FOR THE SAKE OF GOD’S CHILDREN

Section Four
Resources

DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON
Revised 2010
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What is child abuse or neglect?

Child abuse includes, but is not limited to, the following:

1. Engaging in sexual activity with a child.
2. Denial of proper or necessary subsistence, education, medical care, or other care necessary for the child’s health.
3. Use of restraint procedures on a child that cause injury or pain.
4. Administration of prescriptive drugs or medication without the ongoing supervision of a licensed physician.
5. Providing alcoholic beverages or controlled substances.
6. Commission of any act, other than by accidental means, that threatens or results in any injury or death to the child.

Types of Child Abuse

Physical Abuse is any non-accidental physical injury to a child cause by an adult which results in or threatens serious injury. Often adults who physically abuse children do not intend to seriously injure the children but get carried away by anger and frustration in their own lives.

Neglect is the failure of a parent or guardian to provide a child with adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education or supervision. Neglect is a chronic problem often resulting not from poverty, but from lack of knowledge as to the proper care required by children.

Sexual Abuse is any physical contact with a child by an adult or older child in a position of power over the child, for the sexual gratification of the adult or older child. Other terms for sexual abuse include child molestation, incest (if the abuse is a member of the child’s family), or child pornography. Usually, child sexual abuse is not violent, and the child knows the abuser.

Emotional Abuse is an important factor in all forms of child abuse. To be hurt so much by someone who should care and protect is very damaging to the emotional development of a child. Adults who do not physically harm a child may cause emotional harm by using words which threaten, harshly criticize, ridicule or harass.

If you observe that a child is exhibiting any one of the signs of child abuse, be aware that the presence of any one of the signs does not confirm abuse or neglect. However, the presence of a number of these signs may be reason for consultation. It is very important not to jump to conclusions but rather to look carefully at the entire situation for evidence that would give you reason to suspect child abuse.

None of the signs alone proves that a child is being maltreated but when the signs appear repeatedly they should elicit concern.
Indicators of Abuse

Behavior Indicators of Physical Abuse
1. Wary of adults
2. Is either extremely aggressive or withdrawn
3. Is dependent and indiscriminate in his/her attachments
4. Is uncomfortable when other children cry
5. Generally controls his/her own crying
6. Exhibits a drastic behavior change when not with parents or caregivers
7. Is manipulative
8. Has poor self-concept
9. Exhibits delinquent behavior, such as running away from home
10. Uses or abuses alcohol and/or other drugs
11. Is self mutilating
12. Is frightened of parents, of going home
13. Is overprotective of or responsible for parents
14. Exhibits suicidal gestures and/or attempts suicide
15. Has behavior problems at school

Physical Indicators of Abuse
1. Has unexplained bruises or welts, often clustered or in a pattern
2. Has unexplained and/or unusual burns (cigarettes, doughnut-shaped, immersion lines, object-patterned)
3. Has unexplained bite marks
4. Has unexplained fractures or dislocations
5. Has unexplained abrasions or lacerations
6. Wets the bed. (Or explanation is inconsistent or improbable)

Indicators of Neglect

Neglect-Behavior Indicators
1. Is truant or tardy to school often or arrives early or stays late
2. Begs or steals food
3. Attempts suicide
4. Uses or abuses alcohol or drugs
5. Is extremely dependent or detached
6. Engages in delinquent behavior, such as prostitution or stealing

Neglect – Physical Indicators
1. Frequently is dirty, unwashed, hungry, inappropriately dressed
2. Engages in dangerous activities possibly because he/she generally is unsupervised
3. Is tired and listless
4. Has unattended physical problems
5. May appear to be over-worked and/or exploited
Emotional Abuse

Emotional Abuse Behavioral Indicators
1. Is overly eager to please
2. Seeks out adult contact
3. Views abuse as being warranted
4. Exhibits changes in behavior
5. Is excessively anxious
6. Is depressed
7. Is unwilling to discuss problems
8. Exhibits aggressive or bizarre behavior
9. Is withdrawn
10. Is apathetic
11. Is passive
12. Has unprovoked fits of yelling or screaming
13. Exhibits inconsistent behavior at home and school
14. Feels responsible for the abuser
15. Runs away from home
16. Attempts suicide
17. Has low self esteem
18. Exhibits a gradual impairment of health or personality
19. Has difficulty sustaining relationships
20. Has unrealistic goal setting
21. Is impatient
22. Is unable to communicate or express his/her feelings, needs or desires
23. Sabotages his/her chances of success
24. Lacks self confidence
25. Is self depreciating and has a negative self image

