



The Society for Creative Anachronism¹

How to Protect Your Children from Child Abuse

A Parent's Guide

Message to Parents

Our children are often faced with choices affecting their development and safety. As parents we do our best to provide education and guidance to prepare our children to make the best decisions. One way we do this is to talk with our children. Some subjects are easy to discuss with our children—sports, their grades in school, and many other features of their daily lives. Other things are much more difficult for us to discuss including child abuse—especially child sexual abuse.

Although discussing child abuse with your children may be difficult for you, it is very important. Research shows that children whose parents talk to them about preventing sexual abuse are more effective at fending off assaults. Discussing such topics with children is perhaps the most important step a parent can take to protect his or her child.

Open communication between parents and children about serious topics such as child sexual abuse offers children reassurance that no matter how frightening something may be, their parents will be there to help. Unfortunately, a significant threat to the safety of children is adults who sexually molest children. A key to keeping children safe from these individuals is children's ability to seek help from trusted adults anytime they are hurt or feel scared or uncomfortable. We feel that parents are the preferred source of this help.

We do not expect that your child will become a victim of child abuse. It is extremely important, however, that if they ever face an abusive situation, they know that there are adults in their life who will listen and respond in a supportive manner. The purpose of this booklet is to help you and your child develop communication skills and improve their safety.

¹ This booklet is published by the Society of Creative Anachronism, Inc. for its members and is based in large part (including statistical references) on a pamphlet published by the *Boy Scouts of America*, "*How To Protect Your Children From Child Abuse: A Parent's Guide*". We owe them a debt of gratitude to them for all of their published resources dealing with child abuse.

Using This Booklet

This booklet is divided into two sections. The first section contains information for parents about child abuse and some tips to help you talk with your 5 to 15 year old children about child abuse. The second section is for you to share with your child. It presents four simple rules that can help keep them safer. These are followed by a few exercises for you and them to complete. The second section also contains some optional activities for them.

We strongly suggest that you read the entire booklet before you and your younger child do any of the exercises together. Once you are comfortable with the topics in this booklet, you will be able to present the information in ways they can understand. Feel free to reword an exercise to help your child gain a better understanding. You might be tempted to hand this booklet to your teenage children and tell them to read it. We urge you to resist this temptation. Your children need to know that they can openly discuss difficult topics with you.

Basic Information about Child Abuse

An abused or neglected child is commonly defined as a child who is harmed or threatened with physical or mental harm by the acts or lack of action by a person responsible for the child's care. Each state has its own laws concerning child abuse and neglect. Abuse may include physical abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse. Child neglect can occur when a person responsible for the care of a child is able but fails to provide necessary food, clothing, shelter, or care. A brief discussion of forms of abuse follows.

Neglect

A child is neglected when the persons they depend on do not provide food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, and supervision. When these basic needs are deliberately withheld, not because the parents or caregivers are poor, it is considered neglect. Often the parents or caregivers of neglected children are so overwhelmed by their own needs that they cannot recognize the needs of their children.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is the deliberate injury of a child, often by a person responsible for the child's care. Physical abuse is often the result of unreasonable punishment, or punishment that is too harsh for the child. Sometimes, physical abuse is caused when caregivers react to stress. Drinking and drug abuse by abusers are often contributing factors to physical abuse.

Physical abuse injuries can include bruises, broken bones, burns, and abrasions. Children experience minor injuries as a normal part of childhood, usually in places such as the shins, knees, and elbows. When the injuries are found in the soft-tissue areas on the

abdomen or back, or don't seem to be typical childhood injuries, it is possible that the child has been abused.

Bullying

Bullying is intentional aggressive behavior. Bullying behavior can include teasing, insulting someone (particularly about their weight or height, race, sexuality, religion or other personal traits), shoving, hitting, excluding someone, or gossiping about someone.

It can take the form of physical or verbal harassment and involves an imbalance of power (a group of children can gang up on a victim or someone who is physically bigger or more aggressive can intimidate someone else, for instance).

