

#1 Child Sexual Abuse-A resource for parents

INTRODUCTION

My name is Kimberly and I am an adult survivor of child sexual abuse, I am also the parent of a beautiful four year old little girl. One of my biggest fears as a parent is that my daughter will someday be exposed to the kind of pain I have endured. I ask myself many times, "How can I protect her?". Even the most concerned, careful and protective of parents cannot detect a child molester. How much hurt could be avoided if child molesters looked or even acted a certain way. The truth is, they seem to be everywhere and chances are you know one.

Our best line of defense against these predators is to educate ourselves and our children. We live in an era where resources surround us, but many of us feel uncomfortable talking about sex to our children. We do not hesitate to teach our children at a young age not to touch a hot stove, or run into the street. We must learn to think about sex abuse education this way.

I have two wonderful parents who love me very much, but they never taught me about good and bad touches. I was molested by my stepfather from age six until age thirteen and I never understood why this was happening to me, and what I did to deserve this. No one ever told me that I should tell someone if anyone ever did this to me, all I heard was my violator telling me not to tell anyone. I can't help but wonder, if I had the information I have now would I have allowed the abuse to continue for so long?

Contact Kimberly: kimberly.fortune@snet.net

WHAT IS SEXUAL ABUSE?

Sexual abuse has many forms. It can be so subtle that a child may not know what is happening, just that he or she is uncomfortable with it. It can be verbal, physical or emotional, just like any other form of abuse. Sexual abuse includes:

- * sexual touching and fondling
- * exposing a child to pornographic materials and or adult sexual activity
- * having a child pose, undress or perform in a sexual fashion
- * "peeping" into bedrooms or bathrooms
- * rape or attempted rape

Child sexual abuse is legally defined as " all inappropriate sexual activity between an adult and a child". Now we know what it is, how do we prevent it?

TIPS FOR PARENTS

As parents there is no way we can completely protect our children from sexual abuse but there are some ways we can lessen the chance it could occur. Unfortunately, just teaching our children not to talk to strangers or unusual people. In fact approximately 85% of sexual offenders are known to the child and 50% are parent figures. (Facts About Child Sexual Abuse) Here are some tips I have compiled from various sources on how to prevent child sexual abuse:

- * Tell children that if someone tries to touch their bodies in a way that makes them feel "funny" or "bad" to say no then go tell an adult they trust.
- * Talk to children every day about their contacts with other people. Ask them about their feelings. This helps to encourage your children to feel comfortable talking to you about anything.
- * Do not teach your children blind obedience to adults. Don't teach children to do everything a baby-sitter or teacher tells them. Instead teach them that most adults are good people to be respected but that they should listen to their own hearts; tell them that it's OK to say no to an adult if they want the child to do something they know is wrong.
- * Teach your children the correct names for their body parts, as well as any nicknames you might use. Take away the embarrassment children have about talking about "private parts".
- * Teach children the difference between good touches and bad touches. Explain to them that while it is OK for a doctor to touch their stomach to see what's wrong, it is not OK for Mr. Jones to touch them in their pants.
- * Teach your children not to keep secrets from you and don't encourage secret keeping in your family. Tell your children that they can always tell you anything no matter what anyone tells them.
- * Play "what if " games with your children. Create frightening and confusing situations and ask children what they would do in these situations, for example ask, "What would you do if someone wanted you to play undressing games?" Make sure you balance these games with

questions about good touches.

HOW TO TELL IF YOUR CHILD MAY HAVE BEEN MOLESTED

In most cases there are no blatant signs that a child has been molested, however as a parent it is important to trust your instincts. If you think something is wrong it probably is, and it is important to get children to talk to you about whatever problems they have. The following are some indicators that something may have happened:

BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS

- * Unusual interest in and/or knowledge of sexual activity, inappropriate to the child's age
- * Promiscuity, seductive behavior
- * Change in personal hygiene habits, excessive cleanliness or lack of cleanliness.
- * Weight gain or loss, change in appetite
- * Sleep disturbances: bedwetting, nightmares
- * Depression, anger, irritability
- * Reluctance to go home or other places
- * Avoidance of certain people and places
- * Inappropriate dress, such as tight or revealing clothing or overdressing, wearing many layers of clothing regardless of weather
- * Sexual drawings or stories

PHYSICAL INDICATORS

- * Pregnancy
- * Venereal disease
- * Trauma to the mouth or genitals
- * Excessive masturbatory behavior
- * Rectal bleeding
- * Torn or blood stained clothing
- * Attempts to touch adult's, children's or animal's genitals
- * Pain or discomfort in the genital area

WHY CHILDREN DON'T TELL

There is a myriad of reasons why children don't tell about sexual abuse. The biggest of these is fear. Children are afraid no one will believe them especially since many abusers tell children this. Children often believe the threats of their abuser. Children fear that the abuser will hurt them or their families if they tell. Children also don't tell because they feel guilty. They may feel guilty if they get an adult "in trouble". Children often feel they are somehow responsible for their abuse. Often since children know their abusers they care about these people and don't want to "tattle". Children are many times threatened by the abusers that they will be taken away from home. I know this from experience. Everyone fears the unknown, especially children, and as parents we must teach our children that if this ever happens to them we will protect and believe them.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD HAS BEEN ABUSED

I can barely remember most of the incidents that occurred to me as a child, it's mostly a blur to me but one thing I can remember is the first sentence out of my mother's mouth when I told her. She asked me if I had made it up because I hated my step-father. The moments after a child makes a disclosure of sexual abuse are crucial to the child's mental health. The following are some guidelines on how to effectively deal with a child who has opened up to you.

- * Remain calm, underreact, a child can easily interpret signs of anger or disgust as directed toward him or her.
- * ALWAYS BELIEVE THE CHILD!!! In most circumstances a child does not lie about sexual abuse as it is very painful and embarrassing to talk about.
- * Listen to the child and answer any questions honestly
- * Give the child positive input such as, "It's not your fault" and "I'm proud of you for telling"
- * Seek professional help immediately...contact legal authorities and the Department of

Human Services, find a counselor trained in sexual abuse therapy, your local Sexual Assault Crisis Center can refer you to counseling services.

* Arrange a medical exam, not only is it important to make sure no long term physical harm has been done, but it may be important for legal evidence

IN CONCLUSION

Hopefully the information I have provided here will help at least one parent avoid the pain and trauma I have endured in my life. However, this was only a brief overview. There is a great deal of very helpful information out there if you know where to look. Some places to look are at your family doctor, your school guidance office, your local police, and your local sexual assault crisis chapter.