

protecting CHILDREN

As concerned adults, we want to protect children from sexual abuse, but we can't always be there to do that. We can, however, teach children about sexual abuse in order to increase their awareness and coping skills. Without frightening children, we can provide them with appropriate safety information and support at every stage of their development.

We can provide personal safety information to children in a matter-of-fact way, with other routine safety discussions about fire, water, health, etc. Although even the most educated child cannot always avoid sexual abuse, children who are prepared will be more likely to tell someone if abuse has occurred. A child's best defense is having personal safety information. In order to protect children, teach them:

- to feel good about themselves and know they are loved, valued and deserve to be safe
- the difference between safe, unsafe and confusing touches
- the proper names for all body parts, so they will be able to communicate clearly
- that safety rules apply to all people, not just strangers
- that their bodies belong to them and nobody has the right to touch them in any way that is unwanted or hurt them
- that they can say "no" to requests that make them feel uncomfortable—even from a close relative or family friend
- to report to you if any adult or older child asks them to keep a secret
- that some people have problems
- that they can rely on you to believe and protect them if they tell you about abuse
- to tell any trusted adult about abuse even if they are afraid of what may happen (because it is common for children not to disclose to their parents)
- that they are not bad or to blame for sexual abuse

Tennessee law requires that any person who knows, or has reason to suspect, that a child has been sexually abused must report it to local law enforcement authorities or the Department of Children's Services. Remember, "reason to suspect" means that you have seen indicators of abuse. It does not mean that you are certain that abuse has occurred. Reporting abuse or suspected abuse is actually a request for professionals to investigate further.

listening to CHILDREN

If a child trusts you enough to tell you about an incident of sexual abuse, you are in an important position to help that child recover. The following suggestions can help you provide positive support.

- do**
- **KEEP CALM** It is important to remember that you are not angry with the child, but at what happened. Children can mistakenly interpret anger or disgust as being directed towards them.
 - **BELIEVE THE CHILD** In most circumstances children do not lie about sexual abuse.
 - **GIVE POSITIVE MESSAGES** such as "I know you couldn't help it," or "I'm proud of you for telling."
 - **EXPLAIN** to the child that he or she is not to blame for what happened.
 - **LISTEN AND ANSWER** the child's questions honestly.
 - **RESPECT** the child's privacy. Be careful not to discuss the abuse in front of people who do not need to know what happened.
 - **BE RESPONSIBLE** Report the incident to the Department of Children's Services. They can help protect the child's safety and provide resources for further help.
 - **ARRANGE A MEDICAL EXAM** It can reassure you that there has been no permanent physical damage and may verify important evidence.
 - **GET HELP** Get competent professional counseling, even if it's only for a short time.
 - **CALL** the Sexual Assault Crisis Center 24 hours a day at (423) 522-7273 or 1-888-522-5244 for information and support. (You can even call anonymously.)

- don't**
- **PANIC OR OVERREACT** when the child talks about the experience. Children need help and support to make it through this difficult time.
 - **PRESSURE THE CHILD** to talk or avoid talking about the abuse. Allow the child to talk at her or his own pace. Forcing information can be harmful. Silencing the child will not help her or him to forget.
 - **CONFRONT THE OFFENDER** in the child's presence. The stress may be harmful. This is a job for the authorities.
 - **BLAME** the child. **SEXUAL ABUSE IS NEVER THE CHILD'S FAULT!!!**

SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS center

Since 1973, the Sexual Assault Crisis Center has been working to prevent child sexual abuse and sexual assault in East Tennessee. All children's services are confidential and free of charge. They include:

- 24-hour crisis counseling—(423) 522-7273/1-888-522-5244
- medical information
- legal support and advocacy
- individual, family and group counseling
- self-defense programs for children and adults
- in-school child abuse prevention programs
- date rape prevention programs
- parent support groups
- in-service training for child professionals and caregivers
- lending library of books, videos and written information about child sexual abuse

funding SOURCES

The Sexual Assault Crisis Center is a private non-profit agency. The Center receives financial support from United Way; city and county governments; Tennessee Departments of Children's Services, Health and Human Services and the Office of Criminal Justice Programs; foundation grants and private donations. Other support is generated by special events and fundraising activities. Donations of money, goods and services are crucial to the Center's operation. Contributions enable the Center to provide services at no charge. All donations are tax deductible.



Printed, in part, through a grant from the Tennessee Department of Health.

child SEXUAL ABUSE

SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS center

p.o. box 11523 • knoxville, tn 37939-1523
office (423) 558-9040 • fax (423) 584-7872
24-hour crisis line (423) 522-7273
toll free long distance 1-888-522-5244
email: sacc@korrnet.org OR sacc@esper.com

