

How Can I Protect My Child?

Perhaps the most critical child sexual abuse prevention strategy for parents is good communication with your children. Talk to your child every day and really take time to really listen and observe.

Explain that his or her body belongs to them alone and that he or she has the right to say "no" to anyone who might try to touch them.

Tell your child that some adults may try to hurt children and make them do things the child doesn't feel comfortable doing. Often these grownups call what they are doing a "secret" between themselves and the child. Tell your child it is ok to tell these secrets to a trusted adult right away.

Explain that some adults may even threaten children by saying that their parents may be hurt or killed if the child ever shares the secret. Emphasize that an adult who does something like this is doing something wrong.

Tell your child that adults who they know, trust, and love or someone who might be in a position of authority (like a babysitter, an uncle, a teacher, or even a police officer) might try to make them do things the child doesn't feel comfortable doing. Emphasize that the vast majority of grownups never do this and that most adults are deeply concerned about protecting children from harm. Encourage your child to tell you as soon as possible if someone threatens them.

Make sure your child knows that if someone does something confusing to them, like touching or taking an inappropriate or exploitive photographs or giving them gifts, which you want to be told about it. Reassure the child and explain that he or she will not be blamed.

Why Do People Sexually Abuse Children?

It's mostly about power and control. They may feel they lack control in their relationships with adults, and find it by victimizing children. People who commit sex offenses against children know they have an easy target group to pick from. We teach children to respect and obey adults, but this can also make children vulnerable to be victims of child sexual abuse. Following the tips on the back page can help to protect your children.

Support Within Reach: Sexual Violence Resource Center is a private, non-profit organization helping women, children, and men in Itasca and Aitkin County, heal from the wounds of sexual violence. We offer the following services: Medical and Court Advocacy, assistance filing Protective/Restraining orders, Prevention/Education programming, support groups, one-to-one counseling, and a 24hr crisis line. Services are free and confidential.



Itasca Office:
1325 Fourth Street NW
Grand Rapids, MN 55744
218-326-5008 or
1-866-747-5008

Aitkin Office:
204 Second Street NW
Aitkin, MN 56431
218-927-6226 or
1-866-747-5008

Sexual Development in Children

Sexual development and curiosity in children is healthy and normal. Children may explore their sexual curiosity in different ways, such as:

Holding their genitals.

Occasional masturbation.

Playing games such as "doctor" and "house."

Holding hands, cuddling, or kissing peers.

Engaging in sexual jokes or conversation with friends.

However, some behaviors can be unhealthy and a sign of a bigger problem. For a detailed list of healthy and unhealthy sexual behaviors in preschool and grade school children, or if you have a question about the behavior of a child in your life, contact Support Within Reach at 218-326-5008 (Itasca), 218-927-6226 (Aitkin), or toll-free at 1-866-747-5008.



Child Sexual Abuse: Facts and Family Safety Tips

National statistics state **1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys** will be victims of child sexual abuse by the age of **18**. (Botash, Ann, MD, *Pediatric Annual*, May, 1997).



What is Child Sexual Abuse?

Child sexual abuse is when a person uses their force, authority, or power to engage a child in sexual behavior. Child sexual abuse can be committed by adults, adolescents, and even an older or physically stronger child. Child sexual abuse is a crime in all 50 states.



It can include:

- Inappropriately touching a child's genitals (penis, vagina, breasts, and anus).
- Making a child touch someone else's genitals.
- Putting body parts or objects in a child's mouth or genitals.
- Playing sexual games.

- Showing a child pornography.
- Photographing or videotaping a child in a sexual way or pose (child pornography).
- Making a child watch live sexual activity.
- Exposing someone's genitals to a child.
- Not allowing a child appropriate privacy when using the bathroom or undressing (Voyeurism).

Behavioral Warning Signs >>>

A child may be too confused or frightened to talk directly about sexual abuse. But, children may exhibit a variety of warning signs. Remember that one or two of these symptoms does not mean a child is being abused. You have to take a look at the overall picture of the child's new or disturbing behaviors to understand why they are occurring. The following signs are symptomatic of stress or trauma in a child's life:

- Change in appetite.
- Recurrent nightmares or disturbed sleep patterns.
- Regression to more infantile behavior (bed wetting, thumb sucking)
- Sexual language.
- Slang words for body parts.
- Slang words for body parts.
- Playing with dolls or toys in a sexual way.
- Talking about having an older friend.
- Talking about having a "secret" they can't talk about.
- Sudden poor school performance.
- Sexually explicit drawings.
- Trying to touch children or adults' genitals.
- Severe mood swings, being very irritable, emotional, sad, or intense anger.
- Increase in computer use, especially at odd hours or vary late.
- Aggressive or disruptive behavior.
- Running away.
- Delinquent behavior.
- Change in peer group.
- Suicidal ideation or threats.
- Chemical abuse (drugs, alcohol, inhalants).
- Self-Isolation; often being in his/her room; decrease in communicating with others.



Warning Signs of Sexually Abusive Behavior

Over 90% of sexually abused children know and trust the person who offends on them. (Finkelhor, 1994).

- Frequently offers to babysit different children for free or takes children on overnight outings.
- Takes a special interest in a new child every few months.
- Buys expensive or frequent gifts or money.
- Spends most of their time with children and has little interaction with adults.
- Frequently walks in on children or teens in the bathroom.
- Insists on showing a child affection who does not want it.
- Tries to get uninterrupted time alone with children or teens.
- Talks about sexual activity with children or fantasizes about sexual activity with children.
- Asks adult partners to dress like a child or teen during sexual activities.
- Was sexually abused as a child and refuses to get help.

Adapted from StopItNow! Minnesota, 2010

Can Children Sexually Abuse Other Children?



Yes. But, sometimes it is just innocent play.

Here are a few important things to consider:

Size: Is one child involved much stronger or bigger than the other child?

Power: Is one child bribing, threatening, or using physical force to overpower the other child?

Status: Does one of the children have more power or authority, like a babysitter?

Ability: Does one child have greater physical, mental, or emotional ability than the other? Is the victim developmentally delayed? Are they disabled?

If you answered yes to these questions, a report to social services or law enforcement may be appropriate.

Adapted from StopItNow! Minnesota, 2010

Physical Warning Signs >>>



- Sexually transmitted diseases.
- Unexplained bruising.
- Soiling or wetting long after successful toilet training was completed.
- Self-abusive behaviors including:
 - Cutting their body
 - Picking at skin
 - Burning their body
 - Head banging
- Torn or stained underclothing.
- Vaginal or rectal bleeding, pain, itching, swollen genitals.
- Vaginal discharge.
- Vaginal infection.

If your child is showing any of these physical symptoms contact your doctor for an appointment. A doctor can identify and document signs of child sexual abuse. They can also diagnose sexually transmitted diseases.

Q: What do I do if I Suspect Child Sexual Abuse?

- A:** First, children rarely lie about being victims of sexual assault/abuse. Take your child seriously. Listen and be supportive of your child, do not try to probe for more information than what your child is telling you, though this may be difficult to do. Let them know they are right to tell you what happened. Stay calm. Your response helps determine how the child will react to the abuse. Tell your child they are not to blame! Now it's time to take action—if you don't, other children will continue to be at risk!
- ✓ Report the suspected abuse to your local law enforcement or child protective services.
 - ✓ Call Support Within Reach for information, support, and help for you and your child.



Important Numbers

To report child sexual abuse or suspected child sexual abuse call:

Support Within Reach
218-326-5008/218-927-6226

Itasca County Child Protection
218-327-2941

Itasca County Sheriff
218-326-3477

Grand Rapids Police Dept.
218-326-3464