

Parent Guide



Helping Organizations Prevent Child Sexual Abuse





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ISBN (English print version): 978-0-9812360-1-8

ISBN (English online version): 978-0-9869134-0-2

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About Us

What is the Canadian Centre for Child Protection?

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection is a national charitable organization dedicated to the personal safety of all children. Our goal is to reduce child victimization by providing programs and services to the Canadian public. Our mission is to:

- Reduce the incidence of missing and sexually exploited children
- Educate the public on child personal safety and sexual exploitation
- Assist in the location of missing children
- Advocate for and increase awareness about issues relating to child sexual exploitation



The Canadian Centre for Child Protection operates national programs and services:



Cybertip.ca is Canada's tipline for reporting online child sexual exploitation, including child pornography (child abuse images), online luring, children exploited through prostitution, child trafficking, and child sex tourism.



Kids in the Know is a safety education program designed to empower children and reduce their risk of victimization. The program focuses on building self-esteem by teaching critical problem-solving skills, and uses a community-based approach to heighten awareness of child safety and protection strategies. Kids in the Know includes a curriculum for teachers, supplementary information on dealing with disclosures of abuse, training programs, books, puppets, games, and online activities for families.



Commit to Kids is a program to help child-serving organizations create safe environments for children. Commit to Kids provides strategies, policies, and step-by-step tools to help organizations reduce the risk of sexual abuse and protect children in their care.

Research and advocacy: This program gathers and compiles the latest trends and characteristics of child victimization in Canada. It provides the research basis for an advocacy role that supports programs, services, and legislation that promote child protection.

Public awareness and education are integrated into all of the work we do. Since 1985, we have also been providing missing children services in Manitoba as Child Find Manitoba.

"cybertip!ca" and "kids in the know" are registered trade-marks of, and Commit to Kids is a trade-mark of, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection Inc.





Introduction

Children in Canada are involved in activities outside of their homes virtually every day. Child care, sports teams and other extra-curricular programs make up the dynamic life of a child, one where they are often in the care of other responsible adults. The majority of these activities and experiences are fun, positive and help children learn and grow into healthy adults. Just as we recognize the importance of ensuring physical environments do not pose safety risks to children, we must do the same in preventing child sexual abuse. We know that some sex offenders intentionally target child-serving organizations to have 'legitimate' access to children. This guide was created to give parents the necessary information and tools to reduce the likelihood of their child being victimized. The purpose is to educate parents about the risks and help them mobilize their communities to create safe environments for children.

What is Commit to Kids?



Commit to Kids is a comprehensive program to help child-serving organizations prevent sexual abuse and to more quickly identify, terminate and intervene in any abuse that is not prevented. It provides strategies, policies, and a step-by-step plan for reducing the risk of child sexual abuse, and encourages organizations to take an active, participatory role in protecting children in their care.

In Canada, there are several prevention programs that address the issue of personal safety. Typically these programs are taught in the classroom environment. While such programs are essential, they fail to address the specific risks children face in organizations. It is well-known that sexual abuse and misconduct can occur in child-centered activities and programs. Commit to Kids teaches organizations how to define appropriate boundaries between adults and children and create safe and positive environments.

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection created Commit to Kids for all organizations that work with children. It fills a gap in the area of sexual abuse prevention, as we know that sex offenders may specifically target child-serving organizations. Awareness and implementation can go a long way in deterring offenders and protecting children.

COMMIT TO KIDS WILL HELP ORGANIZATIONS:

- ✓ Prevent child sexual abuse through increased awareness and education
- ✓ Teach the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour
- ✓ Develop strategies to manage risk and minimize the chance of child sexual abuse
- ✓ Design programs that focus on child safety and supervision
- ✓ Establish clear boundaries between adults and children
- ✓ Ensure that allegations of child sexual abuse are handled in a sensitive, timely and effective manner
- ✓ Understand their legal obligations to report child sexual abuse
- ✓ Ensure the highest standard of practice when working with children
- ✓ Provide training to all employees who work with children
- ✓ Stop and intervene as soon as possible in any ongoing abuse that is discovered

Parents play the most important role in protecting children. Understanding child sexual abuse and implementing strategies to prevent it, can help you build safe environments for your child and other children in the community.

This guide is tailored specifically to parents. It provides you with the information you need to understand the issue, assess your knowledge, protect your child, and choose safe organizations.



Why Parents Need This Guide



Sex offenders may intentionally target child-serving organizations to access families and children.

Most children are involved in daily activities and extra-curricular programs that require them to spend time outside of your home, supervised by adults other than you. Child-serving organizations are generally committed to providing safe, nurturing environments for the children they serve, but may fail to implement or enforce policies to prevent sexual abuse. Organizations must be vigilant in establishing guidelines and protocols to protect children in their care.



Child sexual abuse is a serious problem and parents need to understand how it happens in order to recognize and prevent it.

Understanding child sexual abuse and how sex offenders target children can help parents and organizations develop tools and strategies to minimize risk.



It provides tools to help you choose safe organizations for your child, conduct a family safety questionnaire, and teach your child how to stay safe.

As a parent, you have a responsibility to make sure you choose organizations that have effective child protection measures in place. If your child is involved in a program that does not have child protection policies and procedures, tell them about Commit to Kids.

How to Use this Parent Guide

- 1 Assess your personal safety knowledge ([starting on page 6](#))
- 2 Understand the risks. Learn about child sex offenders, the grooming process and child sexual abuse ([starting on page 8](#))
- 3 Learn what, when and how to report abuse and misconduct ([starting on page 18](#))
- 4 Implement safety tools, including a family safety plan and lessons on personal safety and boundaries ([starting on page 24](#))
- 5 Learn how to choose safe organizations for your child by asking questions ([starting on page 34](#))



Assessing Your Personal Safety Knowledge

Before moving forward, test your current knowledge about child personal safety. Answer **TRUE** or **FALSE** to the following statements:

Questions

1. Children who appear to consent to sexual abuse are victims.
2. Teaching stranger danger is a good way to keep children safe from abduction and exploitation.
3. Children are most likely to be abused by strangers.
4. Offenders will abuse any child they have access to.
5. Young children are at the highest risk of sexual victimization.
6. Good touch and bad touch lessons are the most effective way to help children learn about sexual abuse.
7. Grooming is a technique used by offenders to sexually abuse children.
8. Assistance, affection and threats are lures used to abduct or sexually assault children.
9. Offenders usually use physical force to sexually abuse a child.
10. If a child is sexually abused s/he will usually tell an adult immediately.
11. Children are always aware when a situation has become sexually abusive.
12. Adolescents will almost always tell a safe adult about sexual abuse.
13. All child molesters were abused as children.
14. Offenders do not have intimate relationships with adults.
15. Boundaries are important to a child's personal safety.
16. In preventative education, instilling fear is NOT an effective way to ensure that children take their personal safety seriously.



