DARKNESS to LIGHT'S

5 STEPS TO PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN™

A guide for responsible adults

DARKNESS TO LIGHT®

We are a national nonprofit organization that seeks to empower adults to prevent child sexual abuse. Our programs raise awareness and educate adults about how to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse.

What is child sexual abuse?

- Any sexual act between an adult and a minor, or between two minors, when one exerts power over the other.
- Forcing, coercing or persuading a child to engage in any type of sexual act. It also includes non-contact acts such as exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, voyeurism and communicating in a sexual manner by phone or Internet.
- Often a traumatic experience for children and teens.
- A crime punishable by law.

This booklet is only the beginning.

Child sexual abuse is a complex problem and this booklet touches on only a small part of it. The information we provide is not a substitute for the advice of professionals or more thorough training. But, taking these *5 Steps* in families and youth settings creates safer communities and helps protect the wellbeing of the children we love.

DARKNESS to LIGHT

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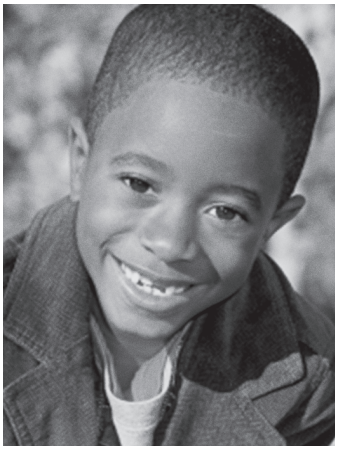
5 Steps to Protecting Our Children™

We believe that protecting children from sexual abuse is an adult responsibility.

About 1 in 10 children experience child sexual abuse before their 18th birthday.



Child sexual abuse happens in families, but also in organizations. Children brave terrible abuses alone, and repeatedly, often with no protection. Sometimes adults have simply lacked prevention knowledge, or not had the awareness to recognize signs. Sometimes we've dismissed gut feelings, and missed opportunities for courage. Some have covered up sexual abuse at the expense of our children.

But this is only one part of the truth.

1 in 10 is a rate that is down from previous generations. Our culture is changing.

We're starting to face the pain of child sexual abuse and do what needs to be done.

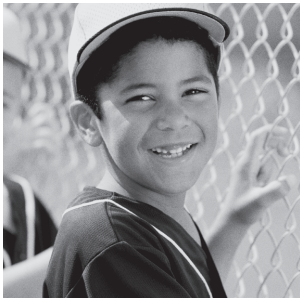
We *can* uncover and prevent child sexual abuse – child by child.

We must act as a community.

STEP 1 LEARN THE FACTS

1 in 10 children are sexually abused. This means realities rather than blind trust should influence our choices regarding children's safety from sexual abuse.

It is likely that you know a child who has been or is being abused.



- Experts estimate that about 1 in 10 children are sexually abused before their 18th birthday.
- Youth are the victims in 66% of all sexual offenses reported to law enforcement.
- Youth are 2.5 times more likely to be raped than adults.
- About 40% of victims are 11 years old or younger.
- 9% of 10-17 year olds receive a sexual request while on the Internet.
- Sexually abused children are at greater risk for psychological, emotional, social and physical problems, often lasting into adulthood.

Child pornography is child sexual abuse.
All child pornography is illegal.

A child is being abused whenever sexual acts are recorded in the production of child pornography.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children is also child sexual abuse.

- Anytime money or something of value is promised or exchanged, it is commercial sexual exploitation of children.
- 90% of children who are sexually exploited have a history of child sexual abuse.

Most child victims never report sexual abuse.

If you discover child pornography or commercial sexual exploitation of children, you must call your local law enforcement or the Cyber Tipline® 1-800-THE-LOST, operated by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Or visit http://www.missingkids.com/CyberTipline to make a report online.

It's also likely that you know an abuser. The greatest risk to children doesn't come from strangers, but from people we know and trust.

- 90% of children who are sexually abused know their abuser.
  - 30% are abused by family members.
  - 60% are abused by people the family trusts. Those who abuse gain access to the child in a school, church, sports club, etc. and often move into a position of trust within the family.
- Only about 10% are abused by strangers.
- 40% are abused by older or larger youth, like babysitters or cousins.

People who sexually abuse children often go out of their way to appear trustworthy.

