

# Let's talk.

A guide to speaking up  
to prevent child sexual abuse.



**Stop It Now!**<sup>®</sup>

## Special Thanks

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## Let's talk.

Talking about sex is never easy. Talking about sexual abuse is even harder, especially when you care about the people involved. You may also be worried or concerned about a situation where an adult's behavior\* with a child brings up concerns for you. Something you have seen or heard just does not feel right.

**If you are reading this guidebook, you care.** Learning how to talk about your concerns about an adult's behavior can help protect a child or teen in your life. It can also make a huge difference in the life of the adult, teen and/or child who needs your help.

\*This guidebook is focused on conversations with adults. However, 30-50% of children are sexually abused by older children or adolescents. It is important to recognize this fact and that interventions will be different than those for adults.



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"I just want to thank you for such a detailed answer and all of the thought you've put into it... I think I will have this discussion with my boyfriend and frame it in a way of setting examples to protect the nephew... in case a bad-intentioned adult did the same thing and his nephews thought that was OK."

– HELPLINE EMAIL

"This has been great. You have been so helpful. It has helped me organize my thoughts and my action plan."

– CONCERNED GRANDFATHER

"Talking anonymously to the Helpline gave me the practice and courage to speak to the people who could help me to make my house safe again."

– HELPLINE CALLER

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# About us

Since 1992, Stop It Now! has talked directly with over 26,000 parents, caregivers, family members, friends, concerned members of the community, and professionals who care about and for children. We have talked with people who have sexually abused a child or are seeking help to act safely, and equally importantly we have talked with their families. We have talked with many, many individuals who were sexually abused as children and their friends and families as well.

Through our work, Stop It Now! has found that **when adults talk to other adults about the way someone – a friend, family member or any other adult – acts with kids, the talk has made a difference in their lives.** Why talk about this? By talking about your concerns, you are helping to break through the silence, isolation and shame surrounding this issue. You have the chance to offer help and resources. You can begin to establish clear and safe boundaries and expectations. Ultimately this conversation lets the person know that the child has an adult looking out for them.



**PHONE**  
1.888.PREVENT



**EMAIL**  
helpline@stopitnow.org



**CHAT**  
stopitnow.org/chat



**ONLINE HELP CENTER**  
stopitnow.org

## It's OK to be nervous.

Being nervous to begin this conversation is understandable. Relationships can be complicated, and talking about someone's behaviors around kids is not easy. It's natural to have concerns about how your relationship will be affected by conversations that bring up sexual behaviors. This is not always a cut and dried situation, especially when you love both the person involved in questionable situations and the children you're trying to keep safe. While we may want a situation to be clear and simple, they rarely are – **but when you do raise your concerns, it can also show how much you care for everyone in the situation.**

This guidebook will help you have this conversation confidently and calmly. Adult-to-adult discussion is the best way to start making changes. We will help you talk specifically about what concerns you have and ask questions about what may be happening. We will help you identify what may be happening and prepare for your next steps. We will also help you decide when it's time to ask a professional for help. No matter what, know that help is available and that it is OK to reach out to professionals.

### IMPORTANT

Child sexual abuse is a crime in all 50 states. If you know that a child is being sexually abused or has been sexually abused, please report the abuse to child protective services or the police. Our Helpline – 1.888.PREVENT – can help you prepare to make a report.



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“What could have been a difficult, messy conversation with my brother turned out to be incredibly reassuring and informative, open, warm and loving. This was the first time I ever had a conversation with him about my concerns. We were able to learn so much about what we could do next to help him.”

– HELPLINE CALLER

“It will be hard to talk with him. But if I don’t have that talk, I will always wonder whether I did everything I could to protect my son and the children in this neighborhood.”

– CONCERNED FATHER

“I can’t talk with my father about anything but sports. How can I possibly explain to him that I don’t feel comfortable leaving him alone with my new baby?”

– HELPLINE CALLER

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## What is child sexual abuse?

If you're not sure exactly what sexual abuse is, you're not alone. Simply put: child sexual abuse is any sexual behavior involving an adult and a child. It's also possible for a child to abuse another child.

According to the World Health Organization, "Child sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person."