Answers

- 1. TRUE.** Children cannot consent to sexual abuse. The legal age of protection in Canada is 16 years of age. Even after 16 years of age, a child cannot consent to sexual contact with an adult who is in a position of trust.
- 2. FALSE.** Children associate a stranger with someone who is scary and mean. Individuals who are interested in victimizing children usually present themselves as friendly and appealing to children.
- 3. FALSE.** Most victims of child sexual abuse know the offender.
- 4. FALSE.** Individuals with an interest in children usually target specific children they want to sexually abuse.
- 5. FALSE.** Children 11-17 years of age are at the highest risk of sexual exploitation.
- 6. FALSE.** This concept can be confusing, as a 'bad touch' does not always feel bad. Teaching 'bad touch' can cause the child to feel shame and guilt associated with the abuse.
- 7. TRUE.** For more information on the grooming process often used by child sex offenders, see page 10.
- 8. TRUE.** Assistance and affection are part of the grooming process (page 10), while threats and intimidation are meant to cause fear in the child, keeping him/her complacent.
- 9. FALSE.** Most offenders groom children and build relationships with them in order to increase compliance. Few use physical force.
- 10. FALSE.** Delayed disclosure is more common than immediate disclosure.
- 11. FALSE.** Sexual abuse can be very confusing to a child because they do not always know that the behaviour has become abusive.
- 12. FALSE.** Adolescents are the least likely to tell if they have been sexually abused.
- 13. FALSE.** Not all child molesters were abused as children.
- 14. FALSE.** Many individuals who sexually offend against children are married and have relationships with many adults.
- 15. TRUE.** Overwhelming evidence points to the importance of personal boundaries in keeping children aware of potentially dangerous situations and reducing the risk of victimization. See page 32 for information on personal boundaries.
- 16. TRUE.** Fear tactics are ineffective in teaching a child personal safety lessons, as fear can interfere with memory.

If you would like more information about the myths and facts of child personal safety and sexual abuse, visit commit2kids.ca.



Understanding the Risks – Child Sex Offenders

The majority of adults who work with children do not harm them. Most environments are safe and provide fun experiences. However, there are individuals who will abuse their positions of trust and offend against children. The following sections provide important information about how a child can be victimized in organizations. As is the case in any environment, you need to be informed about specific risks connected to the extra-curricular and community programs in which your child may be involved.

DID YOU KNOW:

SEX OFFENDERS OFTEN INTENTIONALLY TARGET CHILD-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

Individuals who choose to work with children and end up sexually abusing them typically fall into two categories:

- 1.** Those who deliberately seek access to children to satisfy their deviant sexual interest. This behaviour is calculated and purposeful.
- 2.** Those who have emotional and/or psychological problems rather than deviant sexual interests. This may start with a friendship between the child and adult which becomes distorted, resulting in inappropriate interactions and sexually abusive behaviour. The adult may not have any prior history of sexually offending, yet finds him/herself in a situation where his/her needs are met by exploiting children.

Child sex offenders target children in organizations because they believe:

- They can gain the trust of the victim and those around the victim
- They can get away with it
- There are no clear consequences within the organization



Model in photo. Intended as illustrative.



Offences may go undetected because:

- The offender appears to be a dedicated, outstanding employee/volunteer: extremely friendly, helpful, great with children, well-liked, etc.
- Fellow employees/volunteers and parents cannot imagine that such offences could or would be attempted
- Fellow employees/volunteers and parents believe they would know/notice if misconduct or abuse was occurring
- The offender conceals the behaviour as legitimate job duties: caring for children, going on outings, spending extra time working alone with a child, participating in overnight trips, toileting, seeking assistance from a child, etc.

“Many offenders are not just pretending to be nice, they are nice.”

K. Lanning (personal communication, September 8th, 2009)

DID YOU KNOW:

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE OFTEN BEGINS WITH UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR

Child sexual abuse is a complex problem because the abuse is often hidden, even to parents and other responsible adults. When abuse is obvious, the steps to take are often more clear. Examples of obvious abuse include: verbal abuse, harassment, physical intimidation and aggressive conduct.

It is in the grey area of inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour that it becomes harder for parents to know what to do. Examples of unacceptable behaviour may include an individual being fixated or obsessed with a child, favouritism, special privileges, sexual comments, and inappropriate physical contact (such as rubbing up against a child, stroking hair, etc.). It is important that this behaviour, which demonstrates a violation of boundaries, is identified early. You need to be aware of behaviour that is sexually inappropriate or constitutes misconduct so that you can intervene quickly.

DID YOU KNOW:

MOST CHILD SEX OFFENDERS ARE WELL-KNOWN TO THE CHILD

Most cases of child sexual abuse are carried out by someone the child knows. This is often a family member, but can also be someone that the child knows and trusts from outside the home, such as an adult they know from an extra-curricular activity.

The Commit to Kids Parent Guide helps you identify potential risks associated with child-serving organizations. The information will also help you identify risks that may exist in or around your home and community. Should you become aware of a child in need of assistance (your own or otherwise), your local child welfare and/or law enforcement agency should be contacted for assistance.

How Offenders Target Children

Stories of children who were sexually abused without anyone noticing are, unfortunately, far too common. This is often because the child had been groomed. Grooming is usually a slow, gradual and escalating process of building trust and comfort with a child. A child sex offender can use a variety of subtle, manipulative techniques to gain access to a child and increase the chances that the child will agree to his/her sexual advances. Child sex offenders build rapport with the adults around the child so that his/her involvement with the child is welcomed and encouraged.

