

## Talking to your child about sexual abuse

Sadly, the person most likely to sexually abuse your child is a person your child knows - and may trust. The sex offender looks for a child who trusts him and can be convinced to stay quiet about inappropriate physical contact. It could be a family member, close relative, neighbour, or trusted youth worker.

Discussing sexuality and/or sexual abuse with your child can be uncomfortable, but in today's world responsible parents cannot afford to skirt the issue. Here are some practical suggestions to incorporate in your home:

Plan a specific time to sit down with your child to discuss this issue

Explain to your child that God made their body very special. Every part of their body is good, but some parts of their body are private. 'Sometimes certain people don't understand about this privacy rule.'

Clearly identify for your child which parts of their anatomy are private. If your child is young, consider sharing the above information during their bath time. Another idea is to have your child dress in a bathing suit and show them that all areas covered by a bathing suit are "private."

Let your child know they must tell you if anyone touches them in the private areas - no matter who the person is, or what the person says to them. They must never agree to keep a secret about touching. Assure your child they will not be in trouble if they tell you they've been touched inappropriately - rather, you will be proud of them, and help them through the situation.

Children who are shy or naturally compliant and eager to please may be especially vulnerable to molestation. Helping your child to practise ways of saying 'No' in a polite way will help them to become assertive in protecting themselves. Play out some scenarios- what would you do if John (who is 15) tells you to go with him up in the tree house? What will do you if Frankie and Paul (playmates) say they want you to take your underwear off and play doctors?

Additionally, allow your children to recognise their personal boundaries and don't force them to give another person a hug or kiss. They need to realise that they can have some choice over who they will be affectionate with. This will help them to be able to say no in more difficult situations when they are on their own.

It is possible that when you have this conversation with your child, he or she may reveal inappropriate contact someone has had with them in the past. Listen closely to what your child says, but avoid asking a lot of questions. Young children are sometimes quick to affirm information that may or may not be true. Instead, let your child know you believe them and love them.

Report any concerns to your AIM leader who will pass on the information to the Child Safety Officer. The matter will be dealt with appropriately with the aim of getting the best form of help for the children concerned.

As parents, we will never completely eliminate the possibility that our child will be sexually abused - there are simply too many factors outside of our control. Nonetheless, parents empower their children through simple conversation and love. A conversation with your child could save them, and you, a lifetime of pain.