Bullying can cause a victim to feel upset, afraid, ashamed, embarrassed, and anxious about going to events. It can involve children of any age, including younger elementary grade-schoolers and even kindergarteners. Bullying behavior is frequently repeated unless there is intervention.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is harder to recognize but is just as harmful to the child as other forms of abuse. Emotional abuse damages the child's self-esteem and, in extreme cases, can cause developmental problems and speech disorders. A child suffers from emotional abuse when constantly ridiculed, rejected, blamed, or compared unfavorably with brothers, sisters, or other children.

Unrealistic expectations in academic or athletic achievement are a common cause of emotional abuse by parents or other adults. When a child can't meet these expectations, they feel that they are never quite good enough. Emotional abuse is almost always present when other forms of abuse are identified.

Sexual Abuse

When an adult or older child, often by using their authority or perceived authority, involves the child in sexual activity, it is child sexual abuse, and that person is a child molester. The molester might use tricks, bribes, pressure, threats, or force to persuade the child to join in sexual activity. Sexual abuse includes any activity performed for the sexual satisfaction of the molester.

A common misconception about sexual abuse is that children are most likely to be molested by strangers when the fact is that a child molester is usually someone that the child knows and trusts. Child molesters can be either male or female. Here are a few facts you should know about child sexual abuse:

- Child sexual abuse occurs to as many as 25 percent of girls and 14 percent of boys before they reach 18 years of age.

- Boys and girls could be sexually abused at any age; however, most sexual abuse occurs between the ages of 7 and 13.
- Children are most likely to be molested by someone they know and trust.
- Eighty to 90 percent of sexually abused boys are molested by acquaintances who are nonfamily members.
- Females perform 20 percent of the sexual abuse of boys under age 14.
- Few sexually abused children tell anyone that they have been abused. Children are usually told to keep the abuse secret. This could involve threats, bribes, or physical force.
- Children might feel responsible for the abuse and fear an angry reaction from their parents.

Preteens and teenagers are especially at risk for sexual abuse. The physical and hormonal changes caused by puberty and their natural curiosity about their new emotions and feelings, make these youth likely targets for child molesters. A normal desire of children this age to show their independence from their parents' control adds to the risk. This combination might keep children this age from asking their parents for help when faced with sexual abuse.

Molestation by children

Sexual molestations can also be committed by other children. If your child tells you about club initiations in which sexual activity is included, or if your child tells you about inappropriate or tricked, pressured, or forced sexual activity by other children, this is a form of sexual abuse and you need to take steps to stop the activity. This kind of sexual activity is serious and should not be ignored.

Children who molest other children need professional help. They are much more likely to respond to treatment when young than are adults who began molesting children in adolescence and received no treatment, continuing to molest into adulthood.

Parents and others who work with children need to distinguish between normal sexual behavior of children and abusive behavior. All children are curious about sexual behavior as a part of growing up. When sexual behavior is forced, when the person who initiates the behavior has more power, or when the sexual behavior lacks consent, it is abusive. When parents are concerned about their child's sexual behavior, they should try to talk with them and discuss their specific concerns. If you find your child has engaged in sexual behavior that might not be abusive, but which bothers you, use the opportunity to discuss the behavior and help your child understand why it bothers you.

How can I tell if my child has been abused?

The best indicator of abuse is a disclosure by your child that someone hurt them, scared them, or made them feel uncomfortable. Children frequently do not tell of their abuse, but there may be physical signs or behavioral changes that give parents and other caregivers clues that abuse may have occurred.

Abused children may show few, and sometimes no, outward signs of having been abused. Most abused and neglected children experience and demonstrate some signs of stress. For many children, stress causes unexplained behavioral changes such as unhappiness, bed-wetting, clinging behavior, acting out or aggressive behavior, crying for no apparent reason, inability to concentrate, and changes in school performance, self-inflicted harm, and symptoms of illnesses.

