

TALKING WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT

body safety

Keeping children safe is a parent's job. Yet talking to children about body safety may feel intimidating. What do you say to a young child or adolescent? There is no perfect age to talk with your child; this should be an ongoing dialogue throughout his or her lifetime.

In talking with your child, avoid falling back on the old warning of "strangers". In reality, perpetrators are most often familiar to the child. This is because perpetrators typically have access to children. Show that you are available to talk with your children and learn to listen to what they might be telling you through non-verbal cues and/or behaviors.

NEW HAMPSHIRE NETWORK OF CHILD ADVOCACY CENTERS:

Promoting an environment where children are free from sexual, physical and emotional abuse and neglect by striving to ensure children and families have access to the high quality, comprehensive, specialized and culturally competent services of a local Child Advocacy Center. For more information, or to locate a Child Advocacy Center in your community, please visit www.NHNCAC.org.



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CHILD ADVOCACY CENTERS

Additional support and information is available through the New Hampshire Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. NHCADSV can connect you with your local sexual violence agency. Please call their statewide 24-hour hotline at 1-800-277-5570. All services are free and confidential.



DEVELOPED BY THE
CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER
OF ROCKINGHAM COUNTY

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TALKING POINTS:

These tips are not meant to be the complete answer, but rather offer general guidelines for speaking with your child about body safety.

DO talk at a quiet time without distractions. Doing so will help ensure you have your child's attention.

DO talk about which parts of the body are considered private and which are not. Use whatever language is commonly used within your home. Some parents use the analogy that any part of the body covered by underwear is considered private.

DO talk about whom may touch a child's private parts: doctors as part of an exam, children themselves and parents/caregivers assisting with toileting or bathing. It is appropriate to distinguish between those normal activities as opposed to contact with private areas not in the context of assisting with toileting or cleaning.

DO discuss that it is not ok for anyone else to touch a child's private parts including other children. Ask your child in an open manner if she has ever been touched inappropriately. If yes, ask who.

DO NOT ask direct questions such as "Has Uncle Bob ever touched your private parts?" If you suspect your child is a victim of abuse, ask in general about different people that come in contact with him.

DO talk about what to do if someone does touch her. Help her identify who she could tell. Make it clear that she can always tell you and that you will never be mad at her for doing so.

DO NOT use dolls or stuffed animals to demonstrate body parts or touching—this can invite "magical thinking" into the scenario as children commonly engage in pretend play with these toys.

DO pay attention to changes in sleeping, eating or toileting habits as these can sometimes be indicators of abuse.

DO show support for whatever your child tells you. Try not to show you are upset as this could impact his comfort level in being honest with you.

DO emphasize that it is never safe to go into another person's home or car without your knowledge. Make it clear this includes neighbors, friends, family members and acquaintances. Emphasize to your child how important it is that you always know where she is and with whom.

STATISTICS:

- 1 IN 4 GIRLS AND 1 IN 6 BOYS IS SEXUALLY ABUSED BEFORE THE AGE OF 18.
- 1 IN 5 CHILDREN ARE SOLICITED SEXUALLY WHILE ON THE INTERNET.
- NEARLY 70% OF ALL REPORTED SEXUAL ASSAULTS (INCLUDING ASSAULTS ON ADULTS) OCCUR TO CHILDREN AGES 17 AND UNDER.
- 30-40% OF VICTIMS ARE ABUSED BY A FAMILY MEMBER.
- ANOTHER 50% ARE ABUSED BY SOMEONE OUTSIDE OF THE FAMILY WHOM THEY KNOW AND TRUST.
- APPROXIMATELY 40% ARE ABUSED BY OLDER OR LARGER CHILDREN WHOM THEY KNOW.
- ONLY 10% OF CHILDREN ARE ABUSED BY STRANGERS.

—DARKNESS TO LIGHT, WWW.D2L.ORG

If your child does disclose something that is concerning, avoid the temptation to ask direct or leading questions. Bring this information to the attention of the appropriate authorities: the Division for Children, Youth and Families (1-800-894-5533) and/or your local police department. Ask for help, get support for yourself and let your child know that you are proud of her/him for talking with you. If you have any questions, or for further information, please visit www.NHNCAC.org or call the New Hampshire Network of Child Advocacy Centers at 603-422-8253.