Research demonstrates that sexually abused children are more likely to experience serious consequences during childhood and *throughout their lives*. Some of these are:

- Post traumatic stress disorder
- Anxiety and depression
- Substance abuse
- Aggression, oppositionality, and defiance
- Criminal behavior and violent offenses
- Sexual Promiscuity
- Teen pregnancy and motherhood
- Self-inflicted harm
- Delinquency
- Decreased school performance and dropout
- Health problems
- Suicide

STEP 2 MINIMIZE OPPORTUNITY

Eliminate or reduce isolated, one-on-one situations to decrease risk for abuse.

More than 80% of sexual abuse incidents happen in isolated, one-one-one situations with a child.

- ☐ Choose group situations and have multiple adults supervise children.
- ☐ Scan the physical environment for hidden areas and correct dangers.
- ☐ Make sure interactions can be observed and interrupted.
- ☐ Remember that older youth should not be in isolated, one-on-one situations with younger children.

Ask for these best practices in schools and organizations that serve your children.

- ☐ Background checks
- ☐ In-person interviews for new hires and volunteers
- ☐ Personal and professional reference checks
- ☐ A code of conduct for staff and volunteers
- ☐ A policy for responding to disclosures and discoveries of child sexual abuse
- ☐ A policy for responding to inappropriate behavior, breaches in policy, and suspicions of abuse
- ☐ Prevention training for employees, volunteers, parents, and caregivers

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STEWARDS of CHILDREN®

Prevention training for staff, volunteers, and parents creates a culture of awareness.

It gives people the skills to create safer environments.

It makes them more willing to intervene in unsafe behaviors by adults with children.

Prevention training for adults creates an environment with much less opportunity for those who may offend.

***Stewards of Children* is a program that teaches adults to:**

- ☐ Prevent sexual abuse before it can happen.
- ☐ Recognize signs of sexual abuse in children.
- ☐ Recognize unsafe behaviors by adults.
- ☐ React responsibly when a child discloses, or when an adult discovers or suspects sexual abuse.

Empowering

Uplifting

Working Together

Visit D2L.org

- ☐ To find a facilitator who can bring *Stewards of Children* to your organization.
- ☐ To take *Stewards of Children* online today.

STEP 3 TALK ABOUT IT

Have open conversations with children about our bodies, sex, and boundaries.

Understand why children are afraid to tell.

- ☐ The abuser sometimes threatens the child or a family member.
- ☐ The abuser may try to confuse the child about right and wrong.
- ☐ Many abusers tell children the abuse is “okay” or “a game.”
- ☐ The abuser may shame the child, blame the child, or tell the child that his/her parents will be angry.
- ☐ Children are afraid of disrupting or hurting their family.
- ☐ Some children who did not initially disclose are afraid to tell when it happens again.
- ☐ Some children are too young to understand.

Know how children communicate.

- ☐ Children may ask questions about bodies, interactions, or sex, rather than talk directly about something they’ve experienced.
- ☐ Children may tell parts of what happened, or pretend it happened to someone else, to check your reaction.
- ☐ Children who disclose sexual abuse often tell a trusted adult other than a parent.
- ☐ Children will often shut down and refuse to tell more if you respond emotionally or negatively.

One of the best protections is our relationship with children.

Talk openly with children.

Talking about boundaries and sex forges a protective bond between parent and child, and instills knowledge that makes children and teens less vulnerable. Other adults in the child's life can find ways to teach sexual and body safety as well.

- ☐ Talk with children when they are young, and use proper names for body parts.
- ☐ Tell children what sexual abuse is, and when age appropriate, about sex.
- ☐ Tell children what parts of the body others should not touch. Use examples with situations and people in their lives.
- ☐ Teach children that they have the right to tell any person "NO" to unwanted or uncomfortable touch.
- ☐ Tell children it is not OK for adults or older youth to use sexual words with them, or to act in a sexual way.
- ☐ Explain that secrets can be harmful, and if someone asks them to keep a secret, they should tell you about it.
- ☐ Teach children not to give out email or home addresses, phone numbers or other personal information while using the Internet or handheld devices.
- ☐ Ask children about their online experiences and learn about the sites and services they use.
- ☐ Explore with children who their trusted adults are in the settings they frequent.
- ☐ Speak and listen quietly and calmly. It's important that children feel safe and loved in all of these discussions.

"No one should touch you where a bathing suit covers."

"Your whole body is private when you want it to be. You get to decide who touches you."

"Sometimes touch might just feel uncomfortable, even if you like the person. Whenever it's uncomfortable, you can say no."

STEP 4 RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS

Know the signs of abuse to protect children from further harm.

Learn the signs in children and teens.

