

Child Molestation: What to Look For, What to Do

Signs Of Sexual Abuse

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Certain tip-offs in your child's behavior indicate a need to get further information.

According to some studies, anywhere from 25 percent to 66 percent of girls and 25 percent to 50 percent of boys will be sexually molested by age 18. The tragedy of child sexual abuse can happen to any family.

There are, however, certain tip-offs in your child's behavior that would indicate a need to get further information, or check it out with a counselor:

- Sexually "acting out": sex play with dolls or toys, drawing naked bodies, speaking or acting seductively, or instances of sexual aggression
- **Listen calmly without reaction. Reassure your child as he or she talks.**
 - * Behavioral changes at home and school, such as withdrawal or rebelliousness, a feeling that "something is not quite right"
 - * Sleep disturbances and increased nightmares
 - * Bed-wetting
 - * Clinging—fear of being left alone
 - * Depression
 - * Lack of appetite
 - * Psychosomatic illnesses

If you discover that your child has been victimized, here are some important actions to take:

1. Listen calmly without reaction. Reassure your child as he or she talks.
2. Write down exactly what your child says and include dates. Record any unusual behavior that might confirm the incident. Quote your child word for word.
3. Go to the authorities. School officials, police or your family doctor are trained in this area.
4. Assure your child that neither the abuse nor its outcome is his or her fault.
5. Respond to your child's fears; don't disregard them.
6. Permit him or her to talk but don't force it. Sometimes a child will refuse or deny earlier statements due to confused, painful feelings.
7. Realize that your child may not have negative feelings about the abuse, and may perceive it as affection.
8. Offer therapy, but don't insist on it until the child is ready and feels comfortable with the counselor. If possible, choose a Christian counselor who will honor your family's values.

To provide your children with some extra protection against victimization, here are some suggestions:

- * Establish open communication with your children on every subject, even uncomfortable ones like sex and anatomy.
 - Be a concerned friend to your child, listening to him and taking him seriously.
 - **Tell your children that if something feels wrong to them, it's okay to make a scene.**
 - * Teach your child to say no. Sometimes "good kids" haven't been taught to set boundaries or follow their instincts. They want to be polite.
 - * Tell your children that if something feels wrong to them, it's okay to make a scene — hit, kick, bite, scream or run. You want them to avoid danger by doing whatever is necessary.
 - * Give your children a lesson on right and wrong touching. Tell them no one has the right to touch them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable, no matter who it is. Major video stores offer free community service videos that teach "appropriate touching."
 - * Proper words are "No one is allowed to touch your private areas." Don't say, "Never let someone touch you." This puts the responsibility on the child, where it doesn't belong.
 - * No matter who they are with, don't leave children unattended for long; check in on them at various intervals.
- Molestations by friends or relatives are more common than by strangers. Abuse can occur in a matter of minutes, and usually a child won't cry out or even tell you afterward.
- * Work on having a solid family and home. Give your children the affection, attention, and recognition they crave. A pedophile often targets needy kids in problem situations.
- Give our children the protection they deserve by sending out the message, "Enough is enough!"

"Child Molestation: What to Look For, What to Do" appeared in the book *Raising Them Right*, .