

Top 5 Ways You Can Reduce the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse

A CONVERSATION WITH PARENTS AND LEADERS ABOUT WHAT THEY CAN DO TO REDUCE THE RISK OF SEXUAL ABUSE IN THEIR HOMES AND COMMUNITIES.

At Sprea, we believe that empowering communities with knowledge is one of the best ways to prevent child sexual abuse. Thank you for your willingness to lead out in discussing this important topic. You are an essential part of everything that we do. Here are some best practices to consider before, during, and after the presentation.

Before

- ◆ **Communicate clearly** when and where the presentation is taking place. Let participants know what topic will be discussed.
- ◆ **Prepare teaching materials:**
 - ◊ Download the presentation materials onto your computer and review them thoroughly.
 - ◊ Read the discussion guide.
 - ◊ Print out copies of worksheet for in-person students or include the worksheet link in your virtual invite. Be prepared to share the link again during your virtual class.
- ◆ **Arrive early and set up:**
 - ◊ Ensure AV equipment is present, plugged in, and functioning properly, or that your video conferencing platform is set up, sounds is working, and you can share your screen.
 - ◊ If online, ensure that your video conferencing platform is setup, sound is working, and your screen can be shared.
 - ◊ If in person, arrange seating to encourage discussion and have pens available for participants to take notes.
 - ◊ Start the presentation on the first slide in "presentation mode." For video users, start the video in full-screen mode and PAUSE it on the opening title for Part 1.

During

- ◆ **Add energy to the room.** Be friendly, positive, and enthusiastic.

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- ◆ **Trust the material and your intuition.** Follow the format and activities outlined in the research-based discussion guides while being yourself and considering the needs of the participants you are working with. Share personal experiences that enrich and illustrate critical principles.
- ◆ **When in person, sit with the group if possible.** Larger groups may require you to stand.
- ◆ **Encourage discussion:**
 - ❖ Create a safe environment where participants can be honest and candid.
 - ❖ Thank participants for their comments.
 - ❖ Help as many people as possible participate.
 - ❖ Don't allow one person to dominate the conversation.
 - ❖ Manage time. This discussion is designed to take between 60–90 minutes.
 - ❖ Prompt each participant take action on what they learned.
- ◆ **Post local and regional resources in a visible place.** Share abuse hotlines or community counseling centers that participants can contact for support.

After

- ◆ Make sure participants have a chance to take the exit survey.
- ◆ Review what went well and what can be improved for your next presentation.
- ◆ Follow up with any participants who may have been overwhelmed by the gravity of the topic.
- ◆ Congratulate yourself for the efforts you've made to improve your community!

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Introduction



Vocal Instructions



Facilitator Notes



Explain: As people learn more about the issue of childhood sexual abuse, they naturally ask what they can do to best reduce the risk for the children in their life. Fortunately, there are many actions we can take. But where to start?

Here are five of the best things you can do to reduce the risk of sexual abuse:

1. Assess risky situations and practice navigating them.
2. Teach how to set and respect healthy boundaries.
3. Keep the lines of communication open.
4. Discuss sexual development.
5. Model and develop emotional well-being.

As we review each one, take notes on your worksheet. Record the things that resonate with you and inspire you to take action.



Facilitator Note: If you have not already done so, distribute a copy of the “Top 5 Ways You Can Reduce the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse” worksheet to each participant.

Assess Risky Situations and Practice Navigating Them



Explain: Risky situations are common and diverse. We can't provide you a full list of all the situations you or your child may encounter, but here are four that you should be mindful of:

1. Situations where an adult is alone with a child
2. Overnight outings
3. Interactions that include unsupervised access to technology
4. Situations that present power differences or interactions between children with age/maturity gaps



Paired Discussion: (3–5 min.)

- ◆ Why do you think these situations present some of the highest risks for children and teens?
- ◆ What other situations would you add to this list?
- ◆ How do you strike the balance between over-protecting your children and helping them build confidence to navigate situations that will always pose some amount of risk?



