

PREVENTING SEXUAL ABUSE: WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

Talking about the sexual abuse and sexual assault of children is difficult. The subject is surrounded by social taboos and secrecy. Public awareness of this problem has increased, but there is still a need for accurate information and practical strategies to reduce children's vulnerability.

Sexual abuse is any sexual behavior involving a caregiver and a child or the use of a child for the sexual pleasure of someone else. Children usually know and trust the abuser. They may be abused by adults or older children who can exert power over them. The offender persuades, bribes, tricks or coerces the child to engage in sex or sexual acts.



Virginia's sexual abuse prevention play, *Hugs and Kisses*, includes important lessons for parents and children:

FOR CHILDREN:

The world is filled with a wonderful sensation called touch. However, some touching is not wonderful. There can be "bad touch" (hitting, pinching) and there can be "secret touch."



Private parts of your body are those that are covered by a swimsuit. Secret touching occurs when someone touches your private parts and encourages you to keep it a secret.



Secret touching can come from anyone, even from someone we know and love.



Children have the right to say "NO!" to secret touching.



The most important thing to do if you experience secret touching is to tell a trusted adult. If you are uncomfortable about touch, or if you are confused about whether you have been secretly touched, ask a trusted adult.



If you have a friend who is experiencing secret touching, you should help your friend choose a trusted adult to tell.



Secret touching can happen to both boys and girls.



Secret touching is NEVER a child's fault.

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Call 800-CHILDREN (800-244-5373) for more information.

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FOR PARENTS:

Communication between parents and children is important in keeping children safe. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests the following timetable for talking to children about sexual abuse:

—18 months—

Teach your child the proper name for body parts.

—3-5 years—

Teach your child about "private parts" of the body and how to say "NO!" to any type of touching that seems wrong or makes the child feel uncomfortable.

— 5-8 years—

Discuss safety away from home and the difference between being touched in private parts of the body (parts covered by a swimsuit) and other touching. Encourage the child to talk about scary experiences.

— 8-12 years—

Stress personal safety and give examples of possible problem areas, such as video arcades, malls, locker rooms and out-of-the-way places outdoors. Start to discuss rules of sexual conduct that are accepted by the family.

— 13-18 years—

Continue to stress personal safety and potential problem areas. Discuss other issues concerning sexual assault/abuse and your family's standards of sexual conduct.



Hugs and Kisses is a nationally acclaimed prevention program for children in kindergarten through 5th grade. The play tours Virginia during the school year and has been seen by more than 1,200,000 Virginia students. For more information about ***Hugs and Kisses***, call Theatre IV at **1-800-235-8687**.