Physical signs are not common, but the following should be carefully examined by a professional:

- ☐ Bruising, bleeding, redness, rashes, bumps or scabs especially around the genitals
- ☐ Urinary tract infections
- ☐ Sexually transmitted diseases
- ☐ Abnormal discharge
- ☐ Chronic stomach pain, headaches or other ailments that can't be explained medically

Emotional and behavioral signs are more common.

- ☐ Withdrawal
- ☐ Depression
- ☐ Anger, rebellion, defiance
- ☐ Agitation or inability to concentrate
- ☐ Fear of situations or people
- ☐ Sexual behavior and language that are not age-appropriate
- ☐ Falling grades
- ☐ Use of alcohol or drugs, especially at a young age
- ☐ A change in behavior

Call child protective services or the police in your area.

Use a Children's Advocacy Center whenever possible. To find one, visit the National Children's Alliance at www.nationalchildrensalliance.org or call 1-800-239-9950.

Signs don't always mean sexual abuse, but signs can be a reason to take more interest in the child.

STEP 5 REACT RESPONSIBLY

Understand how to respond to risky behaviors and suspicions or reports of abuse.

There are 3 reasons we need to react to sexual abuse.

- ☐ A child discloses it to us.
- ☐ We discover it ourselves.
- ☐ We have reason to suspect it.

Disclosure

A child has broken through secrecy, fear, and shame and has chosen you as the person he or she trusts enough to tell. Honor that with attention, compassion and belief.

- ☐ Listen calmly and openly.
- ☐ Don't fill in the gaps, or rush to "get to the bottom of it."
- ☐ Don't ask leading questions about details.
- ☐ Ask only open ended questions like, "What happened next?" Or say, "It's ok to tell me more."
- ☐ Believe the child.
- ☐ Tell the child he's done nothing wrong.
- ☐ Affirm the child's courage.
- ☐ Seek the help of a professional who is trained to talk with the child about sexual abuse.

Few reported incidents are false.

STEP 5 REACT RESPONSIBLY

Discovery

You've witnessed a sexually abusive act by an adult or youth with a child, or you know by some other way that abuse has taken place. For example, a friend or coworker may have told you something definitive.

In cases of disclosure or discovery, report immediately to local law enforcement or to child protective services in the county in which the child lives.

- ☐ Tell the child's name and where the child lives.
- ☐ Tell the facts. This may include what the child has told you, or behaviors from the alleged offender that you saw.
- ☐ Tell what signs you've seen in the child.
- ☐ Tell what access the alleged offender has to the child.

And remember, if you've discovered child pornography, you've discovered sexual abuse. Report child pornography to the police or to the Cyber Tipline at 1-800-THE-LOST.

Suspicion

You've seen signs in a child, or you've witnessed boundary violations by an adult or youth toward a child. ***Suspicion means, at a minimum, you need to set some limits or ask some questions.***

People who offend are rarely seen in the act of sexually abusing a child, but they are often seen breaking rules and pressing boundaries.

***A bystander* is a person who witnesses a boundary violation or sees a situation in which a child is vulnerable.**

Bystander Intervention

1. **Describe the inappropriate behavior or the boundary violation** to the person who has crossed it.
   "It looks like you're forcing Chloe to kiss and hug. She looks uncomfortable."
2. **Set a limit** with the person who has crossed the boundary.
   "Please stop. We let Chloe decide who she wants to show affection to."
3. **Move on.**
   "Chloe, let's go see what the other children are up to."

If there is a pattern of boundary violations or you've intervened and boundary violations continue, you may have reasonable suspicion. Make a report to the police or child protective services.

We can make a difference step by step, and these steps add up to happier, healthier children and stronger communities.

Child Abuse Helplines have staff who are trained to answer questions about suspected child sexual abuse.

Darkness to Light's helpline: 1-866-FOR-LIGHT to be routed to resources in your community.

Childhelp USA National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-4-A-CHILD

Children's Advocacy Centers coordinate all the professionals involved in a case (legal, social services, and medical.) If you're unsure about whether to make an official report or just need support, contact a children's advocacy center. The staff will help you evaluate your suspicions and next steps.

To find center near you, contact The National Children's Alliance at www.nationalchildrensalliance.org or 1-800-239-9950.

This *5 Steps to Protecting Our Children* booklet is part of a larger training program called *Stewards of Children*.

Visit D2L.org to take the *Stewards of Children* training online, or to find a facilitator to lead it as training for your organization.

The references for this booklet can be found at D2L.org/5steps

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