Grooming usually begins with subtle behaviours that do not appear to be inappropriate, and that may suggest that the individual is very good with children. Many victims/survivors of sexual abuse did not recognize the grooming process as it was happening, nor do they recognize that this manipulation was part of the overall abuse process.

GROOMING PROCESS

In the grooming process, the offender:

- Manipulates the child into becoming a cooperating participant who is unlikely to report the abuse and repeatedly returns to the offender.
- Begins by establishing trust with adults around the child.
- Begins by establishing a friendship and gaining the child's trust.
- Moves to testing the child's boundaries (and the child's ability to protect him/herself) through the telling of sexual jokes, engaging in roughhousing, backrubs, sexual games, etc., in an attempt to see if s/he is at risk to tell someone.
- Moves from non-sexual touching to 'accidental' sexual touching. This usually occurs during play, so the child may not identify it as purposeful, inappropriate touching.
- Confuses the child into feeling as if s/he is equally responsible for the contact. Most children do not even realize that the contact has changed; they may not notice or simply become confused by the contact as it becomes more intimate and sexual. This may then progress to increasingly invasive touching or abuse.
- Creates an emotional dependency on the offender.
- Discourages and prevents the child from telling anyone about what is happening.
- Makes the child feel obligated to (and, at times, protective of) the offender.

“At some point the child may realize what is happening but still not want the relationship to end.”

K. Lanning (personal communication, September 8th, 2009)



Grooming is often a slow, gradual and escalating process of building trust and comfort with a child.

BEHAVIOUR MATTERS

Pay attention to any adult who demonstrates one or any combination of the following:

- Seems overly interested in your child.
- Frequently initiates time alone with your child.
- Becomes fixated on your child.
- Gives special privileges or gifts to your child (e.g. rides to and from practices).
- Befriends your family, and shows equal or more interest in building a relationship with your child than with you.
- Displays favouritism towards one child in your family or among a particular group of children.
- Creates opportunities that cater to your child's interests so that you or your child will initiate or allow the child to spend time alone with the offender.
- Creates opportunities to be around your child outside of the context of his/her working relationship. This may include finding ways to be with your family in order to gain repeated access to your child, in person or online.
- Offers free or 'anytime' child care services.
- Displays age and gender preferences.

These behaviours do not necessarily indicate that an adult is offending or trying to offend against your child. However, these behaviours could be considered inappropriate. Make sure you also note and question any of the above behaviours being demonstrated toward other children.

Similarly, be aware if your child demonstrates one or any combination of the following:

- Seeks time alone with a specific adult (too often, or for extended periods of time)
- Feels angry, uncomfortable, scared, and/or sad around a certain adult
- Makes regular requests to spend time at an adult's house, including overnight

A child is vulnerable to grooming because:

- S/he, like all human beings, craves attention, affection, kindness and gifts
- S/he is still developing socially and emotionally, and therefore can be easily confused, controlled and coerced
- S/he has been taught to respect and listen to adults
- S/he does not have a developed understanding of sexuality
- S/he may not interpret or understand an adult's intent
- If s/he is an adolescent, vulnerability increases as they are inexperienced, curious, rebellious, and easily aroused

Quite simply, your child is just being a child.

Your child is at an increased risk of being victimized if s/he is:

- Emotionally insecure or deprived of strong emotional connections
- Lacking knowledge about abuse prevention or access to developmentally appropriate sexual education
- Vulnerable due to special needs (cognitively, physically and/or emotionally), and more easily manipulated
- Lacking empowerment — adult-child interactions work in the adult's favour [*Finkelhor, 1984*]
- In a dysfunctional family situation
- Exceptionally needy of attention
- Experiencing sexual orientation confusion

Most survivors of child sexual abuse do not recognize that the grooming took place before they were sexually abused. They often do not see child sexual abuse as a deliberate process.

Examples of concerning adult behaviour

It is important to pay attention to the frequency, intensity and any combination of the following behaviours:

- Deliberately walking in on a child who is changing or using the washroom
- Asking or having the child watch the adult change or use the washroom
- 'Accidentally' touching genitalia or playing games that include touching genitalia (playing doctor)
- Excessive bathing of a child or showering with a child
- Excessive wrestling or roughhousing
- Telling a child sexually explicit jokes
- Teasing a child about breast or genital development
- Discussing personal sexually explicit information while pretending to teach a child
- Showing a child sexually explicit images or pornography
- Excessive activities that involve the removal of clothing (massage, swimming, etc.)



Learning about Child Sexual Abuse

In order to prevent child sexual abuse, it is first necessary to understand what it is, the offending process, disclosure, and its impact on victims. While child sexual abuse is not always the easiest subject for parents to discuss, it is necessary to start with a solid understanding of the issue.

A child is considered to be in need of protection if his/her life, health or emotional well-being is endangered by the act or omission of any person. Everyone who has reasonable grounds to believe a child has suffered, is suffering or is at risk of suffering abuse or is otherwise in need of protection is obligated to report the suspicion to a child welfare and/or law enforcement agency.

Sexual Abuse

Any form of adult/child sexualized interaction constitutes child sexual abuse. Children do not have the level of knowledge, maturity or emotional development to provide consent to such interactions. Sexual abuse of a child may occur through behaviours that do not involve actual physical contact.

Contact sexual abuse includes:

- Touching the genital area, over or under clothing
- Touching breasts, over or under clothing
- Encouraging or forcing the touching of another's genital area
- Oral sex
- Vaginal or anal penetration with a part of the body (e.g. finger, penis) or with an object

Non-contact sexual abuse includes:

- Invitation to touch another in a sexual way
- Voyeurism ('Peeping Tom')
- Encouraging or forcing a child to masturbate or to watch others masturbate
- Indecent exposure ('flashing' or showing genital areas)
- Involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic materials or watching sexual activities
- Encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways

"Adolescents are of sexual interest to a much larger, more diverse group of potential offenders and therefore at higher risk of victimization."

