

KEEPING YOUR CHILD SAFE

A PARENTS GUIDE:



**Abuse Prevention, Detection, and
Intervention.**

2007

Studies show that children who are affected with a developmental disability are commonly abused and are far more likely to become victims of abuse, including sexual abuse. Sadly, very few abuses against people with disabilities are reported to the authorities. Even more alarming is the fact that many perpetrators of child abuse are well known and trusted by the victim.

The nature of this pamphlet is to bring education and power to parents and their children, yet it is specifically applicable for parents of children affected by a developmental disability. Awareness of the harsh reality surrounding child abuse can lead to prevention of abuse, early detection of mistreatment, and positive resolution of previous assaults.

Child Abuse Presents Itself in Many Ways

Physical Abuse: hitting, beating, slapping, burning, etc., sometimes resulting in bruises or welts.

Emotional/Verbal Abuse: belittling, excessive yelling, not providing warmth and love necessary to the development of a child.

Neglect: not providing food, clothing shelter, or other basic need for the proper development of a child.

Sexual Abuse: fondling, rape, exposure to pornographic materials, or any other sexual activity with a child.

The information provided is an introduction to community resources and references for further research. You are encouraged to expand your knowledge as a preventative measure for your family and children. Please feel free to share this information with friends, family and colleagues.

Your comments are welcomed and can be sent to:

North Bay Regional Center
2351 Mendocino Avenue
Santa Rosa, California
95403

WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT CHILD ABUSE ?

Knowledge is Power and parents who possess knowledge will be more successful at ultimately preventing abuse, and identifying possible mistreatment. It is important that you take the time to assess the everyday activities of your child, in order to help keep your child safe from harm.

STOP: Take the time to observe and learn your child's behaviors and body language. Is your child exhibiting behavior issues which are new or re-emerging? Does your child appear distressed, or has their appearance changed? Any dramatic change in behavior or appearance suggests a closer look into the cause.

LOOK: Examine your child during bath time and getting dressed in the morning or undressed for bedtime. If there are obvious physical signs of abuse take the children to the emergency room immediately.

LISTEN: Spend quality time with your child and listen to their stories; ask questions about their day and their friends. If a child is non-verbal, closely observe body language and listen for a change in vocalizations. Children rarely make up stories about being abused, and a disclosure of any type should be given attention.

KNOW: Be informed about your child's daily routine and who is involved with your child on a daily basis. Is there a change in family members, friends, or school personnel? Ask questions and be informed if there are changes in teachers, bus drivers, classroom aides, janitors, or peer tutors.

REQUEST: If your child is involved in group activities or if placed outside of the classroom for 1:1 services request that there is an aide to monitor and observe, or know the background and identity of the person working closely with your child.

TEACH: A child's ability to assert themselves can be one of the most powerful tools in the prevention of abuse. The more a parent teaches their child to acknowledge their likes and dislikes and have those respected, the more they will increase their confidence in making better decisions and in stopping someone who is hurting them or making them uncomfortable.

UNDERSTAND: Become informed on your child's level of development, and assist others in understanding where your child is with respect to abilities. Many times a child can be more properly respected and cared for when others have realistic expectations of their abilities.

SHARING WITH YOUR CHILD

Presenting information to your child is often a delicate situation and can require some creativity on the parent's part. Pick ways to share with your child that are both comfortable to you and your child, and appropriate for their particular learning style.

Pictures provide a concrete medium for discussion on appropriate relationships, and social interactions. Parents can use:

- Family photos
- Line drawings
- Stickers
- Clip on art
- Felt board
- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) board
- Communication books

Full body drawings of your young child provides a fun and interactive medium to reinforce ownership of their body. Parents can:

- Trace the child's body on large butcher paper
- Allow the child to fill in body parts such as eyes, nose, and hands.
- Use the drawing as a discussion piece to identify private areas of the body. For example: You might suggest to your child that anything covered with a bathing suit is considered a private area.

Present information in small sequential steps, repeat frequently and practice real life situations which encourage decision making and problem solving.