Emotional Abuse Physical Indicators
1. Has a sleep disorder (nightmares or restlessness)
2. Wets the bed
3. Exhibited developmental lags (stunting his/her physical, emotional and or mental growth)
4. Is hyperactive
5. Exhibits eating disorder

Sexual Abuse

Sexual Abuse Behavioral Indicators
1. Is reluctant to change clothes in front of others
2. Is withdrawn
3. Exhibits unusual sexual behavior and/or has venereal disease knowledge beyond that which is common for his/her development state
4. Has poor peer relationships
5. Either avoids or seeks out adults
6. Is pseudo-mature
7. Is manipulative
8. Is self conscious
9. Has problems with authority and rules
10. Exhibits eating disorders
11. Is self mutilating
12. Is obsessively clean
13. Uses or abuses alcohol and/or other drugs
14. Exhibits delinquent behavior such as running away from home
15. Exhibits extreme compliance or defiance
16. Is fearful or anxious
17. Exhibits suicidal gestures and/or attempts suicide
18. Is promiscuous
19. Engages in fantasy or infantile behavior
20. Is not willing to participate in sports activities
21. Has school difficulties

Sexual Abuse Physical Indicators
1. Has pain and or itching in the genital area
2. Has bruises or bleeding in the genital area
3. Has venereal disease
4. Has swollen genital parts
5. Has difficulty walking or sitting
6. Has torn, bloody and/or stained underclothing
7. Experiences pain when urinating
8. Is pregnant
9. Has vaginal or penile discharge.
10. Wets the bed
The following information is from the Diocese of Wilmington Guidelines for Developing Parish Personnel Manuals

4.04 HARASSMENT POLICY
The parish will not tolerate acts of harassment of its employees or any discrimination on the basis of age, race, color, national origin, sex, religion, or disability. All employees are responsible for ensuring that the workplace is free from all forms of harassment.

Refer to:
Religious Education Manual #4129.9
Catholic Schools Manual #4001.

COMMENTARY
Harassment Defined:

Harassment is unwelcome verbal or physical conduct, directed at an individual based upon age, race, color, national origin, sex, religion, or disability, which disrupts or interferes with another's work performance, or which creates an intimidating, offensive or hostile environment.

Examples of Harassment:

Harassment includes the use of insulting epithets or nicknames; the display of insulting or offensive cartoons, pictures, slogans or symbols and, intimidation through physical violence or threats of such violence.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is a type of harassment which refers to any unwelcome sexual attention, sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other unwelcome verbal, visual or physical conduct directed to an individual because of gender. Examples of sexual harassment include conditioning employment actions upon the granting of sexual favors; unwanted and unnecessary physical contact; offensive remarks, including unwelcome comments about appearance, obscene jokes or other inappropriate use of sexually explicit or offensive language; and, the display in the work place of sexually suggestive objects or pictures.
PROCEDURE

Complaint:

Any employee who believes that he or she has been subject to harassment prohibited by this policy has a responsibility to report the harassment as soon as possible to his or her immediate supervisor. If the harassment is being perpetrated by the supervisor then the employee may bring his or her complaint to the Pastor. If the Pastor is the source of the harassment, or there are other compelling reasons which prevent bringing the problem to the attention of the Pastor the issue should be taken directory to the Vicar for Priests.

Investigation:

All complaints of harassment will be investigated promptly and impartially. Information will be kept confidential as far as possible.

Action:

Anyone who is found, after appropriate investigation, to have engaged in harassment of another employee, will be subject to disciplinary action, which may include termination of employment.

Retaliation Prohibited:

No one who brings a harassment complaint in good faith will be subject to any adverse employment action for doing so, regardless of whether the complaint is ultimately determined to have merit.

CHILD ABUSE/NEGLECT

INTRODUCTION

Because of the nature of the parish ministries many employees and volunteers are in direct contact with children. All employees and volunteers should be aware of the Diocesan Policy regarding Child Abuse or Neglect. All employees and volunteers should also be familiar with the parish procedures as outline in the Personnel Manual.