K. Lanning (personal communication, September 8th, 2009)



Recognizing the Signs

IF YOUR CHILD DISPLAYS ANY OF THE FOLLOWING BEHAVIOUR, THERE MAY BE CAUSE FOR CONCERN:

- Displaying sexual knowledge and behaviour that is beyond his/her normal developmental stage
- Talking about sexual acts that s/he should not have knowledge or experience of
- Verbalizing what sexual contact looks like, sounds like, or feels like
- Repeatedly acting out sexually and not responding to limits placed on his/her behaviour (e.g. continues to fondle other children or adults after touching boundaries have been explained) [Gil, 2006]
- Behaviour that results in complaints from other children
- If your child is over the age of four and s/he does not have a good grasp of boundaries (e.g. tries to French kiss adults) [Cavanaugh-Johnson, 2003]

While any/all of these may be troublesome to you, they do not necessarily mean that your child has been sexually abused. However, they are an indication that your child may be in distress, and action should be taken to determine the source and scope of the problem.

ADDITIONAL CAUSES FOR CONCERN

While not necessarily an indication of inappropriate conduct or sexual abuse, any abrupt change in your child's behaviour is typically a sign of stress in his/her life that should be investigated. Be aware of any of the following:

- Sleep disturbances
- Drastic change in overall emotions and/or mood swings
- Unexplained fear or refusal to go certain places
- Fear of or refusal to spend time with a certain person or suddenly resisting being alone with a particular person whose company s/he has previously enjoyed
- Insisting on spending time with a particular person
- School problems such as plummeting grades, suddenly acting out or becoming withdrawn/secretive
- Excessive crying or depression
- Excessive worrying
- Becoming very clingy
- Extremely aggressive and risk-taking behaviour
- Lack of emotion or not reacting as s/he previously did
- Avoidant behaviours such as running away, drug/alcohol use, etc.
- Suddenly seeking excessive amounts of time with younger children

Do not immediately conclude that behavioural changes are caused by sexual abuse as this is only one of many possibilities. Any changes in your child's behaviour should be explored, regardless of whether or not you believe there has been sexual abuse. Sudden changes indicate that your child is likely distressed in some capacity. Think about stressors in your child's life and look for ways to address those concerns. If you are unclear about the cause of the behaviours and they occur over a prolonged period, you may need to contact your pediatrician for advice or assistance.



Disclosure of Abuse

WHY CHILDREN DO NOT TELL

A child will often delay disclosure or not disclose if s/he:

- Feels s/he will not be believed
- Has been manipulated and groomed by the offender, and feels like a participant in the abuse as a result
- Has been threatened with violence, or his/her family, friends, or pets have been threatened
- Does not want to lose perceived benefits (gifts, status or playing time on a sports team, academic recognition, etc.)
- Does not want to get the offender in trouble
- Fears judgment
- Does not think s/he has a safe adult to tell
- Feels shame and embarrassment
- Fears his/her life will change dramatically (loss or breakup of family)
- Does not recognize that s/he has been victimized
- Does not think it was 'real' abuse because it didn't feel bad and s/he was not forced

HINTS OF DISCLOSURE

Disclosure might sound like:

- “What do you think of _____?”
- “I don’t want to go to _____ (organization’s name) anymore.”
- “I don’t like _____ anymore.”
- “Please don’t go! Please don’t leave me with _____.” (child desperately tries to avoid being left alone with a certain individual)
- “I don’t like it when you’re gone... I feel uncomfortable when you aren’t here...”
- “I don’t feel good when I’m with _____.”
- “I’m bad...”
- “You will be mad at me...”
- “_____ gets mad a lot.”
- “_____ did things to me.”
- “_____ does bad stuff to me that I don’t like.”
- “_____ plays games with me that I don’t like.”
- “_____ hits my Mom.”
- “_____ hurts my cat.”
- “_____ is not nice.”
- “_____ does not pay attention to me anymore.”
- “_____ likes boys better than girls.”



Hints of disclosure should be considered in the child’s “big picture” context. An isolated statement, separate from any other concerns about the child, may not be cause for concern.

“Children often do not tell, as imagine how difficult sharing something like this could be.” [Ellerby, 2008]



WHEN REFLECTING ON SOMEONE'S BEHAVIOUR, CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

- Does it seem odd?
- Is it weird?
- Does it make you feel uncomfortable?
- Does it seem to happen all the time or too often?
- Has anyone else commented or noticed?

How to increase the likelihood that you will notice a possible disclosure of sexual abuse:

- Increase your overall awareness about sexual abuse (reading this guide is a great first step)
- Increase your child's awareness about personal safety using developmentally appropriate educational material (see kidsintheknow.ca for details)
- Nurture a consistent, positive relationship with your child
- Listen and appreciate your child's feelings, hopes, and fears, and make sure your child knows you are available to listen and help
- Notice and respond to changes in your child's typical behaviour patterns

HOW TO RESPOND TO A CHILD'S DISCLOSURE

While it is upsetting to hear a child disclose, the child's needs must come first. An appropriate reaction to a child's disclosure of sexual abuse is critical, as it affects the severity of his/her overall trauma.

- Research shows that a child who feels supported, nurtured, and safe when disclosing abuse has the most successful chance of recovery and future adjustment.
- Children who have been abused need to understand that they are not 'damaged' people as a result of suffering abuse, but rather that they can overcome the experience and live a fulfilling life.

[excerpted from Finkelhor, 1984]



Children need to understand that what happened was not their fault and that they are not alone.

Tips for Handling Disclosures

Listen

What a child needs when s/he shares a difficult experience is for you to listen to him/her attentively. With this type of incident, it is common for children to be afraid of a parent's reaction, as well as having a fear of not being believed. It takes incredible courage to share such a difficult experience.

Control your reaction

Do not over-or under-react. Be aware of your facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice because your child will be sensitive to your reaction. Your child will be able to pick up on differences between what you are saying and how you are acting. If your body language and verbal language do not match, your child will feel confused.

Do not correct language

A child who has been sexually abused often uses slang or distasteful words for genitals and sexual acts. Disclosure is not the time to educate your child about correct terms. This could make your child feel bad, stupid or dirty, and might prevent your child from continuing to disclose.

Praise your child for telling

It takes tremendous courage to disclose sexual abuse, and a child will often assume responsibility for the abuse. Assure your child that it is not his/her fault, and that s/he did the right thing by disclosing.

