Protecting Your Child

Reduce the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse

Children under 12

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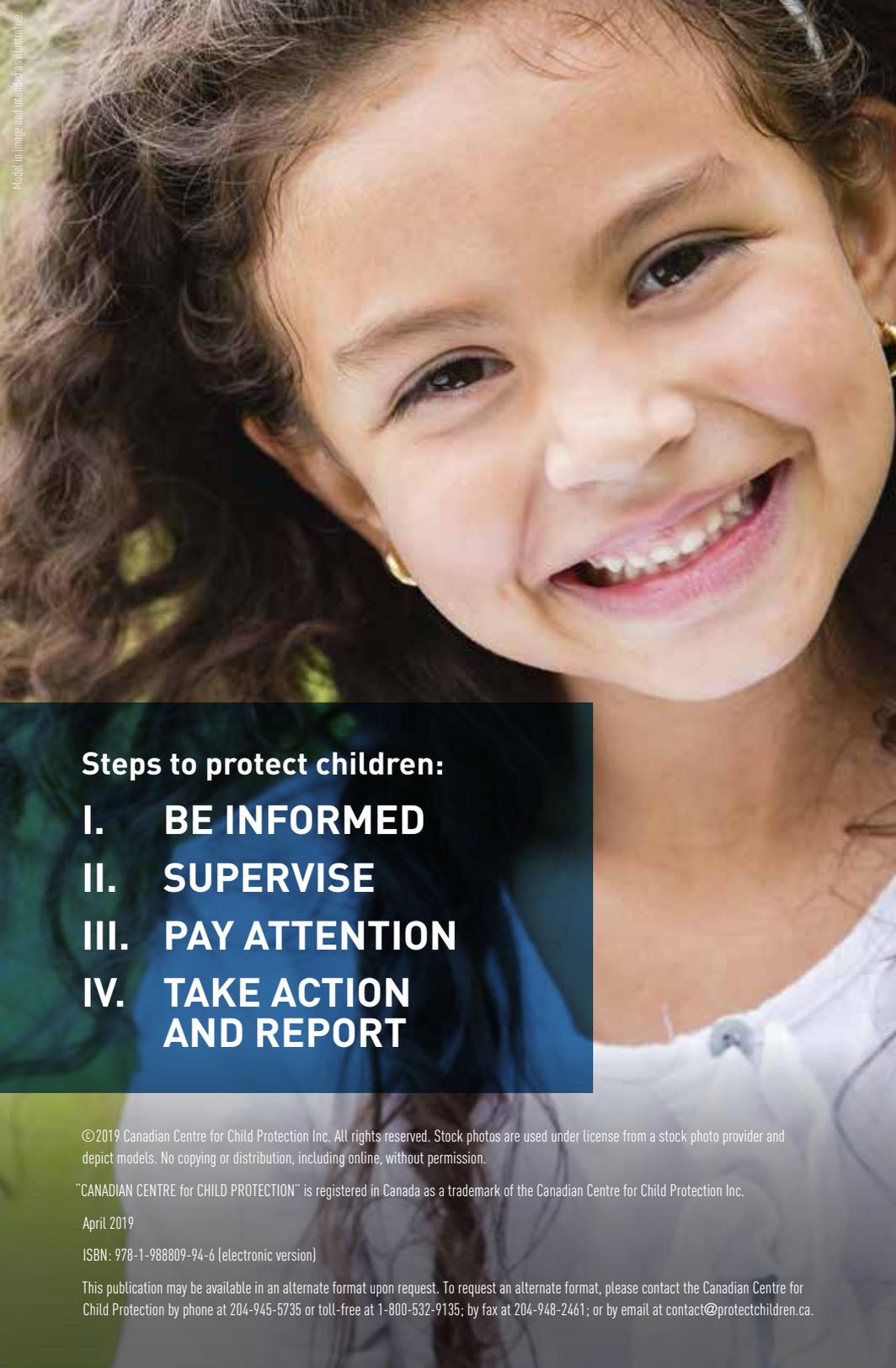
Steps to protect children:

I.   BE INFORMED
II. SUPERVISE
III. PAY ATTENTION
IV. TAKE ACTION
     AND REPORT

PROTECTING YOUR CHILD

The information provided in this guide is intended to support you in your parenting journey and in better understanding the issue of child sexual abuse. Topics covered include personal boundaries, adult supervision, children's use of internet-enabled devices, and concerning sexual behaviour in children. Establishing healthy personal boundaries and providing age-appropriate supervision are pivotal to helping your child develop a sense of security.

Assess Your Personal Safety Knowledge

Before moving forward, test your current knowledge about child sexual abuse and child personal safety. Answer **TRUE** or **FALSE** to the following statements:

1. If a child is sexually abused they will most likely tell someone immediately.
   T / F

2. Children are most often abused by strangers.
   T / F

3. All child molesters were sexually abused as children.
   T / F

4. Personal boundaries are important to child protection.
   T / F

5. Instilling fear in children is not a good way to teach them about personal safety.
   T / F

6. Grooming is a technique used by offenders to pass lie detectors.
   T / F

7. Good touch and bad touch lessons are effective ways to teach about abuse.
   T / F

8. Children always know when they have been abused.
   T / F

9. Sexual abuse has harmful impacts on children even after the abuse has stopped.
   T / F

10. Teaching children stranger danger helps protect them from abduction and exploitation.
   T / F

Note: See page 2 for answers.