**Sex abuse includes both touching and non-touching behaviors.**

All sexual touching between an adult and a child is sexual abuse. Sexual touching between children can be sexual abuse when there is a considerable age difference (often defined as 3 or more years) between the children or if the children are significantly different developmentally or size-wise.

Sexual abuse does not have to involve penetration, force, pain, or even touching. Non-touching sexual abuse is an adult engaging in any sexual behavior (looking, showing, or touching) with a child to meet the adult's interest or sexual needs. This includes the manufacture, distribution and viewing of child sexual abuse material (CSAM, often called child pornography).

If you see or hear something that just doesn't feel right, or gives you a reason to be concerned, trust yourself – even if it's tempting to put off any action and say that "there is nothing worrisome going on." Often your gut instinct is a reaction to something you might have seen or heard, but don't have words to describe.

You don't need proof to follow up on your concerns that a child is being sexually abused or that an adult is abusing a child. By exploring a situation a little further, you can learn what's happening around you. And by learning more, asking questions and having conversations, you will also convey that children under your watch have a protective adult looking out for them.

You may also choose to talk directly to the person, move children to another space or ask the person to leave. Reach out for help so you don't have to do it alone. By taking action, you are sending a message to everyone – including the child that you care about – to create a safer, more secure environment.

As you proceed, know that people's reactions will be informed by legal considerations, cultural norms and issues of race, power and privilege. By recognizing and trying to understand these differences, you can make your conversations and responses so much more effective.

### TRUST YOURSELF

Trust your feelings, observations and gut. Often your gut instinct is a reaction to something you might have seen or heard but don't have words to describe. If you are seeing something, consider saying or doing something. It may be tempting to put off any action and say that "there is nothing worrisome going on." It's natural to worry that someone you care about will feel "accused" of doing something illegal or harmful, but it is our responsibility as adults to speak up about a questionable behavior or concerning situation involving children's safety.

## What to watch for when adults are around children or teens

Have you ever felt uncomfortable observing someone playing with a child or flirting with a teen? Maybe you thought, "I'm just over-reacting," or "Why is he/she doing that?" or "They don't really mean anything by that." Maybe you even thought that something was wrong with you because you were even thinking that something seemed inappropriate. **Don't ignore comments or behaviors that make you uncomfortable and worried.**

You do not need to know someone's intention before speaking up. You can talk about someone's behaviors without making accusations, and you can even create a family safety plan without a disclosure of sexual abuse. You don't need to have "proof" to begin a conversation or intervene in a way that could protect a child before they are harmed. The checklist below offers some warning signs.

Do you know an adult who:

- Refuses to let a child or teenager set any of their own limits? For example, tells a teenager that only a parent can decide when privacy is allowed in the home, even in the bathroom?
- Insists on hugging, kissing, tickling, wrestling or holding a child even when the child does not want this affection?
- Is overly interested in the sexuality of a particular child or teen, such as talking repeatedly about the child's developing body or interferes with normal teen dating?
- Insists on uninterrupted time alone with a child?
- Talks excessively and/or secretively to a child/teen online?
- Spends most of their spare time with children and has little interest in spending time with people their own age?
- Regularly offers to babysit many different children for free or takes children on overnight outings alone?
- Buys a particular child or teen gifts, takes them on special adventures, or gives them money for no apparent reason?

- Offers alcohol or drugs to teens or kids when other adults are not around?
- Frequently walks in on children/teens in the bathroom?
- Allows children or teens to consistently get away with inappropriate behaviors?

Any one of these behaviors does not mean that a child is being sexually abused. But if you answered “yes” to more than one, begin to ask questions and get help. You have the chance to strengthen a circle of protection around a child.

## Warning signs of behaviors that may need to be addressed

Someone you love may be acting in sexual ways that worry or confuse you. It may be difficult to imagine them creating a vulnerable environment for a child or being sexually abusive. While we may not know why someone we care about acts in a potentially harmful way, we can learn the warning signs in adults' behaviors that indicate a difficulty with understanding safe boundaries.

Do you know someone who:

- Often has a “special” child friend, maybe a different one from year to year?
- Spends their spare time on activities involving children or teens, rather than other adults?
- Does not have any close adult friends or just a very few that are kept at a distance?
- Makes fun of a child's body parts, calls a child sexual names such as “stud,” “whore,” or “slut”?
- Talks again and again about the sexual activities of children or teens?
- Encourages silence and secrets with a child?
- Talks about sexual fantasies with children?

