

# Parents' Guide

1. The only thing worse than finding out that your child is being sexually abused is not finding out.
2. Both boys and girls can be targets for sexual abuse. Age is not a factor. Young children and teenagers alike can be abused.
3. Most children are abused not by strangers but by someone they know and trust. Abusers have sometimes been a family member, a close friend of the family, a teacher, a coach, a camp counselor, or a baby-sitter. Abusers can be male or female. They can be any age, from other children to grandfathers.
4. Often children are afraid to tell. Their abusers warn them not to tell. In addition, children worry that they will be blamed. They wonder if it is their fault. They also worry that no one will believe them.
5. Beware of anyone who showers your child with gifts or favors. Be especially wary of anyone who wants to spend time alone with your child.

6. Sometimes abuse starts out as tickling or wrestling and gets more intimate. Be certain your child can tell the difference. Make sure he or she knows which parts of his or her body are private. These parts may be simply defined as the parts of the body that are usually covered by underwear or a swimsuit.

7. Notice changes in behavior that might suggest sexual abuse, including nightmares, bed-wetting, withdrawing from friends or family, fear of being left alone, change in eating habits, avoiding relationships with others, unexplained sadness, or anger.

8. In teenagers, behavior changes may include avoiding dating, voicing an extreme dislike of the opposite sex, or expressing a desire never to marry. In extreme cases some teenagers turn to promiscuity, alcohol, or drugs as a result of sexual abuse. Another teenage sign of abuse may be anger or voicing self-injurious or suicidal thoughts.

# What to Do?

1. Maintain a loving relationship with your child. Make it easy for your child to talk to you. Have frequent talks about all sorts of things, both important and unimportant. Be a safe person for your child to talk to.
2. Talk to your child about sexual touching. Ask if anyone has touched your child inappropriately. Remind your child that it is okay to say no to someone who wants to touch them inappropriately. Teach them to get away as quickly as possible, and always tell. The idea is not to frighten your child but to give enough guidance that your child will know what to do.
3. Always believe your child. Always remind your child that it was not his or her fault. Never blame your child.



4. Stay calm. If you overreact, your child may feel threatened or shut down. Thank your child for trusting you with the information. Tell your child he or she did the right thing by telling you and that now you will be able to help.

5. Some children may find it difficult to talk about sexual abuse but could draw a picture or write down a name.

6. Seek professional help from your family physician and contact the local authorities.

7. Support your child in his or her healing process, and do not blame yourself unnecessarily. Take whatever steps are needed to keep your child safe.

"Parents' Guide" and "What to Do" adapted from *To Strengthen the Family*, by JoAnn Hibbert Hamilton (Las Vegas: Positive Values Publishing, 2003); used with author's permission.