Note: Bring participants back together to discuss the question below. Allow 3–5 minutes for the discussion.



Large Group Discussion: (3–5 min.) What is one idea you talked about that you could share with the group?



Explain: Here are some questions you can consider as you assess the potential risk to your child in various places and settings:

- ◆ Who are the people involved? Will there be adults or older children present that I do not know well?
- ◆ Is this a new situation or place where my child could be vulnerable? (e.g., times where they are undressing, isolated from others, etc.)
- ◆ Are there power differences present that could contribute to the risk of abuse? (Older children with younger children, authority figures with sustained close contact, peer pressures, etc.)
- ◆ Will my child be able to alert me or another trusted adult if there is a need or crisis?
- ◆ What is our plan to monitor technology use?



Summarize: How is assessing risky situations connected to reducing the likelihood of sexual abuse? Examine moments of unsupervised time and monitor who is with your kids. You can't be with them every minute, and that is how they develop independence. But you can choose the right moments to be most vigilant and prepare children for high-risk situations.



Take Action: On your worksheet write down the names of people who have unsupervised time with your children, and other situations where you can see potential risks. Plan when to talk through these risks with your family.

Teach How to Set and Respect Healthy Boundaries



Explain: We want to emphasize that the burden of preventing abuse should never be placed on children. This is because abusive actions taken by others (especially adults) violate boundaries.

Boundaries are often linked to rules and expectations. Teaching children that actions have consequences is important. Kids need to feel confident in voicing when they see adults or older kids breaking rules. Many cases of reoccurring abuse can be interrupted if adults respond to a child's report that misconduct is occurring.

Kids often push against rules and boundaries that they do not entirely understand. It is helpful when we take time to explain what the point of a rule is or why it is important to follow.

Let's listen together as parents and their kids share how boundaries play a role in their lives.



Watch: Press *PLAY* to start the *Healthy Boundaries* video.



Reflect and Record: What are some of the values that inform your boundaries? Complete these statements that explain your "why" behind the rule:

Example: "My number one job as your parent is to keep you safe, which is why I am asking you to... wear your helmet while you ride your bike."

- ◆ "The way we show respect to others when it comes to physical affection is..."
- ◆ "Rape and sexual assault are against the law because..."
- ◆ "Things we don't allow others to do when it comes to our bodies include..."
- ◆ "When we are uncomfortable with something, we can express that by..."
- ◆ "If someone's behavior is completely unacceptable, we can express that by..."

Keep the Lines of Communication Open



Explain: Communication is key to raising kids. Do the children you care about have regular opportunities to discuss what they are experiencing, thinking, and feeling with you? When they have a crisis, will they confide in you?

Communication entails many things. Let's focus on just one element to get thinking about this concept in a practical way.



Watch: Press *PLAY* to start the first *React vs Respond* video. Remember to press *PAUSE* to discuss after the first video segment concludes.



Large Group Discussion: (3–5 min.)

- ◆ What else did the parent learn when they were responsive to what was shared?
- ◆ What did the parent say or do that invited the child to continue the dialogue?



Watch: Press *PLAY* to start the second *React vs Respond* video. Remember to press *PAUSE* to discuss after the video segment concludes.



Large Group Discussion: (3–5 min.)

- ◆ Again, what else did the parent learn when they were responsive to what was shared?
- ◆ What did the parent say or do that invited the child to continue the dialogue?
- ◆ What have you found works well when a child presents an unexpected question?



Note: Take 3–5 minutes to discuss the answers to these questions with the group. Allow participants to highlight observations they took from the video or share relevant experiences they have had.



