

For Parents of Children with Disabilities:

Family Safety Planning to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse



When thinking about how to keep your child safe from sexual harm or abuse, creating a family safety plan is a good place to start. All children, by virtue of their size and development, are vulnerable to sexual abuse. Children with disabilities are often more vulnerable. By being proactive about safety, there are many ways to reduce your child's vulnerability and keep your child safe.

To start, download a [Family Safety Plan](http://stopitnow.org/family_safety_plan) template (stopitnow.org/family_safety_plan). As you complete it, review the information below, and keep in mind that the plan should address the needs of all members of your family, not just your child with a disability.

Learn about sexual development and developmentally-expected sexual behaviors.

- All children, including those with disabilities, are sexual beings and have sexual feelings. Review resources about developmentally expected sexual behaviors so you are knowledgeable about what behaviors are common or developmentally expected in children of various ages. Seek input about your child's sexual development from the professionals who know your child including your family doctor, social workers, and teachers.

Plan to address your child's specific vulnerabilities.

- Set clear guidelines for personal privacy and behavior that take into consideration your child's needs for help with personal care.

Talk about sexual abuse with your child's caregivers.

- Have explicit conversations with all caregivers about your specific family rules about privacy and touch. Ask your child's caregivers to respect your child's personal space and to provide only the level of personal care your child needs.

Set clear expectations for your child's caregivers.

- Monitor your child's response to the people in his life. Pay extra attention if you notice behaviors that indicate concerning reactions or if your child tells you he has concerns about his caregivers.

Identify "safe" people for your child.

- All children need "safe" adults in their lives who they can turn to for help and support. Demonstrate for your child how he can let a safe adult know he needs help. Practice with your child's safe adults. Have your child communicate he needs help and ask the adult to respond. This helps both your child and the adult practice and learn in less stressful situations.

Prepare to respond to sexual behaviors in children.

- Expect that your child will have sexual feelings and will engage in sexual behaviors, regardless of the type and extent of his disability. This way you can be prepared to be proactive in addressing sexuality and sexual behaviors in your child by calmly responding and redirecting behaviors as needed.

Talk with your child about sex and sexuality.

- Children need developmentally appropriate information about sex and sexuality. Teach your child the proper names for body parts and about privacy and rules about touching.

Know your local resources.

- Learn about the agencies in your area. Know who to contact to make a report if you know or suspect that a child may have been sexually abused. You can call the National Child Abuse Hotline **1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)** for information on who to call in your area.

For more tips and information about the Coalition Against Sexual Abuse of Children with Disabilities, visit www.ChicagoCAC.org/CASACD/



Chicago Children's Advocacy Center and our partners are the front-line responders in Chicago to reports of child sexual abuse, as well as reports of physical abuse of children under 3 years old.

1240 South Damen Avenue • Chicago, Illinois 60608 • ChicagoCAC.org • (312) 492-3700