It is important to note that there are many other events in a child's life that can also create stress, such as family turmoil, drug abuse by a parent, divorce, death of a close relative or a pet, and moving. As a parent, you may be able to identify and help your child cope with such unfortunate occurrences.

Other signs of abuse may include:

- Unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes
- Injuries to or around the genitals
- Bruises or other marks in various stages of healing indicative of repeated beatings or physical assaults
- Refusing to go to a friend's or relative's home for no apparent reason, for example, "I just don't like them anymore."
- Acting out adult sexual behavior or sexually explicit language a young child is unlikely to know
- Not wanting to go to school
- Complaints of headaches or stomachaches
- Anxiety
- Sadness
- Lack of self-esteem
- Sudden drop in school performance

- Trouble sleeping or eating
- Sudden aggressive behavior or displays of temper
- Conflict with siblings or playmates
- Repeated loss of or damage to their personal belongings

What should I do if I suspect that my child has been abused?

It is very important that parents remain as calm as possible. Explosive displays of emotion in front of your child may cause them to feel guilty—either responsible for the abuse or responsible for upsetting you. In either case, it will not be helpful to your child. You should show real concern, but NOT alarm or anger, when questioning your child about possible child abuse.

If your suspicion of abuse is caused by something you observed—a change in behavior, unexplained injury, or avoidance of a particular person—ask your child about it. Use your unique knowledge of your child to select words that will encourage openness.

The first consideration should be the safety and well-being of your child. If there is an indicator of injury, your child should be seen by your family’s doctor. You should also contact your local child protective services agency and report your suspicions.

What should I do if my child tells me they have been sexually abused?

- Don’t panic or overreact to the information disclosed by your child.
- Don’t criticize your child or claim that your child misunderstood what happened.
- Do respect your child’s privacy and take your child to a place where the two of you can talk without interruptions or distractions.
- Do reassure your child that they are not to blame for what happened. Tell the child that you appreciate being told about the incident and will help make sure it won’t happen again.
- Do encourage your child to tell the proper authorities what happened, but try to avoid repeated interviews that can be stressful to the child.
- Do consult your pediatrician or other child abuse authority about the need for medical care or counseling for your child.

If your child has been sexually abused, do not blame yourself or your child. People who victimize children are not easy to identify. They come from all walks of life and all

socioeconomic levels. Often they have positions of status—they go to church, hold regular jobs, and are active in the community. Child molesters are sometimes very skilled at controlling and using children, often by giving them excessive attention, gifts, and money. They use their skills on parents and other adults, disguising their abusive behavior behind friendship and care for the child.

How can I tell if someone is a child molester?

Child molesters look and act quite normal except for their interest in children. They often establish relationships with children through organizations and then use those relationships to gain access to children outside the protective environment offered by the organization.

It is a widespread misconception that child molesters are complete strangers to their victims, and statistics of child sexual abuse confirms that 90% of sexual abuse victims know their abusers. Children are most often sexually abused by family members, close family friends and acquaintances, such as fathers, brothers, grandfathers, uncles, cousins, boyfriends of single mothers, babysitters, etc.

When a molester takes special care to facilitate a trusting relationship with a child and or the child's parents, he or she is in the act of grooming. The meticulous grooming pattern begins with a molester identifying his or her next victim. Molesters will seek out children from broken and troubled families, especially single mothers who work one or two jobs away from home. Many times the sexual predator will befriend the parent first as a way to gain access to the child.

The act of grooming a child involves spending time, energy, and money to make a child and even the parent or parents feel comfortable with the relationship. Only after a trusting relationship is established will the child predator start to become more intrusive and to test the boundaries of the relationship by pushing limits. These violations may include hugging, kissing, tickling, wrestling, and invading a child's privacy while showering, dressing or toileting.

Initially a molester will begin to violate the physical boundaries, by accidentally touching the child through his or her clothes to see what kind of reaction he or she receives. If a child or parent, questions the action the predator will likely back off and regain the trust of the child or parents before proceeding.