Protect your child and other children from overexposure

Respect your child's need for privacy and confidentiality, and make sure that no other children are around to hear your child's disclosure. Only adults who will be directly involved in taking action should be present.

Show affection

Adults can be apprehensive to show affection to a child after hearing s/he has been sexually abused. A child who discloses abuse needs affection, support, and understanding. This is especially true between parents and children.

Take action

Promise your child that you will take quick steps to stop the abuse, but be sure to avoid making promises about matters you cannot control (e.g. "I will make sure the offender goes to jail!").

Never communicate blame

Never imply guilt such as "I told you so," or "This wouldn't have happened if you hadn't..." when the child discloses sexual abuse. Be non-judgmental, both verbally and non-verbally (gestures, facial expressions). A child who has been abused needs to understand that what happened was not her/his fault, and that s/he is not alone.

Contact a child welfare agency or police for more information on how to deal with the disclosure and the next steps that should be taken.

Reporting Abuse and Misconduct

It is essential that you report any suspicions of child sexual abuse or inappropriate behaviour that you notice with your child or any other child.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Any form of sexualized interaction with a child constitutes child sexual abuse, including contact abuse and abuse that does not involve physical contact (see page 13). All adults have a legal obligation to report these suspicions. **Know your legal responsibility.**

If you have reasonable grounds to suspect sexual abuse or a child discloses that s/he has been abused by:

A. A family member

- If it is your child or another child, you must report it to your local child welfare and/or law enforcement agency.

B. An individual who is not related to the child (family friend, neighbour, etc.)

- If it is your child, control any contact s/he may have with the possible offender. Report to your local child welfare and/or law enforcement agency to help ensure the safety of other children.
- If it is another child, a report should be made to child welfare and/or law enforcement.

C. An individual who is in a position of trust and authority

(e.g. an adult who is responsible for caring for children, someone in a child-serving organization)

- Report to a child welfare and/or law enforcement agency and to the head of the organization where the abuse allegedly occurred
- If it is your child, request a meeting with the head of the organization to ask questions about:
 - How the investigation process will unfold
 - How your child will be protected while the investigation is ongoing



When a child and an adult have cooperating sex, the adult is ALWAYS the offender and the child is ALWAYS the victim.



Child abuse - Scenarios

1.

Scenario:

Judy's daughter's friend disclosed that her step dad comes into her room at night and touches her inappropriately.

Action Taken:

Judy makes a report to her local child welfare and/or law enforcement agency.

2.

Scenario:

Judy's daughter discloses that a neighbour has touched her inappropriately.

Action Taken:

Judy reports it to her local child welfare and/or law enforcement agency and controls any contact her daughter has with the neighbour.

3.

Scenario:

Judy is reading her daughter's Internet chat logs and comes across inappropriate dialogue between her daughter and her daughter's swimming coach. The dialogue is very sexual and on several occasions the coach has sent naked pictures of himself and asked for naked pictures of her daughter.

Action Taken:

Judy reports the incident to her local child welfare and/or law enforcement agency and to the swimming club.

Judy requests information about how the investigation will unfold.

Judy asks how her daughter will be protected while the investigation is carried out.

Parents need to understand and believe that a child can be a victim even if:

- S/he did not say "No"
- Did not fight
- Did not tell
- Initiated the contact
- Actively cooperated
- Accepted gifts or money
- Enjoyed the sexual activity



MISCONDUCT

Sometimes it is difficult to identify inappropriate adult behaviour. People often question themselves or are reluctant to talk about concerning behaviour towards a child. While there may be an element of discomfort in doing so, it is imperative that you put the well-being of your child first.

Reporting inappropriate behaviour will ensure that proper action is taken and expectations are established. It can also prevent your child and other children from being sexually abused by intervening before the behaviour escalates. Use the following as a guideline for reporting inappropriate behaviour to an organization:

1. Communication that goes beyond the individual's role with your child and/or is not occurring within the context of their employment duties and responsibilities, including:

- Writing personal letters or text messages to your child
- Making personal phone calls to your child
- Having personal Internet exchanges with your child (email, instant messaging, chatrooms, social networking, etc.)
- Sending personalized gifts to your child

Note: It is not misconduct to give a contextually appropriate thank you card, seasonal card, or other nominal gift to a child, where such a gesture would be considered reasonable in the circumstances. All gestures taken together should not be excessive in number and any such exchanges should be carried out within the workplace in the presence of others, and with the knowledge of the organization.

2. Inappropriate interactions with your child that go beyond the individual's role with your child, including:

- Offering unauthorized personal rides to your child
- Spending time with your child outside of designated work times and activities
(Except when such activity has been disclosed to and approved by the parent and the organization in advance)
- Favouring your child and giving him/her personalized gifts
- Inappropriate physical boundaries, touch and sexualized behaviours
- Telling sexual jokes to your child

- Showing your child sexually explicit or sexist material (signs, cartoons, calendars, literature, photographs, etc.) or displaying such material in plain view
- Taking pictures of a child, except when specifically requested to do so by the organization and provided that only cameras owned or under the control of the organization are used to take such pictures

Note: Under no circumstances may an employee ever use his/her cellular phone or personal camera to take pictures of a child, nor upload or copy any pictures s/he may have taken of a child to the Internet or to any personal storage device without signed parental permission.

3. Behaviour that would be concerning to anyone who witnessed it

4. Behaviour that embarrasses, humiliates or shames your child

5. Physical contact with your child that makes him/her feel uncomfortable, violates reasonable boundaries, or is not appropriate for the context of the situation

6. Inappropriate boundaries between an adult and your child, sexualized behaviours (e.g. sexual talk, leering, flirting) or touching that others feel uncomfortable with



Children with Special Needs

Appropriate touching may need to vary a bit for children with special needs due to unique cognitive, sensory and behavioural issues that may be at play. Special training and considerations need to occur for those working with special needs children in order to come up with something that achieves the appropriate result without compromising the organization's ability to manage the child's special needs. Rules may need to be adjusted and formalized within an individualized education plan based on the needs of a particular child.