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Answers

1. **False.** Delayed disclosure is more common than immediate disclosure.

2. **False.** In most cases, children and their families know the abuser.

3. **False.** The majority of individuals who abuse children were not sexually abused as children.

4. **True.** Teaching children about personal boundaries — how to set their own limits, to know what behaviour is appropriate and inappropriate, and that the role of adults and teenagers is to take care of children — is important to their personal safety.

5. **True.** Scaring children creates insecurity and increases vulnerability. It is important to build children's confidence and safety knowledge.

6. **False.** Grooming is when offenders use manipulation to gain the trust of adults and children in order to gain access to a child for a sexual purpose.

7. **False.** The touching in sexual abuse is confusing for children, so it is better to focus on teaching children that all secrets about touching need to be told to a safe adult.

8. **False.** Children do not always have the language or experience to understand how to make sense of what has happened to them, and although they know they don't want it to happen, they don't necessarily know it is wrong.

9. **True.** Sexual abuse can have an emotional, psychological, cognitive, and physical impact on children beyond the time frame in which it is occurring.

10. **False.** Stranger is an abstract concept for young children. Children often associate stranger with someone mean; as soon as someone is friendly, children no longer consider them a stranger. It is better to place the focus on the caregiver's job to supervise and teach the child that they cannot go anywhere with anyone, regardless of who they are, without checking first with the adult who is taking care of them (e.g., parent, babysitter, teacher).

SECTION I:
BE INFORMED

Understanding Child Sexual Abuse

According to researchers, understanding the true extent of child sexual abuse is complex.[1] It is the most hidden form of child abuse and the least likely to be disclosed by both child victims and adult survivors.

Be mindful that:

- Children who are sexually abused are **never responsible or at fault** for the abuse
- Adults are responsible for their actions/behaviour towards children
- It is critical for children to be believed and supported following a disclosure of abuse
- Children should not be defined by their abuse experience

Did you know?

- Abuse is a misuse of power and control
- Both girls and boys experience abuse
- Both males and females can be offenders
- Children can be abused by teenagers as well as adults
- Abuse is always a betrayal of trust

[1] Glaser, D., & Frosh, S. (1993). *Child sexual abuse* (2nd ed.). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

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The Scope of the Problem in Canada

- According to research, **1 in 10 Canadians** reported being sexually victimized before they turned 18.[2]

- In 49% of all cases of sexual abuse reported to police between 2009 and 2014, the victim was a child under the age of 17, and 26% of all victims were under the age of 13.[3]

- In 80-90% of cases, the **offender is known to the child**.[4]

- Parents, including biological, adoptive, step, and foster parents, were responsible for more than half (59%) of all family-related sexual offences and physical assaults against children and youth victims in 2009.[5]

- **93% of child maltreatment cases** are never brought forward to police or child welfare.[6]

- **The majority of adult survivors** of child sexual abuse report that they did not disclose the abuse to anyone when they were children.[7]

[2] Afifi, T. O., MacMillan, H. L., Boyle, M., Taillieu, T., Cheung, K., & Sareen, J. (2014). Child abuse and mental disorders in Canada. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 186(9): E324-32.

[3] Rotenberg, C. (2017). Police reported sexual assaults in Canada, 2009 to 2014: A statistical profile. *Juristat*, Vol. 37, No.1. Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada. Cat. No. 85-002-X.

[4] Cotter, A. & Beaupré, P. (2014). Police-reported sexual offences against children and youth in Canada, 2012. *Juristat*, Vol. 34, No. 1. Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada. Cat. No. 85-002-X.

[5] Ogrodnik, L. (2010). Child and youth victims of police-reported violent crime, 2008. *Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics profile series*. Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada. Cat. 85F0033M, No.23.

[6] Burczycka, M. & Conroy, S. (2017). Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2015. *Juristat*, Vol. 37, No. 1. Ottawa: Statistics Canada. Cat. No. 85-002-X.

[7] Hindman, J. (1999). *Just before dawn: From the shadows of tradition to new reflections in trauma assessment and treatment of sexual victimization*. Ontario, Oregon: AlexAndria Associates.

What is Child Sexual Abuse?

Child sexual abuse involves a child being forced or manipulated to take part in sexual activities. The abuse can involve contact and non-contact offences and it can occur online and offline. In some situations, the child may be fearful to speak out or they may not even understand what is happening to them is abuse.

Offences involving non-contact and contact sexual abuse of children include a wide range of behaviour and situations:

- The abuse can range from one-time occurrences to multiple experiences; from one offender to multiple offenders

- The abuse can occur with or without the use of violence

- The abuse may involve the use of technology—for example, using a livestreaming service to record child sexual abuse images and then sharing this content online with others

Child sexual abuse doesn't have to be violent or happen repeatedly for a child to be impacted and need support. All abuse is serious — children's struggles are very real and can extend into adulthood.