By befriending the parent or parents, the molester gains the trust of everyone in the family. Children are less likely to tell when the relationship turns sexual if the adult is someone he or she knows personally or is a friend of mom or dads. In addition, mom and dad may be less likely to listen to a child when it involves a good friend of the family.

Single parents, especially mother's will be looking for a positive male role model if there is no father involved. Single mothers are more likely to accept offers from a child's coach or school for help when offered. All parents need to be vigilant when it comes to

allowing someone access to his or her child, and question friendships or relationships that take up a lot of a child's free time.

Signs that a molester may be grooming your child include:

- Telling a child, he or she is a special friend.
- Showing more interest in one child when there are multiple siblings.
- Bringing a child special mementos or gifts.
- Talking to a child about adult issues like sex or marriage problems.
- Giving a child alcohol, cigarettes or illicit drugs, like marijuana.
- Inviting a child to spend the night or go camping.

Molesters are master manipulators, often convincing the child or family that this is the first time anything like this has ever happened and that it will never happen again. In reality, it is likely not the first, or even the twentieth time something indecent has happened, but because people want to give someone the benefit of the doubt, the incident is swept under the carpet, and this leaves the door wide open for other children to be violated by the same perpetrator. You should be concerned about any adult or older youth who wants to spend an unusual amount time alone with your child.

How can I talk with my Children about sexual abuse?

Many parents find it difficult to talk with their children about child sexual abuse. The following points may help you and your child talk about sexual abuse prevention.

- **If you are uncomfortable discussing sexual abuse with your child, let them know.** When parents who are uncomfortable discussing sexual abuse with their children try to hide their uneasiness, the children may misinterpret the anxiety and be less likely to come to you when they need help. You can use a simple statement like, "I wish we didn't have to talk about this. I'm uncomfortable because I don't like to think this could happen to you. I want you to know that it's important and you can come to me whenever you have a question or if anybody ever tries to abuse you."
- **Adolescent children are developing an awareness of their own sexuality and need parental help to sort out what is and is not exploitive.** Children at this age need specific permission to ask questions about relationships and feelings. Nonspecific "good touch, bad touch" warnings are insufficient, since most of the touching they experience might be "confusing touch." Adolescents also need parental help to set boundaries for their relationships with others—an awareness of when they are being controlling or abusive.

- **Many adolescent children feel it is more important to be “cool” than it is to ask questions or seek parental assistance.** Your children might resist discussing the material in this booklet with you. They might be giggly, unfocused, or restless. They might tell you that they already know about sexual abuse. That’s all right. The point of discussing sexual abuse with them is to let them know that if and when they have questions or problems they can’t handle alone, you will help them. If they tell you they already know about sexual abuse, you can ask them to tell you what they know.
- **Select words your child understands.** One of the primary concerns of parents is finding words to explain sexual abuse. If you are uncomfortable using the names of body parts, use whatever terms your child understands.
- **Provide an opportunity for your child to practice youth protection skills.** Learning is more effective when children have a chance to practice the skills they are taught.

Today’s teenagers and preteens receive a lot of misinformation about sexuality, relationships, and sexual abuse. Their role models are likely to be rock stars and other media personalities. As influential as these are, surveys of young people indicate that parents continue to be a strong influence in their lives.

Many parents feel that teaching younger children about sexual abuse will take away the innocence of childhood. Many children are at risk of sexual abuse because they do not have the maturity to understand why a child molester would want to look at, touch, or otherwise violate them. This, in part, explains why children who are sexually abused at a young age do not realize they were abused until they are older. It also explains a child’s confusion if parents or other adults respond emotionally when they disclose sexual abuse.

What should I do if I suspect that a child is being abused?

If you suspect - or hear - that a child at an SCA event or gathering is being abused, you should contact the autocrat, local seneschal or Kingdom Seneschal without delay. They will be able to tell you what you should do. They will also tell you that they must contact the appropriate authorities and report your suspicions to them. You can also contact local law enforcement directly, without going through the autocrat or seneschal. If you suspect that a child who is not at an SCA event or gathering is being abused, you should contact your local law enforcement who will assist you.

