



# Keeping My Family Safe

A workbook for parents and caregivers  
on preventing, recognizing and  
responding to sexual abuse.

***Preventing sexual abuse starts with caring adults taking responsibility for protecting children and youth. Know the important things you can communicate to your child, behaviors to watch out for and steps to take to keep children safe.***

**Components of sexual abuse prevention for caregivers:**

- Communicate healthy sexual development and body parts
- Teach boundaries, privacy and consent
- Know behavioral warning signs in children, youth and adults
- Create a family safety plan
- Speak up during concerning situations

***The Birds and the Bs of Sexual Abuse Prevention***

**Body Parts and How Things Work: Empower your kids with knowledge about healthy sexual development.**

Children with accurate information about healthy sexual development are more protected from sexual abuse. It is common for parents to have questions about what healthy sexual development is at different stages of a child's life. The degree to which you are comfortable talking about this with your child may depend on your own up-bringing, how your parents may or may not have explained sexuality to you as a child, or maybe even your own history of abuse. It is important to understand what age-appropriate behavior is and communicate this to your child throughout his childhood in an honest, respectful, developmentally-appropriate way, so that your child comes to you to answer questions about sex instead of someone else who may be misinformed, manipulative or even abusive.

Using the proper terms for all body parts, including genitals, empowers children with correct information about their bodies and helps lay the foundation for a lifetime of open communication between you and your child about all kinds of things. Talking openly and honestly sends the message that their bodies are special and their own, nothing to be ashamed or embarrassed about. And this knowledge is empowering! This knowledge gives children the correct language for understanding their bodies, asking questions and telling about any behavior that could lead to sexual abuse.

Practice these tough conversations before you have them. Look for windows of opportunity and "teachable moments," and don't send the message that these topics are off limits! Remember that these conversations evolve as your child reaches different stages of development and adolescence, and there are many great books and websites that can help you along the way (see page 10).

Teaching children anatomically-correct terms, age-appropriately, promotes positive body image, self-confidence, and parent-child communication; **discourages perpetrators**; and, in the event of abuse, helps children and adults navigate the disclosure and forensic interview process.

**National Sexual Violence Resource Center**

## Boundaries, Privacy and Consent: Tools to keep children safe

**When everyone is clear on rules and expectations, everyone is safer.** The tips below will help you keep children safe. Remember, it is important that everyone who cares for your child is aware of, and agrees to abide by, your family rules.

**Teach children that they have the right to say “no” when it comes to their bodies.** Some see “no” from a child in regards to hugs, etc. as being disrespectful and disobedient, but this is an important way to teach and respect consent when it comes to one’s own body. Teach and reinforce this during everyday interactions like wrestling with siblings, hugging or tickling. For example, if your child does not want to be tickled, when she says “stop” or “no,” ensure that it does indeed stop. You may need to explain to the adults around you why a child’s ability to say “no” is important for their safety. You might feel uncomfortable about potentially hurting a family member’s feelings, but remember, your child’s safety is more important.

**Be clear with adults and children about the difference between OK touch and inappropriate touch.** Talk to your child about “personal safety zones,” and help them pay attention to their own feelings of uneasiness when someone makes them feel uncomfortable in their personal space. For younger children, teach more concrete rules such as “talk with me if anyone – family, friend or anyone else – touches your private parts.” Teach kids that they are also not allowed to touch anyone else’s body without consent.

**Explain the difference between a secret and a surprise.** Abusers use secrecy to gain and maintain access to their victims, so everyone needs to know how secrets may make kids unsafe. Talk about how surprises are OK and a fun way to plan something special for someone we love. But secrets exclude others and hurt people. Explain to your child that no adult should ever ask them to keep a secret.

**You are your child’s ultimate role model.** Show your child that these rules apply to everyone!

## Behavioral warning signs: Know what concerning behaviors to look out for in adults and older children that could lead to sexual abuse.