The Diocese and this parish are committed to providing an environment that gives, nourishes and defends life. The Diocese and this parish deplore the harm and injury individuals and families suffer because of anyone’s misconduct. Such misconduct violates the respect to which all persons have a right. When anyone engages in abusive behavior, that individual betrays the trust and commitment to contribute to the life and growth of others.
Parish staff members and members of the parish volunteer corps always bear the responsibility for maintaining boundaries and clear roles in ministerial relationships. The Diocese and parish take seriously any allegations of abuse and respond immediately in a pastoral, compassionate and responsible manner. With the ultimate aim of reconciling and bringing healing, the Diocese and parish pledge to treat justly, respectfully, and compassionately everyone involved in such cases.

A. GENERAL LAWS OF THE STATES OF DELAWARE AND MARYLAND REGARDING THE REPORT OF ALLEGED CHILD ABUSE AND /OR NEGLECT

The laws of the States of Delaware and Maryland require that any person who knows of or reasonably suspects child abuse or child neglect shall report the same promptly to appropriate civil authority. As persons who are often in contact with children, through church programs, through Religious Education classes, Youth Ministry activities or the Catholic School, we have a particularly serious responsibility to be aware of the law and to be alert to real or potential problems. In Delaware, the report is to be filed with the Division of Family Services; in Maryland to the appropriate county office or law enforcement agency. The initial report may be made by telephone or in person. The law further provides that persons making such reports in good faith shall be immune from any liability, civil or criminal, which might otherwise be incurred or imposed with respect to making such a report.

Delaware : Report to Division of Family Services
Hotline # 1-800-292-9582

Maryland : Department of Social Services in the Maryland county
Where allegedly abused child lives or, if different, the Maryland county where the abuse is alleged to have occurred.
Hotline # 1-800-492-0618

B. WHO MUST REPORT

Delaware
In Delaware, any person who knows or reasonably suspects child abuse or child neglect must report the matter to civil authorities. Failure to report makes one liable to fine (not more than $1000) or imprisonment (not more than 15 days). The law also states that only the attorney/client privilege exempts reporting. Parish employees and volunteers must comply with the reporting statute.
MARYLAND

Any parish employee or volunteer who has reason to believe that the child has been subjected to abuse shall notify the local Department of Social Services or the appropriate law enforcement agency and give all information required by the law to their supervisor. Any doubts concerning serious suspicions about child abuse are to be resolved in the child’s favor and are to be reported. The report should be submitted as soon as possible.

C. WHAT TO DO:

If the alleged abuser is an employee
If the alleged abuser is a volunteer or
If the alleged abuse occurred on parish property:

1. Any parish employee or volunteer who has reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect by a fellow employee or volunteer shall immediately make a report of such abuse or neglect by telephone or in person to the Division of Family Services in Delaware (hot line no. 1-800-292-9582); or to the Department of Social Services, in the Maryland County where the allegedly abused child lives or, if different, where the abuse is alleged to have taken place (hot line no. 1-800-492-0618). Immediately thereafter, the employee or volunteer shall, as applicable, promptly notify the Pastor and other responsible parish supervisor. In any and all cases the Pastor is to be informed and he will promptly notify the Vicar General for Administration.

2. The report to the civil authority may be made by telephone and/or in person and should include, if known, the name and address and other identification of the suspected child abuser; the name, age, sex, whereabouts, and home address of the child; the names and address(es) of the child's parents, guardian or other responsible person who has custody of the child; the nature of the abuse or neglect including any evidence and information of a history of abuse or neglect and any other relevant information. This information should be given to the Pastor.

3. The Pastor after consultation and at the direction of the Vicar General for Administration will make arrangements to notify the parent or guardian. Notice should NOT be given to the parent or guardian if he or she is the one against whom the complaint is made.
4. If the report of child abuse or neglect is against an employee or volunteer of the parish, the employee or volunteer shall be removed from all possible contact with children until such time as the suspect is exonerated by the proper civil authorities. This is to be done in consultation with the Vicar General for Administration.

5. In a case where the alleged child abuser is a priest, the Pastor will advise the Vicar General for Administration. In the case where the alleged child abuser is the Pastor the employee will contact the Vicar General for Administration.