Model in image and intended as illustrative.

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The following are examples of non-contact and contact sexual abuse offences. These are not meant to be exhaustive.

Non-Contact Sexual Abuse:

- Encouraging a child to masturbate or watch others masturbate
- Secretly recording or observing a child in a private situation for a sexual purpose (voyeurism)
- Exposing a child to individuals engaging in sexually explicit acts (including exposure to adult pornography)
- Exposing a child to child sexual abuse material*
- "Flashing" or exposing genitals to a child
- Communicating over technology to make it easier to commit a specific sexual offence against a child (luring a child)**
- Taking a picture or recording a video of a child's sexual organs for a sexual purpose

Contact Sexual Abuse:

- Touching or fondling genital area
- Touching or fondling breasts
- Oral sex or stimulation
- Vaginal or anal intercourse
- Vaginal or anal penetration with an object or finger

* Child sexual abuse material is photographic or video evidence of a crime scene, not to be confused with pornography. An offender may be involved in accessing, creating, possessing, and/or distributing child sexual abuse material, all of which involve the sexual abuse and/or exploitation of children. While some child sexual abuse material offences may involve a contact offence (e.g., creating child sexual abuse material at the same time the contact offence is committed), others may not (e.g., accessing child sexual abuse material).

** Online grooming or luring generally refers to a process through which someone with a sexual interest in a child prepares them for future sexual contact. This is a process of using technology to facilitate communication in order to groom a child, and involves manipulation to increase compliance for the purpose of sexually exploiting the child. Children between the ages of 8 and 17 are targeted for online grooming. The Criminal Code of Canada offence called "luring a child" is when someone uses telecommunications to communicate with someone they believe to be under the age of 18 years in order to facilitate committing a specified sexual offence against that child.

The Process of Child Sexual Abuse

Stories of children who were sexually abused without anyone noticing are, unfortunately, far too common. This is often because the child and the adults around the child trust the individual who is abusing the child. Families, including the child, are often confused by how the relationship was manipulated to gain sexual access to the child.

Individuals who abuse children and who are known to the child/family often use a process called grooming. Grooming is often a slow, gradual, and escalating process of building trust and comfort with the child and the safe adults around the child to eventually sexually abuse the child. The individual often establishes a legitimate purpose for their involvement with the child.

In the early stages of grooming, there are subtle behaviours that begin to cross boundaries. As such, many victims/survivors of sexual abuse do not recognize the manipulation as being connected to the overall abuse process.

Children are more at risk of being sexually abused by someone they know.

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Child sexual abuse can occur by someone the child and/or family knows or by someone the child and/or family does not know.

An offender who is <u>known</u> to the child and/or family (is in a position of trust or is in the family's circle of trust) may:

- Establish trust with the adults around the child
- Manipulate the child by distorting their thinking and creating a dependency on the offender (grooming the child)
- Manipulate adults around the child to reduce any suspicion (grooming the adults)
- Find ways to spend ongoing time with the child to extend their access
- Misuse the child's trust and the trust of their family
- Normalize boundary crossing with the child
- Start making casual sexualized comments and/or jokes around the child

An offender who is a <u>family</u> member may:

- Use their authority/role in the family and private access to control the child
- Take advantage of the child's dependency on them for survival[8]
- Assert their authority and domination in the home[9]

[8] Herman, J.L. (1981). *Father-daughter Incest*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[9] Burczycka, M. & Conroy, S. (2017). Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2015. *Juristat*, Vol. 37, No. 1. Ottawa: Statistics Canada. Cat. No. 85-002-X.

An offender who is <u>unknown</u> to the child and/or family may:

- Use lures to gain control of a child, such as:
    - » telling the child there is an emergency
    - » telling the child they need help
    - » offering to give the child a gift, money, or job
- Use threats of violence or harm to the child
- Use physical force to control the child

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Impact of Child Sexual Abuse

The degree to which a child may internalize experiences of sexual abuse is unique to them and is dependent on a number of factors, including:[10]

- The nature of the abuse

- The circumstances in which the abuse occurred

- What the grooming process looked like and its duration

- Who the offender is in relationship to the child

- The child's previous life experiences

- The degree of support the child received when they disclosed (or after the abuse was discovered)

- The degree of support that is available and given to the child at home

- The child's innate resilience

- The development stage of the child

Models in image and intended as illustrative.

[10] Hindman, j. (1999). *Just before dawn: From the shadows of tradition to new reflections in trauma assessment and treatment of sexual victimization.* Ontario, Oregon: AlexAndria Associates.

