

Child Abuse is Preventable!

As a parent, your greatest responsibility is to protect your child from harm of all kinds. At home, this might seem easy, but most children today spend a significant portion of each day out from under the watchful eyes of their parents. They interact with teachers, school staff members, after-school program organizers, bus drivers, babysitters, family members, and many other adults in different capacities. Although it might seem like you have little control over what happens to your child when you aren't around, there are some specific things you can do to protect your child from physical, emotional, and sexual abuse—even when you can't be at their side.

Sources of Abuse

Any adult, or even another child, can be a source of abuse. But by consulting statistics and research, we can pinpoint groups of people and situations that are more likely than others to form a threat to your child. The more controlled an environment is—a well-staffed school, for example—the less opportunity there is for a predatory adult to commit abuse. If your child is walking around your neighborhood alone or in a neighbor's house, on the other hand, the environment has far less accountability for an adult who is inclined to do wrong.

It is not inappropriate for you to insist on knowing every adult that your child spends time with. Failing to meet the parents of your child's friends, simply assuming that they are trustworthy and responsible, is a mistake. Hiring a babysitter without knowing anything about their personality and home background could place your children in a potentially abusive situation.

Unfortunately, family members are a common source of abuse. While we naturally tend to trust extended family members with our children, it is not worth doing so if it places them in danger. Don't let your desire to maintain family peace allow you to leave your children in a dangerous situation with unpredictable or troubled family members.

RESOURCES

National Movement for America's Children:

www.preventchildabuse.org

Childhelp:

www.childhelp.org

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Child Welfare Information Gateway:

www.childwelfare.gov

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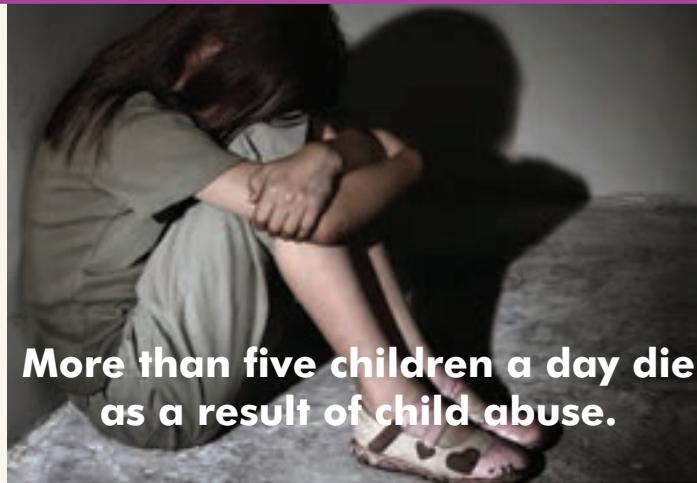
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Kinds of Abuse

It is understandably difficult for a parent to consider the possibility of anyone abusing their child. But recognizing the different kinds of abuse and knowing how to spot their warning signs is critical to protecting your child from them.

Physical Abuse. You might not be able to tell at first glance if a bruise is simply the result of falling on the playground or abuse by an adult. A conversation with your child about it, though, usually gives you a good idea of whether or not the injury is “normal.” If your child seems afraid to talk about it or tells an obvious lie about its source, you should become suspicious that something is not right.

Emotional Abuse. Many children have a hard time adjusting to new surroundings, such as a new school or a new home. These adjustments can cause emotional upheaval, but typically kids settle in well after a short period of time. If someone at school or elsewhere is emotionally abusing a child—by constantly speaking in a hurtful way to them, for example—they



More than five children a day die as a result of child abuse.

will probably display an unexpected change in their behavior. Some children become unusually reserved, while others begin lashing out in anger or display bullying behavior.

Sexual Abuse. This is probably the most devastating and complicated type of abuse, which does incredible harm to a child. If your child seems unusually sensitive about his body or starts asking sexually related questions, don't brush them off. These could be the warning signs that someone is treating your child in an inappropriate manner.

Preparing Your Child Beforehand

It is the natural tendency of many parents to assume that their children will never face abusive situations. This attitude is not only naïve; it is also unfair to children, as it leaves them unprepared to recognize danger signs and respond to them correctly. If your child spends time away from you during the day, you should make sure that they are ready to avoid, escape from, or respond to abuse.

Describe to your child what a dangerous situation looks like. Role playing scenarios can help children prepare for possible encounters. The standard rules can't be emphasized enough: Never get into a car or enter a house with an adult you don't know. Your child should know that if an adult begins acting unusual around them, or asks them to do something strange, they should get away immediately and tell an adult they know and trust about what happened.

Responding to Abuse

In the unfortunate event that abuse does occur, responding correctly as a parent is critical to minimizing physical and emotional damage. Responding correctly begins by laying groundwork well before any abuse happens.

Maintain an Open Relationship. Your child should feel like they can tell you anything at all. Children, as well as adults, often feel ashamed, embarrassed, and scared after suffering abuse, so they tend to keep it to themselves rather than tell someone else about it. Make sure your child knows that they can and should tell you about anything that happens to them without fearing anger or misunderstanding on your part. Being honest with your child and telling them about painful experiences you have had goes a long way toward building trust.

Controlled Response. Hearing about abuse will trigger anger and indignation in you, but you must be careful about displaying those emotions. Your child can easily mistake your response as directed toward them, creating further pain and distress. Your immediate response should be one of love, comfort, and understanding.

Address the Problem. On the other hand, don't shrink back from addressing the problem. Don't assume that school administration or law enforcement already knows about an instance of abuse. If the situation involves an emotionally abusive teacher or babysitter, referring the problem to a principal or parent may be a sufficient response. However, if a crime has been committed, your first call should be to your local police department.

Your child is your greatest treasure, and protecting him or her should be your highest goal. Most of the adults he or she interacts with throughout the day are on your side in this, but by following these tips you can prepare him or her to avoid and correctly respond to those that want to harm them.