Explain: Here are some guiding principles that can help you keep the lines of communication open:

- ◆ Seek to understand and ask questions with a calm tone.
- ◆ Show empathy.
- ◆ Be patient. Allow for children to develop the courage to share.
- ◆ Be careful not to criticize.
- ◆ Remember, children don't perceive strong emotional reactions as openness.
- ◆ In most cases, children need support and short answers, not a lecture.
- ◆ When needed, take a few moments before a conversation to prepare to respond.
- ◆ Remember, you model how you react and respond. Children will learn from you.



Summarize: How is open communication connected to preventing sexual abuse?

Do everything you can to help children feel comfortable and able to discuss what is going on in their life. Emphasize the dangers of secrecy, the benefits of open dialogue, and that they can always talk with you and feel safe to share. Helping children communicate openly will increase the likelihood they will come to you when something does happen.



Take Action: On your worksheet, record key items you are learning as well as things you want to incorporate into your interactions with your children.

Discuss Sexual Development



Explain: There are many different opinions on teaching children about sex, sexuality, and intimacy. Your own perspective on the topic of sexuality is informed by your upbringing, life experience, and values.

Our essential message: Start simple. Start now.

Teaching children about sex or the dangers of sexual abuse can feel daunting. But taking intentional action is the best way to gauge your individual success. Think about situations and ideas that you want your child to be prepared for before they occur.

Listen to the experience of one parent share how he approached the task and saw both failure and success.



Watch: Press *PLAY* to start the *Discuss Healthy Sexuality* video. Remember to press *PAUSE* to explain after the video segment concludes.



Explain: Ignorance and misinformation around the topic of sex can actually lead to abuse. You may be surprised to learn that research confirms that many instances of child sexual abuse are perpetrated by other children. One reason such abuse occurs is because children can lack understanding around their actions and what effect they can have.

What to teach:

- ◆ Share correct terms and accurate information.
- ◆ Have age-appropriate discussions.

How to teach:

- ◆ Initiate lots of little talks instead of one big talk. Discussions about sexual development should never be “one and done.”
- ◆ Answer children’s questions briefly and accurately. Then ask if they have any more questions.
- ◆ Remember to try your best to respond, not react.

Model and Develop Emotional Well-Being

**Explain:** How is emotional well-being connected to preventing abuse?

Children who have healthy self-esteem can manage their emotions and are less vulnerable to abusive situations. They are more likely to trust their instincts when something doesn't feel right and quickly navigate away from things that cause them concern. On the other hand, children experiencing loneliness and insecurity are more vulnerable to risky situations. Providing space where children can express themselves leads to good communication and promotes the confidence that is needed to set and maintain healthy boundaries.

**Paired Discussion:** (2-3 min.) Take a moment to imagine a child feeling lonely or isolated in these situations:

- ◆ A class at school
- ◆ Playing poorly on a sports team
- ◆ Moving to a new neighborhood

What actions could you take to help a child in this situation? What are some different ways to teach children and teens to manage feelings of loneliness?



Explain: Now think about a time where you felt lonely and sad. Did you long for connection? Is it any wonder why a child feeling that way could be vulnerable to an abusive situation if it offered any kind of perceived connection and validation? Now consider the opposite—a young person with peers and adult mentors who consistently validate them and are enjoyable to be around, with no strings attached. A child in that context is much less vulnerable to abuse.

One useful tool you can use to help children understand and manage their emotions is an emotion wheel. It can help children observe their emotions and identify the feelings they are experiencing.



Watch: Press *PLAY* to start the *Emotion Wheel* video.



Take Action: Visit saprea.org to get a copy of the emotion wheel and other resources you can use with a child to validate them as they identify their emotions.



Conclusion: We hope you have learned about some helpful actions you can take to reduce the risk of abuse impacting the children in your life. Just by taking time to participate in our discussion today, you have shown your commitment to safety and protecting children.



Take Action: Saprea offers several other discussion guides that can help you dive deeper into some of the concepts we covered today. Please take a look at the online resources available at saprea.org/community-education and hold additional discussions about these important topics.



Note: Allow participants enough time to take the exit survey before the Q&A.