



# Keeping My Family Safe

A workbook about sexual abuse prevention for parents and caregivers



Preventing child sexual abuse starts with caring adults being responsible for educating and protecting the kids in their lives.

This workbook will review the main components of child sexual abuse prevention for parents/caregivers and provide resources for further learning.

Components of sexual abuse prevention for caregivers:

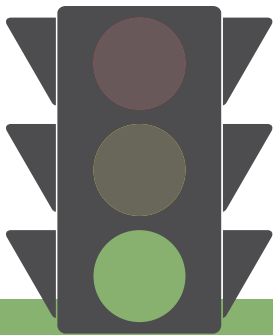
1. Know about child sexual abuse
2. Promote open communication
3. Teach about consent, touch, boundaries and privacy
4. Speak up and show up for prevention
5. Create a Family Safety Plan

## 1. Know the behavioral indicators of child sexual abuse and how to respond

**Adults who better understand the issue of child sexual abuse are better prepared to prevent it from happening in the first place.** Think of the spectrum of behaviors like a traffic light (see the next page). This graphic will help you get started with understanding what behaviors are abusive, concerning and preventative. Take a look at the behaviors and how adults should respond.

The rest of this book will focus primarily on the behaviors and responses listed in the green and yellow light sections.



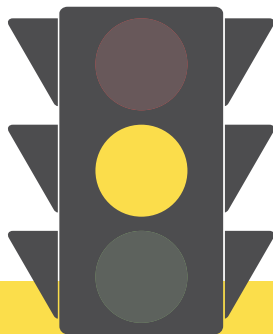


### **Preventing child sexual abuse is:**

- Asking for permission if you need to touch a child, reinforcing that they are in charge of their bodies
- Respecting a child’s right to say “no” to touch and to speak up when they are uncomfortable
- Maintaining open communication
- Parents/caregivers: using the correct names for private body parts and talking to children about sexual development
- Professionals: working with children one-on-one in open spaces that are visible to others

### **ACTIONS TO TAKE**

- **Model preventative behaviors in your everyday interactions**
- **Establish and monitor age-appropriate guidelines around privacy, consent and boundaries for kids and adults**

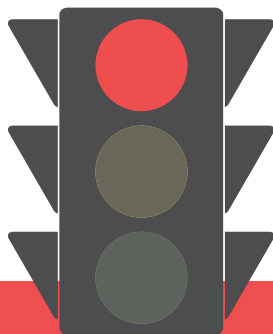


### **Watch for concerning or inappropriate behavior, such as:**

- Seeking out or frequently initiating alone time with a child
- Giving special treatment, favoritism or gifts to a child
- Encouraging or keeping secrets with children
- Using touch, hugs or physical contact with a child in ways that are inappropriate for one’s role
- Ignoring or invalidating a child’s right to say “no” to physical contact

### **ACTIONS TO TAKE**

- **Set clear boundaries; give reminders of appropriate interactions**
- **Increase monitoring with random drop-ins and observations**
- **Consult someone you trust; provide ongoing support to the child**



### **Child sexual abuse is:**

- Fondling or rubbing against a child’s private parts, butt or breasts
- Asking or coercing a child to touch someone’s private parts
- Exposing private parts to a child
- Showing or making pornographic movies or images of/to a child
- Having inappropriate sexual conversations with children in person, on the phone, or on the internet

### **ACTIONS TO TAKE**

- **Call the child abuse hotline, 1-800-25-ABUSE.**
- **If there are immediate safety concerns, also call 911.**

## 2. Promote open communication

### About feelings

**Encouraging your kids to talk openly about their feelings helps prevent sexual abuse.** Allow your kids to talk freely about a variety of feelings, including those that are uncomfortable, so they know they can talk to you about anything. Here are a couple of tips:

- Name feelings for kids. They learn about their feelings by having the words to describe them. If you see that a child is having an emotional reaction, name it by saying “you look sad/mad/happy/confused.”
- Let kids know that they can have multiple feelings at the same time. This will help them navigate many situations, including if a person tries to confuse them with an unsafe touch and a gift.
- Validate kids’ feelings by listening and actively responding to what they say, such as “It sounds like you’re upset because...”