6. If the alleged abuse takes place on church property by someone other than a parish staff member or a member of the parish volunteer corps, the alleged abuse must still be reported to both the civil authorities and diocesan officials.

7. Pastoral and psychological care of the abused child and his/her family is made available when and where appropriate.

8. All information related to a child abuse incident in which a complaint is made against an employee should be gathered and retained in written form in a confidential manner at the direction of the Vicar General for Administration. Files are to be entrusted solely to the care and safekeeping of diocesan officials and are not to be retained at the parish level.

Additional procedures for Catholic School and Parish Religious Education programs can be found in the following manuals:

| Diocesan School Policy Manual #4129 and #5151 and attending procedures. |
| Religious Education Manual Policy #4129.1 and attending procedures. |

Complete Policies and Procedures regarding Reporting Alleged Child Abuse /Neglect are on file in the Human Resources Office : 302-573-3126
**RELIGIOUS PRIVILEGE**

**STATE OF DELAWARE**

Uniform Rules of Evidence Rule 505

(a) Definitions. As used in this rule:

1. A “clergyman” is a minister, priest, rabbi, accredited Christian Science practitioner or other similar functionary of a religious organization, or an individual reasonably believed so to be by the person consulting him.

2. A communication is “confidential” if made privately and not intended for further disclosure except to other persons present in furtherance of the purpose of the communication.

(b) General rule of privilege. A person has a privilege to refuse to disclose and to prevent another from disclosing a confidential communication by the person to a clergyman in his professional character as a spiritual adviser.

(c) Who may claim the privilege? The privilege may be claimed by the person, by his guardian or conservator, or by his personal representative if he is deceased. The clergyman may claim the privilege on behalf of the person. His authority so to do is presumed in absence of evidence to the contrary.

**STATE OF MARYLAND**

Courts and Judicial Proceedings

§9-111 Minister, clergyman or priest.

A minister of the gospel, clergyman or priest of an established church of any denomination may not be compelled to testify on any matter in relation to any confession or communication made to him in confidence by a person seeking his spiritual advice or consolation. (Ann Code 1957, art. 35, § 13; 1973, 1st Sp. Sess. ,ch.2, § 1.)
**FOR THE SAKE OF GOD’S CHILDREN**
**NOTES FOR ATHLETIC DIRECTORS/COACHES**
**KEEPING OUR SPACE SAFE AND SECURE**

1. Please be sure that the children know the expectations/requirements for safe and secure environments while they are in the facilities - ex. going to the restroom, strangers in the building etc.
2. Be clear on how the two adult rule is applied in your school.
3. Be vigilant about the facility, know where children are suppose to be and where they are, know what areas are lighted, monitored and which are restricted.
4. When a child needs to leave the class be sure a buddy accompanies the individual.
5. If you have to leave the class be sure a cleared adult is notified and/or is present in the class.
6. Always conduct yourself in accord with the ethical standards you have signed.

**Reporting Allegations of Child Abuse to Civil Authorities**

Any regular volunteer who has cause to suspect an act of *child abuse or neglect* has occurred or receives a report of such an act, must report the incident to:

**Delaware:** Division of Family Services at 1-800-292-9582

**Maryland:** Should report to the Department of Social Services in Maryland County where the allegedly abused child lives, or if different, where the abuse is alleged to have occurred. (See attached list.)

If the individual suspects an act of *sexual abuse* of a child, receives a report of such an act by a cleric, employee or volunteer of the diocese they should immediately call:

**Delaware:** State Attorney General’s Office: 302-577-8310 and ask to speak to someone in the Sex Crimes Unit.

**Maryland:** The call should be placed to the County Attorney General’s Office in which the alleged crime occurred. (See attached list.)

**Reporting to the Diocese of Wilmington**

To report suspected sexual abuse of a minor by a priest or deacon, present or in the past call: Rev. Msgr. J. Thomas Cini, VG, 302-573-3118. Send written allegations to Rev. Msgr. J. Thomas Cini, VG, Diocese of Wilmington, P. O. Box 2030, Wilmington, DE 19899-2030.
(1) Please be sure that the children know the expectations /requirements for safe and secure environments while they are in the facilities – ex. Going to the restrooms, strangers in the buildings, etc.