- Is not clear about what behaviors and situations are appropriate when with children?
- Was exposed to violence, pornography, or sexual behaviors as a child and has not dealt with it in any way?
- Masturbates so much that it begins to get in the way of important day-to-day activities?
- Views sexual material online that includes children, including "barely legal" pornography sites?

Any one of these signs does not mean that a child is in danger. But if you see a few of these signs in someone you know, begin to ask questions. This is an opportunity to protect kids.

These behaviors open the door for you to have a conversation about your concerns, then decide what next steps are needed. This may also be a way for the person to ask for help.

Stop It Now! has heard from many people with sexual behavior problems that they wish someone had asked them what was going on. They wish they had known help was available – or how to get it.

“I didn't think I could talk to him, but now that I have talked to you about it in this new way, I think I'll try this discussion again.”

– HELPLINE CALLER

# Preparing for the conversation

These steps are suggestions to help you move forward. Use the ideas that make the most sense for you and your situation.

## 1. Learn more.

You may be thinking to yourself, “Maybe the things I’ve noticed are normal.” In order to know what’s normal and what’s not, look for trusted resources to help you learn about healthy and safe relationships for both adults and for children at different ages.

This guidebook focuses on adults concerned about and responding to an adult’s behavior, but the more adults learn about healthy sexual development and age-appropriate behaviors in children, the better prepared they are to respond to warning signs. (Learn more at [StopItNow.org/ohc-content/age-appropriate-sexual-behavior](https://www.stopitnow.org/ohc-content/age-appropriate-sexual-behavior).) Although it may be scary, take the time to learn about warning signs in a child that could tell you that they were sexually abused. These are important protective actions we can take to create safer environments.

Lastly, learn the warning signs in adults or teenagers that show they may be abusing or at risk to sexually abuse a child. These are the signs that you may have already seen in them or in their interactions with a child. Many of these behaviors are “normal,” but when the behaviors are excessive or repetitive or, the person doesn’t seem to respond to any suggestions or redirections or you are seeing multiple behaviors on this list, it may be worth learning more. While we can never really know someone’s intentions, we can see behaviors that cross boundaries and may put a child or teen at risk.



## DECIDING WHETHER IT'S SAFE TO TALK

When you're on an airplane, you're instructed to put on your own oxygen mask before helping anyone else. The same applies to starting conversations about difficult subjects: you have to ensure your own safety first.

If you are not safe or you are worried that the talk could put you or someone else at risk, do not have this conversation. If someone has a history of anger or violence, it may not be safe to have this talk or to talk alone. Find someone who is YOUR ally, and talk about what next safe steps are for you and your family. You can also call the Stop It Now! Helpline to learn about more resources to help you. Do not put yourself in harm's way – you won't be able to help anyone else if you are not safe.

## 2. Begin a journal.

It often helps to write down what you have seen or heard, even if it “seems like nothing.” Each of your journal pages should include what you heard or saw, when it happened, where it happened, and who was involved. When you talk with someone about their behaviors, it can help to refer back to what you wrote about in your journal. (For a sample journal entry, go to [StopItNow.org/journal\\_entry](https://www.stopitnow.org/journal_entry)).

## 3. Take care of yourself.

This kind of conversation can be difficult for anyone, and maybe even more so when it is someone you care about. The answers you hear could change your life. Think about what you need, what support you have for your own feelings and concerns, and how you can take care of yourself. Consider how to address your own barriers or any resistance you have for exploring this further. Some of this may be about your own safety. If that is the case, it may make the most sense to find someone else to have the conversation who shares your concerns.

## 4. Find an ally.

Before you begin a conversation about what you have seen or heard, talk with someone else who knows the other person well, such as a family member or close friend who may share your concern. You may want to share this guidebook or other Stop It Now! tip sheets on signs that an adult might be at risk.

You might hear something like, “Mind your own business,” or “Don’t start trouble.” These responses don’t mean that your concerns aren’t real. The other person may need time to get comfortable with the subject. You may need to ask more than one person to find someone who understands. It is helpful to know at least one person who cares about you, can talk with you about your concerns, and who can offer you support. If the person you are concerned about is in your family, you may want to talk with other members of the family to ask what they

have seen or heard, share what you have seen, and begin to talk about how to set clear boundaries for the family about bodies, privacy and having important conversations. If your family is not a safe place, you may want to think about support and resources from others who care about you and your family.

