

For Parents of Children with Disabilities:



Behaviors to Watch for When Adults Are with Children & Signs That a Child or Teen May Be at Risk to Harm Another Child

It is hard to believe that someone we know could also sexually abuse a child, yet nearly 90% of the time children are sexually abused by someone they know, like, trust or even love. More than a third of all sexual abuse of children is committed by other children or youth. It is an unfortunate reality that children with disabilities and other special needs experience abuse at even higher rates than other children.

Being knowledgeable about how to recognize early warning signs and situations that increase the risk of sexual abuse will help you keep your child and other children safe. Use this knowledge to set clear standards for appropriate, respectful behavior for the people who care for and interact with your child. By setting clear expectations, you can recognize and respond to concerning behaviors.

Behaviors to Watch for When Adults Are with Children

When you are aware of behaviors to watch out for, you have an opportunity to intervene in response to the very early signs that someone is unclear about how to behave and interact with children. When you see these signs, speak up and set a limit – this is an opportunity to keep a child safe.

Pay attention and monitor more when an adult:

- Refuses to let a child set their own limits (e.g. personal care beyond what the child needs)
- Misses or ignores cues about personal limits or boundaries
- Ignores a child's need for and right to privacy
- Spends significant time with children and shows little interest in spending time with peers
- Treats children more like peers by sharing personal or private information or allowing children or teens to get away with inappropriate behaviors
- Seems "too good to be true" (e.g. frequently babysits different children for free, takes them on special outings alone, buys them gifts or gives them money for no apparent reason)

Be prepared to intervene when an adult:

- Insists on or manages to spend uninterrupted time alone with a child
- Encourages silence and secrets in children
- Makes sexually explicit comments or jokes around children, points out sexual images, or describes children using sexual words like "stud" or "sexy"
- Is overly interested in the sexuality or sexual development of a particular child or teen

Signs That a Child or Teen May Be at Risk to Harm Another Child

More than a third of all child sexual abuse is committed by someone under the age of 18. Children, particularly younger children, may take part in inappropriate interactions without understanding how it might be hurtful to others. For this reason, it may be more helpful to talk about a child's sexually "harmful" behavior rather than sexually "abusive" behavior.

Pay attention and monitor more closely when you observe the following types of behaviors in your child or another child you know.

Confused about social rules and interactions

- Explores own natural sexual curiosity with younger children or those of differing size, status, ability or power.
- Takes younger children to "secret" places or hideaways or plays "special" games with them (e.g. playing doctor, undressing or touching games)
- Insists on physical contact with a child when the child resists the attention

Impulsively sexual or aggressive

- Links sexuality and aggression in language or behavior (e.g. makes sexual threats or insults)
- Is unable to control inappropriate behaviors involving another child after being told to stop
- Engages in sexually harassing behavior
- Shares alcohol, drugs or sexual material with younger children
- Views sexual images of children on the Internet or elsewhere
- Forces sexual interaction, including direct contact and non-contact (like exposing genitals) on another adolescent or child

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