Sexual abuse can affect a child's emotional, psychological, cognitive, and physical well-being. Symptoms can also occur for a child in high stress situations. Some symptoms may (but do not always) include:

- Learning difficulties due to changes in concentration, attention, memory, impulse control, and organization.
- Emotional imbalance, such as extreme moods, anxiety, depression, numbness, being zoned out.
- Difficulty forming relationships and trusting others.
- Physical complaints, such as headaches, stomach aches, chronic pain.
- Change in appetite.
- Disruptions in sleeping patterns, such as not being able to sleep at night, unable to get up in morning, sleeping more during the day.
- Self-harming behavior, such as cutting, drugs, alcohol, smoking, promiscuity, recklessness
- Sensitivities to sound, touch, taste, movements, or a lack of coordination
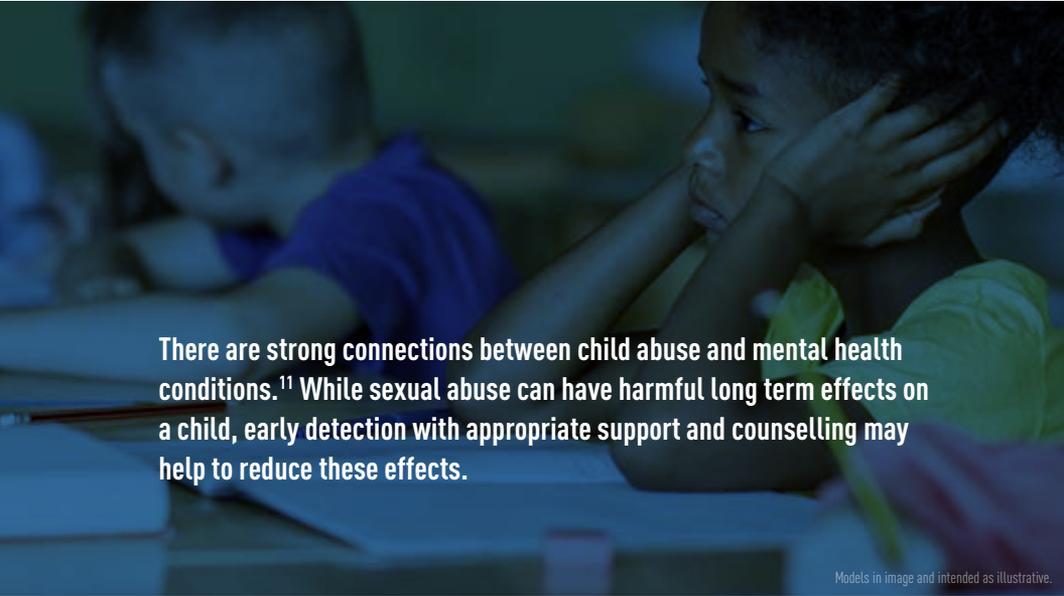
There are strong connections between child abuse and mental health conditions.[11] While sexual abuse can have harmful long term effects on a child, early detection with appropriate support and counselling may help to reduce these effects.

Models in image and intended as illustrative.

[11] Afifi, T.O., MacMillan, H.L., Boyle, M., Taillieu, T., Cheung, K., & Sareen, J. (2014). Child abuse and mental disorders in Canada. CMAJ : Canadian Medical Association Journal, 186(9), E324–E332.

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The Role of Technology and the Internet in Child Sexual Abuse

The role of technology in facilitating sexual offences against children has evolved and increased significantly. Today, it is commonly misused to create a record of the abuse, which is called child sexual abuse material.

Child sexual abuse material is created or used for a sexual purpose and can involve an image, video or drawing of a child being sexually abused or posed in a sexualized way, as well as an audio recording or a written description that describes sexual activity with a child (under the age of 18). Children of all ages — from infants and toddlers, to school-age children and teens — can be depicted in child sexual abuse material.*

Model in image and intended as illustrative.

Under the Criminal Code of Canada, child sexual abuse material is legally termed ˝child pornography˝. This includes, but is not limited to, visual material that either shows a child engaged in explicit sexual activity or that has, as its dominant characteristic and for a sexual purpose, the depiction of a sexual organ or the anal region of a person under 18.

Discovery or Disclosure of Child Sexual Abuse

When children are sexually exploited by someone they trust, they often feel responsible and can harbour feelings of guilt and shame about what happened. As such, children fear disclosing the abuse because they think people will blame them for what happened and/or they think they will not be believed.

Did you know?

- The discovery or disclosure of child sexual abuse is often delayed — research indicates that less than 25% of children immediately disclose being sexually assaulted.[12]

- Children often avoid telling someone about sexual abuse because they are afraid they won't be believed or will get into trouble, or they are worried about what telling someone may do to their family and/or the offender.

