



Protective Factors to Help Prevent Child Sexual Abuse

The Building Blocks of a Family Safety Plan



Adults

Prevention starts with responsible adults—those who are willing to talk to each other about tough issues and work to build protective factors around children. Children are vulnerable when they feel isolated or alone, and teaching them about personal safety is not enough. Helping children identify one or more trusted adults plays a crucial part in keeping them safe, and puts the responsibility for child safety where it belongs—with adults.

Boundaries

It is important for parents to set clear boundaries with family members and other adults who supervise their children. For example, if a child does not want to kiss or hug an adult good-bye, allow them to shake their hand instead. If a child is not comfortable around someone (could be an adult or another child), it is important to talk to the child about their apprehensions and to address the issue with the other person.

It is equally important to talk about acceptable behavior between family members and develop clear house rules so everyone feels respected and safe. As a child matures, boundaries within the home may need to change (i.e. knocking before entering the room of an adolescent.)

Communication

Open communication is critical within a family. Parents can protect children by developing a family rule of “no secrets.” Also, parents should let children know it is okay to ask questions about sexual development and use the proper names for body parts. Adults who are comfortable talking with their children and other adults about healthy sexual development send a clear message that they can be approached about this issue.

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Determination & Ongoing involvement

Conversations surrounding healthy sexual development or sexual abuse concerns are difficult. Rarely is this a “one-shot” conversation. Persistency is key and adults must stay involved and approach the issue more than once, if needed.

Become a resource person for a child or adolescent. Children are resilient and deal more successfully with adversity when they know an adult believes them and supports them.

Education for everyone

Teach children the proper names for their body parts and what to do if someone touches them inappropriately. Understand healthy sexual development in children, as well as sexual behaviors that may be of concern. Learn the warning signs in children and adults that indicate they may have a sexual behavior problem. Learn where to find help at www.stopitnow.org/mn.

Children cannot stop abuse; adults can. Establishing and implementing protective factors gives all adults the chance to do more than just intervene after a child has been harmed.

If you are concerned about your own or another’s sexual behavior towards children or if you do not know how to talk about these issues, or you want further information, please call our safe and confidential Helpline toll-free at 1.888.PREVENT (1.888.773.8368) Monday – Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (CST). Call and have a conversation with a professional about your concerns, learn about local resources, and what options are available to you.

Stop It Now! Minnesota is a member of the Stop It Now! network (www.stopitnow.org).

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