Use this information about feelings as a starting point to a foundation of trust and open communication. We are our kids’ ultimate role models, and they’re always watching and listening. Do your best to be consistent, open and honest.

### About healthy sexual development and body parts

**Kids deserve to learn accurate information about all aspects of their development, including healthy sexual development.** Your kids learn a lot from you about what the expectations are around their bodies. By communicating openly about sexual health and body parts, we can help prevent feelings of shame or embarrassment about bodies that often allow abuse to thrive.

Start these conversations about healthy sexuality with kids from birth and continue the discussion often throughout their lives. Keep conversations honest, respectful and direct. Talking about healthy sexual development with your kids should include these basic topics in an age-appropriate manner:

- Accurate names for and information about private body parts including vulva, vagina, penis, testicles, breasts, nipples, butt and anus.

*“During bath time, we are going to clean behind your ears, under your arms, around your vulva and your butt to keep you healthy.”*

- Relationships between family, friends and partners should be safe and free of violence. Kids and adults can say no to touch that feels unsafe or confusing.

*“We have lots of neighbors who we like. If one of the neighbors, either a kid or an adult, ever touches you in a way that feels unsafe or confusing, come to me right away so I can help you.”*

- As kids begin to engage with technology, frequently talk about online safety.
- As kids get closer to and reach adolescence, share information about puberty, sex, pregnancy and safe sex.

There are many books and websites that can help you (see page 10).

### 3. Teach kids about consent, touch, boundaries, and privacy

#### Consent

Explain to your kids that they have the right to say “no” to anyone – adult, teen or child – touching their body or asking for a touch. As they get older, you can talk about the importance of actively consenting to sexual activity (more resources on page 10). Teach and reinforce consent during everyday interactions, like wrestling with siblings or hugging family members.

*If your child says “no” or “stop” when being tickled, ensure that the person who is tickling them stops.*

Explain to the adults around your family that a child saying “no” is important in case an unsafe person enters their social circle. You might feel uncomfortable about potentially hurting a family member’s feelings, but remind them that we are all working together toward kids’ safety.

#### Types of touch

**Safe touches:** These are touches that are respectful and caring. Safe touches keep us healthy. Safe touches are consensual. Use examples to help kids understand:

*“Safe touches are when you want to give me a goodbye hug, when you meet a new person and shake hands, or when you and the neighbor high-five.”*

**Confusing touches:** These are touches that we might not like and might not be safe. Tell kids it is OK to be confused and that they should always come to you about confusing feelings or touches. Sometimes children like, love, or are otherwise emotionally attached to their abusers. Not all children and teens see an abusive relationship as bad or wrong.

*“If someone touches you and says it’s a secret, this might be confusing. Make sure to come talk to me about it, so I can help you figure it out.”*

Thinking back to the traffic light from earlier in this workbook, a confusing touch falls usually into the “yellow light” area. Many times, these concerning behaviors are referred to as the grooming process. Sometimes abusers will confuse children by touching them in a way that feels loving or “good,” but is in an inappropriate way or in places they shouldn’t be touching. By helping children identify confusing touches, you give them the language and tools to speak up.

Sometimes kids receive touches that they do not like from people like doctors or dentists when you or another trusted family member are present. It’s important to talk to your kids through any confusion about these types of touches and remind them about your role in making sure they are safe during these kinds of appointments.

**Unsafe touches:** These are touches that are disrespectful, hurtful or that we do not want. Teach your kids it is OK to say no to any touch, especially unsafe ones. Let your kids know they won't get in trouble if they say no to touch or come to you about unsafe touches. As young kids become able to identify the names of their private parts, explain to them that it's unsafe if an adult or kid tries to or touches their private parts, especially if it's in secret and/or they feel uncomfortable. As kids get older, you can talk about the importance of actively consenting to sexual activity (more resources on page 10).