“ I finally approached another mom in my neighborhood about my concerns for this family. I was so glad to talk and to hear that she shared some of my thoughts. ”

– HELPLINE CALLER

## 5. Think about what you want to say.

Think about the person you want to talk with and any values that you share, such as keeping children safe and healthy. This shared value can be a starting place in a conversation and help you build a sense of connection. Then, you will need to choose just a couple of the most important points for your first talk. You may want to say:

- that you care about them
- that you are open to talking
- specific things you want this person to do or not do
- what limits and boundaries you want to establish
- that you are a resource to the person and the family

## 6. Practice saying the words out loud.

You need to be able to describe your concerns about the sexual behaviors you see. Remember, no one finds it easy to talk about behaviors towards children that may be sexual. If you have found an ally, you might ask that person to help you prepare for your conversation ahead of time. You can write down the words you want to say and practice out loud so you can feel more confident in the moment.

If you don't have an ally yet, you might want to practice by saying what you want into your phone memo or another recording device. It might feel strange at first, but if you've heard yourself saying the words, it will be a lot easier to say them to someone else.

Stop It Now!'s free, confidential helpline exists to have these conversations. Give us a call: 1-888-PREVENT.

“It's so helpful to practice this conversation with you. I can't imagine talking to my friend without having talked it through with someone else ahead of time.”  
– HELPLINE CALLER

## 7. Choose a time and place to talk.

You are creating the opportunity for a conversation; this does not have to be a confrontation. Think about having this conversation where you feel safe. Choose a place that is comfortable and away from children or other distractions. Pick a time when you both don't have to rush off to another meeting or appointment. Then ask the other adult if they can meet with you. This sounds formal, but it could be as simple as, “Can you stop by for coffee and a talk tomorrow morning? What time would be good?” or “Let's talk after the kids go to sleep.”

# Having the talk

## 1. Begin a conversation.

Be honest and genuine. If this is hard to talk about, say so. If you feel it, start with the simple words, "I care about you." People are more likely to listen and change if they feel loved and have hope that life can be better. You can also start with a shared value, "I know we both care deeply about our child" or letting them know that you understand how hard a conversation this is for both of you.

Many people who struggle with thoughts or feelings they don't understand feel alone. They don't know who to talk to. We have heard from adults and teenagers who have sexually abused that hearing "I care about you" made a huge difference to them. It helped them feel less alone and hopeful that help might be possible for them.

If the talk becomes too difficult, or either of you becomes really angry, stop. Consider your next steps. You may need to involve other adults. You may simply say, "Let's try again tomorrow." This first talk is not your only chance; it is just a beginning.

### Sample conversation starters

*"I have been struggling with how to talk with you about this. Let me start by telling you how much I care about you. I couldn't live with myself if I didn't ask you about this."*

*"I have something uncomfortable to talk with you about. You're really important to me, and I know we both care a lot about children's safety. Some things I've seen lately involving children's safety – and your safety – have been troubling me."*

*"Can we talk about something that is really important to me? I know you really love spending time with Joey, and he loves spending time with you. I want to make sure that you and I are on the same page about safe environments and behaviors so that Joey is as safe as possible, something I know you care about too."*



### USE "I" STATEMENTS TO TALK ABOUT DIFFICULT TOPICS

Even if you have talked about this with a friend or family member, try to say this is what **I** have seen or this is what **I** feel. **I** statements help you focus on behaviors, feelings and beliefs. It is less accusatory and allows for the actual situation to be addressed.

“When I got the courage to talk to my son, he surprised me by admitting right away that he needs help.”

– HELPLINE CALLER

## 2. Explore the situation without accusation.

Think about the conversation as a chance to talk about behaviors: what you saw and what you heard. This is not about blame or accusations, but an opportunity to **talk about specific behaviors or conversations** that have been seen or heard. If you have a safety plan, this can be a good time to talk about explicit safety rules that are being ignored. Specifically describe the behaviors that are violating your family safety plan and even will send mixed signals to your children.