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FOR THE SAKE OF GOD’S CHILDREN
NOTES FOR TEACHERS
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## Reporting Numbers Maryland

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>Child Protective Services</th>
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<tr>
<td>CAROLINE COUNTY</td>
<td>410-479-5900</td>
<td>410-479-0255</td>
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<td>After hours 410-479-2515</td>
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<td>CECIL COUNTY</td>
<td>410-996-0100</td>
<td>410-996-5338</td>
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<td>After hours 410-398-3815</td>
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<td>DORCHESTER COUNTY</td>
<td>410-901-4100</td>
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<td>After hours 410-221-3246</td>
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<td>KENT COUNTY</td>
<td>410-810-7000</td>
<td>410-778-7479</td>
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<td>After hours 410-758-1101</td>
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<td>QUEEN ANNE'S COUNTY</td>
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<td>After Hours 410-632-1113</td>
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# FOR THE SAKE OF GOD'S CHILDREN
## Talking Points for Parents and Children

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<th>THINGS THAT CHILDREN NEED TO KNOW</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. As early as possible, teach children their full name, address and telephone number. Periodically ask them to repeat it back to you.</td>
<td>Learn full name, address and telephone number.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Never leave children unattended.</td>
<td>When shopping or in a crowd know where to go (cashier, security officer, etc.) if separated from your parent/guardian. Never leave the store by yourself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Explain the difference between good touching and bad touching. The doctor's examination is good touch but touching of the child's private parts by a relative, friend or a stranger is bad touching.</td>
<td>No matter who does the bad touching, tell parents/guardian.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. In order for children to understand good touch/bad touch they need to know the proper names for body parts. Take away the embarrassment children have about talking about &quot;private parts&quot;.</td>
<td>It is good to tell Mom and Dad if anyone tries to touch the private areas of their bodies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. You and your child should have a password worked out in case you cannot pick them up from school or day care center. If the child is unsure who is picking them up have the child go to the principal or teacher.</td>
<td>Never leave school with anyone except your parent or guardian and know the family password.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Do not leave your children unattended in a car.</td>
<td>Never get in the car alone to play or hide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. On the telephone your child is never to let anyone know they are home alone. Discuss responses like, &quot;My Dad is in the shower or my Mom is busy right now.&quot;</td>
<td>Never tell anyone on the phone that your parents/guardians are not home. Use the responses you have practiced/been taught.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Instruct your children never to open the door without you being present.</td>
<td>Never open the door without your Mother or Father/guardian being present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Know the route your child takes to and from school and have them use the buddy system.</td>
<td>Walk to and from school with a buddy and stay away from alleys, wooded lots and vacant areas. Follow the route you and your parents practiced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Do not allow children to wear T-shirts that show their names.</td>
<td>Do not respond to strangers who call you by name.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11. Children should be taught that it is alright to say no to anyone if they are asked to
   - Look at pictures offered by strangers
   - Allow strangers to take pictures of them
   - Approach the car of someone asking directions
   - Enter someone’s house or property of anywhere with anyone they cannot be seen by others
   - Do anything that might frighten them or make them feel uncomfortable, including unwanted hugs, pats on the buttocks, or touches that make you uncomfortable

| If anyone grabs you, touches you or otherwise threatens you, run away, scream for help, bite, kick, scratch or use any method necessary to escape. |
| It is okay to say no to anyone who tries to hug or kiss you. It is okay not to go anywhere unless your parents/guardian approved. |
| You can refuse someone if their request feels weird or separates you from the other children. |
BEGINNING THE YEAR WITH WAYS TO MAKE KIDS SAFER

At Home
- Teach your children their full names, addresses and home phone number. Make sure the youngest knows your name.
- Make sure your children know how to reach you at work or on your cell phone.
- Teach your children how and when to use 911.
- Instruct your children to keep the door locked and not open the door to talk to anyone when they are home alone. Set rules with your children about having visitors over when you are not home and how to answer the phone when you are out.
- Choose babysitters with care. Obtain references. Once you have chosen a caregiver, drop in unexpectedly to see how your children are doing. Ask children how the experience with the caregiver was and listen carefully to their responses.

On the Net
- Learn about the internet. The more you know about how the Web works, the better prepared you are to teach your children about potential risks.
- Place the family computer in a common area, rather than a child’s bedroom. Also, monitor their time spent online and the websites they’ve visited.
- Use privacy settings on social networking sites to limited contact with unknown users.
- Make sure screen names don’t reveal too much about your children.

