

# BODY SAFETY BE AWARE: Some General Tips and Guidelines

## Some general grooming techniques to be wary of:

- Be aware of any person who wishes to spend a great deal of time with your child, seeking out their company and offering to take care of them at the 'drop of a hat'.
- A person who pays special attention to your child, making them feel more special than another child; providing them with special treats, presents, sweets, etc.
- A person who is always willing to help out and 'babysit' when you are extremely busy and pushed for time.

Sexual offenders will **always** plan whom they target and will work very hard at gaining both the child's and the family's trust. They will create opportunities to be alone with children or groups of children and may well target vulnerable communities. They frequently change jobs and address to avoid detection. They will often spend a lot of time with children outside of their jobs. Sex offenders may well set up a scenario where a child has a reputation for lying so as to discredit them if they ever should disclose. They will use threats and blackmail to ensure the child keeps the secret. The keeping of 'the secret' is crucial to the perpetrator; it allows them to continue the sexual abuse undetected. An abuser will use 'guilt' and 'blaming' techniques to coerce the child into believing that they are an equal participant in the 'shameful' secret and are equally too blame. The abuser may even make the victim feel they encouraged the sexual contact. The child can be so guilt-ridden they may never disclose and this is the perpetrator's **key** aim.

Grooming is about power over the child and using that power to maintain the secret. It is about making sure the child never tells. Grooming can take place over days, weeks or years. A groomer who takes time to 'groom', enables trust between the abuser and the child (and the family) to build up. This trust, in turn, creates opportunities for regular abuse to occur.

Parents are often concerned about what is 'normal' and 'abnormal' sexual behaviour of a child. The following points can be used as a guideline.

## Normal sexual behaviour:

Children have a natural curiosity about their bodies and sex. This is normal. If you see any of the following behaviors try not to react in a negative way. Sexual curiosity is how a child learns about their gender. Age appropriate sexual behavior is as follows:

- babies, toddler and young children exploring their genitals and enjoying being naked
- questions about why they have a penis and girls don't (vice a versa), i.e. trying to work out the difference between what it is to be male and what it is to be female
- showing others their genitals
- playing doctors and nurses and/or mummies and daddies; kissing holding hands with children of a similar age
- using slang words or 'rude' words they have picked up
- looking at each other's body parts (particularly children: under 7, close in age and those who know each other) in mutual agreement, i.e. no-one is being forced to show each other's their body parts

- as they get older, curious about where they came from; may be giggly and embarrassed about body parts discussion

## Some general signs that a child (0 to 12 years) may be being sexually abused:

**Note:** one or more of these indicators does not mean your child is being sexually abused, but if they do show these indicators, then there is good reason to investigate further.

- overly interested in their's or other's genitals
- continually wants to touch private parts of other children
- instigating and/or forcing 'sex play' with another child (often younger, more than 3 years difference in age)
- sex play that is not appropriate i.e. oral genital contact between a 7 year old and a 4 year old
- sex play with another child happening more than three times, despite careful monitoring and discussion about inappropriateness
- persistent masturbation that does not cease when told to stop
- sexualized play with dolls or toys
- sexualized play involving forced penetration of objects vaginally or anally
- chronic peeping, exposing and obscenities
- touching or rubbing against the genitals of adults or children that they do not know
- persistent use of 'dirty' words
- describing sexual acts and sexualized behavior beyond their years
- strong body odor
- sores around the mouth
- bruising or bleeding in the genital area; bruising to breasts, buttocks, lower abdomen or thighs
- withdrawn and anxious behavior
- secretive or say they have a 'special' secret that they must not tell
- child or child's friend telling you about interference directly or indirectly
- going to bed fully clothed
- increase in nightmares and sleep disturbances
- regressive behavior, e.g. a return to bed-wetting or soiling
- unexplained accumulation of money and gifts

## In older children (adolescents)

- self-destructive behavior such as drug dependency, suicide attempts, self-mutilation
- eating disorders
- adolescent pregnancy
- persistent running away from home
- withdrawn, angry
- pornography interest; verbally sexually aggressive obscenities

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