

A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING AND PREVENTING ABUSE



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



INSIDE THIS GUIDE

Page 1: Talking about Abuse

Page 2: How to keep your children safe

Page 3: Know the signs and be ready to respond

Page 4: Hurdles to getting children to speak out & Who to call for help.

ABUSE FACTS

1 in 10 children will be sexually abused before their 18th birthday.

Roughly 1 in 7 girls and 1 in 25 boys will be victims.

35% of abuse victims are 11 years old or younger. 20% are under the age of 8.

60% of child abuse victims never tell anyone about their abuse.

Of all the babies born in the U.S. this year, 400,000 will be victims of child sexual abuse.

LEARN MORE

For more information on how you can recognize and prevent child abuse, please visit:

Darkness 2 Light
www.D2L.org

Westport Weston Family YMCA
www.westportymca.org/protecting-our-children

TALKING ABOUT ABUSE CAN HELP YOU PREVENT IT

TALK TO YOUR CHILD

Talking about abuse with your children and other adults can be uncomfortable, but it's worth it. If your child knows how to stay safe and is comfortable talking to you about abuse they will be more likely to talk to you if something does happen.

Take into consideration the age of your child when talking to them about preventing abuse. With younger children, teach them the appropriate names for their body parts and what are private parts that only parents or a doctor should see and touch. With older children you can begin talking about why others shouldn't touch them and who they can talk to if they need help.

TALK TO OTHERS

Let others know that you talk to your kids about abuse. Set boundaries for your children and their caregivers. Inform babysitters about your rules in the house and that you and your children talk about these things. Ask the staff in your child's programs what they do to protect your children and prevent abuse. The more we all talk about it, the more we can bring the topic out into the open and help prevent abuse.

HOW TO HELP KEEP YOUR CHILDREN SAFE

TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN

- Know their activities and daily habits. Know where they are and be able to recognize if they went off their routine so you can check in.
- Listen to what they like and don't like. Talk about new interests or changes in what they like to do.
- Encourage them to talk to you and have honest conversations with them to set a precedent of trust and acceptance.
- Make sure they know they and their safety are your first priority.
- Ask them if anyone has made them uncomfortable and how they were uncomfortable.

SET BOUNDARIES

- Set limits of where they can go, what they can do and who they can be with.
- Check into their online world. See who they are talking to and what are they looking at. Consider limiting times younger children can be online and if they need to be in an open spot in the home so you can see what they are looking at.
- Let other parents know your boundaries of what shows or videos they can watch, activities they can do and the level of supervision you expect when your child is under their care.

TEACH THEM TO PROTECT THEMSELVES

- Make sure they know their name, address and your phone number.
- Make sure they know not to accept gifts, rides in cars or other special treats without asking you first.
- Teach them to say "no" if someone tries to touch them and for them to tell an adult they trust.
- Tell them what would be unsafe behaviors and what not to let people do and that they should tell you about anything that happens that makes them uncomfortable.

GET INVOLVED

- Know where your child is at all times. Ask your child to let you know if their plans change.
- Make a habit of checking in with them while they are away from home. Call them to check in so they know you are keeping an eye on them and others know you are aware of where they are.
- Know the adults and older youth involved in your child's lives. Let them know who you are, ask them questions and make sure you are comfortable with them.

DID YOU KNOW?

This sobering statistic about child abuse in the United States:

70-80% of abuse survivors report drug and alcohol abuse later in life.

30% of abuse victims are abused by a family member.

The CDC estimates that child abuse costs us billions of dollars every year.

Statistics are from
Darkness 2 Light



KNOW THE SIGNS AND BE READY TO RESPOND

SIGNS TO LOOK FOR IN YOUR CHILD

There are many signs a child may give that they are experiencing abuse. They may not show all of them, but it is important that caregivers know the signs so they can recognize any that may appear.