- Children who have experienced child sexual abuse may minimize what has happened, or may not remember all of the details about what happened.
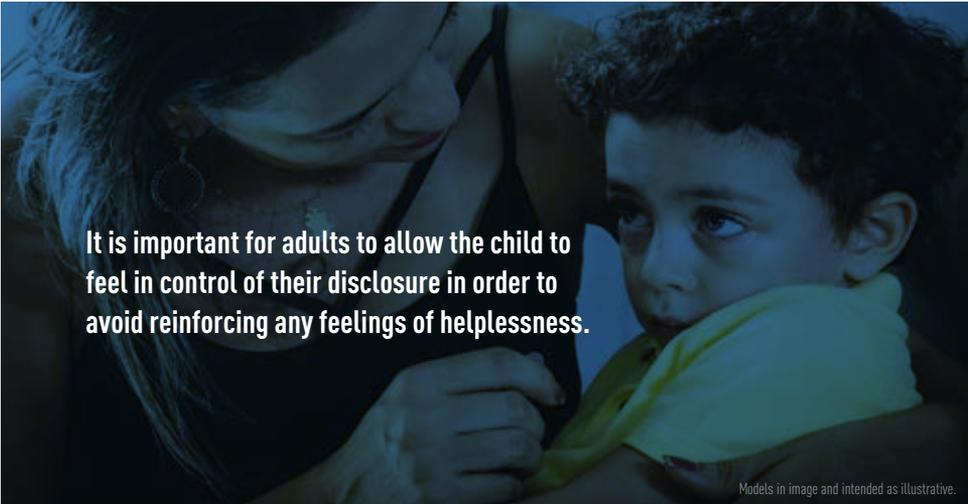
It is important for adults to allow the child to feel in control of their disclosure in order to avoid reinforcing any feelings of helplessness.

Models in image and intended as illustrative.

[12] Tashjian, S. M., Goldfarb, D., Goodman, G. S., Quas, J. A., & Edelstein, R. (2016). Delay in disclosure of non-parental child sexual abuse in the context of emotional and physical maltreatment: A pilot study. *Child Abuse & Neglect,* 58, 149-59.

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When Abuse is Discovered or Disclosed

When abuse is discovered or when a child discloses, the child may not share everything that happened to them. They may share bits of information to test how adults respond and to see whether they are believed. They may not want to share some information as they feel too much shame, they may not be able to share everything that has happened to them at that time, or they may not remember.

How to Respond to a Child's Disclosure

While it is upsetting to learn that a child is being/has been sexually abused, the appropriate reaction of the adult is critical as it affects the severity of the child's overall trauma. Research shows that children who feel supported, nurtured, safe, and believed when disclosing abuse have the most success in recovery and future adjustment.[13]

What does a child need from you once abuse has been disclosed or discovered?

- To know you believe them
- To hear from you what has happened to them is not their fault
- To hear from you that you aren't angry with them
- To hear from you that you love them
- To know you can handle what is happening and can protect them
- To know they do not need to worry about you
- To be treated as the person you know them to be, not as fragile or damaged
- A protective support circle at home, school, daycare, and at extra-curricular activities
- Someone to confide in to help them manage emotional stress

For more information on responding when abuse has been disclosed or discovered, *see Child Sexual Abuse: Picking up the Pieces*, available at protectchildren.ca/familysupport.

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[13] Alaggia, R., Collin-Vézina, D., & Lateef, R. (2017). Facilitators and barriers to child sexual abuse (CSA) disclosures: A research update (2000–2016). *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 1-24.

SECTION II:
SUPERVISE

Supervision and Safeguarding

Parental supervision is fundamental to protecting children because it provides safety, support, predictability, and structure in children's lives. Balancing children's needs for independence and safety can be difficult. While you want to avoid being over protective, you also do not want to be under protective. **This balance needs to be revisited and adjusted often.** While required levels of supervision will vary based on the age and needs of individual children, what follows are general supervision guidelines.

4 to 6 years old:

Direct supervision is required, and children should always be in view when playing in the backyard, on the street, at the playground, in the house, etc.

7 to 10 years old:

Direct and indirect supervision is required. As children begin to have playdates at friends' houses and are under the supervision of others, build in check-in times to connect with them while they are away — ask them about what they're doing and who is there. This will allow for indirect supervision and monitoring.

11 to 12 years old:

Children start seeking more independence. Parental supervision and availability is important, but will often be less direct. Know where they are, what they are doing, who they are with, and build in regular check-in times. Make yourself visible when children have friends over and keep an ear open to what is going on.

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Safeguarding for When Your Child is in Someone Else's Care

There are important considerations for ways to safeguard your child when they are not in your care. These include being aware of the protective practices and appropriate behaviour guidelines within programs and services in which your child is participating.

Important considerations for selecting babysitters

- Avoid posting ads or searching for babysitters online.
- Inquire about babysitters known within the neighbourhood.
- Speak to other people who have hired the babysitter.
- If possible, meet with the babysitter and their parents.
- Have the babysitter over a few times to play with your child when you are home.
- Consider setting parameters, such as the babysitter does not bathe or change your child into their pajamas — you do that before you leave — and the babysitter does not take pictures of the child with personal devices.
- Call and speak to your child before bed. If you are not able to call, arrange for someone else to do so, such as a grandparent. Your child needs a built in check-in while you are out

Models in image and intended as illustrative.

Important considerations for selecting programs and activities

- What steps does the organization take to screen employees/volunteers?
- What strategies, policies, and safety plans does the organization have in place for:
  - » Transportation of children?
  - » One-on-one time with children?
  - » Changing and showering needs?
  - » Overnight trips?
  - » Communication with children/family outside program activities (including texting, emailing, using social networking sites)?
  - » Picture taking?
  - » Any extended contact staff may have with children outside of their role?
- How does the organization communicate issues or concerns to parents when an incident or situation takes place?

For more information, visit commit2kids.ca.

