

**CHILD
ASSAULT
PREVENTION**

**ADULT
INFORMATION
GUIDE**

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expresses its appreciation to:*

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Dedication

To all the children, parents, teachers,
administrators and Prevention Specialists who have
participated in and supported CAP over the years.

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SECTION I: Welcome to CAP

What Is CAP?

The Child Assault Prevention program is a curriculum whose main goal is to teach children and communities to reduce vulnerability to threatening and assaultive situations. It is a community based program that is implemented by trained prevention specialists in schools and other educational settings.

Program Goals

- To give children information in a sensitive, safe and non-threatening manner within their classroom.
- To teach children how to recognize potentially threatening situations.
- To encourage children to practice skills for potentially threatening situations.
- To encourage children to problem-solve options for responding to difficult situations.
- To increase awareness among adults and help adults respond effectively to children in need.
- To help children identify trusted adults in their lives.
- To help children in recognizing and establishing peer support.
- To build support among children and adults within your community.



The Program Has Four Major Components:

1) Parent Workshop

Before CAP comes to a school to teach prevention skills and concepts to the children, we hold a Parent Workshop. We want parents to:

- Have the opportunity to hear for themselves exactly what their children will be learning.
- Learn how they can continue to teach prevention at home, after the CAP workshops are over.
- Have the chance to ask all the questions they have regarding child abuse and how to prevent it.

2) Teacher/Staff Workshop

This covers much of the same material as the Parent Workshop, but adds more information that teachers and school administrators need about:

- How to identify abused children.
- How to get help for abused children.
- How to do follow-up lessons on prevention in their classrooms after CAP leaves the school.

Once parents and teachers know what CAP will be teaching, we return to the school and do Student Workshops, classroom by classroom.

3) One-Hour Classroom Workshop for Children

This is a combination of guided discussion/role plays depicting threatening or intimidating situations. Each role play is done twice, first unsuccessfully and then successfully, focusing on three problem-solving skills: assertiveness, peer support, and telling a trusted adult. The children have an opportunity to participate in the successful role play, acting as a "helpful friend."

4) Review Time

This is a time when children can come on a voluntary basis to talk with us, to review, to ask questions they didn't get to ask, and to practice prevention skills. In some cases, children will tell us about their worries or fears, or about being abused. CAP relays this information to the school so that everything possible may be done to get help for the child.

The CAP Concept: Safe, Strong and Free!

Children in schools across the country and around the world know CAP by these three words. They're our trademark.

But they're more than that.

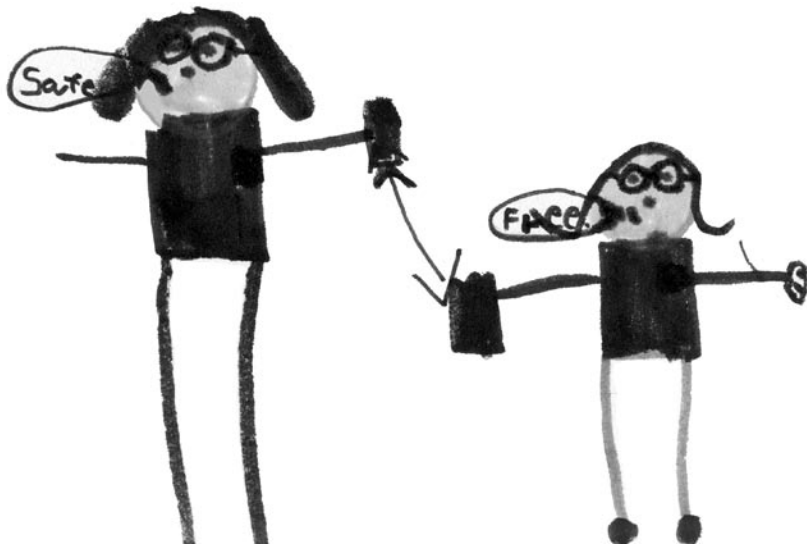
They accentuate the positive. They give the deeper meaning to CAP. CAP begins and ends with these three words. We believe that all children have the right to be safe, strong and free. Child abuse is a difficult, disturbing and negative topic to talk about. But prevention is not. **Prevention is positive and hopeful. Prevention can triumph over abuse.**

It's great for children to know how to prevent abuse, but HOW is not enough. We also want them to know WHY.