*"Unsafe touches are when anyone hits you, when someone tries to touch your private parts, or when someone asks you to touch their private parts."*

Unsafe touches that are within the "red light" area of the traffic light should be reported. It is never easy to report child sexual abuse, especially if it is someone you know. **But remember, it is our responsibility as adults to speak up and stop abuse.** If a child tells you that they have been sexually abused:

- Stay calm and listen carefully. Encourage the child to speak freely, but do not ask detailed questions about the abuse.

*"I'm glad you shared this with me. Is there anything else you can tell me about what happened?"*

- Reassure the child. Tell the child that you believe them, that telling you was the right thing to do, and that they have not done anything wrong.

*"I believe you. You did nothing wrong. Telling was the right thing to do."*

- Take action. Report abuse to the child abuse hotline, 1-800-25-ABUSE. If there is an immediate safety concern, also call 911.

Kids can sexually harm other kids. If you suspect sexual abuse between two kids, call the child abuse hotline to seek consultation or your local Children's Advocacy Center. Your phone call can be the catalyst for safety plans to be put in place, caregivers to receive much needed support and information, and youth to get appropriate services.

Be sure to reach out to a community agency or someone who can help you like a school social worker if you need help; have these names and numbers handy on your Family Safety Plan (see page 9). For more information, visit [ChicagoCAC.org](http://ChicagoCAC.org).

## **Boundaries and privacy**

Research has taught us that abusers are often people who have access to a child such as a neighbor, educator, family friend, babysitter, etc. Having guidelines, keeping them visible and enforcing them at home helps ensure that everyone – your children, extended family members, and other caregivers – is on the same page about safety and respect. The same rules apply to online interactions, too.

We have provided an example Family Safety Plan on page 9, as well as a blank one for you to utilize. It's also important to have regular discussions about the components of the plan and use examples to help kids understand.

For kids in 2nd grade or younger, teach more concrete rules such as:

- “Tell right away if anyone – family, friend or anyone else – touches your private parts.”
- “Only one person is allowed in the bathroom at a time.”

For kids in 3rd grade or above, involve them in developing rules about privacy. Practice asserting boundaries at home, at school and in the community.

- “I have the right to say no to any touch that makes me uncomfortable.”
- “I can ask mom or grandma any questions about my body or about relationships.”
- “I can spend an hour on the computer playing games at night, and I will only play games with people we know in real life.”

Let kids know that they can come to you if anyone, a stranger or a family member or a friend, makes them uncomfortable, violates the Family Safety Plan or does an unsafe or confusing touch.

- Avoid “stranger-danger” language. Instead, assist children in identifying “helpers” or others in the community who they could also go to about abuse, such as: trusted teachers, counselors or school social workers, or first responders who they may need to communicate with in an emergency.
- Let kids know they can also go to other people if for any reason they don’t want to come to you. The Family Safety Plan asks you to identify 4 other people who they can talk to. Keep this list updated, and notify each person that you’ve selected them for this important role!

People who sexually abuse children use secrecy to gain and maintain access to their victims. Explain the difference between a secret and a surprise. Secrets exclude people and can hurt. Surprises like birthday gifts can be fun for everyone.

- Explain that no adult should ever ask a kid to keep a secret, and they should tell you about it right away.
- Lead by example. Avoid the concept of secrecy altogether at your house, such as not saying something like, “You can have more chocolate, but don’t tell your father/mother.”

## 4. Speak up and show up for prevention

Use your words and actions to impact change. Say something when you observe concerning or inappropriate behaviors in adults or kids, even if the person exhibiting these behaviors is a member of your family or a close friend. If you feel you can't have this conversation, find someone who can and will help you intervene. Model this for the kids in your lives and teach them to speak up, too.