It may be hard, but you don't want to jump to conclusions. This is not about wondering what motivated their actions. Labels will most likely create barriers for productive communication. You do not want to start by accusing someone of wanting to hurt a child or using labels like pervert, monster or pedophile – these will not lead to an open and honest conversation.

Focus on what you have seen or heard and ask open ended questions such as, "This is what I saw: [describe the situation]. Can you tell me more about what was going on?" Do follow-up with more questions when the answers you hear are not clear or complete. If you talk about specific behaviors or what you have heard, your concerns will be easier to hear and helps to begin the conversation. Additionally, you can share your reaction to whatever you heard or saw.

The person you're speaking with may not be aware of their concerning behaviors. This is an opportunity to talk about what worries you and learn more. They might not fully understand safe behaviors or how your child is changing as they grow older and that certain behaviors are no longer age-appropriate. By having the conversation, you are also sharing information and helping to make those boundaries clear. As you explore what happened, you will understand whether your concerns are heard and also begin the conversation about what needs to change.

## Sample conversations

Do separate the person from the behavior:

*"You are a good friend, and I know you care about the safety of all children. I feel uncomfortable when you talk about 12- or 13-year-old girls in such a sexual way. If we just talk about how sexy they are, I'm concerned they will not also think that they are smart, talented and capable. I hope we can focus on all of these other, more positive ways, to appreciate these smart young girls."*

*"I love the work you are doing with kids in our church, and they clearly love you as well. I also know that you and your family have a personal relationship with many of these other families. But when we are in the church setting, we need to respect a different set of boundaries. So, while your instinct is to hug the children and hold them in your lap, we need to follow the church code of conduct and have side hugs, and sit next to children while we are reading. By following these boundaries, it sets an example for all of our families."*

Do ask direct and simple questions:

*"When you say 'We were just fooling around,' can you tell me what you mean? I am concerned because I have seen you touch their private parts even when you wrestle."*

*"Why are you ignoring our family rules about showing children pornography? What is your reason for exposing the children to these materials? Are you aware that by showing children this material, you are increasing their vulnerability to be abused and this could be considered illegal?"*

Do name specific behaviors you saw, and state your reaction:

*"Did you see how uncomfortable our nephew was when you were tickling him and you would not stop? We are trying to teach our children that it is OK to say no to an adult when it comes to their body. As his favorite uncle, can you help us reinforce this important message?"*

*"I'm curious about some websites I saw in our laptop's history. I clicked on one and was shocked to see pictures of young children in sexual poses. You're the only other person to use this computer, and I am concerned because these are illegal images. I need you to stop. I know of some resources if you need some help."*

If you want to generate an honest conversation, it is helpful to use this format of what you have seen and setting clear limits. It offers the chance to address both the behaviors as well as your family values and boundaries.

Continue the conversation until you get the answers you need. It may take more than one conversation. If someone says, "Don't worry, I can handle this," it may be true. But it still makes sense to stay involved and check in again in a few days or weeks.

### **3. State your expectations and values.**

In whatever way the conversation unfolds and beyond defining the safe behaviors that are expected, this talk is your opportunity to clearly state your family expectations and boundaries. This may be a simple statement that children have the right to say "no" to touching of any kind. It may be a deeper explanation of your family safety plan.

If the individual does not understand why this is so important, you may need to explain the impact on your child when someone they feel is safe chooses to ignore a family or organizational rule. Experts agree that it can confuse a child about when and how to say no, and it can make them much more vulnerable to truly risky situations.

You can also ask this person to be a part of your plan to create the safest environment possible for your child and other children. Their role is to help model safe behaviors, and that includes following your family's rules about boundaries, privacy and consent.

## Sample conversations

*"I'd like you to be a part of keeping Lisa safe. She is safer when every adult in our family follows our safety plan."*

*"We want our son to know that it is not OK for adults to ask him to keep a secret. What if someone asks him to keep a secret about harmful or illegal behaviors? When you ask him to keep a secret about the kind of movies he watches with you, he may think it is OK for adults to ask him to keep secrets, no matter what kind of secret it is."*

## 4. Ending the first talk.

Remember, this is not a one-time conversation. Often it takes several talks to really reach someone. Your job is to keep the conversation focused on your concerns. You may also choose to acknowledge how difficult this conversation has been and how you appreciate their listening to you.