We want them to know WHY to prevent abuse, so they will be *motivated* to put what they learn into action.

The simple answer to the question WHY is that every child has the right to be "Safe, Strong and Free." Every child is born with these three rights. Every child is precious and worthy.

The more loved and respected a child feels, and the more deeply they feel they deserve to be "Safe, Strong, and Free," the more likely it is that they will turn their prevention training into action if or when the time comes.



The Three Rights

The Right to Be Safe

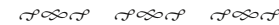
Every child has the right to live a life free of abuse.

The Right to Be Strong

Every child has the right to be strong in body, mind and spirit; to be confident; to stand up for self and others; to ask for help.

The Right to Be Free

Every child has the right to be free to love themselves, to love others, and to take advantage of all the opportunities life has to offer; the right to choose where and with whom they feel safe.



In Children's Words...

Safe!

- *Safe means you won't be hurt.*
- *Safe means people will take care of you.*
- *Safe is falling asleep on my mom's lap on a stormy night.*



Strong!

- *Strong means diving off the high diving board.*
- *Strong means backing off from a fight.*
- *Strong is going to school the day after my puppy died.*



Free!

- *Free means having a choice.*
- *Free is being able to have friends, and trust people.*
- *Free is not having to ride in the back of the bus like before civil rights.*



What Is Child Sexual Assault?

Child sexual assault is the misuse of power by an older or stronger person over a weaker or younger person through the use of forced (often by nonviolent coercion) or tricked sexualized touch, language, or behavior. This may include genital fondling by one or both individuals, photographing a child in sexually explicit poses, oral-genital contact, exposure of a child to sexual behavior between adults or genital penetration.

Myths/Facts About Sexual Abuse and Assault

MYTH: The sexual abuse of children is very rare.

FACT: It is estimated that 1 out of 3 girls and 1 out of 6-10 boys will be sexually abused by the age of 18.

MYTH: Most children are sexually abused or assaulted (physically, emotionally) by a stranger.

FACT: 75% -80% of children are abused or assaulted by a known and trusted person in their life: a family member, family friend, a care provider, a peer.

MYTH: Sexual abuse and assault only occur in poor, inner city or rural communities.

FACT: Sexual abuse and assault crosses all geographic, economic, racial, ethnic, gender, and cultural boundaries. It is not a crime of poverty or sexuality, but rather a crime of power and control.

MYTH: Most child molesters are mentally ill, easily recognizable.

FACT: Those who sexually abuse or assault children are not easily distinguishable from other community members. They are not usually adults with mental illness or retardation.

MYTH: Men who sexually abuse male children are homosexuals.

FACT: The majority of men who sexually abuse male children identify themselves as heterosexual. The victimization of children has little, if anything, to do with sexual passion or sexual orientation. Sex is a tool, used to exert power and aggression over someone who the abuser perceives to be vulnerable and accessible for victimization.



MYTH: Sexual abuse always includes violent, physical assault.

FACT: Sexual abuse is most often accomplished through the use of psychological coercion and manipulation, bribery, and secrecy by someone in a trusted or caretaking role.

MYTH: Giving assault prevention information to children can often leave them feeling frightened and anxious.

FACT: The information given to children in prevention workshops is far less frightening, violent, and sensational than the information they are exposed to through the media: on TV, radio, in the movies and on milk cartons (pictures of missing children). By the time children are 14 years old, they will have witnessed 13,000 murders on television. Of all types of programming, cartoons are the most violent, with 22 acts of violence per hour, or one every three minutes. By giving children accurate information and problem solving skills in a non-threatening manner, their fears and anxiety are actually reduced.