Important considerations for arranging playdates and sleepovers

- Who is supervising the kids? Will anyone else be there, such as houseguests?
- Establish check-in times where you call to speak with your child.
- Establish a signal for your child to communicate to you if they want to come home. Signals might include your child phoning you to tell you they have a headache or stomach pain, or an agreed upon text message.
- Make arrangements so they can be picked up at any time.
- Let your child know it is okay if they decide they want to come home at any time.

As your child increases time away from home playing at friends' houses, establish check-in times where you can call to speak with them.

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SECTION III:
PAY ATTENTION

Personal Boundaries and Safeguarding

Healthy boundaries are the key to a child's sense of safety and security. A child relies upon the guidance and judgment of adults to keep them safe. If you are uncomfortable with the way an adult is interacting with your child or another child, **do something about it.**

Practice What You Preach

Adults who respect children's personal boundaries help reinforce how children should expect to be treated. When adults demonstrate unhealthy boundaries with children, it compromises their sense of safety and security.

Healthy adult behaviour with children includes:

- Being friendly, not friends
- Respecting a child's limits
- Modelling healthy personal boundaries (e.g., changing, sleeping, bathing, possessions, thoughts, emotions)
- Re-establishing boundaries when kids push the limits

Models in image and intended as illustrative.

Personal boundaries are divided into **four** areas:

1. Physical boundaries

Respecting our bodies and our personal belongings, and those of others.

Examples of adults crossing physical boundaries:

- Insisting children hug or kiss others
- Being excessively affectionate and ignoring a child's signs of discomfort
- Exposing a child to violence and aggression

2. Emotional boundaries

Respecting our private thoughts and feelings, and those of others.

Examples of adults crossing emotional boundaries:

- Using shame
  (e.g., "I can't believe you would do that! What kind of a person are you?")
- Using sarcasm
  (e.g., "Way to go Einstein. A 2-year-old knows how to do that.")
- Using guilt
  (e.g., "I do so much for you. Can't you do this one thing for me?")
- Demeaning someone
  (e.g., "You may as well quit. You have no talent anyway.")
- Placing a child in a role as an adult's confidant/best friend
  (e.g., confiding about financial problems or relationship problems)
- Body shaming
  (e.g., "You're fat. Look at that stomach.")

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3. Sexual boundaries

Understanding sexual consent (including in relation to the age of protection/ consent), and the harm of exposure to sexually explicit content.

Examples of adults crossing sexual boundaries:

- Telling a child sexual jokes
- Showing a child sexually graphic pictures
- Sharing adult-level sexual information with or around a child
- Engaging in sexual activity in the presence of a child
- Watching pornography in the presence of a child
- Sending sexual pictures, texts, or emails to a child
- Engaging in sexual activity with a child

4. Social boundaries

Adjusting our interactions with others depending on the type of relationship or roles we have with them.

Examples of adults crossing social boundaries:

- Repeatedly using poor judgment when interacting with children
- Asking overly personal questions
- Embarrassing, humiliating, or shaming a child
- Walking in on someone when there is an expectation of privacy, such as the bathroom, bedroom, shower
- Sending or posting personal pictures of others
- Distorting a child's views of other adults in their life

Note: Be respectful and follow your child's lead as they begin to seek privacy and start to feel embarrassed being naked or bathing in front of you.

Responding to Concerns when a Boundary is Broken

If you or your child feel uncomfortable because of an interaction with an adult (e.g., an adult makes an inappropriate sexualized remark to the child), let the adult know you are not comfortable with what transpired to re-establish boundaries between them and your child.

People often question themselves or are reluctant to talk about situations or relationships they question between an adult and a child. They want to avoid interfering or meddling. There may be an element of discomfort in raising your concerns; however, by doing so you are showing your child they have the right to establish their own boundaries, be treated with respect, and feel safe.

Concerning Behaviour

If you notice a change in your child's typical behaviour patterns, let them know that you notice and are there to help. **It is important to note that changes in a child's behaviour may signal they are in distress, but those same changes may also be observed in a child who has NOT been sexually abused.** Some children who have been sexually abused may not show symptoms, while others may display a variety of behaviours and symptoms.

Models in image and intended as illustrative.

