

QUICK TIPS *for* PARENTS

Preventing Child Sexual Abuse

As a parent, you do everything you can to give your child the chance to grow and thrive — and to protect them from harm — because you know their experiences growing up pave the way for the rest of their lives.

Sexual abuse can happen to any child. In 2021, 1 in 6 Texas high school students reported they experienced it.¹ And in 90% of cases, the abuse is committed by someone the child knows and trusts, like a relative, neighbor, or even an older child or youth.²

We can **prevent it**, **recognize it**, and **report it** to help make sure every child has the opportunity to grow and thrive.

PREVENT IT

Actions you can take on your own:

- **Educate yourself** about recognizing and reporting child sexual abuse and how you can help prevent it. Share what you learn with other adults.
- **Be aware of situations where your child is one-on-one** with an adult (other than a parent) or alone with another youth.
- **Get clear on what is—and isn't—developmentally appropriate behavior** among children.
- **Understand technology risks and safety measures** — and implement them.
- **Have open conversations** with family members and parents you know about keeping children safe and preventing abuse.
- **Discourage secret-keeping** between adults and children.
- **Ask questions about existing child protection policies and programs** at school, youth groups, or other organizations where your child spends time.

Actions you can take with your child:

- **Model and encourage open communication with your child.** Let them know that it is okay to talk to you about anything.
- **Talk with your child about boundaries and safety** around their private parts and about respecting boundaries and safety for other people's private parts.
- **Teach the correct names of body parts** from an early age.
- **Reinforce preventative measures** by practicing safe behaviors and “what if” situations together.
- **Discuss your family's safety rules** including around access to technology and digital devices.
- **Ask your child to tell you** if anyone (adult or child) ever makes them feel uncomfortable or asks them to keep something secret from you.
- **Support your child's participation in school-based safety programs** (some require parental permission).

¹ Texas Department of State Health Services (n.d.). 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Retrieved from <https://healthdata.dshs.texas.gov/dashboard/surveys-and-profiles/youth-risk-behavior-survey>.

² Finkelhor, D. (2012). Characteristics of crimes against juveniles. Durham, NH: Crimes against Children Research Center.

Here are some things to say to your child:

"Nobody should touch you in ways that make you feel scared or uncomfortable."

"You don't have to kiss or hug anyone if you don't want to, even if it's a family member."

"Always ask if it's OK before touching or hugging someone, even if it's a close friend. And if they ask you to stop, then stop."

"If anyone touches you in a way that makes you scared or uncomfortable, remember that it's not your fault. And tell me right away. If I'm not nearby, tell another trusted adult. Who are some grownups you think you could go to for help?"

"I believe you and I believe *in* you. Don't ever be afraid to tell me about something that has happened to you that made you feel uncomfortable or scared."

Learning More

Together, we can protect children from child sexual abuse. To learn more, visit the Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas (CACTX) at www.cactx.org. CACTX is a statewide nonprofit organization with a network of children's advocacy centers (CACs) that have helped more than a million children and families impacted by crime and abuse to achieve safety, justice, and healing.

RECOGNIZE IT

Possible signs of abuse are listed here, but **the presence of any one indicator may not mean that a child is being abused**. If you notice changes, don't assume you know the cause. Try to have an open conversation with your child.

- Changes or regression of behavior or habits, like sleeping, eating, school performance, or personal hygiene — or fearing certain people or places
- Seeming sad, withdrawn, or anxious, or secretive about their in-person or online activities
- Inappropriate sexual behaviors or seeming to know more about sex than they should at their age, or risky or self-harming behaviors
- Unexpected physical injuries, difficulty walking or sitting, bruising on or near private areas or complaining of pain or itching in private areas, or pregnancy at a young age

REPORT IT

In Texas, any person who suspects a child might have been abused is required by law to report it.

Making a report opens the door to critical services for a child and provides an opportunity to seek accountability for the offender.

Report suspected abuse to:

Texas Abuse Hotline 1-800-252-5400 www.txabusehotline.org	The Police 911 Or contact local law enforcement
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