- A change in personality and behavior that can't be linked to another cause
- Withdrawal from activities or groups they enjoyed previously
- A sudden desire to avoid someone they enjoyed being with before
- A sudden shyness and reluctance to allow people to hug or touch them
- A new desire for privacy and avoiding times where they are exposed to others such as bath time, swimming or locker rooms
- Marks or injuries that they can't or won't explain
- A sudden interest in discussing sexual topics including a new level of knowledge or vocabulary

HOW TO RESPOND IF YOU RECOGNIZE SIGNS IN YOUR CHILD OR IF THEY DISCLOSE ABUSE TO YOU

Your availability to talk to your child and ability to listen to them will help your child share with you.

- Have set times in your house for your children to talk to you. Bedtime, rides in the car and meal times are examples of routines you can set where your child can talk to you. Be sure to give your child your full attention during these times.
- Listen to your child when they talk to you.
- Question vague comments. They could be testing your reaction to a disclosure.
- If your child does tell you about a situation where there was possible abuse.
 - Remain calm, don't show shock or anger.
 - Let them know you believe them.
 - Ask open ended questions such as "who", "what happened" and "where were you". Asking leading questions such as "did she touch you" may confuse the facts for the child.
 - Tell them you are going to find help for them.
- Write down what your child said. Facts may get confused as time goes by.

RECOGNIZING AN ABUSER

As parents and care givers, we must trust others with our children. Here are some red flags to watch for in the people who care for our children. These red flags could be signs of an abuser.

- An adult who seems to enjoy being with your child more than you do.
- Gives gifts to your child. They often offer to watch your children so you can take a break. They may not ask for payment saying they just want to help out.
- Your child mentions special secrets they may have with that another adult.
- An older youth or adult seems to spend excessive amounts of time alone with your child.
- They ask to take pictures of your child or if they can call, email or connect with your child privately.
- They are willing to "bend rules" to help you and your child.
- Your child has knowledge or topics or activities you do not approve of.

DID YOU KNOW?

MYTH: Most abusers are adult men who are strangers to the family.

FACT: 90% of children who are abused are abused by someone they know and 40% are abused by another, older child. Abusers are all races, genders and religions.

WHEN YOU NEED A LITTLE HELP, YOU AND YOUR CHILD ARE NOT ALONE

WHY A CHILD MAY NOT SPEAK OUT

It's important to understand that children may be hesitant or scared to share an incident of abuse. Knowing these reasons can help you encourage a child to talk and possibly prevent them from feeling nervous .

- Children may be afraid that they will be in trouble for letting someone touch or see them. Especially if they know it is wrong and the family has rules against it.
- Sometimes abusers will convince they child they are bad for participating in the abuse and that parents will be upset about it. They may even threaten to harm another person the child cares about.
- Children may be afraid that others may think it is ok to abuse them now that it is already happened. This can also be a case if the abuser is someone they and their family trust. Sometimes children believe they did something to attract the abuse.
- Other reasons can include a child's fear of not being believed, fear of the abuse getting worse if they talk about it and fear that their family will reject them and protect the abuser.

WHO TO TALK TO FOR HELP

You and your child are not alone. There are many resources our there to help you if you have questions or if you feel your child is being abused.

Resources at the Westport Weston Family YMCA

Meaghan George, *Director of Camp & Family Services*
(203) 226-8981 X119

Jay Jaronko, *Senior Program Director*
(203) 226-8983

Pat Riemersma, *YMCA CEO*
(203) 226-8981 X107

Other Local Resources

CT Department of Children and Families (800) 842-2288

Westport Police (203) 341-6000

Weston Police (203) 222-2600

Darkness 2 Light:
www.D2L.org
(866) 367-5444

The Center Crisis 24 Hour
Hotline (203) 329-2929

Community Child Guidance Clinic
(860) 643-2101

Our Mission

"The Westport Weston Family YMCA enriches the community by developing and nurturing youth, promoting healthy living for all and fostering social responsibility."

We are committed to our mission and value the trust you have in us to be a part of your family's life. We cherish the role we get to play in developing the children of our community. For more information about our child abuse prevention measures, please visit our website at westporty.org or contact: Meaghan George, Director of Camp & Family Services (2030 226-8981 X 119 or mgeorge@westporty.org)

