

# Building Boundaries: Called to Protect for Young Children

## Safety Tips for Parents

### 1. Practice active parenting.

Your presence, participation, and constant interaction with your child make him/her a difficult target for child molesters who are usually looking for a child without strong family support.



### 2. Talk to your child.

This seems simple enough, but it isn't. Many parents shy away from talking to their children about anything related to sex and about anything that parents, themselves, find scary, such as child sexual abuse. Have ongoing discussions about the body and about rules regarding the body. These discussions make it easier for your child to approach you with questions or with their own concerns and experiences.

### 3. Listen to your child.

As before, listening isn't as easy as it sounds, either. Children do not always emphasize what is important information from what is purely conversational or even just mindless echoing of TV commercials. Listen carefully, though, for the names of adults and older children who seem to play a significant role in your child's life. Listen also to the emotional content of your child's communications. Does s/he frequently sound sad, angry, or anxious? All of these are normal feelings, but children should be expressing a full range of emotions not just those indicating distress.

### 4. Listen to your intuition.

No one knows your child better than you. If you see behaviors or hear comments from your child that disturb you, don't ignore your concerns. If you see unusual practices at school or any other program or if an adult's behavior is suspicious, respect your own insight. Don't be afraid to give voice to your intuition. Tell the school, etc. Never let someone make you think that your concerns are silly or over reactive.



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#### 5. When you suspect something is wrong, take action.

You can take action in several ways.

A. Talk to your child. Keep it simple and direct. For example, you can say, "I notice that you no longer want to play with Jason. What happened between you and him?"

B. Talk to the director of the program where you have concerns. Again, keep it simple. But be prepared to provide concrete examples of incidents or staff/child behaviors that raise your concern.

C. Follow up. Keep the communication open with your child. Check back with the program director to see that your concerns have been addressed.

#### 6. If your child discloses an incident of abuse to you, stay calm.

Incidents of false allegations of abuse from typical children are rare. Only about five percent of all allegations of abuse are false. If this information comes to you, of course you will be alarmed. Even so, you must accomplish several things at this critical moment.

A. Reassure your child that telling you is the right thing to do.

B. Ask if the child is hurt. If so, get medical help immediately.

C. If the child is not in a state of emergency, ask only questions that will help you understand exactly what has happened. (e.g., "Did this happen when you saw him yesterday?" or "Where were the two of you when this happened?")

D. Be sure that your child is safe. Convey to the child that you will not allow this to happen again.

E. Tell your child that the abuse is not his/her fault, no matter what s/he has been told by the molester.

F. Promise that you are going to take charge of the matter. Do not promise to keep the abuse secret. But do promise to keep your child safe and appropriately informed.

G. Notify the authorities in your state, the police or child protective services.

