

# Child Protection



## CHILD PROTECTION

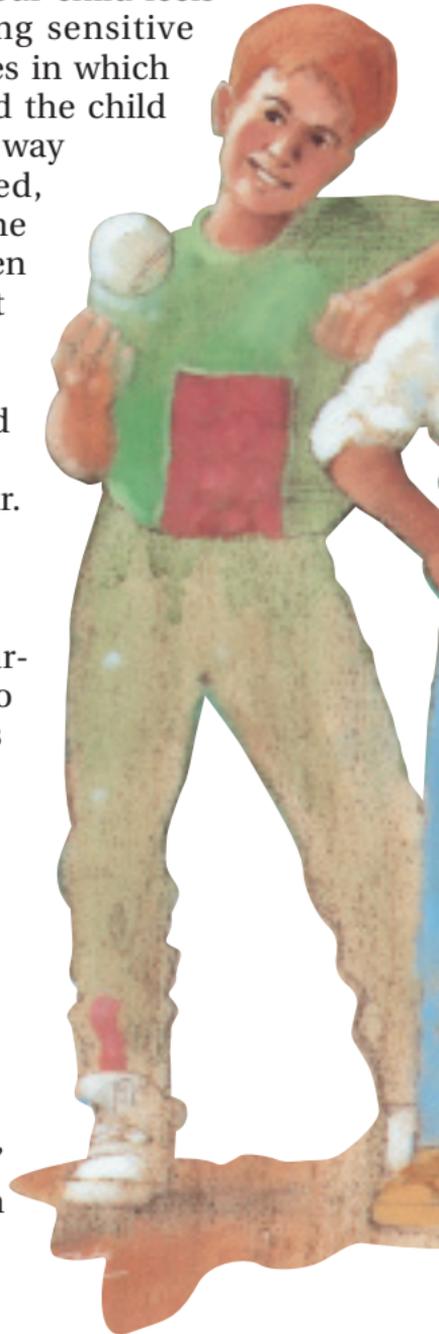
**A**s a society, our efforts to prevent crimes committed against children have not kept pace with the increasing vulnerability of our children. After hearing the tragic stories about abducted or exploited children, most parents and guardians are surprised to learn many crimes committed against children **can be prevented**. This brochure is about child protection.

The most important key to child safety is effective communication with your child. Remember, children who do not feel they are listened to or who do not think their needs are met in the home are more vulnerable to abduction or exploitation. The first step you should take is to establish an atmosphere in the home in which your child feels truly comfortable in discussing sensitive matters and relating experiences in which someone may have approached the child in an inappropriate manner or way that made the child feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused. The simple truth is children are often too afraid or confused to report their experiences and fears.

Unfortunately the rising awareness of crimes committed against children has left many families with a real sense of fear. You and your child need to be careful and aware, but you do **not** need to be afraid. Talk to your child in a calm and reassuring manner, being careful not to discuss the frightening details of what might happen to a child who does not follow the safety guidelines.

### THE EXPLOITER OR ABDUCTOR: NOT A "STRANGER"

**"S**tay away from strangers" is a popular warning to children to prevent abduction or exploitation. Unfortunately, however, many children are abducted or



exploited by people who have some type of familiarity with them but who may or may not be known to the child's parents or guardians.

The term **stranger** suggests a concept children do not understand and is one that ignores what we do know about the people who commit crimes against children. Children may believe they should only be aware of individuals who have an unusual or slovenly appearance. Instead, it is more appropriate to teach children to be on the lookout for certain kinds of **situations** or **actions** rather than certain kinds of individuals.

Children can be raised to be polite and friendly, but it is okay for them to be suspicious of any adult asking for assistance. Children help other children, but there is no need for them to be assisting adults, nor should adults request assistance from children. Children should not be asked to touch anyone in the areas of their body that would be covered by a bathing suit or allow anyone to touch them in those areas.

Often exploiters or abductors initiate a seemingly innocent contact with the victim. They may try to get to know the children and befriend them. They use subtle approaches that both parents or guardians and children should be aware of. Children should learn to stay away from individuals in vehicles, and they should know it is okay to say **no** — even to an adult. Since children are often reared to respect adult authority and never be a tattletale, parents and guardians should explain why the child's personal safety is more important than being polite. Children should also be taught to tell a trusted adult and there will always be someone who can help them.

Remember, a clear, calm, and reassuring message about **situations** and **actions** to lookout for is easier for a child to understand than a particular profile or image of a "stranger."



## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PREVENT CHILD ABDUCTION AND EXPLOITATION

- ▶ Know where your children are at all times. Be familiar with their friends and daily activities.
- ▶ Be sensitive to changes in your children's behavior; they are a signal you should sit down and talk to your children about what caused the changes.
- ▶ Be alert to a teenager or adult who is paying an unusual amount of attention to your children or giving them inappropriate or expensive gifts.
- ▶ Teach your children to trust their own feelings, and assure them they have the right to say **no** to what they sense is wrong.
- ▶ Listen carefully to your children's fears, and be supportive in all your discussions with them.
- ▶ Teach your children that no one should approach or touch them in a way that makes them feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused. If someone does, they should immediately tell you.
- ▶ Be diligent about babysitters and any other individuals who have custody of your children. Obtain references from people you trust and see if you can access background screening information about these individuals. Many states provide access to sex-offender registries and criminal histories.

## BASIC RULES OF SAFETY FOR CHILDREN

**A**s soon as your children can articulate a sentence, they can begin the process of learning how to protect themselves against abduction and exploitation.

- ▶ Children should be taught
- ▶ If you are in a public place, and you get separated from your parents or guardians, don't wander around looking for them. Go to a uniformed law-enforcement or



security officer, store salesperson or person in the information booth with a nametag, or a mother with children and quickly tell the person you have lost your family and need help finding them.

- ▶ You should not get into a vehicle or go anywhere with any person unless your parents or guardians have told you it is okay to do so on that day.
- ▶ If someone follows you in a vehicle, stay away from him or her and turn around and go in the opposite direction. You should not get close to any vehicle, unless your parent, guardian, or a trusted adult accompanies you. If someone is following you on foot, run away as fast as you can and tell a trusted adult what happened.
- ▶ Grownups and others who need help should not be asking children for help, they should be asking older people.
- ▶ No one should be asking you for directions, asking you to help look for something like a “lost puppy,” or telling you your mother or father is in trouble and he or she will take you to them.
- ▶ If someone tries to take you somewhere, quickly get away from him (or her) and yell or scream, “This man (woman) is trying to take me away” or “This person is not my father (mother).” If someone tries to grab you, make a scene and make every effort to get away by kicking, screaming, and resisting.
  - ▶ You should try to take a friend with you, and never go places alone.
  - ▶ Always ask your parents’ or guardians’ permission to leave the yard or play area or go into someone’s home.
  - ▶ Never hitchhike. Don’t ride home with anyone unless your parents or guardians have told you it is okay to do so on that day.
  - ▶ If someone wants to take your picture, tell him or her **no** and tell your parents, guardians, or other trusted adults.
  - ▶ No one should touch you in the parts of the body that



would be covered by a bathing suit, nor should you touch anyone else in those areas. Your body is special and private.

- ▶ You can be assertive, and you have the right to say **no** to someone who tries to take you somewhere; touch you; or make you feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused in any way.

