



Child Sexual Abuse:

YOU CAN PREVENT, RECOGNIZE AND REACT

SIGNS THAT A CHILD MAY HAVE BEEN ABUSED:

- ✦ Withdrawn behavior
- ✦ Sleeping/eating difficulties
- ✦ Angry outbursts
- ✦ Anxiety/Depression
- ✦ Sexual knowledge, language or behaviors not appropriate for the child's age

WHY DON'T CHILDREN TELL THAT THEY HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED?

- ✦ Fear of not being believed that the abuse happened
- ✦ Fear of removal from their home/loss of relationships with their loved ones
- ✦ Shame or guilt that they caused the abuse to happen
- ✦ Threats to the child or the child's family (physical or emotional) by the abuser

What is child sexual abuse?

- ✦ Interaction between a child and an adult (or older child) in a sexual manner
- ✦ Touching or non-touching behaviors of a sexual nature
- ✦ Voyeurism (looking at a child's naked body)
- ✦ Exhibitionism (showing one's naked body to a child)
- ✦ Exposure to pornography (including magazines, movies and tv)

Abusers often "GROOM" a child, which may include buying gifts or arranging special activities. This often confuses the child and makes it more difficult for the child to reveal the abuse. Abusers may use play, deception, threats or other forms of coercion to engage children and maintain their silence.

HOW TO TALK TO A CHILD ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE:

When working for PREVENTION...

- ✦ Be aware of the child's cognitive and emotional level. Use proper terminology (such as "vagina" and "penis") so that you normalize those words and teach your children that body parts are not a taboo subject. Examples of conversation starters include:
 - "As your parent, it's my responsibility to keep you safe...";*
 - "It is important to talk with you once in a while to make sure you are safe...";*
 - "I'd like to know how you feel about other people (kids & adults) you see during your day...";*
 - "Camp is coming up, it's time to talk about private parts and how we protect them..."*
- ✦ Ask open ended questions to engage in discussion – "Has anyone ever touched you in a way that made you feel uncomfortable? Tell me about it".
- ✦ Be calm and neutral while emphasizing your acceptance of what they say. Use words like "You can always tell me if something happens to you or someone you know".
- ✦ Emphasize safety – "Besides me, who are the other people that can keep you safe?"
- ✦ Reassure the child that if someone touches them inappropriately, it is never their fault.

If a child DISCLOSES abuse...

- ✦ Believe the child and make sure they know you believe them. Remember very few disclosures are false.
- ✦ Be patient. Avoid reacting in anger or disbelief – the child may shut down.
- ✦ Listen and let the child know that he/she has your support and that you will get the child help.
- ✦ Encourage the child to talk. Avoid making suggestions or putting words in their mouth about what may have happened.
- ✦ Avoid repeating questions. It is better that the details are given directly to a professional trained to talk with children about sexual abuse.
- ✦ Thank the child for telling you and reinforce that he or she is not at fault.
- ✦ Contact local Child Protection Services, Child Advocacy Center or police to file a report immediately.
- ✦ Do not make any promises to the child as to the possible outcome of the disclosure.

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in Northern Virginia

SCAN of Northern Virginia is pleased to offer Stewards of Children training, the nationally recognized child sexual abuse prevention program. SCAN offers Stewards of Children trainings using curriculum developed by the Darkness to Light Foundation. Learn more online at

www.scanva.org/D2L