What if I am not sure that the child is being abused?

You may have a reasonable suspicion, but not know for certain, that a child has been abused. When you make a report, the appropriate agency will investigate and determine if abuse can be substantiated. Unless you make a report, the child might remain in grave danger.

The following section has information for children. It states four simple rules that are the keys to your child's personal safety. It also has some "What if . . ." exercises showing how the rules may be applied to common situations. We ask that you review the rules and complete the exercises with your child.

Information for Children

Personal Safety Rules for Children

Children under the age of twelve benefit from having concrete safety rules. It is important, however, to stress that traditional cautions about "strangers" are not sufficient to protect our children. It may be hard for a child to differentiate between a stranger and someone who is known but not considered a trusted adult. In addition, individuals who harm children are usually known to the child. Children younger than twelve need to rely upon adult guidance to improve their safety.

Discuss the following safety rules with your younger child and then help your child apply them in the "What if . . ." exercises in the next section.

- ***Check first with a parent or other trusted adult before you change plans, go anywhere, or accept anything from anyone.*** Children need to understand that their safety is greater when parents or the adult responsible for caring for them knows where they are and what they are doing.
- ***Go with a friend in order to be safer and to have more fun.*** For Children under twelve years of age, the friend should be a parent, other trusted adult, or older child.
- ***It is your body and you have the right to say no to anyone who tries to touch you in places covered by your swimming suit or to do things that you think are wrong.*** Children need to be empowered to set personal limits and to resist anyone who fails to respect those limits.
- ***Tell a trusted adult anytime you are hurt, scared, or made to feel uncomfortable.*** Children need help in recognizing whom they should trust. Parents are in the best position to help children identify the adults in their lives deserving this trust. You can also reassure your child that they will not be in trouble when they come to you for help. It's very important that children understand they are not at fault when an adult or older child harms them.

For adolescent children, the Child's Bill of Rights outlines some specific strategies your child can use to protect himself. You should discuss these and the "three Rs" of Youth Protection with your child. These could provide the information that your adolescent children need to help them respond to the situations which could arise.

Child's Bill of Rights

When feeling threatened, you have the right to:

- Trust your instincts or feelings.
- Expect privacy.
- Say no to unwanted touching or affection.
- Say no to an adult's inappropriate demands and requests.
- Withhold information that could jeopardize your safety.
- Refuse gifts.
- Be rude or unhelpful if the situation warrants.
- Run, scream, and make a scene.
- Physically fight off unwanted advances.
- Ask for help.

It's important to remember that these are protective actions that will give your adolescent children the power to protect themselves.

The "three Rs" of Youth Protection provide a useful tool for parents when they talk with their 11- to 15-year-old children about sexual abuse. Children of this age are less apt than younger children to respond to a list of child safety rules.

"Three Rs" of Youth Protection

- **Recognize** that anyone could be a child molester and be aware of situations that could lead to abuse.
- **Resist** advances made by child molesters to avoid being abused.
- **Report** any molestation or attempted molestation to parents or other trusted adults.

You can help your children develop their personal safety skills. Read the following material with your adolescent children. Use the "three Rs" of Youth Protection and the Child's Bill of Rights as references.

Applying the Personal Safety Rules

Helping your younger child learn to apply these personal safety rules can be approached in the same non-frightening way you teach them not to play with fire or to look both ways when they cross the street. Discussing the following situations with your child offers an opportunity for you to help your child learn how to apply the rules.

"What if . . ." Situations and Applicable Safety Rules

What if you are playing in your yard and your neighbor asks you to help carry groceries into his house? What should you do?

- —Check first with a parent or other trusted adult before you change plans, go anywhere, or accept anything from anyone.

What if you are camping with a relative and they suggest that you allow them to take your picture when you are not wearing clothes? What do you do?

- —Tell your relative that you do not want to have your picture taken. (It is your body and you have the right to say no to anyone who tries to touch you in places covered by your swimming suit or to do things that you think are wrong.)
- —Tell your parents when you return home what happened. (Tell a trusted adult anytime you are hurt, scared, or made to feel uncomfortable.)