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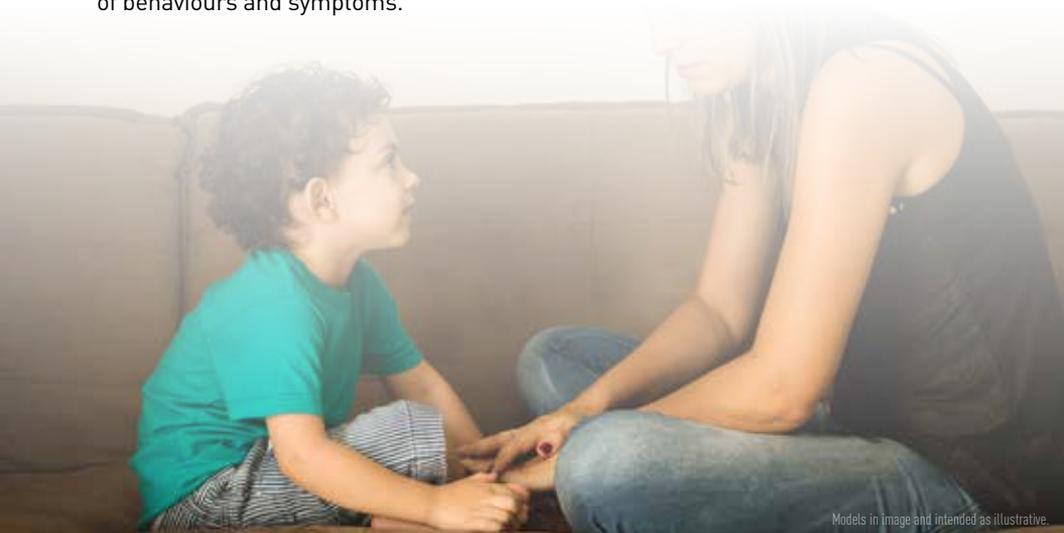
Children who have been sexually abused may:

- Demonstrate advanced sexual knowledge for their age

- Withdraw and appear numb

- Be extremely clingy

- Show extreme resistance to being around a particular adult, or be desperate for attention from a particular adult

- Feel jumpy or nervous — easily startled

- Experience strong emotional flooding — scared, angry, sad

- Harm themselves

- Find social situations difficult to handle

- Have difficulty sleeping

- Experience daily headaches or stomach aches

- Have sudden toileting issues

Changes in a child's behaviour that signal a child is in distress can be caused by a variety of factors other than sexual abuse. A child showing signs of distress needs support from an adult and the cause needs to be explored.

Models in image and intended as illustrative.

SECTION IV:
TAKE ACTION AND REPORT

Teach Your Child About Personal Safety by Talking About:

Taking ownership of their body

Once your child is able, teach them to dress, bathe, wash, and use the toilet on their own. This will teach your child the boundaries around privacy. As they become more independent, respect their privacy.

How to get out of uncomfortable situations

Brainstorm different ways to get out of uncomfortable situations, such as I have to get home; I am feeling sick; my mom is picking me up; I have homework.

Using the correct names for body parts

Teach your child the correct names for body parts. It enhances communication between adults and children, and is especially important if your child needs to disclose an experience of sexual abuse or inappropriate contact.

Identifying safe adults

Help your child identify safe adults in their life who they can go to for help. It is important that your child knows exactly who they can turn to both during times of distress and when they want to share something that is important to them. It's a good idea to choose adults that you trust as well (e.g., aunt, grandma, best friend) who will be able to distinguish what needs to be shared with you and what does not.

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Identifying and labelling feelings

Encourage your child to identify and label feelings. This will promote self-monitoring and increase self-awareness.

Developing a positive self-identity

Help your child learn to talk about themselves in a positive way. Reinforce their strengths and unique qualities that make them a special person.

Having healthy personal boundaries and healthy relationships

Discuss and model the roles of adults versus children, such as an adult's job is to protect children and keep them safe. Teach your child to tell you if someone tries to cross their personal boundaries. Respect the limits and boundaries your child sets.

Being safe online

Supervise and carefully manage your child's online presence, public availability of accounts, communication, and information sharing.

Talking about secrets

Explain the difference between secrets that are safe and can be kept (i.e., secrets that are fun, don't hurt anyone, and will eventually be told) and secrets that are unsafe and should be told to a safe adult (i.e., secrets about touching or picture taking that children are told never to tell).

For storybooks about secrets you can read with your child, visit protectchildren.ca/storybooks.

Safety with Internet-enabled Devices

How your child develops their online presence and uses the internet requires parental involvement. While most experiences children have on the internet are positive, parents/guardians need to be aware of risks, teach their child what to do if they encounter unsafe situations online, and model appropriate online behavior for their child. Consider the following:

- Children learn more from what their parents/guardians do than from what they say, so it's important to model safe and responsible online behavior for your child. This can include:
  - » Being selective about the information and pictures you share of your child on social media to reduce the risk of pictures being copied and misused by others.
  - » Using privacy settings on your social media accounts so you limit your child's exposure to only people you know.

- Some social media platforms have a section where you can post a bio, which may be public even if the account itself is set to private. Many children use this section to post usernames for other social media where they can be contacted, or their age, location, phone number, or name of their school.

Communication with Others

To increase your child's safety online and reduce opportunities for victimization, consider the following:

- Supervise online activity.

- Set limits on the amount of time your child spends on devices.

- Reassure your child that they can come to you for help or to discuss any situation they encounter.

- Discuss ways to get out of uncomfortable conversations or situations online.

- Have regular conversations about risks and safety strategies with your child.

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- Review and try out any apps your child uses to ensure they are age appropriate.

- Ensure that you understand how the safety controls of the apps work and how they can be enabled/disabled.

- Avoid apps that do not have privacy/safety controls.

- Limit your child's access to social media and do not allow them to create their own accounts without your oversight.

- Ensure you are involved in setting up the controls for each of your child's social accounts.

