

How to talk to your children about child sexual abuse

Parenting is an amazing rollercoaster ride. Parenthood presents real challenges. Although we would like to think *we* can always keep our children safe, it isn't always the case. Our children go to school, have after school activities and hang out with friends. Keeping them safe means providing them with ALL the information they need. We can't assume anyone else is having "those" conversations with our kids. So that means we **MUST!** Educating your kids on child sexual abuse may not be your favorite conversation to have, but it is one of the most important.

Now what?

- First, take a breath.
- Be honest and open with your children.
- Talk to kids about their bodies using the correct words. Don't nickname body parts or use slang. By using these words like any other, kids can see that there is no shame associated with their bodies and they will be more comfortable talking about it.
- Let them know that no one gets to touch them in a sexual way, no matter who it is.
- Empower them. Discuss which body parts should not be touched. Stay away from the term "Good touch, bad touch" as this is very confusing for children. Children cannot always differentiate the difference and none of it may be considered "bad" to the child.
- Mention that possible abusers could be anyone, even someone they know or trust.
- Try to stay away from the familiar idea of "Stranger Danger." 90% of children are abused by someone they know. We should put our efforts into protecting our children from real threats and not talking about something simply because it is more comfortable for us.
- If your child has questions, answer them. If you don't know the answer, we are here to help with those answers.

Additional resources to help in talking to your children about child sexual abuse:

"Out of Harm's Way" by Sandy K. Wurtele, PhD

<http://productsearch.barnesandnoble.com/search/results.aspx?store=BOOK&WRD=out+of+harm+way&box=out%20of%20harm%20way&pos=-1&ugrp=2>

"So Sexy So Soon" by Diane E. Levin, PhD

<http://search.barnesandnoble.com/So-Sexy-So-Soon/Diane-E-Levin/e/9780345505071/?itm=1&USRI=so+sexy+so+soon+the+new+sexualized+childhood>

If you have any questions about how to talk to your children about child sexual abuse, please call us at 508.375.0410 or email info@barnstablecounty.org