If you witness misconduct against a child by:

A. An individual who is not a family member (family friend, neighbour, etc.)

- If it is your child, talk to the adult and express your concerns about their inappropriate behaviour. Control and supervise the time your child spends with that individual.
- If it is another child, talk to the child's parents about the concerning behaviour you witnessed.

B. An individual who works or volunteers at a child-serving organization, or who is in a position of trust and authority with children

- If it is your own child, request a meeting with the head of the organization in order to make a formal report. Ask the organization for information about how the investigation process will unfold, and inquire about how your child and other children in the organization will be protected.
- If it is another child, report the misconduct to the head of the organization. The organization is responsible for contacting the child's parents and following through with an internal investigation.



Misconduct - Scenarios

1.

Scenario:

Ken witnesses his neighbour snap his daughter's bra.

Action Taken:

Ken talks to the neighbour about the behaviour.

Ken limits the family's contact with the neighbour and never leaves his daughter unsupervised with him.

2.

Scenario:

Ken overhears his neighbour telling a nine-year-old boy from the neighbourhood sexually explicit jokes.

Action Taken:

Ken talks to the child's parents about what he overheard and his concerns.

3.

Scenario:

Ken finds an inappropriate text message on his daughter's phone from her teacher. The text message says that she looks "hot" in her jeans.

Action Taken:

Ken and his wife request a meeting with the principal to make a formal report about the teacher's inappropriate conduct.

They request information about how the investigation will unfold.

They ask how their daughter will be protected while the investigation is carried out.



DID YOU KNOW:

RESPONSIBLE ADULTS OFTEN FAIL TO ACT

While child protection is an obvious concern to parents, there are many reasons why people may fail to act. Some commonly held misconceptions include:

Negative attitudes: "It really isn't a big problem in our society."

Sixty per cent of victims of sexual offences reported to police are children under 18 years of age [*Statistics Canada, 2005*]. This number does not account for the 70% of child abuse victims who do not disclose their abuse during childhood [*Robins, 2000*].

Indifference: "It's not my problem. Let someone else handle it."

Fear of retaliation: "He knows our family and where we live. What if he does something to us?"

Denial: "He wouldn't do something like that. He's a really nice guy."

It can be hard to believe that someone in a child-serving organization could sexually abuse a child. However, abusers are often friendly, helpful, outgoing, and very likeable individuals.

Not believing the child victim: "That child is always up to something. She lies all the time."

It is common for child victims of abuse to not be believed. Parents should always take disclosure or suspicion of child sexual abuse seriously.

Place responsibility on the child to use the words "someone touched my private parts": "If a child experiences sexual abuse, they will tell someone immediately."

Disclosure of abuse is often a process rather than a one-time event. While full disclosure happens occasionally, information is typically provided bit by bit or through hints and signs. This process may span hours, weeks, months, or even years. If the process is interrupted, discouraged, or shut down, the sexual abuse may not be fully revealed until adulthood – if at all. Reasons a child might not immediately tell a safe adult about the abuse include feeling s/he will not be believed, being threatened with violence, having feelings of shame and embarrassment, being manipulated and groomed by the offender to feel like a participant in the abuse, fearing judgment, etc. (for more examples see p. 15).

Do not want to be responsible for wrecking a family: "I don't want the child to be pulled out of their home and put into foster care."

An allegation of child sexual abuse and any subsequent investigation will impact a family. In order to ensure the child's safety during this time, steps may be taken resulting in all of the family members no longer residing together, at least on an in-term basis. Prior to placing a child in foster care, child welfare will explore options which allow the child to remain with people known to them including having a non-offending care provider continue to care for the child or arranging for other family members/close family friends to care for the child. Failing to report due to concern regarding the impact on the family may result in a child being left in an abusive situation.

Believe they only have to report what can be proven or observed: "I didn't witness the abuse and I don't have any concrete evidence, so I don't have to report it."

Adults have a legal responsibility to report all suspicions and disclosures of sexual abuse, not to investigate the abuse itself. Leave any 'investigating' to law enforcement and/or child welfare agencies. Do not disregard a possible disclosure just because it appears vague, inconsistent, or unbelievable.

Do not know who to report to: "If a child disclosed sexual abuse, I have no idea who I would report it to."

In Canada, individuals are legally obligated to report suspicions or disclosures of child sexual abuse to law enforcement and/or child welfare agencies.

Are not encouraged to report: "My employer doesn't really encourage that sort of reporting here."

Organizations need to outline reporting procedures for all employees/volunteers and make sure that all employees/volunteers understand their legal obligation to report.

Safety Tools

Creating a family safety plan

The following exercise is meant to help raise awareness of the risks that increase a child's vulnerability to sexual exploitation. It also highlights protective factors that can reduce those risks. Creating a 'big picture' view of your child's life will help you see where protection and risk already exists, and how to create a plan to manage the risks identified.

HOW DO I START?

- 1 Create a 'big picture':**
 - a. Carefully read through safeguards and check off the ones that exist in your child's life.
 - b. Carefully read through the risks and check off the ones that exist in your child's life.
 - c. Highlight the safeguards you feel are the most important.
 - d. Highlight the risks that are your biggest concern.
- 2 Make a plan:** Continue to strengthen the safeguards. Choose two or three risks you have control over. How can each one be reduced or managed?
- 3 Implement your plan.**
- 4 Revisit the plan regularly to assess its effectiveness. Make ongoing adjustments as needed.**



Model in photo. Intended as illustrative.