At School
- Don’t display your children’s names on clothing, backpacks, lunch boxes, or bicycle license plates. When children’s names are visible, it may put them on a first-name basis with someone who means them harm.
- Remind kids to take a friend whenever they walk or bike to school.
- Walk the route to and from school with your children, pointing out landmarks and safe places to go if they are being followed or need help. If your children ride the bus visit the bus stop with them to make sure they know which bus to take.

Out and about
- Take your children around the neighborhood and tell them whose homes they may visit without you.
- Tell your children to come and get you if they come across a dangerous object or situation.
- Teach your children to ask permission before leaving home.
- Remind your children not to approach any vehicle, occupied or not, unless they know the owner and are accompanied by a trusted adult.
- Remind your children it is okay to say NO to anything that makes them feel scared, uncomfortable or confused.
- Explain to the children not to go near pools or other bodies of water without adult supervision. If you have a pool at home, establish appropriate swimming hours and supervision.
• Set up “What if” situations and ask your children how they would respond……What if you fell off your bike and needed help, whom would you ask?
• During family outings, establish a central easy-to-locate spot to meet for check-in or should you get separated.
• Teach your child to check in with you if there is a change of plans, especially teens.
BEGINNING OUR YEAR - FOR TEACHERS/RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS AND YOUTH MINISTERS

- Tell students what actions they can take against online bullies:
  - Never respond.
  - Don’t delete anything.
  - Turn off the monitor.
  - Ask a trusted adult for help.

- Teach children about password protection:
  - Make it at least 8 characters long.
  - Use a random mix of letters and numbers and special characters.
  - Avoid using words and names.
  - Change password regularly.

- Discuss what not to share online:
  - Name
  - Address
  - Phone number
  - School name
  - Parents’ names
  - Revealing photos.
  - Brainstorm with the children what it is safe to share.

- Be sure students have a “code” if someone else besides a parent or guardian is picking them up.
Child abuse is unfortunately not a rare occurrence. Public health authorities estimate that about 81,000 children are victims of sexual abuse and 160,000 are victims of physical abuse each year. About 1 in 100 children will be victims of sexual abuse during childhood. Child abuse is a topic that should be discussed in every household. Families should teach children about safety and privacy and how to keep the lines of communications with trusted adults open.

There are no helpful stereotypes of who might be a predator, and so it is important to help children build skills and self-esteem that will help them avoid unsafe situations and ask for help if something is happening. Federal statistics indicate that perpetrators of sexual abuse are most commonly friends or neighbors (57.7%), followed by other relatives (32%), and child daycare providers (23.9%). (US Department of Health and Human Resources)

**Talk to your kids**

Always start discussions with your child at a general level. Keep in mind some facts about your child’s cognitive and emotional development.

**Children aged 5-12**

- Are quite suggestible
- Take their cues from their parents about how to react
- Are still developing abstract reasoning
- Tend to see things in black and white
- Tend to be quite rule-bound and rule-oriented

Start by setting up a general framework for discussion. For example:

- "It’s time to have a talk about good touch and bad touch because camp is coming up", or "because it is swimsuit season and kids will be wearing less clothing, we should talk about this": or" because I read an article in the paper, I want to have a talk with you about this."

- "It is important that we talk about this every once in a while, because it is a way that I make sure you are safe and I can teach you ways to stay safe."

- "Only your parents and your doctor are ever supposed to touch your private parts". Good touch --- appropriate hugs, kisses, pats. Bad touch ....private parts, anything that makes you uncomfortable that doesn’t stop. This is a good opportunity to talk with your kids about body boundaries and respect, in general.
Ask open ended questions:

“Has anyone at school, at camp, .....ever touched you in a bad way, or made you do anything you didn't like?” “Tell me about it”.

Be calm and emphasize your acceptance:

“You can always tell me if something like that happens. I won’t be mad at you.”

Emphasize safety:

“Who are other people you can tell who can keep you safe?” “If someone makes you uncomfortable, you can always tell me, or a teacher, and we will protect you.”

Reassure your child that if someone touches him/her inappropriately, it is never his/her fault; he/she is not to blame. Say you appreciate being told. Since children at this age can incorporate hints or possibilities into their beliefs about a specific situation, it is important not to encourage the child to embroider. For example:

Avoid suggesting that something happened. E.g. “He did that, didn’t he?”