## DETECTING SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

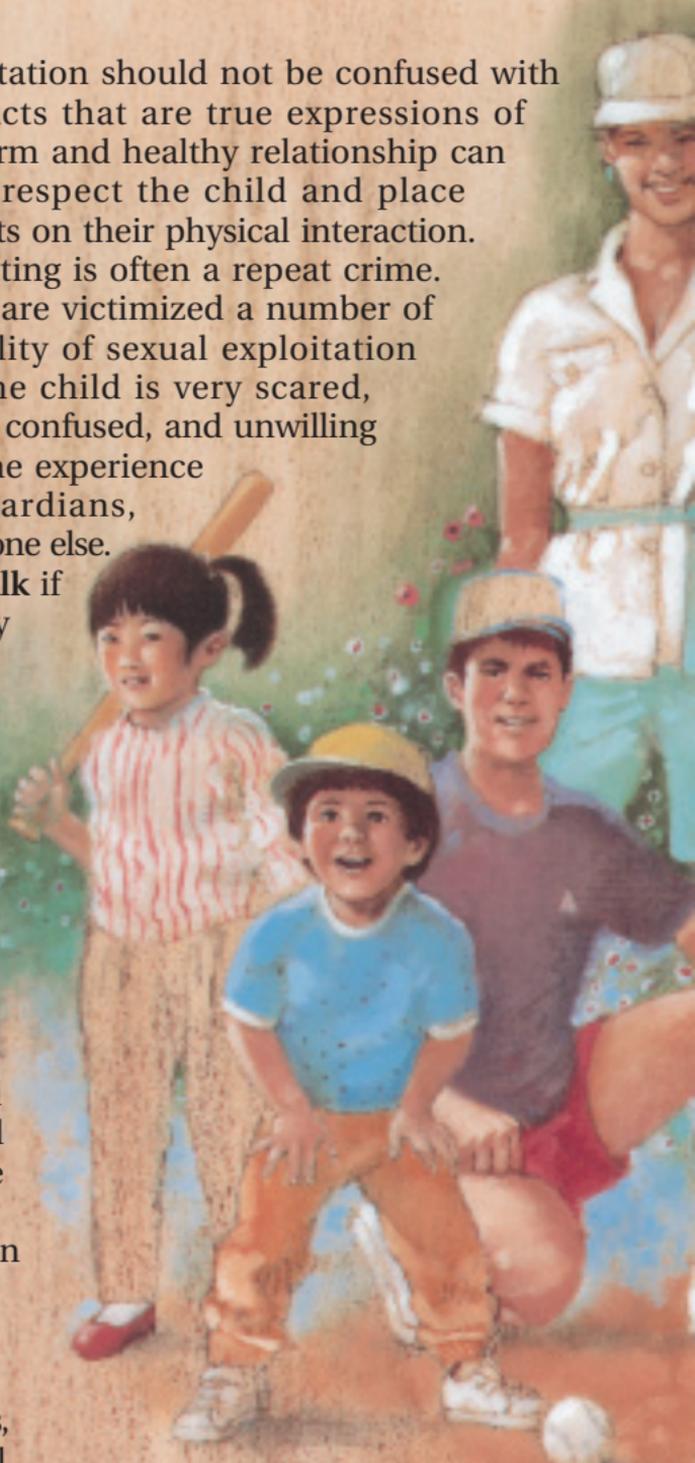
**S**exual exploitation should not be confused with physical contacts that are true expressions of affection. A warm and healthy relationship can exist if adults respect the child and place reasonable limits on their physical interaction.

Child molesting is often a repeat crime. Many children are victimized a number of times. The reality of sexual exploitation is that often the child is very scared, uncomfortable, confused, and unwilling to talk about the experience to parents, guardians, teachers, or anyone else.

But **they will talk** if you have already established an atmosphere of trust and support in your home where your child will feel free to talk without fear of accusation, blame, or guilt.

Parents and guardians should be alert to these indicators of sexual exploitation

- ▶ Changes in behavior, extreme mood swings, withdrawal, fearfulness, and excessive crying.



- ▶ Bed-wetting, nightmares, fear of going to bed or other sleep disturbances.
- ▶ Acting out inappropriate sexual activity or showing an unusual interest in sexual matters.
- ▶ A sudden acting out of feelings or aggressive or rebellious behavior.
- ▶ Regression to infantile behavior.
- ▶ A fear of certain places, people, or activities, especially being alone with certain people. Children should not be forced to give affection to an adult or teenager if they do not want to do so. Be alert to signs your child is trying to avoid someone and listen carefully when your child tells you how he or she feels about someone.
- ▶ Pain, itching, bleeding, fluid, or rawness in the private areas.

## CHILD PROTECTION IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF EVERYONE

An illustration of a woman in a white shirt and green skirt standing on the left. In the center, a young boy with red hair in a green shirt and khaki pants holds a baseball. To his right, a young boy in a white baseball jersey with the number 12, blue pants, and a blue cap stands with a baseball glove. The background is a textured, light brown wall.

**B**ecause children cannot lookout for themselves, it is our responsibility to lookout for them. Every home and school should establish a program that effectively teaches children about safety and protection measures. As a parent or guardian, you should

take an active interest in your children and listen to them. Teach your children they can be assertive in order to protect themselves against abduction and exploitation.

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children has developed a publication titled, *Guidelines for Programs to Reduce Child Victimization: A Resource for Communities When Choosing a Program to Teach Personal Safety to Children* that is available upon request.

And, most importantly, make your home a place of trust and support that fulfills your child's needs — so he or she won't seek attention and support from someone else.

If you would like additional materials regarding child safety, please write to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, Charles B. Wang International Children's Building, 699 Prince Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3175 or visit [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com).

If you have information about the location of a missing child, please call 1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678). The TTY line is 1-800-826-7653.

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