Don't be surprised if the listener gets defensive or angry. If you can, stay calm instead of matching the other person's anger. If there is too much anger and fear, you can stop and say that you would like to talk again at another time.

If you still have concerns, be clear about them. You both may want time to think. However, if you become concerned for your or a child's immediate safety, seek help from a victim services organization, child protection services, and/or the police.

## Sample conversation enders

*"Hey, I've said a lot. Maybe you need time to think about it all. I'll check in soon to talk some more."*

*"Can we think about what we've said and talk again in a couple days?"*

*"I care about you, and as you know, I have to do all that I can to protect kids. I know this is difficult, but what you're doing online is illegal, and I need to report this. It may not feel this way, but you do have choices about your next actions. I hope you will seek out professional support."*

## 5. Debrief.

You may have learned things that scare you. You may feel guilty about not saying something sooner. You may have more questions that you would like to ask. You may also feel OK for now, but you want to see if things will change. Take the time to share what you have gone through with your ally.

You might now need time to think about what else you may want to do. It's OK for you to have a mix of feelings, and you deserve your own personal and professional support. For more help and resources, visit [StopItNow.org](https://www.stopitnow.org) or call our confidential Helpline: 1.888.PREVENT.

Whatever the outcome of your conversation, commit to doing something. Depending upon what you learn, there are a number of different next steps you can take (see below). If nothing else, you are now in a teachable moment for you, your family, your child, your circle of friends and possibly your larger community. Our children are safer when we can talk about concerning behavior, when we know the resources and we are able to take some next steps.

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“Thank you for empowering me to speak up.”

– HELPLINE CALLER”

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## Next Steps

Below are three possible outcomes from your conversation. Whatever you learn, we always recommend that you look into your next steps to keep kids safe.

### **1. Safety: After your conversation, you feel confident that no one has been sexually abused. You want to be sure a child is continually protected and safe.**

This is the best news of all. You may still be worried, but you are not in a crisis. You feel confident that a child is not being abused or at-risk to be abused, and you feel confident that there are safe adults in your child's life. You still want to stay involved in preventing harm to children. Now you have the chance to increase the protection surrounding the people you care about.

If you have tried the ideas in this guidebook, you have already taken a big step. You learned a lot about a very difficult issue. You started talking with your family and community. And you identified supporters for yourself and the people you care about.

### **Create a family safety plan**

Now is an excellent time to create a family safety plan. Be sure that everyone in your family (adult, teen or child) has someone to talk to. The resource section of this guidebook includes other places you can continue learning about child sexual abuse.

### **Become a resource for others**

You can also become a resource for others. Try to share what you've learned with people in your school, neighborhood, community organization, or faith community. This is a chance for you and the adults around you to take responsibility to prevent sexual abuse. When you take the lead, you can make a huge difference for everyone. As your communities get involved, the responsibility for preventing sexual abuse becomes easier.



## FAMILY SAFETY PLANNING

Whether the risk of abuse is within your family or an organization, you have begun to build a safety plan just by talking and being willing to listen.

A safety plan helps you establish clear family boundaries and clarify acceptable behaviors. Set clear rules about privacy, touching, and a child's physical and sexual development. Examples include rules about no secrets allowed between adults and children, and open-door policies when more than one person is in a bedroom or bathroom. They should reflect your family's personal values and environment. Educate all of the adults involved, and have regular conversations about children's health, development and safety. Include your child and talk with them about these important issues, too.

Having a family safety plan can help you have a conversation about your concerns when an adult behaves in any way around your children that raises warning signs for you. By referencing your safety plan, you can make clear what behaviors are allowed – and what are not – when it comes to your children and family.

Learn more at [StopItNow.org/ohc-content/tip-sheet-create-a-family-safety-plan](https://www.stopitnow.org/ohc-content/tip-sheet-create-a-family-safety-plan)

## 2. Concern: After your talk, you know a bit more, but you are still concerned.

No one has disclosed abuse, and there is no evidence of sexual abuse. You have however observed some warning signs in the behavior of an adult close to children in your family. Even without a direct disclosure, you can still take steps to address your concerns and make your home safer for everyone.

Many families have said that talking openly about difficult sexual issues was a wake-up call for themselves and for the people around them. If you believe that someone you're close to may be at risk to harm a child, you may decide that it is safe to talk to that person, ask them to change their behaviors and get help. Safety is always the priority.

