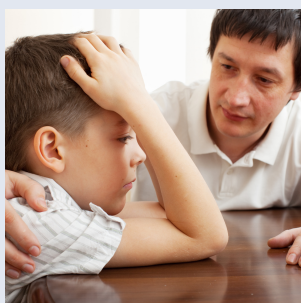




# WAYS TO TALK TO CHILDREN

## Identifying and Addressing Sexual Abuse

Tips to Promote Child Well-Being and Resilience



### A Difficult Conversation

Discussing this topic can feel overwhelming and emotional, however, it is crucial for caregivers to learn what child sexual abuse is and be aware of possible signs and risk factors, ways to prevent it, how to protect children against it, ways to be involved and buffer the impact of it and support resilience skills, mindsets and behaviors.

### What is Child Sexual Abuse?

- Child sexual abuse is any interaction between a child and an adult (or another child) in which the child is used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or an observer.
- Sexual abuse can include both touching (touching of the vagina, penis, breasts or buttocks, oral-genital contact, or sexual intercourse) and non-touching behaviors (showing pornography to a child, exposing a person's genitals to a child, prostituting/trafficking a child, photographing a child in sexual poses, encouraging a child to watch or hear sexual acts either in person or on a video, and/or watching a child undress or use the bathroom).



### What is Grooming?

- Manipulative behaviors that the abuser uses to gain access to a potential victim, coerce them to agree to the abuse, and reduce the risk of being caught.
- Abusers often use play, deception, threats, or other forms of coercion to engage children and maintain their silence.
- This may include focused, special attention, arranging special activities and fun days, buying expensive gifts for the child, and giving them money, which can further confuse the child.



## Suspected Child Abuse

- Everyone is a mandated reporter when it comes to child sexual abuse.
- Childhelp® National Child Abuse Hotline at 1.800.4.A.CHILD (1.800.422.4453)
- Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) Abuse Hotline at 1-800-962-2873
- In the event of an emergency, always call 911
- If a child discloses abuse, it is critical to stay calm, listen carefully, and respond carefully.

# Facts about Child Sexual Abuse



- Over 65,000 children are abused in the United States each year
- Every nine minutes child protective services finds evidence for a claim of child sexual abuse.
- About 1 in every 4 girls and 1 in every 13 boys in the US experience sexual abuse at some time in their childhood.
- Sexual abuse is considered an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)
- Children of all ages, races, ethnicities, and economic backgrounds are vulnerable to sexual abuse.
- 91% of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone the child or child's family knows.

## Warning Signs



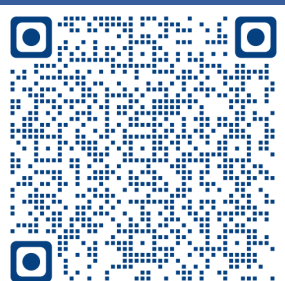
- An increase in nightmares and/or other sleeping difficulties
- Withdrawn behavior
- Angry outbursts/unexplained irritability
- Anxiety/separation anxiety from primary caregiver
- Depression
- Not wanting to be left alone with a particular individual(s)
- Sexual knowledge, language, and/or behaviors that are inappropriate for the child's age
- Seems distracted or distant at odd times
- Has a sudden change in eating habits
- Mood swings: rage, fear, insecurity or withdrawal
- Writes, draws, plays or dreams of sexual or frightening images
- Refuses to talk about a secret shared with an adult or older child
- Talks about a new older friend
- Suddenly has money, toys or other gifts
- Thinks of self or body as repulsive, dirty or bad

## Tips for Parents/Caregivers



There are many ways to help prevent Child Sexual Abuse and it starts with talking openly about it and providing children an open and safe environment in which to communicate and discuss it.

- Teach children accurate names for body parts
- Avoid focusing exclusively on "stranger danger"
- Teach body safety: "okay/safe" touches
- Let children know they have the right to make decisions about their bodies
- Communicate that older children/adults never need help with their private body parts (eg: bathing/toileting)
- Teach children to care for own private parts
- Educate children on difference between good secrets (surprise party which is not kept for long) versus bad secrets (keep forever and never tell anyone)
- Be available to spend time with your child where they have your undivided attention
- Reinforce that the child won't get in trouble
- Ask open-ended questions and discuss new topics
- Trust your instincts!
- Show interest in their daily life
- Get to know the adults who care for your child and children your child interacts with
- Choose caregivers carefully
- Talk about the media and ask questions
- Know the warning signs



Scan for Resources



[www.centerforchildcounseling.org](http://www.centerforchildcounseling.org)

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