- Make the practice realistic and applicable to the child's immediate environment.
- Include familiar people the child knows, such as teachers, bus drivers, and family members.
- Stage practice sessions in familiar settings such as the school playground or home.

Age Appropriate Education

Developmental milestones are typically marked by a child's speech and language skills, fine and gross motor skills, as well as their social and interpersonal skills. Parents can start at an early age to develop a child's sense of personal safety, and appropriate body ownership and knowledge. Each stage builds onto the next. Revisit each stage as you move onto the next age range.

Ages 3 to 5:

- Teach your child about body parts being careful not to omit reproductive organs and their appropriate names.
- Reinforce the idea that a child's body belongs to them.
- Observe emerging personal boundaries and encourage assertion of instinctual knowledge between a touch which feels good and one that feels bad.
- Empower a child to say “**NO**” to unwanted or uncomfortable touches or interactions with others.
- Understand children will engage in natural curiosity and exploration of their bodies.
- Instill a positive self image in your child; allow your child to make choices and decisions in their everyday lives. This creates a sense of confidence which will enable a child to make difficult decisions, during stressful times.

Age 5 to 8:

- Revisit the previous stages to reinforce each skill.
- Continue to use correct names for all body parts and reproductive organs.

- Compare and contrast good and healthy touching versus touching that is not appropriate.
- Identify to your child who (doctors, neighbors, parents, teachers, friends) are allowed to touch your child, when, and what touch is appropriate.
- Discuss similarities and differences between boys and girls.
- Introduce the reproduction cycle.
- Stress the qualities of a good relationship between friends, family and acquaintances.
- It's natural for children to explore their own bodies. Establish an appropriate place for "private time."

Age 8 to 11:

- Revisit the previous stages to reinforce each skill.
- Discuss the importance of discretion when revealing personal information with peers.
- Prompt for and facilitate healthy hygiene.
- Assist and model appropriate presentation skills including:
 - Clothes
 - Body language
 - Attitude
 - Dialogue
 - Social interactions
- Discuss pre pubescent changes that occur:
 - With themselves
 - With their peers of the opposite sex

- Call attention to the differences in the changes between boys and girls.

Ages 12 to 18:

- Revisit the previous stages to reinforce each skill.
- Understand that during the teenage years your child will probably begin to become interested in romance, relationships, and sex. This is normal even if your child has developmental challenges.
- Teach the difference between public and private behaviors.
- Discuss appropriate hygiene skills and needs.
- Discuss potential consequences of sexual behaviors; include books or social stories.
- Provide and model examples of appropriate behaviors for intimate friendships.
- Discuss and model how to make good choices in difficult social situations.
- Provide, guide, and facilitate safe and appropriate social activities (see resource guide for listings).
- Discuss birth control options and the need for proper medical care (such as yearly gynecological exams) if sexually active.

Signs of Abuse: What to Look For

Red Flags are exhibited in many ways, but can be identified through common signs and behaviors exhibited by your child. These may be resurfacing patterns, or simply new to the child's character. Typical red flag are indicators of stress in a child's life. Though often associated with abuse, these signs may also be due to changes in a child's routine, or exposure to other forms of trauma (loss of a loved one, abrupt family changes, divorce). Often a dramatic change in a child's demeanor suggests a closer.

- **Physical Signs:** unexplained bruises, injuries, or marks on body, genital pain or irritation, STDs (infection/ discharge from genital areas).
- **Regressive Behavior:** Withdraw from typical activities, bedwetting or "accidents" during the day, self stimulating behavior, thumb or finger sucking.
- **Dramatic reenactment:** reenacting events through play with dolls, other children, art, and/or stories.
- **Problematic behaviors:** heightened aggression, depression, anxious behavior, unprovoked crying, poor performance at school, changes in sleeping patterns (nightmares, insomnia).
- **Self Abusive Behaviors:** Head banging, biting, cutting on body, picking at skin, pulling out hair, drug or alcohol use/ abuse, picking fights with bigger or stronger individuals.
- **Destruction of Property.**
- **Increased Knowledge of Sexuality, or Increased Sexual Activity:** inappropriate play, interest in sex, disrobing, constant and/ or painful masturbation.
- **Lack of Personal Boundaries including:** compulsive sexual touching of family and friends.
- **Extreme avoidance of particular places or specific people.**

Suspected Child Abuse: What to Do Next.