What if you are playing at a friend's house and their older brother and some of his friends invite you to join a club? To join the club you are expected to take off all your clothes and wrestle with them. Your friend wants to join. What do you do?

- —Tell your friend it's time for you to go home; leave immediately. (It's your body and you have the right to say no to anyone who wants to touch you in places covered by your swimming suit or to do things that you think are wrong.)
- —When you get home, explain to your parents what happened. (Tell a trusted adult anytime you are hurt, scared, or made to feel uncomfortable.)

What if a neighbor comes to you and says your mother is sick and you must go with them? This neighbor is not a person you have been told it's OK to go with. What would you do?

- —Check first with a parent or other trusted adult before you change plans, go anywhere, or accept anything from anyone.
- —If at school, go to the principal or your teacher for help and verification.
- —If at home or somewhere else, call the emergency number—parents' employers, close relative—for help and verification.
- —Don't go anywhere without checking with someone in authority whom you have been told to contact in this kind of situation.

What if you are in a public restroom and someone tries to touch your private parts? What do you do?

- —Yell “STOP THAT” as loudly as you can and run out of the room as quickly as possible. (It’s your body and you have the right to say no to anyone who tries to touch you in places covered by your swimming suit or to do things that you think are wrong.)
- —Tell your parent, a police officer, a security guard, or other adult (such as your teacher) what happened. (Tell a trusted adult anytime you are hurt, scared, or made to feel uncomfortable.)

What if you are walking to school in the rain and a car stops and the driver asks if you want a ride? What do you do?

- —Stay away from the car; you do not need to go close to the car to answer.
- —Unless you have your parent’s permission to ride with the person, say “No, thank you.” If the driver persists, say “No!” (Check first with a parent or other trusted adult before you change plans, go anywhere, or accept anything from anyone.)
- —Tell your teacher when you get to school, and tell your parent when you get home. (Tell a trusted adult anytime you are hurt, scared, or made to feel uncomfortable.)

What if you are playing on the playground and an adult comes up to you and asks you to help find their lost puppy? What do you do?

- —Adults should ask other adults for help. Tell the person you have to ask for permission. (Check first with a parent or other trusted adult before you change plans, go anywhere, or accept anything from anyone.)
- —Tell your parent what happened. (Tell a trusted adult anytime you are hurt, scared, or made to feel uncomfortable.)

What if your babysitter asks you to sit on their lap while they read a story and show you pictures of naked people?

- —Tell them no. (You have the right to say no to anyone who wants you to do things that you think are wrong.)
- —Tell your parent what happened. (Tell a trusted adult anytime you are hurt, scared, or made to feel uncomfortable.)

What if you’re using the Internet and a pop-up asks you to fill out a form with your name, address, birth date, and telephone number to win a prize?

- —Do not give out personal information on the Internet. You never can tell how it will be used or even who will get it. (Check first with a parent or other trusted adult before you change plans, go anywhere, or accept anything from anyone.)

Another Youth Protection Activity

Family Meeting

A child must feel comfortable telling his parents about any sensitive problems or experiences in which someone approached them in an improper manner or in a way that made them feel uncomfortable. Studies have shown that more than half of all child abuse incidents are never reported because the victims are too afraid or too confused to report their experiences.

Your children need to be allowed to talk freely about their likes and dislikes, their friends, and their true feelings. You can create open communication through family meetings where safety issues can be talked about by the entire family.

Additional Resources

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information
330 C St., SW
Washington, DC 20447

Phone: 800-394-3366 or 703-385-7565
E-mail: nccanch@caliber.com
<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>

Prevent Child Abuse America
228 South Wabash Ave.
Chicago, IL 60604

Phone: 312-663-3520
www.preventchildabuse.org

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children
699 Prince St.
Alexandria, VA 22314-3175

Phone: 800-843-5678
www.missingkids.org