FAMILY SAFETY PLAN

EXAMPLES OF SAFEGUARDS - CHILD

- Displays confidence
- Has care and support from family and extended family
- Feels safe at home, in school, and in the neighbourhood
- Makes friends easily and/or has support and opportunities to develop social skills
- Feels skilled at something (e.g. school work, sports, art, music, technical/hands-on work, etc.)
- Is involved in extra-curricular activities
- Sets personal boundaries and respects the boundaries of others
- Reaches out to safe adults when upset
- Maintains a close relationship and secure attachment with a safe adult
- Shows an optimistic/positive outlook

EXAMPLES OF RISKS - CHILD

- Acts insecure/displays low self-esteem
- Feels isolated and lonely most of the time (has difficulty making friends)
- Feels useless and/or not good at anything
- Feels unloved
- Has a disability (cognitive, physical, emotional and/or learning)
- Displays risk-taking behaviour (thrill-seeking)
- Frequently acts on impulse (very impulsive)

EXAMPLES OF SAFEGUARDS - FAMILY

- High supervision (including at home, on the Internet, on the street, in public places)
- Open lines of communication
- Strong emotional bond between parent and child
- Structure and routine at home
- Established family customs (e.g. movie night, pizza night, evening walks, etc.)
- Established family boundaries (sleeps in own bed, privacy, doesn't take on adult role)
- Warm and caring environment (positive time at home)
- Monitored media access (Internet, TV, movies, music, games, etc.)
- Strong support network (extended family and friends)
- Parents notice and respond to changes in child's behaviour patterns
- Parents notice and value what is important to their child

FAMILY SAFETY PLAN

EXAMPLES OF RISKS - FAMILY

- Lack of parental supervision
- Move and change schools several times during school year/move around a lot (lack connection to community)
- Chaotic home environment
- Sibling with severe behavioural problems (criminal activity, violent, verbally abusive, etc.)
- Lack of family boundaries (physical, emotional, and family roles)
- Lack of emotional connection between child and parent
- Lack of positive parental involvement with child
- High level of conflict between parents

INTERNET SAFETY:

- Anti-virus software and firewalls are used and up-to-date
- Expectation is set that you will monitor your child online
- Games your child plays have been examined by you to determine age appropriateness
- Webcam and computer use is supervised
- Unregulated chatrooms are not permitted
- Your child's time spent online is balanced with time spent in offline activities
- Appropriate online behaviour has been discussed, and appropriate boundaries are reinforced (boundaries can be crossed faster online)
- Your child has been taught to pay attention to 'weirdness' such as someone talking to him/her about sex or someone asking him/her to send pictures of him/herself

PREVENTION CONSIDERATIONS:

- Babysitters have gone through background checks and several reference checks
- Stay engaged in your child's relationships with adults, peers, older and younger children
- Do not leave your child alone with intoxicated adults or teenagers
- Get to know your child's friends and the friends' parents before allowing him/her to sleep over at their houses
- Explain the difference between okay and not okay touching
- Accompany your child to community job opportunities (raking lawns, cutting lawns, shovelling, babysitting) to verify the safety of the job
- Teach your child to always ask permission from you before going anywhere with anyone
- Teach your child to always use the buddy system when going to and from places (visit billybuddy.ca)
- Create and practice "What if" scenarios with your child regarding potentially dangerous situations so your child can consider his/her response before danger actually occurs



FAMILY SAFETY PLAN

SAFEGUARD:	My husband is involved in my child's hockey. He assists with coaching her team.
How I will strengthen it:	I will make sure to attend games to show my support.

SAFEGUARD:	We have a family pizza and movie night once in a while.
How I will strengthen it:	We are going to make it a custom every third Friday of the month.

SAFEGUARD:	I know my kids' interests. One is interested in horses and the other in singing.
How I will strengthen it:	I am going to get them involved in lessons to build their skill and confidence.

FAMILY SAFETY PLAN

RISK:	I feel completely at odds with my teenage daughter. We fight constantly.
How I will reduce or manage it:	I am going to talk to friends and her pediatrician to learn more about resources I can access to learn about how to parent through the teenage years.

RISK:	We do not know anyone in our community because everything we do is outside of the community.
How I will reduce or manage it:	I am going to go for a walk with the kids three times a week, so we become familiar with what is going on in the community and start to meet people.

RISK:	We do not have filtering software on our computer.
How I will reduce or manage it:	We are going to install filtering software and continue to monitor our child's computer use.

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FAMILY SAFETY PLAN

SAFEGUARD:	
How I will strengthen it:	

SAFEGUARD:	
How I will strengthen it:	

SAFEGUARD:	
How I will strengthen it:	

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FAMILY SAFETY PLAN

RISK:	
How I will reduce or manage it:	

RISK:	
How I will reduce or manage it:	

RISK:	
How I will reduce or manage it:	

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How to Increase Your Child's Safety

✓ UNDERSTAND CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND GROOMING

The sexual victimization of children involves many dynamics. It can include abuse by strangers, acquaintances or family members. When children are groomed by an acquaintance or family member they are less likely to disclose the abuse. It is important to understand the dynamics of sexual abuse — how to possibly prevent abuse and how to recognize signs of misconduct in order to intervene as soon as possible.

✓ ESTABLISH BOUNDARIES

Establish and reinforce the role of your child within the family.

If your child wants to listen to adult conversations about adult decision-making and adult-related topics, gently re-establish the line. Your child should be separated from adult issues.

✓ MONITOR EXPOSURE TO ADULT TOPICS

Set limits with regard to the multimedia content that your child is exposed to, including television, music, Internet, games, etc. Although your child may be interested in adult information, set limits about what information is for him/her and what is not.

✓ AVOID INVOLVING YOUR CHILD IN ADULT RELATIONSHIP ISSUES

Involving your child in adult relationship issues is very confusing and can cause emotional stress. Keeping adult relationship issues separate from your child draws a line between his/her role and your role, which helps build the child's sense of security.

✓ DO NOT FORCE AFFECTION

Remember that teaching respect does not mean teaching obedience. Respect your child's decisions to avoid physical affection. This fosters self-awareness and respects his/her right to make decisions about touching.

✓ ESTABLISH PERSONAL SPACE AND PRIVACY

Establish family privacy for using the bathroom, bathing and changing. Designate a personal space in the home for each person's belongings (a bedroom, closet, drawers or shelves, etc.).

What to Teach Your Child

✓ TEACH THE CORRECT NAMES OF BODY PARTS

Teaching your child the correct names for body parts enhances communication between adults and children, and is especially important if your child needs to disclose an experience of sexual abuse or inappropriate contact.

✓ ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO TAKE OWNERSHIP OF HIS/HER BODY

Once your child is able, teach him/her to dress, bath, wash and toilet him/herself. This will teach your child the boundaries around privacy. As s/he becomes more independent, respect his/her privacy.

✓ TEACH ASSERTIVENESS

Create opportunities for your child to practice matching his/her body language with strong verbal messages that demonstrate they mean business (NO!, Stop!, I don't like that!, etc)



Model in photo. Intended as illustrative.