Below are examples of concerning behaviors. These “yellow light” behaviors should raise your antenna and move you to take action. *(Refer to the chart on page 5 for more examples.)*

- having poor personal boundaries
- being overly interested in relationships with children
- holding inappropriate sexual conversations around children
- singling out a child for “special attention”
- seeking out one-on-one time with child
- not being respectful of a child’s “no”

### Children are most often abused by someone they know and trust.

In more than 90% of sexual abuse cases, the child knows their perpetrator personally – he or she is a family member, childcare provider, friend, neighbor or other trusted person. Perpetrators, who can be adults or youth, usually have permission to be around the child on a regular basis.

## **Be Responsible: Observe, intervene and speak up!**

Be proactive in safety planning for your child. Don't be embarrassed to ask questions of your child's school and recreational activities. Take the time to plan for safety, talk and listen, and voice your concerns.

Speak up when you observe concerning or inappropriate behaviors, even if the person exhibiting these behaviors is a member of your family or an older youth. It's normal to feel uncomfortable having these difficult conversations, but remember that a child's safety trumps our own discomfort or embarrassment. If you feel you can't have this conversation, find someone who can and who will help you intervene.

**As adults, we have a responsibility to protect the children around us.**

**Prevent sexual abuse.  
Recognize the signs.  
Respond with compassion.  
Report suspected abuse.**

**Trust your instincts.** Report anything you know or suspect might be sexual abuse. It is never easy to report abuse, especially if it is someone you know. But remember, it is our responsibility as adults to speak up and stop abuse. Be sure to reach out to a community agency or someone who can help you; have these names and numbers handy on your *Family Safety Plan*.

### **Take action!**

Here are a few ways to be active in planning for and participating in your child's safety.

- Ask daycares, schools and afterschool programs questions about their sexual abuse prevention policies.
- Show up unannounced at sports practices or daycare.
- Let people know you are aware and observing. Safety is increased when everyone around your children knows that you are an active and observant caregiver!
- Listen, watch and observe cues of adults and older youth in all environments where children are present.
- Be aware of children and families who may be vulnerable, such as children with disabilities or families in high-stress situations.
- Decrease isolation. The majority of sexual abuse cases occur during one-on-one situations.
- If someone is "too good to be true," ask more questions. Even a close friend or relative may not be a safe person for your children.
- Talk to other adults about prevention. Spread the message of how the actions of caring adults can protect children from sexual abuse. Identify one or more adult to talk to if you have a concern.

## How will I know if a child has been abused?

Children often disclose abuse through unusual behaviors or changes in behaviors, not words. Because many forms of abuse are not physically evident, adults should recognize certain behavioral cues as signs of potential abuse. Consider the possibility of abuse when a child:

- is hesitant about being alone with a specific adult or child
- has sophisticated or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior
- suddenly refuses to change for or participate in physical activities
- experiences nightmares, trouble sleeping or bed-wetting
- shows signs of depression, anxiety, aggression or suicidal ideation, including cutting and other forms of self-harm
- becomes pregnant or contracts a sexually transmitted infection, particularly if under 14
- experiences pain when sitting, walking or using the bathroom

## “But my child would tell me if something was wrong!”

It's difficult to think about the possibility that if your child was abused they may not immediately tell you. Understand why some children may not tell when they feel unsafe, or have been abused:

- shame or embarrassment
- fear that the abuser may hurt them or their family
- fear that they will not be believed
- fear that they will be blamed
- worry that their parents will be upset or angry
- fear that disclosing will disrupt or separate the family
- language and developmental ability

It can take a child weeks, months, years or an entire lifetime to fully reveal abuse using words.

## Responding to disclosures

Coming forward takes courage. If a child discloses abuse to you, respond with compassion.

- **Stay calm and listen carefully.** Encourage the child to speak freely, but do not ask detailed questions about the abuse.
- **Reassure the child.** Tell the child that you believe him or her, that telling you was the right thing to do, and that he or she has not done anything wrong.
- **Take action.** Report the abuse to 911 or 1-800-25-ABUSE.

### Facts about Disclosures

Very young children tend to accidentally reveal abuse.

School-aged children tend to tell a caregiver.

Adolescents are more likely to tell friends.