Avoid asking questions over and over again—it will communicate to the child that something is wrong, when nothing may have happened.

Avoid: putting words in their mouths or suggesting who, when, or where something might have happened.

Be patient this will be challenging if you are worried about your child. You may ask about a situation in a routine way, and she or he may not answer you right away. Be attentive for an answer some time after you ask about it.

How will elementary school-aged children react to specific questioning about sexual behavior? They:

Will have trouble understanding the idea of “alleged” behavior. In their minds, people are either rule breakers or rule followers, good or bad.

Will tend to interpret anxiety in parents as an indicator that something bad did happen, and that something “might have happened” or that you want to provide information “in case” will try to read you and tell you what they think you want to hear.

Even if a child will not talk about what occurred, you may notice symptoms that are worth further evaluation, such as:
- Repetitive, sexualized play, with other kids or with dolls or in pretend
- A change in interest in play from usual patters
- Seeming more cut off or withdrawn from peers or adults
- Seeming more emotionally numb
- Nightmares that are recurrent
- Increased irritability, jumpiness, wariness, and being easily startled
- Increased anxiety and worry, particularly in response to people or places that may be associated with the traumatic exposure.
- Efforts to avoid specific places, people or events that are not explicable.
- Changes in personality that seem linked in time to a potential event.

If your child learns of specific details of an incident affecting another child, or asks specifically about a person in question:

- Give matter of fact answers about what you know for certain, and be honest about what you do not know.
- Let your child tell you what he/she knows, what she/he wonders about and what his/her concerns or worries are.
- Remind your child of all the ways in which people work to keep him safe, parents, teachers, police officers, administrators. Remind the child that he/she can always tell you or another trusted adult.
- Remain calm and neutral. It will not help your child to tell you something if he thinks you will be angry or frightened or sad.
- Don’t tell your child what will happen, only that you think it would be a good idea to talk about what happened with someone else also.
- Do show real concern, but not alarm or anger
- Call your child’s school

**Responding to your child should he or she disclose sexual abuse:**

**During the conversation**

Talk with your child in a place that is private
Do not panic; try to remain calm and reassuring
Do not seek more information than the child is prepared to give
Assure your child that it is not his or her fault and that he or she is not in trouble.
Assure your child you will protect them.
In the event you do get upset, assure your child that you are upset with the abuser, not with your child.

**After the conversation**

Remember that you are dealing with your child, not an adult and treat them as your child, comforting and supporting the child.
Do not disrupt the family schedule, try to keep things as normal as possible.
Be prepared for depression for weeks or months and the child may act out or withdraw. Seek appropriate help.
Do not question about the event, do not jeopardize the investigation, if your child needs to talk, listen, support and reassure. Explain what is happening in age appropriate language so as not to create anxiety.
Acknowledge the feelings that the child experiences and assure the child it is okay. Teach appropriate ways to express these feelings. Be conscious of how you are responding/reacting and seek help or support as necessary. Never discuss the situation with others in the presence of your child.

Your support and encouragement are essential to the healing process.

Suggestions on what to tell a child to say to someone who may be touching them or making them feel uncomfortable:

- A stranger is someone you have never met. Most are nice, but some are not and you have to be aware of that.
- If a stranger asks you for help or to keep a “special secret”, it could be a dangerous situation. Say no and tell a trusted adult.
- If you feel scared or uncomfortable, get away from the situation. Make an excuse and run away and go to a safe place.
- Know what to do --- think….NO, GO, YELL, TELL. If you are in a dangerous situation, say no, run away, yell as loud as you can and tell an adult.
- If a stranger invites you to go somewhere, offers you a gift or just wants to talk, say you need to ask your parents for permission first.
- Stick with your friends because it is always safer to play in a group.

Overall, the hardest job may be reassuring yourself that your child is fine and that nothing has happened. This uneasiness may even occur when all the evidence indicates that nothing happened to your child and that she or he is fine. Try to develop a clear sense of what signs or symptoms would indicate problems and a clear sense of what standards of normal you have for your child. If problems persist, consult with a mental health professional for help.

Sources:

National Crime Prevention Council
Article : Taking to Children About Physical and Sexual Abuse by Anthony Charuvastra, M.D.
Child Lures Prevention Think First and Stay