

# What if my child has been sexually abused?

- ❖ Believe what your child says and listen calmly. Showing your distress may frighten them from telling you.
- ❖ Reassure your child it is not their fault and they are not in trouble.
- ❖ Tell them how proud you are they told you.
- ❖ Reassure them that you love them.
- ❖ Let them know that they are safe now and you will deal with it all and the abuse won't happen again.
- ❖ Don't push for details of the abuse if your child isn't ready to tell you. Give them time.
- ❖ If the abuser is a close family member, family life will be seriously disrupted. Try to keep normal routines going if possible. Routines help children feel more secure.
- ❖ Even though you may feel very anxious about your child's safety, try to maintain their usual activities.
- ❖ Think carefully about who to tell about your child's abuse and when, and talk to your child about this. Other people knowing can make the situation more distressing. Explain the difference between privacy and secrecy to avoid your child feeling ashamed.
- ❖ **IMPORTANT.** Get help and support for yourself. You may feel betrayed, angry, or failing as a parent. You need support from friends and family and often need professional counselling advice to keep going. Remember, child sexual abuse is rarely a parent's fault. Abusers are clever manipulators of parents as well as children...

**Important:** Sexual abuse is a **CRIME!** If you suspect someone is abusing your child or others, you must tell the appropriate authorities to put a stop to abuse.

## For more parenting information and support:

Parentline ACT (02) 6287 3833  
Parentline NSW 1300 1300 52  
Parentline NT 1300 30 1300  
Parentline QLD 1300 30 1300  
Parent Helpline SA 1300 364 100  
Parenting Line TAS 1300 808 179  
Parentline VIC 13 22 89  
Parenting Line WA (08) 9368 9368 (metro)  
1800 111 546 (regional)

Parentinglinesprovideatelephoneservice providinginformationandgoodideasabout caringforbabiesandchildren.

## Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800

TheKidsHelplineisafree24hourtelephone counsellingserviceforchildrenandyoungpeople agedbetween5and25.

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## Supported by

TheAustralianGovernmentDepartmentoffamily, Housing,CommunityServicesandIndigenousAffairs

NAPCANisanindependentcharityandtheleading advocacybodyforpreventionofchildabuseandneglect.

[www.napcan.org.au](http://www.napcan.org.au)  
  
**NAPCAN**  
PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE

# KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE FROM SEXUAL ABUSE

# Keeping children SAFE from Sexual Abuse

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# The facts...

Sadly, sexual abuse of children is common.

- ❖ Children are mostly abused by someone they know – even relatives and family friends
- ❖ Child sexual abuse happens in all cultures and all kinds of families.
- ❖ Girls and boys of all ages are at risk.

**WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?** – Child sexual abuse is when an adult or someone older or bigger uses a child for his or her own sexual pleasure. Abusers take advantage of a child's trust or use their power and authority over the child. Child sexual abuse includes many different activities such as:

- ❖ Sexual touching of the child or adult
- ❖ Oral sex, vaginal or anal intercourse
- ❖ Indecent exposure
- ❖ Exposing children to sexual acts or pictures
- ❖ Enticing children into internet 'chat rooms'

**HOW DO ABUSERS WORK?** – Most abusers go to great lengths to win children's trust. They often target vulnerable children. A normal friendly relationship develops into a sexual one, with the abuser either persuading or coercing the child to cooperate. Then they often use threats that something terrible will happen in order to stop the child telling.

## How can I keep my child safe?



Know about your children's daily world:-

- ❖ Where they are
- ❖ Where they play
- ❖ Who they play with
- ❖ What activities they get involved with
- ❖ How they use the Internet – web sites, chat rooms, emailing, video, CD and DVD use
- ❖ Who you trust to look after them when you're not there

### TALK AND LISTEN TO YOUR CHILDREN –

It's important to teach your children they can refuse to do anything with an adult or child that they feel is wrong or frightens them. However, you cannot expect children to say 'No'. Encourage them to tell you whenever they are worried about what other adults or children want them to do. ALWAYS LISTEN carefully to your child's fears and concerns. Stop what you are doing and really pay attention.

### TEACHING YOUR CHILD SEXUAL SAFETY –

Teach your children how to stay safe from sexual abuse just as you talk to them about road, fire, water, and internet safety.

### TOUCHING –

Even little children know the difference between touching that is OK or not OK. Explain that no-one has the right to touch them in places and ways that make them feel scared or uncomfortable.

**FEELINGS** – Encourage children to trust their feelings. Talk about feeling safe and unsafe and work together on plans of what to do if they feel

unsafe. This should include ways to leave awkward situations, like saying they have to go home now, or need to ask a parent or other adult for permission first.

**GROWN-UPS** – We teach children to respect adults, so it's hard for them to say 'No' without feeling rude. Explain that sometimes adults do things that are not OK and they should tell you if this happens. Don't expect them to kiss or cuddle other adults, especially ones they don't know. Make a practice of discussing what your children do when they are with other adults and whether they like these people, just as you ask about their friends. This will alert you early to possible concerns.

### KNOWING AND TALKING ABOUT BODIES

– Encourage children's natural interest in their bodies. Teach them the correct names of all their body parts. Talking about sexuality can embarrass some parents. Your local child librarian can help find appropriate age level books to discuss with your child. If you can talk comfortably about these matters, it will be easier for your children to tell you their concerns.

**SECRETS!** – Many abusers make children keep their abuse a secret- often using threats. Children need to learn the difference between safe and unsafe secrets. Teach them the only OK secrets are those which give someone a nice surprise.

**WHO CAN THEY TRUST?** – Work out with your child which key people they can trust to ask for help if they are frightened and you aren't there. Does your child's school have a protective behaviours program?