It is a difficult time for both parent and child when a suspicion of abuse arises. Parents play an important role in facilitating the needed actions and providing the emotional support that a child needs. When a parent is aware or suspects that a child has been abused they need to immediately:

- Find a safe place for your child.
- Check in with yourself. Disclosure is often a high stress time for both you and your child. Be sure to acknowledge emotions inside yourself which may be triggered by your child's communication. Remember the emotions which you feel are often expressed by your body language and facial expressions.
- Comfort and reassure your child.
- If abuse is suspected, but not disclosed or proven, refrain from interviewing the child. Instead contact law enforcement and Child Protection Services and request an interview be done by an interdisciplinary team.
 - **Child Protection Services**
Phone: (707) 565-4304
- **DO NOT** confront the perpetrator as this will interfere with any investigation law enforcement may conduct as well as placing yourself in danger.
- Report the abuse/ suspected abuse to the proper agencies.
Immediately call 911:
 - **Santa Rosa Police Department**
Phone: (707) 543-3595
 - **Rohnert Park Police Department**
Phone: (707) 584-2600
 - **Petaluma Police Department**
○ **Phone: (707) 762-2727**

- Request an interdisciplinary team to do the interview with your child. This approach will save your child from the added stress of repeated interviews from various agencies, as all agencies (Social Workers, Child Protective Services, Law Enforcement, and the District Attorney) will be part of the interdisciplinary team, assisting a trained interviewer.
- Contact local agencies for assistance, support, services and/or Advocacy. (Most often this will be done by law enforcement professional for the victim.)
 - **United Against Sexual Assault**
Phone: (707)545-7270
 - **Rape Crisis Center of Sonoma County**
Phone: (707) 545-7273
- Keep anything that may be evidence including clothing, blankets, and towels in a paper bag (plastic bags can destroy evidence). Refrain from bathing until the child has had a medical exam.
- Assist your child in getting medical and emotional/mental evaluations. Parents are advised to remain with their child through the exam and take the time to explain each procedure/evaluation to their child in advance.
- Follow through with recommended medical and mental health care for your child. Please refer to the resource list in this pamphlet for agencies that can assist with low cost counseling services. Victim assistance will be offered through your local District Attorney's office.
- Continue to reassure and protect your child and remind them that they did nothing wrong and are not to blame for the assault.
- It is important to understand that the highest success rates of abuse recovery and trauma reduction are due to a supportive parent or adult assisting the child with the healing process. You may need to address personal issues for yourself during this time in order to properly support your child. As a parent you are also eligible to receive counseling services through the D.A. Victim Assistance Program.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Parenting/Family Support

- **California Parenting Institute :**
Phone: 585-6108 **WARMLINE:** 544-WARM
www.calparents.org
Parenting classes, children groups and parent support.
- **CARE Children's Counseling Center:**
Phone: 575-9166
www.carechildren.org
Sliding scale counseling, and parenting support.
- **Family Service Agency:**
Phone: 545-4551
www.familyservicesonoma.org
Sliding scale counseling for youth, families, adults, and couples.
- **Jewish Family and Children's Services :**
Phone: 571-8131
http://jfcs.org
Various family supports, call for more information.
- **LOMI Psychotherapy Clinic:**
Phone: 579-0465
www.lomi.org
Sliding scale counseling for youth, families, adults, and couples.
- **Social Advocates for Youth**
Phone: 544-3299
www.socialadvocatesforyouth.org
*Crisis intervention for youth, sliding scale and Medi-cal counseling.
for youth and families.*
- **United Against Sexual Assault:**
Phone: 545-7270
www.uasasonoma.org
*Assault prevention, intervention, support groups, and education for
children, and adults.*

- **West County Community Services:**
Phone: 829-5717
www.westcountyservices.org
Various family, individual, and child supports Medi-cal and sliding scale counseling, call for more information.