- Monitor all your child's social accounts to ensure contacts are people they know in person.

- Regularly review apps to ensure you are implementing any new privacy/safety controls.

Cybertip.ca
ALERTS!

Sign up for **Cybertip.ca Alerts** to stay on top of the concerning online trends impacting the personal safety of children and youth.

Online Games

Other areas to monitor are online games and gaming consoles that are internet-enabled. Consider the following:

- Take an interest in what your child is doing online rather than just saying "no."

- For consoles, set up parental controls and create passwords for the parental control features. You can control online access by using the block and/or restrict features available on most video game consoles.

- Know your child's passwords, screen names and the friends they are playing against and chatting with.

- Review games to ensure they are age appropriate.

- Review the game's guidelines and see if there is an option to report inappropriate activity.

- Consider differences in features between the desktop and app versions of the game.

- Seek games that offer the ability to block or restrict individuals who can play with your child and allow you to mute other individuals from chatting with them.

- Consider the additional risks if the game has a chat feature, and whether it's open chat or users send private messages.

- Discuss the risks of meeting and talking to people online. Others can easily misrepresent themselves even if the game is intended for a specific age group, so your child needs to check in with you before they start chatting with someone new.

For more information about helping your child stay safe online, visit ProtectKidsOnline.ca.

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Exposure to Sexually Explicit Material

Keep in mind that pornography is readily available and unregulated online. **About one in three children is exposed to pornography by the age of 10.**[14] This can be confusing and distressing for children as they are not developmentally ready to process such explicit material. Stay calm and let your child know you understand how this can happen while online and they can come to you if this happens to them. Let them know they will not be in trouble. Sometimes children are too embarrassed to talk to their caregivers about sensitive topics, and this is where a circle of safe adults is helpful.

TIP: Disable Wi-Fi each evening so all devices are restricted. This fosters healthy internet use, promotes healthy sleeping routines, and reinforces parental supervision and monitoring.

Model in image and intended as illustrative.

Reporting Child Sexual Abuse

Any form of sexualized interaction with a child constitutes child sexual abuse, including both **contact abuse** and **abuse that does not involve physical contact**. All adults have a legal obligation to report these suspicions.

If you have reasonable grounds to suspect child sexual abuse, or a child discloses that they have been abused by:

A family member
• Report the suspected abuse to your local child welfare and/or law enforcement agency.

[14] Skau, B. (2007). Who Has Seen What When? Pornography's Contribution to the Social Construction of Sexuality During Childhood and Adolescence. *Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive)*. 1044.

An individual who is not related to the child

- Report the suspected abuse to your local child welfare and/or law enforcement agency.
- If it is your child, you should also control any contact they may have with the possible offender.
- If it is not your child, you should also report the abuse to the child's parent or guardian.

An individual who is in a position of trust or authority

- Report the suspected abuse to a child welfare and/or law enforcement agency and to the head of the organization where the abuse allegedly occurred.
- If it is your child, you can request a meeting with the head of the organization to ask questions about:
  - » How the investigation process will unfold
  - » How your child will be protected while the investigation is ongoing

Reporting Misconduct/Concerning Behaviour

While obvious sexual acts are easier to identify and address, situations and behaviour that do not meet the threshold of abuse still need to be acted upon. If you observe or hear about concerning behaviour or an inappropriate/questionable situation between an adult/teenager and your child or another child, **report your concerns to the organization where the behaviour/situation allegedly took place.** If it is not your child and you have contact with the child's parents, report your concerns to the parents.

Flagging the concerning behaviour to the organization should trigger a review of activities in an effort to correct and stop the possible misconduct. It will also allow the organization to document the incident and address any behaviour that is not consistent with its policies and procedures.

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APPLY WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

After reading through this guide, think about the action that's required by a safe adult to keep the child safe in the following scenarios:

1. **Scenario:** Judy's daughter's friend disclosed that her mom's boyfriend comes into her bedroom at night and touches her inappropriately. What action should Judy take?

   Action required: Judy should make a report to child welfare about what her daughter's friend disclosed.

2. **Scenario:** Judy's daughter discloses that a neighbour exposed himself to her. What action should Judy take?

   Action required: Judy should report it to police and prevent all contact her daughter has with the neighbour.

3. **Scenario:** Judy comes across sexually inappropriate questions someone is asking her daughter in an online game. What action should Judy take?

   Action required: Judy should report it to Cybertip.ca.

4. **Scenario:** Ken overhears his son's hockey coach telling his son and another nine-year-old boy sexually explicit jokes. What action should Ken take?

   Action required: Ken should tell the other boy's parents what happened. The parents should each address their concerns with the coach and report it to the provincial hockey association and the provincial territorial sport representative (e.g., Sport Manitoba).

5. **Scenario:** Ken looks in his daughter's backpack and finds an expensive present from one of her daycare workers. His daughter tells him that she is the only one to receive the special gift. What action should Ken take?

   Action required: Ken should contact the director of the daycare to ask what the policy for gift giving is at the daycare and ask if they are aware of the gift given to his daughter. He should clarify that he should be notified of special gifts given to his daughter so the process is transparent.

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