By taking the steps described in this guidebook, you have already begun to create a safer home and neighborhood. You got here because you care, and you are concerned. You may have already begun to act on your concerns.

### **Stay involved.**

It's critical that you stay involved in your child's life and activities. Continue paying attention to what is happening around you and the children you care about. Share this information with others – this can help you expand your circle of safety beyond your immediate family. Also use this time to learn about the reporting process and what happens when a report is made.

### **Don't do this alone.**

Sexual abuse thrives in isolation. The best thing you can do is get connected and feel supported. You may choose to find other safe adults in your family and get them involved. You may also want to reach out to your friends, teachers or other adults who care about your child. This ensures you are not alone – and neither is anyone else.

## **Keep communication open.**

Continue to speak up when you see something that doesn't seem right to you. Interrupt behaviors and talk with the adult, teenager or child responsible about what makes you uncomfortable. By speaking out about this issue, you become "ASKABLE!" You become someone who is approachable and safe in your family and circle of friends.

## **Create a family safety plan.**

You can help keep your child safe from sexual abuse by creating a safer environment around them. Set clear rules for privacy, boundaries and consent, and ensure the rules are enforced. See previous pages for information.

## **Learn as much as you can.**

Learn about the warning signs and what to look for in adults, teenagers and children who may be at risk to harm others. Also learn the behavioral warning signs that a child may be at risk or may have been harmed. Get started at [StopItNow.org](http://StopItNow.org)

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"We are going to for sure do the safety plan for our family... it is a great idea!"

– HELPLINE CALLER”

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### 3. Reporting: You learn that a child has been sexually abused.

If you learn that someone has sexually abused a child, take a deep breath. You are in a crucial position to help prevent any further abuse from happening and possibly get help for everyone involved. You may have a very difficult road ahead, but you are not alone. Help is available.

#### **Report.**

Reporting child sexual abuse to your local child protection services (CPS) or police is the best way to help the child get out of an unsafe situation and get everyone appropriate help. You may also want to report child sexual abuse material (CSAM) that you've become aware of to Cybertipline. You can find the numbers you need in the resource section of this guidebook or search for your local CPS. Ask to speak with someone trained in cases of child sexual abuse.

#### **Decide your next steps.**

If you are a parent or guardian of the child being harmed, reach out to a professional therapist or counselor who specializes in child sexual abuse issues. They can help you think through your options and decide the best next steps to support your child. Your local CPS may also help connect you with these resources.

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“I don't want him to destroy his life or anyone else's.  
I just want him to get help.”

– HELPLINE CALLER”

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## **Get support for yourself.**

Once you have protected the child, everyone else involved may also need support – including you. Do not try to address all that is happening by yourself. Try to find other people who will understand your situation and give you support.

A family doctor, social worker, or psychologist who specializes in sexual abuse will be able to assess the situation and walk you through the options. Counseling may be available through programs such as rape crisis centers, victim compensation programs, or a community mental health center. They can refer you to therapists who specialize in treating sexual abuse.

## **Remember that healing is possible.**

Uncovering sexual abuse will affect each person differently. The lives of everyone involved will be forever changed by sexual abuse and by the way the abuse is addressed. But healing is possible. Each and every person involved can learn from the experience and by doing so, live healthy and safe lives.



"I've just got to get these thoughts out of my head. I feel a lot better now that I've said this out loud."

– HELPLINE CALLER



# Final Thoughts

You've taken an important step by reading this guidebook. By exploring a situation a little further, you can learn more about what is needed to keep a child safe from sexual abuse. By having a conversation, you are increasing the protective factors. By taking action, you are sending a message to everyone – including the child that you care about – to create a safer and more secure environment.

Just as every family is encouraged to create a fire safety plan, every movie theater tells you where the emergency exits are, and every infant should be given wellness checks through their young life, you are doing the right thing by looking to what you can do to make your family a safer place for everyone. By investing the time and learning how to talk about the difficult topic of child sexual abuse, every family can do their part to keep themselves, their children and others they love safer from sexual harm.

# Resources

To talk about having a “Let's Talk” conversation or any other concerns about a personal situation involving child sexual abuse, contact our confidential, national toll-free Helpline:

**1.888.PREVENT**

**helpline@stopitnow.org**

**stopitnow.org/chat**

Our Helpline is available to anyone who is concerned about a child's sexual safety, including people who are worried about their thoughts or behaviors towards children.