✓ **TEACH YOUR CHILD TO TELL YOU IF SOMEONE TRIES TO CROSS HIS/HER PERSONAL BOUNDARIES**

This may include someone:

- Asking to touch your child's private parts (or asking him/her to touch another person's private parts)
- Wanting to look at your child's private parts (or asking him/her to look at another person's private parts)
- Wanting to take naked pictures of your child (or to show him/her naked pictures of others)
- Telling your child sexual jokes or talking to your child about sex
- Going to the bathroom in front of your child
- Wanting to bathe your child
- Making the child feel scared, hurt, sad, or uncomfortable

✓ **TALK ABOUT SECRETS**

Explain the difference between secrets that are healthy and can be kept and secrets that are unsafe and should be told to a safe adult.

✓ **IDENTIFY SAFE ADULTS**

Help your child identify safe adults in his/her life who can help. It is important that your child knows exactly who to turn to during times of distress and when they want to share something that is important to them.

✓ **TEACH ABOUT HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ADULTS AND CHILDREN**

Discuss what friendship is and what friendship is not. Offenders may use the idea of friendship to increase a child's compliance and reduce the likelihood of disclosure. Discuss qualities of friendship with your child. As children reach grade six, move the conversation with your child to a discussion about healthy and unhealthy relationships. A child responds to attention and affection, which can be used by offenders to manipulate him/her into compliance. Discuss the difference between cooperative and coercive relationships.

✓ **TEACH YOUR CHILD HOW TO IDENTIFY AND LABEL HIS/HER FEELINGS**

Encourage your child to identify and label feelings. This will promote self-monitoring and increase self-awareness.

See kidsintheknow.ca for developmentally appropriate education information and personal safety lessons



Choosing a child-safe organization

As a parent, you will make many decisions about where to send your child for school, child care, or extra-curricular activities and programs. While it is not easy to think about the issue of child sexual abuse, you will be more confident as a parent if your child is in a safe environment. A child-safe organization is one that:

- ✓ Understands child sexual abuse
- ✓ Manages risk by implementing strategies to reduce it
- ✓ Takes their responsibility of protecting children from victimization seriously
- ✓ Recognizes their ethical and legal obligation to help protect the children they serve
- ✓ Builds a culture of transparency, trust and openness among employees, volunteers, children and parents
- ✓ Has safeguards in the form of policies and procedures to prevent or stop child sexual abuse
- ✓ Keeps the safety of children paramount
- ✓ Hires the right people (job description, job posting, interviewing, screening, reference checks, etc.)
- ✓ Provides an orientation to new employees/volunteers that includes information on child sexual abuse
- ✓ Supervises and monitors employees/volunteers
- ✓ Trains employees/volunteers on child sexual abuse
- ✓ Provides information and training to parents and children
- ✓ Has clear policies in place to deal with disclosures of child sexual abuse or allegations of employee/volunteer misconduct
- ✓ Has and enforces a code of conduct
- ✓ Has a child protection manual, including policies, that is available to parents

QUESTIONS FOR CHOOSING AN ORGANIZATION

When you are considering organizations for your child to attend (such as a sports facility, community club, school or child care facility), ask a representative of the organization the following questions to help you identify what systems the organization has in place for preventing child sexual abuse.

1. Does your organization train staff about child sexual abuse?

YES NO

2. Does your organization have a Code of Conduct for adults working with children?

YES NO

a. Does the Code of Conduct outline clear expectations about boundaries:

i. Between staff and children?

YES NO

ii. For volunteers?

YES NO

iii. For children?

YES NO

iv. For parents?

YES NO

3. How are staff and volunteer interactions with children supervised?

4. Do you have screening and hiring processes for staff and volunteers (e.g. rigorous interview process, background checks, etc.)?

YES NO

5. How is staff misconduct handled?

6. What is the organization's policy for reporting child abuse or staff misconduct?



QUESTIONS FOR CHOOSING AN ORGANIZATION *(continued)*

7. How is risk managed within the organization for the following activities:
- a. Naptime
 - b. Toileting children
 - c. One-on-one time with children
 - d. Offsite activities (e.g. field trips, walks, swimming programs, etc.)
 - e. Transportation of children
 - f. Overnight trips (e.g. camping, tournaments, overnight stays at museums, etc.)
 - g. Children visiting staff homes (e.g. activities that are held at a staff member's house, sleepovers, etc.)
 - h. Staff having contact with the children outside of their work duties
 - i. Staff offering activities or services for the children after hours (e.g. sport clubs, tutoring, babysitting, trips, etc.)
 - j. Staff visiting a child's home

Questions to Ask Yourself

- 1. What do you know about the organization's history, mandate, organizational structure, and values?
- 2. Visit the organization for a tour. What impression were you left with after visiting?
- 3. Is the organization transparent (i.e. open to questions about child protection and outside ideas)?
- 4. Does the organization have an open-door policy for addressing concerns?
- 5. Are parents welcome to stay and watch activities?
- 6. How is parental involvement encouraged?

Conclusion

While no program can guarantee that an organization will prevent all instances of abuse, child-serving organizations that implement Commit to Kids will create barriers for child sex offenders. This decreases the likelihood that offenders will enter the organization and develop inappropriate relationships with the children in its care. Commit to Kids works to increase awareness of inappropriate boundaries and how they can potentially lead to sexual abuse. It teaches child-serving organizations about the importance of a code of conduct and child protection policies, how to hire the right people, the need for good supervision, and what steps they should take to report sexual abuse and misconduct.

Parents want their child to be safe at all times, especially when in the care of others. Commit to Kids addresses some of the most serious issues that child-serving organizations of every size and shape face today. The program provides solutions for how an organization can ensure quality programming and safe, nurturing environments for children.

Sexual abuse is a potential reality that cannot be ignored. Learn about the safety measures in place in the organizations your child attends. Ask whether they use Commit to Kids; if they do not, ask whether they would be interested in adopting the program for the benefit of the employees/volunteers, the organization and – most importantly – the children in their care.

For more information, visit commit2kids.ca



Model in photo. Intended as illustrative.



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Model in photo. Intended as illustrative.





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