Legal

- **Sonoma County Victim Assistance Program:**
Phone: 565-8250
www.sonomacounty.org/DA/victimassistance.htm
- **Sonoma County Legal Aid:**
Phone: 542-1290
www.sonomacountylibrary.org/legalaide.htm

Emergency/Crisis

- **Santa Rosa Police Department: 911**
<http://ci.santa-rosa.ca.us>
 - **Santa Rosa Police Department**
Phone: (707) 543-3595
 - **Rohnert Park Police Department**
Phone: (707) 584-2600
 - **Petaluma Police Department**
Phone: (707) 762-2727
- **Child Protective Services:**
Phone: 565-4304
- **Petaluma Valley Hospital:**
Phone: 778-1111
www.petalumavalleyhospital.org
- **Santa Rosa Memorial:**
Phone: 546-3210
www.santarosamemorial.org
- **St Joseph's Urgent Care**
Phone: SR. 543-2000
 RP. 584-0672
www.santarosamemorial.org

Recreation

- **Santa Rosa Recreation and Parks:**
Phone: 543-3282
<http://ci.santa-rosa.ca.us>
Safe recreational environment, classes and groups for children, teens, families and adults.
- **Boys and Girls Club:**
Phone: 542-3249
Safe recreational environment for children.
- **De Meo Teen Club/CHOPS:**
Phone: 284-2467
www.chopsonline.com
Safe recreational environment for teens.
- **YMCA:**
Phone: 545-9622
www.scfymca.org
Provides various classes and recreational opportunities.

Special Needs

- **North Bay Regional Center Sonoma County :**
Phone: 560-2000
www.nbrc.net
Provides diagnostic, intervention, and support to persons with developmental disabilities.
- **Family Resources and Advocacy Center**
Phone: 524-6600
<http://becomingindependent.org/frac3.htm>
Supports and resources to families and children under the age of 22 with developmental disabilities.
- **Early Learning Institute:**
Phone: 591-0170
www.earlylearninginstitute.com
Support for young children with developmental delays.

Book List for Parents and Children

Books for Parents and Children To Read Together

It's Perfectly Normal

By: Robie H. Harris
Michael Emberley

My Body is Private

By: Linda Walvoord Giard

It's My Body (Children's Safety & Abuse Prevention)

By: Lori Freeman

Please Tell: A Child's Story About Sexual Abuse

By: Jessie Ottenweller

Tom Doesn't Visit Us Any more

By: Mary Leah Otto

No More Secrets For Me

By: Oralee Wachter

What's The Big Secret? Talking About Sex with Boys and Girls

By: Laurie Krasny Brown

The Period Book

By: Karen Gravelle

It's So Amazing

By: Robie H. Harris

What's Happening To Me? A Guide to Puberty

By: Peter Mayle

Changes in You for Girls

Changes in you for Boys

By: Peggy Siegel

The Care and Keeping of You: The Body Book for Girls

By: Valorie Schaefer
Norm Bendell

Books for Parents

Discipline Without Shouting or Spanking

By: Jerry Wycoff, Ph..D.
Barbara C. Unell

No More Magging, Nit-Picking and Nudging

By: Jim Wittens

The Challenging Child

By: Stanley Greenspan, M.D.

Confident Parents Exceptional Teens

By: Ted Haggard
John Bolin

Parents in a Pressure Cooker

By: Jane Bluestein, Ph. D.
Lynn Collins, M.A.

How to Talk with Teens about Love, Relationships and S-E-X

By: Amy and Charles Miron

Sexuality and People with Intellectual Disability

By: Fegan, Rauch, McCarthy

An Easy Guide for Caring Parents: Sexuality and Socialization

By: McKee and Blacklidge

An Easy Guide to Loving Carefully

By: McKee, Kempton and Stiggall

I Can Live Safely: An Independent Living Skills Workbook

By: Jim and Lorrie Lewis

Couples with Intellectual Disabilities Talk about Living and Loving

By: Melberg and Schwier

Enabling Romance: A Guide to Love, Sex and Relationships for the Disabled

By: Kroll and Klein