

# WHAT TO DO

Don't jump to conclusions prematurely. Some children really don't like gym class—and some may just not like Uncle Joe because he has a scary haircut or bad breath. Pay attention to the cues but assess those cues in the context of total behavior. No real determination can be made by a single observation.

If you discover or suspect your child has been a victim of abuse—STAY CALM.

It is important to not transmit your own emotional upset. Don't grill a child for every detail or alarm the child by panicking.

Take immediate steps to protect your child from any imminent danger by removing all contact with the suspected abuser. While your first instinct may be to confront the accused yourself, that may not be the right approach.

The first contact you want to make is with the police. This is especially important with children under the age of 5.

Children under the age of 5 are not considered credible in the justice system. Even if a child is 4 years old and clearly says someone touched me—even if they can describe it—they are not considered legally credible witnesses, thus a court case cannot go forward.

If you contact the police, a little bit of detective work on their part can go a long way in discovering additional evidence that could make apprehending the abuser far more likely.

The police will advise you on how to proceed in terms of dealing with the abuser. Particularly if they reside in your home or are a close family member.

Contacting a child-advocacy center can help; most major medical centers have one. You will find experts trained in not only counseling children that have been exposed to abuse, they can also be a treasure trove of information on what parents can expect from their children and justice system.

A child-advocacy center is also a good place to turn if you suspect your child is being sexually abused but they have not yet corroborated your suspicions. When this is the case, trained counselors can talk to your child and help discover if, in fact, abuse is occurring.

## PARENTS RESOURCES

**Childhelp USA**, National Child Abuse Hotline  
(800) 4-A-CHILD , (800) 422-4452.

**Child Abuse National Hotline**  
(800) 25-ABUSE, (800) 252-2873.

**State of Texas Child Abuse Hotline**  
(800) 252-5400,

or visit [www.txabusehotline.org](http://www.txabusehotline.org)  
Texas Youth Hotline (800) 210-2278

### Online:

[www.therapistfinder.net/Child-Abuse/Child-Abuse-Hotlines-Phone-Numbers.html](http://www.therapistfinder.net/Child-Abuse/Child-Abuse-Hotlines-Phone-Numbers.html).

To find a child advocacy center in your area, call your local hospital. Online visit the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, [www.nctsnet.org](http://www.nctsnet.org).

For a direct link to a listing by state, visit,

[www.nctsnet.org/nccts/nav.do?pid=abt\\_ntwk](http://www.nctsnet.org/nccts/nav.do?pid=abt_ntwk).

**Diocese of Tyler**

PROTECTING  
YOUR CHILD  
FROM  
ABUSE



# Not Just Strangers

Assault by a stranger accounts for just 3 percent of molestations in children under the age of 6 and 5 percent in children aged 6-11.

Since winning the child's trust, referred to as "grooming", is part of the sexual abuse pattern, the vast majority of abuse occurs with adults the child knows and comes to trust. And it often occurs right in their home.

The message you don't want to give your child is that the world is a bad or scary place.

## BUILDING PROTECTIVE BONDS

How do you strike a balance between protecting your child and encouraging growth and trust?

It begins by building awareness and trust into your own relationship with your children.

Teach children to respect themselves and others.

Teach children how to treat others and how they in turn should expect to be treated.

One of the best ways in which a parent can protect their child from sexual abuse is with early intervention of awareness of grooming behaviors and situations.

Use age-appropriate measures to introduce children to the concept of sexual abuse and teach them how to respond if the threat occurs.

Discussing the topic with your children routinely makes it easy for them to come to you.

A child needs to fully understand, in an age-appropriate way what abuse is, how others should act and they did nothing to cause it.

Listen to your children. Become tuned in to what is "normal" behavior for your children.

Look for patterns in behavior changes, specifically as they relate to an individual such as an uncle, stepfather or neighbor - or a specific event such as soccer practice or a scout meeting.

## KNOW THE SIGNS

### PRE-WARNING

#### GROOMING FOR ADULTS/CHILDREN

Friendliness, excessive patronizing of children/caregivers.

Ingratiating activity such as doing favors, helping out when no one has asked for help.

Targeting vulnerable families such as those with alcohol problems or single mothers.

Adults spending time alone with your child or giving your child gifts.

#### AFTER ABUSE HAS OCCURED

A sudden onset of sexualized behavior. A sudden desire to touch their body or the bodies of other children/adults.

Sudden or rapid onset of fears—including fears of being around a certain person or attending a regular activity.

Change in personality. Acting out, particularly showing anger or aggression towards others. In younger children this can be manifested while playing with toys or playmates. In older children the anger can manifest as substance abuse, particularly alcohol.

Sleeping disorders—more or less than usual. Children may be obsessed with secrecy or privacy.

Fire setting—or having an obsession with fire. In younger children the fascination may be in drawings of fire or in pictures that use a lot of red.

Onset of eating disorders—overeating/under eating.

Pain or discharge in the genital area, body bruises, cuts or abrasions that can't be explained, constant or difficulty urinating.

Any change in behavior that seems abnormal. Personality, habits, likes/dislikes, particularly any change in attitude toward something the child used to enjoy, such as a sporting event, dance class or scouting events.

## GOOD TOUCH

## BAD TOUCH

How do you talk to your children about such a difficult topic?

Begin at a very early age, using the concept of "good touch", "bad touch" and "secret touch".

**Good touch**—hug, pat on the back, kiss on the cheek.

**Bad touch**—when someone hits or pushes you.

**Secret touch**—when someone wants to touch and they say you have to keep it a secret

Make sure your child knows that if anybody wants to give them a "secret touch", they should say "no" and tell Mommy/Daddy right away.

Tell children that any area where a bathing suit covers is their private place—and this is where they don't want other people to touch. As the child gets older, more age-appropriate details can be added.

Talk with your children frequently. When your child comes home from school ask them to tell you about the "good" touches they had that day; then ask them about any "bad" touches. Finally ask if anyone tried to have a secret touch. If your child gets used to hearing these terms they will feel more comfortable sharing information.



**Define good, bad and secret touches**