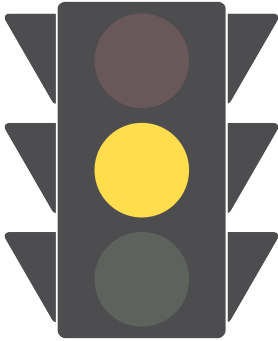
Children with intellectual disabilities tend to show through changes in behavior.

Many children have not been given the tools understand that the abuse was wrong.

For more information, visit [ChicagoCAC.org](http://ChicagoCAC.org)

## Observation and Action

Caring adults need to be the voice of children to keep them safe and help them lead lives free of abuse. Speaking up and taking action takes courage, but it is our responsibility. Print this “Traffic Light” chart and post it where you and others in your home can easily see it, so all adults in your child’s life know what behaviors to watch out for and what steps to take. Be aware that youth and older children can also be perpetrators of sexual abuse.



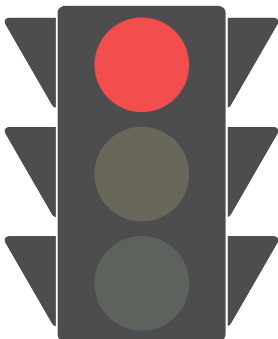
### **Yellow light = concerning or inappropriate behavior**

*Examples:*

- Showing favoritism to one child, such as special gifts
- Frequently initiating time alone with child
- Seeming overly-interested in child
- Insisting on hugging, touching, kissing, tickling, wrestling or holding a child even when the child does not want this physical contact or attention
- Frequently walking in on child in the bathroom
- Child acting uncomfortable or scared around a certain adult/youth

#### **Actions to take**

- Intervene if possible; let the person know you are watching!
- Set clear boundaries and give reminders of appropriate interactions.
- Increase monitoring, random drop-ins and observations.



### **Red light = harmful and constitutes sexual abuse.**

*Examples:*

- Coercing a child to fondle him/herself or someone else
- Touching a child’s genitals, buttocks or breasts
- Exposing oneself
- Inappropriately viewing private behaviors of a child or teen (e.g., undressing, bathing)
- Taking sexually explicit or provocative photographs of a child
- Showing pornography or sexually suggestive images to children
- Talking in sexually explicit or suggestive ways to children in person, by phone, by Internet, or via text messages

#### **Actions to take**

- Call 1-800-25-ABUSE. If there are immediate safety concerns, also call 911.



# Family Safety Plan

As a family, discuss and decide safety rules together, and fill them in below. Then post this list on your refrigerator or another prime spot at home, and review the rules often so no one forgets! Be sure to talk about them with other caregivers, such as extended family members, babysitters and teachers. See the reverse page for an example of family safety rules.

## These are the safety rules for our family:

- #1: \_\_\_\_\_
- #2: \_\_\_\_\_
- #3: \_\_\_\_\_
- #4: \_\_\_\_\_
- #5: \_\_\_\_\_
- #6: \_\_\_\_\_
- #7: \_\_\_\_\_
- #8: \_\_\_\_\_
- #9: \_\_\_\_\_
- #10: \_\_\_\_\_

## These rules have been shared with:

_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Name</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Date</i>
_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Name</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Date</i>

If I have any questions about concerning behavior or abuse, I can contact: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Chicago Children's Advocacy Center: [Info@ChicagoCAC.org](mailto:Info@ChicagoCAC.org)**

**Stop It Now! Help Line: 1.888.PREVENT**



# Family Safety Plan

As a family, discuss and decide safety rules together, and fill them in below. Then post this list on your refrigerator or another prime spot at home, and review the rules often so no one forgets! Be sure to talk about them with other caregivers, such as extended family members, babysitters and teachers.

## These are the safety rules for our family:

#1: No means no! Kids in this house are the bosses of their bodies and have the right to say no to any touch or interaction in regards to their body or personal space.

#2: We tell a trusted adult if anyone touches us or talks to us in a way that makes us feel uncomfortable.

#3: We use the proper names for body parts in this house, including for our private parts.