## For general questions about sexual abuse

### **Stop It Now!**

Office: 1.413.587.3500

[www.stopitnow.org](http://www.stopitnow.org)

Support, information and resources that enable individuals and families to keep children safe and create healthier communities.

### **Child Welfare Information Gateway**

Office: 1.800.394.3366

[www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)

A resource and clearinghouse that collects, stores, organizes and shares information on all aspects of child maltreatment.

### **Darkness to Light (D2L)**

Office: 1.843.965.5444

[www.d2l.org](http://www.d2l.org)

A national prevention program, working to reduce the incidence of child sexual abuse nationally through education and public awareness.

### **National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)**

Office: 1.703.224.2150

[www.missingkids.org](http://www.missingkids.org)

Information about preventing child victimization, missing children, and child sex trafficking.

## For therapy, family support, or crisis intervention

### **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**

Helpline: 1.800.662.HELP available 24/7, TTY: 1.800.487.4889  
[findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov)

The helpline can assist in locating treatment providers for mental health and substance abuse concerns.

### **Victim Connect (National Center for Victims of Crime)**

Helpline: 1.855.4.VICTIM, [chat.victimsofcrime.org](http://chat.victimsofcrime.org)  
[www.victimsofcrime.org/getting-help](http://www.victimsofcrime.org/getting-help)

Information and referrals to locate crisis intervention, assistance with the criminal justice process, counseling, support groups, and local attorneys in victim-related cases.

### **The National Children's Advocacy Center (NCAC)**

Office: 1.256.533.KIDS  
[www.nationalcac.org](http://www.nationalcac.org)

Prevention, intervention and treatment for children and families impacted by sexual abuse. Find your local CAC on their website.

## To report child sexual abuse within the US

### **Child Welfare Information Gateway**

[www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/?CWIGFunctionsaction](http://www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/?CWIGFunctionsaction)

Child abuse and neglect reporting numbers by state.

### **Child Help**

Hotline: 1.800.4A.CHILD available 24/7  
[www.childhelp.org](http://www.childhelp.org)

Programs to directly serve abused children and their families. Call to connect with local resources to report or access crisis intervention and referrals to emergency and social services.

### **CyberTipline, by NCMEC**

Hotline: 1.800.THE.LOST available 24/7  
[www.missingkids.org/gethelpnow/cybertipline](http://www.missingkids.org/gethelpnow/cybertipline)

A toll-free line to report any information pertaining to online child sexual exploitation or trafficking, child sexual abuse material (child pornography), and missing or exploited children.

## To report child sexual abuse outside the US

### **InHope**

[www.inhope.org](http://www.inhope.org)

International reporting for internet crimes against children.

### **Child Helpline International**

[www.childhelplineinternational.org/child-helplines/child-helpline-network](http://www.childhelplineinternational.org/child-helplines/child-helpline-network)

Helplines by country, including potential reporting.

## For questions about treatment specific to sexually harmful and/or abusive behaviors

### **The Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA)**

4900 S.W. Griffith Drive, Suite 274, Beaverton, OR 97005

Office: 1.503.643.1023

[www.atsa.com/referral](http://www.atsa.com/referral)

A national organization developing professional standards and practices in sex offender research, evaluation and treatment for children, adolescents and adults with risky, boundary-crossing and abusive behaviors.

### **The Safer Society Foundation, Inc. (SSFI)**

PO Box 340, Brandon, VT 05733-0340

Office: 1.802.247.3132

[www.saferpress.org/treatment-referrals](http://www.saferpress.org/treatment-referrals)

Provides books and publications for youth with sexual behavior problems, adult offenders, their families, survivors, treatment providers, and mandated reporters. Maintains list of therapeutic resources by state for those who experienced sexual abuse and youth and adults with harmful or abusive sexual behaviors.

### **CURE-SORT**

P.O. Box 1022, Norman, OK, 73070-1022

Office: 1.405.639.7262

[www.cure-sort.org](http://www.cure-sort.org)

Support for those who have engaged in sexually abusive behavior and are seeking or who are currently in treatment and answers general questions about sex offender treatment.



