

# Childhood Sexual Assault

## *...preventing victimization*

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### How can we keep children safe from sex offenders?

#### *Health care providers:*

- Create an environment where it feels safe for children to talk about difficult topics. (For example, speak to the child directly as much as possible, rather than speaking to the caregiver, use a gentle tone of voice, etc).
- Implement a policy to screen for child sexual assault during routine examinations.
- Encourage caregivers to teach children about their right not to be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable.
- Convey to children that secrets about touching are not okay.
- Teach caregivers to look out for “warning signs” of abuse in other adults (see other side).

#### *Adults who care about children:*

- Watch for signs of possible sexual abuse in adults, between adults and children, and in children.
- Speak up when you see “warning signs” (see other side).
- Practice talking about difficult topics such as sexual abuse with other adults.
- Respect the rights of children when they say “no” or seem uncomfortable with physical contact.

#### *Parents:*

- Set and respect family boundaries.
- Explain that adults should not ask children to keep secrets for them.
- Show your children that it is okay to say “no” when an adult or another child does something that makes them uncomfortable.
- Teach children the difference between “OK touch” and “touch that is not OK”.
- Be sure you are comfortable saying the proper names of body parts before you teach them to your children.
- Emphasize to your children that no matter what they disclose to you, you will still love them.

### If a child discloses abuse:

- Give her/him the benefit of the doubt and respond in a calm, supportive manner.
- Listen to the words and feelings being expressed and observe her/his body language. Respond to the feelings that the child is expressing.
- Report the assault to the appropriate agency (Child Protective Services or law enforcement)
- Reassure the child that s/he has done nothing wrong.
- Let the child know that you will do whatever you can to keep him/her safe.
- Gather community resources to support the child and non-offending adults in the child’s life.
- Provide a referral to the Virginia Family Violence & Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-838-8238 V/TTY.

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## Warning Signs<sup>1</sup>

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### Warning signs when adults are with children

*Have you ever seen someone playing with a child and felt uncomfortable with it? Maybe you thought, "I'm just over-reacting," or, "He/she doesn't really mean that." Don't ignore the behavior; learn how to ask more questions about what you have seen. The checklists below offer some warning signs.*

#### Do you know an adult or older child who:

- Refuses to let a child set any of his or her own limits?
- Insists on hugging, touching, kissing, tickling, wrestling with 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 (e.g. talks repeatedly about the child's developing body or interferes with normal teen dating)?
- Manages to get time alone or insists on time alone with a child with no interruptions?
- Spends most of his/her spare time with children and has little interest in spending time with someone his/her own age?
- Regularly offers to babysit many different children for free or takes children on overnight outings alone?
- Buys children expensive gifts or gives them money for no apparent reason?
- Frequently walks in on children/teens in the bathroom?
- Allows children or teens to consistently get away with inappropriate behaviors?

### Warning signs for adults with sexual behavior problems

#### Do you know someone who:

- Talks again and again about the sexual activities of children and teens?
- Talks about sexual fantasies with children and is not clear about what's okay with children?
- Encourages silence and secrets in a child?
- Looks at child pornography?
- Asks adult partners to dress or act like a child or teen when being intimate?
- Often has a "special" child friend, maybe a different one from year to year?
- Spends most spare time on activities involving children or teens, not adults?
- Makes fun of a child's body parts, or calls a child sexual names such as "stud", "whore", or "slut"?

*If you answered "yes" to some of these questions, talk to that person. If you aren't sure of what to say or want more information, call the Stop It Now! Hotline at 1-888-PREVENT.*