

10 Ways You Can Help Prevent Child Abuse

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, a designation that highlights the widespread issue of child abuse. By conservative numbers, 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 10 boys will be victim of sexual assault before they reach adulthood. In the Quad Cities alone, 20 school buses could be filled with child victims of neglect and abuse. Yet, child abuse is 100% preventable.

So what can parents do?

First, focus on yourself and how you can be the best parent you can be.

Learn how to walk away

Sometimes babies and kids can be exhausting, frustrating, challenging--infuriating even. When you start to get overwhelmed with these negative feelings, sometimes the best thing that you can do is walk away. Take yourself out of the situation and make no room for any situations in which you find yourself doing something you never thought you would do, like raising your hand or shaking your baby.



Ask for support

We talk about this one a lot, but only because it is so important! If you're feeling overwhelmed or exhausted, or just want some alone time, reach out to your support group. Ask your partner or trusted family members or friends to watch your kids while you take some time to reset. Call a friend and ask for advice. Or, if you feel like you need more help, reach out to a therapist. It is okay to ask for help!!

Now, let's get into some steps that can help protect your child (and other children!) from those who want to harm them.

Support other parents

Just like you, other parents may need support from time to time, too! If they are a little more stressed than normal, or struggling with something, reach out. Sometimes just a friendly voice can be a reminder that they are not alone. Offer to help around the house for an hour or watch the kids for an afternoon if you are able.

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Educate yourself

Do you know the signs for child abuse? Or the warning signs of a potential abuser? Knowing what kinds of behaviors or characteristics to look for can be crucial to preventing abuse before it happens, or stopping any occurring abuse. And remember, kids often don't tell you outright that they were hurt. It's up to adults to sense if a situation is not right and to listen, really listen, when kids are telling us things they think are important.

Teach about safe touching

Educating your kids about safe touching from an early age is crucial so that they know what is and is not okay. You can purchase a book to help explain, or simply have conversations. Make sure you are specific about what parts are not okay for others to touch or what kind of touching is not appropriate. Most importantly, teach your children the anatomically correct names for their body parts. If a situation does happen where they feel unsafe, your child has the correct words to tell you what happened, or to tell another responsible adult what happened, and be understood. Have conversations several times a year to make sure they don't forget. A quick reminder before they go over to a new friend's house can be helpful too.

Establish safety rules

Lay out a set of steps for your child in the event they are ever in a situation in which they are not comfortable. If they were touched inappropriately, or someone is being weird and making them feel uncomfortable, they should know to call someone or tell someone. Who will they call? And do they know the phone number? And if they don't have a phone with them, what should they do?

Communicate with your child often

From asking how their day was to talking about their feelings, it is so important to make sure your kid feels comfortable talking to you about the little stuff, so when it comes to the big stuff, they know they can still come to you. Make sure they know that they will never get in trouble for talking to you, even if someone else says something bad (scaring children into keeping secrets is a common tactic for abusers).

Get to know your child's friends

Your kids have friends, and they might be going over to the friend's house to play. As a parent, try to get to know these friends. Additionally, spend time getting to know their families. Meet their parents and see where the kids hang out. Invite them over for dinner. They will have access to your child when you are not around; make sure they are trustworthy.

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Monitor your child's Internet access

Between gaming chat rooms to Internet websites, there are a lot of places online in which abusers can target your child. Make sure you have conversations about the dangers of online strangers or "friends". Keep an eye on how much time they spend on their devices. You can even set parental restrictions on the device to prevent their access to certain sites or apps.

Report suspected abuse

You've educated yourself and you know the signs. If you see anything suspicious, regarding your child or another child, report it. And know who to report it to. For emergencies, call 911. In Iowa, call the Iowa Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-362-2178. In Illinois, call the Child Abuse Hotline at 800-25-ABUSE (800-252-2873).

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Get involved in the community

To make a community safe, it takes a lot of effort from organizations and volunteers. Get involved with the prevention of child abuse-- there are lots of ways you can help. Volunteer at a local child abuse prevention organization. Advocate for education curriculums in your children's schools that will teach classes about safety. Talk to your friends about warning signs. You could even join a neighborhood watch group. The opportunities are out there-- you just have to take them!

Remember, child abuse is 100% preventable!

Originally posted on the Now What? Blog on 4.2.21. The Now What? Blog served for nearly 7 years to

- 1. Normalize parents seeking support and help as a manner of child abuse prevention*
- 2. Engage community in how they can work to prevent child abuse*
- 3. Work to build resiliency in families through promotion of the 5 protective factors*

Maybe you coach a baseball team or you help care for the neighbor kids from time to time. You are investing in the safety and security of the children in our community. Because it truly does take a village to raise our children, we want to offer the tools needed to bring awareness and education to preventing child abuse.

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