#4: Private parts are our body parts that are covered by a bathing suit.

#5: We don't touch, look at or ask to play games with anyone's private parts.

#6: We don't ask anyone to touch or play games with our private parts.

#7: Boundaries keep us safe. We speak up when someone crosses into our "personal safety zone" or makes us feel uncomfortable.

#8: We respect others' privacy, boundaries and personal space.

#9: We don't keep secrets. We know that no grown-up should ever ask us to keep a secret.

#10: We speak up and ask questions if we don't understand a rule, expectation or boundary.

## These rules have been shared with:

Grandma & Grandpa                      Babysitter  
*Name*                                      *Name*                                      *Date*

Aunt & Uncle                              Coach  
*Name*                                      *Name*                                      *Date*

If I have any questions about concerning behavior or abuse, I can contact: \_\_\_\_\_

**Chicago Children's Advocacy Center: [Info@ChicagoCAC.org](mailto:Info@ChicagoCAC.org)**

**Stop It Now! Help Line: 1.888.PREVENT**

# Prevention Checklist

Below are the main components of sexual abuse prevention that you learned from Chicago Children's Advocacy Center. Think about how confident you feel with each. If you feel you need more practice or information, make a plan for how you can get there and keep your family safe!

**1. I know the behavioral warning signs in youth and adults that may indicate sexual abuse.**

- Yes, I am ready to do this!
- I need some more information and guidance. Below are steps I will take.

**Action steps:**

**2. I feel knowledgeable and confident teaching my child about proper names of body parts, healthy sexual development, boundaries, privacy and consent.**

- Yes, I am ready to do this!
- I need some more information and guidance. Below are steps I will take.

**Action steps:**

**3. I feel empowered to ask questions of babysitters, relatives, schools and organizations that provide my child with services and care.**

- Yes, I am ready to do this!
- I need some more information and guidance. Below are steps I will take.

**Action steps:**

**4. I have the information to create a family safety plan and discuss it with my child and their caregivers.**

- Yes, I am ready to do this!
- I need some more information and guidance. Below are steps I will take.

**Action steps:**

**5. I have the knowledge and confidence to intervene and speak up during concerning situations.**

- Yes, I am ready to do this!
- I need some more information and guidance. Below are steps I will take.

**Action steps:**

# Resources

***For more information on preventing, recognizing, responding to and reporting child sexual abuse, visit [ChicagoCAC.org/resources](https://chicagocac.org/resources)***

## **Online Resources**

### **Prevention**

- Coalition Against Sexual Abuse of Children with Disabilities: [ChicagoCAC.org/CASACD](https://chicagocac.org/CASACD)
- Internet Safety Information: [NetSmartz.org](https://net-smartz.org)
- Stop It Now!: [StopItNow.org](https://stopitnow.org)
- Committee for Children: [CFChildren.org/families](https://cfchildren.org/families)
- Child Help: [ChildHelp.org](https://childhelp.org)
- Enough Abuse: [EnoughAbuse.org](https://enoughabuse.org)
- The Mama Bear Effect: [TheMamaBearEffect.org](https://themamabeareffect.org)
- Strengthening Families Illinois: [StrengtheningFamiliesIllinois.org](https://strengtheningfamiliesillinois.org)

**To schedule a training for your parent group or organization, contact [Training@ChicagoCAC.org](mailto:Training@ChicagoCAC.org)**

### **For adult survivors of sexual abuse**

- Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault: [ICASA.org](https://icasa.org)
- Rape Victim Advocates: [RapeVictimAdvocates.org](https://rapevictimadvocates.org)
- Joyful Heart Foundation: [JoyfulHeartFoundation.org](https://joyfulheartfoundation.org)
- Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network: [RAINN.org](https://rainn.org)
- Oregon Abuse Advocates & Survivors in Service: [OASSISOregon.org](https://oassisoregon.org)
- Black Abuse Survivors: [BlackSurvivors.org](https://blackabusesurvivors.org)

## **Response Resources**

***For a crisis needing immediate attention, call 911 or go to the nearest police station.***

### **Child abuse and neglect**

- Illinois Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873)

