it can confuse the child on what type of touch is appropriate. When you defend your child from uncomfortable touches, you build trust with the child and dissuade the offender.

i.e. "It looks like you are forcing Annie to hug you. She looks uncomfortable, please stop. We let Annie decide if and how she wants to show affection."



TIP: (Continued)

Sympathetic Listener - The offender will often listen to the child when they are excited or upset. They will start to build barriers between the child and their parents and friends by telling the child they care for them more than anyone else. Be open with your kids, let them know that even people they love can hurt them. Tell your children you will always be there for them and they can tell you anything. Do your best to listen to your kids, even when the days are hectic.

i.e. "Surprises make people happy. We don't want to keep a secret though because secrets can make people upset or unhappy. If anyone wants you to keep a secret, tell Mommy or Daddy. You can tell us anything."

Offers to help the family - The individual will offer to do special favors or help the caregivers to gain alone time with the child. Be sure to let other adults know that you do not approve of them being alone with your child without your permission or knowledge. Check-in regularly so other adults know you are watching.

i.e.: Drop in unexpectedly on a babysitter. Stay for the entire soccer practice, even until the last child leaves.

Gaining Access Via the Internet - Perpetrators will often pretend to be someone they aren't to gain access to kids online. They will pretend to share similar interests to gain trust, grooming them online. Know who your kids are talking to online.

i.e: Monitor what apps your children use and have limits to when and where they can use their devices. Perhaps at night, tablets, phones, and computers live in the caregiver's room.

exercise

01.

What are some personal examples of how you could respond to each red flag behavior above? Try to tailor each example to your child's unique situations, or the specific situations in which you interact with children. Learn more about the stages of grooming at www.fivedaysofaction.org.

take notes here:



RESPOND

There are three instances in which we need to react to sexual abuse: a child **discloses** abuse to us, we **discover** sexual abuse ourselves, or we have a reason to **suspect** it.

Speaking out can be scary. What if you don't know all the details? What if you aren't 100% sure? **Report anyway.** Legally, you do not need proof that abuse is occurring to make a report, only reasonable suspicion. Reporting child sexual abuse is key to preventing and intervening in abuse.

TIP: If a child disclosed abuse to you, they have taken a big risk. What you do next is very important. Take a deep breathe and give attention, compassion, and belief. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Listen calmly and openly.
- Don't fill in the gaps.
- Don't ask leading questions about the details.
- Ask open-ended questions like, "What happened next?"
- Let them know you believe them and that it isn't their fault.
- Don't overreact. When you react to a child's disclosure with anger or disbelief, the child is likely to feel even more ashamed, shut down, or change or retract the story.
- Say, "I believe you" and "what happened is not your fault."
- Don't promise that the information will be kept confidential.
- Seek the help of a professional who is trained to talk with the child about sexual abuse. Let the professional collect the details from the child. Head to www.fivedaysofaction.org to find Child Advocacy Centers and other resources in your state.
- Report sexual abuse to the police or to child protective services. Be clear and specific.



exercise

What are some specific ways you can respond to a child who discloses abuse to you?

01.

take notes here:

CONCLUSION

This is a lot of information about how to protect children from child sexual abuse. Feel free to take a few days to think about the information in this booklet, talk it over with your spouse, friends, and family, and refer back to it as often as needed.

exercise Now that you have completed this booklet, review your notes. List some action steps you are going to incorporate into your life to better protect children from abuse:

01.

take notes here:

exercise Visit www.fivedaysofaction.org and research your local resources for responding to child sexual abuse. Write down the websites and/or phone numbers here, so you have them on hand in case you ever need them.

02.

take notes here:



References:

1. Townsend, C. Rheingold, A.A., (2013) *Estimating a child sexual abuse prevalence rate for practitioners: A review of child sexual abuse prevalence studies*. Charleston, S.C., Darkness to Light. Retrieved from www.D2L.org.
2. Finkelhor, D. (2012) *Characteristics of crimes against juveniles*. Durham, NH: Crimes against Children Research Center.
3. Julia Whealin, Ph.D. (2007-05-22). "Child Sexual Abuse." National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, US Department of Veterans Affairs.

Materials are derived from YMCA of the USA's "Know. See. Respond." copyrighted in 2020. Content provided by Darkness to Light. To learn more or get trained to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse visit www.D2L.org