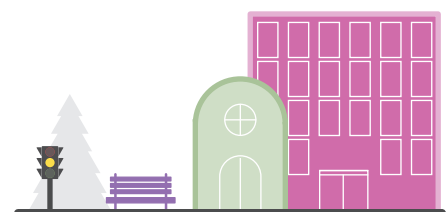
*"Thanks for coming over to our BBQ today. I noticed you are doing a lot of horseplaying and I wanted to let you know that in our family, we don't play like that because it makes some people uncomfortable. Let's get out a different game so we can all enjoy ourselves!"*

*"Please don't take photos of my kids without asking me first."*

*"We have a rule about one kid in the bathroom at a time at our house. I reminded you about this rule already, and you didn't follow it, so I am going to call your parents to come get you."*

Additionally, speak up and show up before a situation becomes concerning to help promote a culture of safety at the places where your kids spend time. Here are ideas:

- Ask daycares, schools and afterschool programs about their sexual abuse prevention policies and if they offer prevention education for parents, staff or students.
- Let people know you are aware and observing. Safety is increased when everyone around your kids knows that you are an active and observant caregiver. Show up unannounced at sports practices or daycare.
- Listen, watch and observe cues of adults and older youth in all environments where children are present. Make mental notes so you can stay aware.
- Be aware of kids and families who may be vulnerable, such as children with disabilities or families in high-stress situations.
- Decrease isolation and increase community interactions as much as possible; sexual abuse most often occurs during one-on-one situations.
- If someone offers help that seems "too good to be true," ask more questions. Even a close friend or relative may not be a safe person for your kids.
- Talk to other adults about prevention. Spread the message of how the actions of caring adults can protect kids from sexual abuse. Identify one or more adults to talk to if you have a concern.





## 5. Create a family safety plan

As a family, discuss and decide a safety plan together, and fill in the blank version on the next page. Then post the list on your refrigerator or another prime spot at home, and review the rules often so no one forgets! Be sure to talk about the rules with other caregivers, such as extended family members, babysitters and teachers.

Below are a few ideas of safety rules for your family to get you started.

- *We respect others' privacy and personal space.*
- *Boundaries keep us safe. We speak up when someone crosses boundaries or makes us feel uncomfortable in-person or online.*
- *No means no! Kids in this house are the bosses of their bodies and have the right to say no to any touch or entrance in their personal space.*
- *We use the proper names for body parts in this house, including our private parts.*
- *Private parts are private, and they include anything covered by a bathing suit. We don't touch, look at or ask to play games with anyone's private parts.*
- *We tell a trusted adult if anyone touches us or talks to us in a way that makes us feel uncomfortable, including online communication.*
- *We don't keep secrets. We know that no grown-up should ever ask us to keep a secret in-person or online.*
- *Feelings are important. We can talk about feelings any time, whether they are happy, sad, angry or confusing.*
- *We don't use the computer, tablet, phone or video games without an adult's permission.*
- *We speak up and ask questions, especially if we don't understand a rule. Adults listen to our questions and help us understand.*





# Our Family Safety Plan

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9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

Here are other adults we can talk to if we have questions or concerns about safety, touches or boundaries. This plan has been shared with these adults.

NAME DATE NAME DATE

NAME DATE NAME DATE

**If you have any questions about prevention, concerning behaviors or abuse, contact:**

Chicago Children's Advocacy Center  
Info@ChicagoCAC.org

Stop It Now! Helpline:  
1.888.PREVENT

## Resources

To report child abuse and neglect in Illinois, including child sexual abuse, call the Illinois Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873) or contact local police.

For more information on preventing, recognizing, responding to and reporting child sexual abuse, visit [ChicagoCAC.org](http://ChicagoCAC.org). To schedule an educational session for your parent group or organization, contact [Training@ChicagoCAC.org](mailto:Training@ChicagoCAC.org).