### **Adult survivors of sexual assault**

- Chicago Rape Crisis Hotline: 1-888-293-2080
- Rape Victim Advocates: 312-443-9603

### **Youth and adults with sexual behavior problems**

- Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers: [ATSA.com/request-referral](https://atsa.com/request-referral)
- National Center on the Sexual Behavior of Youth: [NCSBY.org](https://ncsby.org)
- Center for Contextual Change: 847-676-4447
- Advocate Child Trauma Treatment Program: 800-216-1110

## Help and hotlines

- Illinois Domestic Violence Helpline: 1-877-863-6338, TTY: 1-877-863-6339
- NAMI of Greater Chicago's Mental Health Helpline: 312-563-0445
- Community Counseling Centers of Chicago's crisis line: 773-769-0205
- Crisis and Referral Entry Service (CARES) line: 1-800-345-9049
- National CyberTipline: 1-800-843-5678 or [MissingKids.com/CyberTipline](http://MissingKids.com/CyberTipline)
- National Runaway Safeline: 1-800-786-2929
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

## Books

### Books for children about prevention

- *Some Parts are Not for Sharing* – Julie K. Federico (ages 6 months+)
- *Your Body Belongs to You* – Cornelia Spelman (ages 3-6)
- *It's MY Body* – Lory Freeman (ages 3-8)
- *Loving Touches* – Lory Freeman (ages 3-8)
- *The Right Touch* – Sandy Kleven (ages 3-8)
- *The Trouble with Secrets* – Karen Johnsen (ages 3-8)
- *My Body Belongs to Me* – Jill Starishevsky (ages 3-8)
- *A Secret Safe to Tell* – Naomi Hunter (ages 3-8)
- *Some Secrets Should Never Be Kept* – Jayneen Sanders (ages 3-8)
- *I Said No: A Kid-to-kid Guide to Keeping Private Parts Private* – Kimberly King (ages 3-8)
- *Body Safety* – Jayneen Sanders (ages 3-12)
- *My Body is Private* – Linda Walvoord Girard (ages 6-11)
- *The Swimsuit Lesson* – Jon Holsten (ages 6-11)
- *Fred the Fox Shouts "No!"* - Tatiana Y. Kisil Matthews (ages 3-8)

### Books about sexual development and safety

- *The Sex-wise Parent* – Janet Rosenzweig
- *Birds + Bees + Your Kids* – Amy Lang
- *Off Limits: A parent's guide to keeping kids safe from sexual abuse* – S. Wuertele & F. Berkower
- *Teaching Children with Down Syndrome about Their Bodies, Boundaries and Sexuality* – T. Couwenhoven
- *Understanding Your Child's Sexual Behavior* - Toni Cavanaugh Johnson
- *Childhood Sexuality: A guide for parents* – Gail Ryan and Joanne Blum
- *From Diapers to Dating: A parent's guide to raising sexually healthy children* - D. Haffner
- *What's the Big Secret? Talking about sex with boys and girls* - Laurie Brown
- *Changing Bodies, Changing Lives* – Ruth Bell
- *It's Perfectly Normal* – Robbie Harris
- *It's So Amazing* – Robbie Harris

### Books for Children on Healing and Recovery

- *Something Happened and I'm Scared to Tell* – Patricia Kehoe, Ph.D. (ages 3-7)
- *Something Is Wrong at My House* – Diane Davis (ages 3-12)
- *I Can't Talk About It* – Doris Sanford (ages 4-8)
- *A Very Touching Book for Little People and for Big People* – J. Hindman & T. Novak (ages 6-12)
- *Sarah's Waterfall: A healing story about sexual abuse* – Ellery Akers (ages 7-12)



Chicago Children's Advocacy Center and our partners are the front-line responders in Chicago to reports of child sexual abuse, as well as reports of physical abuse of children under age 3.

We are committed to empowering parents, professionals and other community members to prevent, recognize, respond to and report sexual abuse.

Learn more, schedule a training or download free resources at [www.ChicagoCAC.org](http://www.ChicagoCAC.org)

