



Child Safety Information

for Caregivers and Coaches

OVERVIEW

When it comes to child sexual abuse, many of us feel like our kids aren't at risk. The problem is, they are. Child sexual abuse happens every day, in every community. 1 in 5 children is sexually abused before the age of 18. And the perpetrators usually aren't strangers—they are the people in your life. 80% of children who are abused know their perpetrator, which means that you likely know them, too.

Sports provide youth with the opportunity to build empowering relationships with teammates, coaches,

staff, mentors, and the parents of other players. And while it is expected that the caregivers in these positions will keep our children safe and help to foster their growth, it's important to educate ourselves and our children on how to stay protected from potential threats.

Children who are sexually abused often experience long-lasting effects associated with the trauma, including difficulty in school, challenges with sleep and/or eating, and increased likelihood of substance abuse—all struggles that no child should ever have to endure. Although the reality of risk is difficult to think about, there are preventative measures you can take to safeguard the children you love.

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Assess Risky Situations and Practice Navigating Them

Oftentimes your child may be in a risky situation without you even realizing it. There are precautions that you can take as a parent or caregiver to minimize your child's vulnerability to sexual abuse. You can learn to **identify risky situations** and address them with family rules, increased communication, or monitoring of online activity to keep your kids healthy, happy, and safe.

Teach How to Set and Respect Healthy Boundaries



It is crucial to teach the children in your life the importance of **setting healthy boundaries**. These boundaries can include standards on privacy, secrets, or physical touch. Kids feel more empowered when they understand that they have the right to make (or weigh in on) choices about their bodies, their property, what they wear, and anything else that is important to them. The self-trust that they'll develop as they make choices and define their own boundaries is a great way for them to build confidence.

Keep the Lines of Communication Open

When your child feels confident that they can share information with you, they are more likely to feel they can come to you with challenging situations and to ask you questions about sex, their bodies, and anything else they want to discuss. To promote **open and honest communication** with your child, you can ask how they'd like to communicate with you, practice being a better listener, and respond without reacting to the information they choose to share with you.

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Discuss Sexual Development

You can talk to your child about **healthy sexual development** no matter the age. It is never too early, or too late, to have these conversations. It may be awkward at first, but sexual development is an important topic that gets easier as you talk through it. Before engaging in these conversations, always take the time to think through what you're going to say and remember to keep your child's maturity in mind. And be prepared to really listen to what your child says, because one of the best ways to protect your child from sexual abuse is by creating an open dialogue.

Model and Develop Emotional Well-Being

MANAGING EMOTIONS

As a parent or caregiver, you can set an example for your child by demonstrating how to experience various feelings without letting the emotion control your response. Being able to cope with strong emotions, sometimes referred to as **emotional regulation**, is an important part of your child establishing and maintaining healthy and helpful relationships.

Children who feel like they can manage their emotions are more likely to feel confident and content. What may be surprising, however, is that emotional regulation may play a role in child sexual abuse. Loneliness, feelings of disconnect, or shame may all contribute to a child being vulnerable to sexual abuse, so helping a child work through those overwhelming feelings is important for their safety and well-being.

COPING WITH EMOTIONS

Strong emotions can often lead to impulsive behaviors. In other words, a child may behave in a way that is out of character for them when they are overwhelmed by feelings that they can't manage. Impulsive behavior may be one cause of concerning sexual behaviors from one child to another. This behavior can cause long-term impact and trauma for both the one acting and the one being acted upon.

Coping with emotions requires patience and practice, for you and your kid. What really empowers your child to cope with an overwhelming emotion is being able to identify it, feel it (not fight it), find a way to manage it in a healthy way, and be reassured that the feeling will eventually pass.



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If You Suspect Your Child Has Been Sexually Abused

The **signs of sexual abuse** can be as individual as the child who has experienced it. Some children will show several common signs or symptoms of sexual abuse while others may show no symptoms at all. Signs of child sexual abuse may be physical or behavioral. As a caregiver, you have to follow your intuition and do what you think is best for the child or teen in your life.

It's crucial to not only believe the child, but to do all you can to ensure the person who abused them is unable to continue illegal sexual behaviors against your child or other children.

When Child Sexual Abuse Has Occurred

Discovering your child has been sexually abused can be painful and heartbreaking. As their caregiver, you might feel despair, rage, numbness, hopelessness, or may even experience symptoms of trauma yourself. As difficult as this time may be, **hope and healing are possible**.

As you learn more about the sexual abuse, it's important to remember that your words and actions have a great impact on your child. You can help your child process and heal from the trauma of sexual abuse as well as reduce its long-term impacts. Research suggests that the level of support from the family may be more influential on the survivor's outcome than the severity of the abuse. In other words, your love for them is one of the most powerful forces available to help them heal from abuse.

How Saprea Can Help

Saprea is a nonprofit that's leading the charge against child sexual abuse and shedding light on the issue. Saprea supports communities around the world in healing and prevention. Backed by a team of clinical experts and a willful community of survivors and defenders, Saprea exists to liberate individuals and society from child sexual abuse and its lasting impacts. With clinically proven tools and resources, Saprea empowers survivors, parents, and community members with the knowledge needed to protect, heal, and overcome.

Are you interested in learning more about Saprea's services and resources?

Visit saprea.org