Contact Stop It Now!'s Helpline, a free, confidential service to ask questions, receive support and have professional guidance on preventing abuse, concerning behaviors in adults and youth, and resources for kids and adults: [StopItNow.org/help](http://StopItNow.org/help) or 1.888.PREVENT

Coalition Against Sexual Abuse of Children with Disabilities in Chicago: [ChicagoCAC.org/CASACD](http://ChicagoCAC.org/CASACD)

The Chicago Rape Crisis Hotline: 1-888-293-2080

National CyberTipline: 1-800-843-5678 or [MissingKids.com/CyberTipline](http://MissingKids.com/CyberTipline)

Obtain online safety info for kids of all ages, teachers and parents: [NetSmartz.org](http://NetSmartz.org)

National Children's Advocacy Center: [NationalCAC.org](http://NationalCAC.org)

National Sexual Assault Telephone Hotline (1-800-656-4673) or online chat: [RAINN.org](http://RAINN.org)

National Center on the Sexual Behavior of Youth: [NCSBN.org](http://NCSBN.org)

National Runaway Safeline: 1-800-786-2929

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

## Books for adults and older teens about sexual development and prevention

- Off Limits: A parent's guide to keeping kids safe from sexual abuse – S. Wuertele & F. Berkower
- Teaching Children with Down Syndrome about Their Bodies, Boundaries and Sexuality – T. Couwenhoven
- Understanding Your Child's Sexual Behavior – Toni Cavanaugh Johnson
- From Diapers to Dating: A parent's guide to raising sexually healthy children – D. Haffner
- Sex Wise Parent - Janet Rosenzweig
- Que Pasa Por Alla Abajo?: Respuestas Faciles a Preguntas Dificiles para un Adolescente - Karen Gravelle
- Hablemos acerca del S-E-X-O - Sam Gitchel

## Books for kids about sexual development and abuse prevention

- Some Parts are Not for Sharing – Julie K. Federico (ages 6 months+)
- Your Body Belongs to You – Cornelia Spelman (ages 3-6)
- My Body Belongs to Me – Jill Starishevsky (ages 3-8)
- A Secret Safe to Tell – Naomi Hunter (ages 3-8)
- Those are MY Private Parts – Diane Hansen (3-8)
- Some Secrets Should Never Be Kept – Jayneen Sanders (ages 3-8)
- I Said No: A Kid-to-kid Guide to Keeping Private Parts Private – Kimberly King (ages 3-8)
- Fred the Fox Shouts “No!” – Tatiana Y. Kisil Matthews (ages 3-8)
- Miles is the Boss of His Body! - S. Kurtzman-Counter & A. Schiller (ages 3-11)
- My Body: What I say goes! – Jayneen Sanders (ages 3- 11)
- My Body Belongs to Me from My Head to My Toes – Dagmar Geisler (ages 3- 11)
- An Exceptional Children’s Guide to Touch – Hunter Manasco (ages 3-8; kids with disabilities)
- What’s the Big Secret? Talking about sex with boys and girls – Laurie Brown (ages 3-8)
- Changing Bodies, Changing Lives – Ruth Bell (ages 12-17)
- It’s Perfectly Normal – Robbie Harris (ages 9-14)
- It’s So Amazing – Robbie Harris (ages 3-8)

### Books in Spanish




- Algunas Partes No Son Para Compartir – Julie K. Federico (ages 6 months+)
- Mi Cuerpo es Mío: Un Libro para Enseñar a los Niños Pequeños cómo Resistir el Contacto Incómodo – L. Britain (ages 3-8)
- ¡Mi cuerpo es mío! - Dagmar Geisler (ages 3-12)
- El Problemo con los Secretos – Karen Johnson (ages 3-8)
- Sexo, que es? - Robbie Harris (ages 9-14)
- Es alucinante! - Robbie Harris (ages 3-8)

This book was written by Chicago Children’s Advocacy Center in collaboration with Children’s Advocacy Center of North and Northwest Cook County using content from Body Safety Curriculum authored by Elizabeth Diaz. For a list of other references, please contact [info@chicagocac.org](mailto:info@chicagocac.org).

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