

WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

Child sexual abuse occurs when someone engages a child in any type of sexual activity. Sexual activity can be anything from exposing a child to pornography, to fondling, to oral-genital contact, to intercourse.

The child's reaction to such abuse may vary greatly depending on the nature of the abuse, who is committing the abuse, the reactions of the important adults around the child, and the child's general feelings about themselves and the world.

PREVENTION

The idea of discussing sexual molestation with our children can make us feel very uncomfortable. Yet, avoiding the subject leaves children without the knowledge of how to prevent such abuse and reinforces the view that it is a taboo subject. The abuser requires such silence from the victim and others in order to succeed; not talking about it helps create this silence.

It may not be possible to prevent all abuse, but practical information about personal safety will help reduce the risk. It is important to know that the biggest risk to your child is someone they already know. For example:

- **Check the references of your babysitters.** Be aware of how your child interacts with other adults – if your child tries to avoid a familiar adult you should find out why.
- **Teach your child that they have certain rights (with which no adult can interfere).** Tell them it is all right to say “No!” to an adult if that person is doing something to make them feel uncomfortable.
- **Teach your child the difference between secrets and surprises.** Surprises are something that will eventually be told and the person who is being surprised will be

happy. Secrets are never to be told and may make you feel uncomfortable. It is **never** okay for someone to ask a child to keep a secret about touching.

- **Give your child the language to tell you if something bad has happened to them.** This can include feeling words as well as the proper names for private parts. Develop an atmosphere of openness and trust so that your child can talk to you about anything unusual that happens to them.

It is important that all children are given warnings about strangers. These can be given in such a way as to not alarm the child unnecessarily. The police will be able to offer information to help you develop a safety program for your children. Check with school authorities on the types of personal safety programs offered in your school. However, it is important to know that **strangers are not the largest risk.** About 95% of reported abuse is committed by someone the child knows and trusts. It may be a babysitter, family friend or member of the family. The Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton offers training on the **S.P.E.A.K. program.** This is a safety and prevention kit for children ages 3 to 8 that promotes personal safety, discusses good touch/bad touch, and child sexual abuse. Call a Public Educator at the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton for more information at 423-4102.



S.P.E.A.K. PROGRAM

WHAT IF A CHILD DISCLOSES TO YOU?

- Believe them. Children do not lie about abuse.
- Remain calm.
- Let them tell you in their own words what happened.
- Let them know they did the right thing by telling.
- Tell them you are sorry this happened and you will try to get help for them.
- Take any possible steps to ensure it cannot occur again.
- Report the disclosure to Alberta Family and Children's Services or the Police.

Respect your child's right to privacy – do not discuss the assault unnecessarily with other people. Other children in the family should be told something happened; they do not need to know the details of the abuse, but they must know enough to protect themselves.

You will also be upset about the abuse. It is essential that you find support for yourself in order to better help your child.



MEDICAL ATTENTION

If there was any bodily contact during the abuse, it is imperative that a physician examines your child. There may be the danger of internal injuries, sexually transmitted disease, or, if of childbearing age, there may be a danger of pregnancy. Medical evidence may be necessary to lay charges. The visit to the doctor itself may be traumatic for the child and support will be needed. However, a visit to the doctor may reassure the child they are not “damaged”.

INDICATORS

Not all children are able to tell their parents they have been abused so it is important to be aware of signs your child may exhibit. Big changes in behavior may be signals that something has happened. Some possible indicators include:

- sleep disturbances (nightmares, fear of going to bed);
- appetite changes;
- irritable behavior;
- bed wetting;
- fears;
- depression and sadness; and
- regression (behaving as a younger child).

Your child may have some of these problems or none at all. If the situation is handled in a direct and sensitive way, your child need not suffer permanently from the abuse.

If you need to discuss your concerns with someone, call the Sexual Assault Centre's 24 Hour Crisis Line at 423-4121.

RECOVERY IS POSSIBLE

Fortunately, a child can recover from the abuse. With the support of their family, friends and community, children are able to deal with the sexual abuse and improve their outlook on themselves and on life.

The Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton (SACE) offers individual counselling for girls and boys between the ages of 3 and 17 years. In order for children to be seen for counselling, the sexual abuse or assault has to have been reported to Alberta Child and Family Services (1-800-387-5437) and/or the police (423-4567).

ALBERTA CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

In Alberta, you are legally required to report all suspected cases of child abuse to Alberta Child and Family Services. The police should be called to further ensure the safety of your child and of other children. Steps have been taken to ensure that this procedure is as simple and safe as possible for the children involved, including allowing testimony through closed circuit television. Physical evidence will probably be required in a court of law, so it is important to contact the authorities immediately. They are able to best collect evidence and the statement of children.

To report a suspected case of child abuse call your local Alberta Child and Family Services office, or after hours contact the Child Abuse Hotline at the following numbers:

- North Central/NW - 415-6012
- Northeast - 422-2112
- Central - 415-9619
- East - 427-6440
- West Central - 427-1551
- Southeast - 422-4060
- Southwest - 427-9040
- Child Abuse Hotline - 1-800-387-5437

CAPITAL CITY SAVINGS
Kids Foundation



Child Sexual Abuse



SPEAK UP!
SOMEONE WILL LISTEN!

Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton
205, 14964 - 121A Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5V 1A3

Business Line (780)423-4102
24 Hour Crisis Line (780)423-4121
Website www.sace.ab.ca
E-mail info@sace.ab.ca



Revised January 2005