

# SAFETY IN CHILDREN'S MEETING INFORMATION

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This information has been gathered and put together by the Children's Religious Education Committee. Its purpose is to educate meeting members and child care workers about child sexual abuse and what we in the meeting are doing to ensure our children are safe during First Day School.

## DEFINITION OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child sexual abuse is defined as someone exploiting a child for the sexual gratification of an older person. Contact can take many forms: fondling of the genitals or breasts; oral or anal intercourse (penetration by genitals or by an object); or exposing sexual parts of the body. Child sexual abuse is a misuse of power. Children depend on adults' power/authority for protection, nurturing, and setting appropriate limits on behavior. A molester uses his/her authority and power to coerce a child into sexual compliance.

Usually, children are sexually abused by someone they know. The majority of child molesters are teenage or adult males. Most molesters are heterosexual, many with children of their own. Sometimes children are abused for a single incident and, more often, they suffer multiple episodes which span a number of years. It takes as little as 30 seconds time to abuse a child.

Half of sexual abuse victims are preadolescent boys and girls including infants and toddlers. Teenage boys are also abused in alarming numbers. Boys are less likely to disclose sexual abuse than females because: 1) of societal pressure for males to be strong and protect themselves; 2) of the fear of being labeled gay if the perpetrator was male; 3) of the fear of embarrassment if the perpetrator was female; 4) society doesn't give permission to males to be identified as victims; and 5) violence and threats by the perpetrators are used more commonly with boys. Sexual abuse is also sometimes perpetrated by an older child to a younger one.

## PLOYS ABUSERS USE

Ploys are used by abusers to control someone they are or are trying to abuse. Below are examples of common ploys and not everyone who asks these questions will be an abuser trying to hurt children.

1. **Flattery:** "You're only 12! You look at least 16; you are so mature."

2. **Fear:** “Come with me, you mother was in an awful car wreck and she is at the hospital.”
3. **Asking for help:** “I think my dog is in your back yard. Will you help me get him?” or “I can’t get my car started. Can I come in and use your phone?”
4. **Force, Threat of Force:** “Come with me and you won’t get hurt.”
5. **Friendliness:** “Let’s just hang out, me and you, we can do anything you want.”
6. **Guilt:** “You wanted this, you caused this, no one is going to believe you.”
7. **Trickery:** “We can’t afford a doctor, so I will examine you.”
8. **Bribery:** “I know you wanted that video game. If you do what I want you can have it.”

## HOW TO RECOGNIZE ABUSE

Children do exhibit reactions to being sexually abused—but not always. Each child differs in personality and the abuse will impact each child differently. One child may react severely to being abused while another may hardly react at all.

Children who have been sexually abused may:

- show signs of redness, bleeding or other injury around the genitals
- regress to infant or younger child behavior
- wet the bed
- excessive masturbation
- have chronic stomach aches with no medical explanation
- loss of appetite
- have trouble sleeping
- experience painful urination
- have contracted a venereal disease

- behave sexually beyond knowledge for their age or accepted standards
- be reluctant to go to a particular place or be with a certain person
- suddenly turning against one parent
- exhibit an extreme amount of guilt or negative feeling about him/herself
- feel responsible for and a need to protect or parent their own parent
- develop dishonest interpersonal relationships
- be manipulative, destructive, and self-hating

Any one of these symptoms could mean any number of things. When there is a cluster of symptoms, it should be brought to the attention of any of the members of the Children's Religious Education Committee.

#### WHAT CAN WE DO TO EMPOWER CHILDREN?

(In Any Situation, But Especially at Friend's Meeting)

Children who are being abuse experience that differently. As parents, meeting members, and child care workers, what can we teach the children to ensure their safety? Our attitudes and the language we use are critical. Children may have a hard time talking to an adult about the situation because they do not have the words to describe it. We want to use words like "safe touching" and avoid words like "bad touching" or "naughty behavior" etc. We want to impart positive attitudes about sexuality in adulthood and at the same time teach children how to protect themselves from unwanted touch. Information about sexual assault can become a part of every child's basic safety information.

1. Develop a mutual vocabulary about body parts. Don't use "cutsie" names; rather use real names for body parts.
2. Give the child control of her or his own body. Say to the child, "You have a right to your own body, and no one have a right to hurt you in any way."
3. Tell the child to trust her or his own feelings and act on them. Say to the child, "If anyone is doing anything you don't feel okay about, say

no to them and tell a grown up about your experience. If the person you tell doesn't believe you, tell another grown-up, and keep on telling until you're believed."

4. Respect the child's feelings and support them. If kissing grandpa, for example, does not feel good to the child you should support him or her. Let the child know that s/he does not have to do it anymore.
5. Give the child permission to tell. Say to the child, "Keep telling until somebody believes you and does something."
6. Let there be NO SECRETS. In order for sexual abuse to continue, it needs secrecy.
7. Tell the child that you want to know if something is bothering him/her. LISTEN TO THE CHILD.
8. Let the child know that adults aren't always right. Again, tell the child to trust her/his own feelings.

#### WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CARE GIVERS?

1. Remind each child to stay with group, and/or an adult.
2. Frequently count children to assure that they are all present. If anyone is missing, tell another adult and begin to search.
3. If a child wants or needs to leave the group, have a care giver go with him or her.
4. Report any concerns to members of the Children's Religious Education Committee.