MYTH: A discussion about sexual abuse will scare children away from all affectionate touching.

FACT: Children, like adults, choose who they want to be affectionate with based on their feelings of comfort, trust, and personal boundaries. These feelings are different and unique for each child. Children who are given permission to have control over how and by whom their bodies can be touched will find a comfortable manner in which to share and receive affectionate behavior.

What Are the Effects of Sexual Abuse?

- Children lose trust that the adults in their lives provide consistent care and protection.
- They feel responsible as well as helpless. They develop a sense of shame and guilt, feeling that they were responsible or allowed the abuse to happen.
- Children may experience problems with truancy, prostitution, drug and alcohol abuse, and teenage pregnancy.
- Children who were assaulted sometimes grow up to become abusers themselves.
- Child sexual assault survivors may experience low self-esteem, self-doubt, depression, guilt, and difficulty with trust and intimacy.

How Do I Talk to My Child about Abuse?

That's the question this handbook answers.

Sometimes parents, grandparents, and others who take care of children, are initially afraid to talk with them about abuse and assault.

They worry they might say the wrong thing and make things worse. They worry they might scare their children.

We think it doesn't hurt to be a little cautious. When you talk with your children about a difficult issue like abuse, it's important to do it right.

But with the help of CAP, we believe doing it right is not that hard.

CAP can give you a way to talk with your children. A way that really works. A way that will make you feel better and give your children increased confidence both in you and in themselves.

In this handbook are highlights of the CAP program, specifically for people who take care of children. In italics are things you can say directly to your children, if you like. But feel free to say them in your own words and in your own way. And feel free to adjust how you say them according to your child's age level.

We know CAP works for kids. Children have gotten away from kidnapers and molesters by doing what they've learned in a one-hour CAP lesson in their classrooms. They've been able to ask for help to stop abuse because of CAP.

Just on its own, CAP works for kids. But CAP works a hundred times better if everyone at home knows CAP, too, and practices it with them.

Children Are Vulnerable, But Not Powerless.

In so many cases, there's something simple and effective a child can do to handle a situation on their own, or something they can do to get help. For example:

- Kidnappers often take children from a front yard, a grocery store, or a busy street—places where the children are within earshot of their parents or other adults who could help. But every child can learn the Special Safety Yell. And it could save their lives.
- Strangers who molest children count on secrecy to get away with their assaults. People within the family who abuse children count on secrecy, too. Both types of abusers scare children into silence. But every child can learn that they don't have to keep a secret which is confusing, scary, or hurtful. They can learn that there are no Forever Secrets. They can learn how to tell and who to tell to get help.

Yes, children are vulnerable to abuse. But, no, they are not powerless to prevent it. In fact, they can be very capable and effective if they know what to do.

And we, as parents, need for them to know what to do, too. We can't always be with them and watching over them every moment of every day. Sometimes they're going to be with someone else, and as they get older, they're going to spend more and more time out in the world on their own, taking responsibility for themselves.

Growing up is always a challenge, but by practicing prevention skills at home with our children, we can help them do their growing up safely and successfully.



SECTION II: Highlights of CAP

Saying No... Effectively

NO is not just a word. Not when you really want it to work for you. When you want it to be effective, it's an action as well as a word.

Your mouth can say NO.

But what if the person doesn't stop? And what if it's really serious? And what if your mouth needs help in saying NO?

Your tone of voice can say NO.

You can make your NO loud and serious.

Your attitude can say NO.

You don't have to be polite. You can say NO with all your might, because it's wrong for someone to take advantage of you or hurt you.

Your feelings can say NO.

Let yourself feel the NO as deeply as you want to when you say it.

Your body can say NO.

You can move away from somebody. You can run to a place of safety.

How do children say NO with conviction? By believing in themselves.

That's one reason why it's so good when we:

- Give our children constant encouragement in life.
- Focus on the things they can do, instead of the things they can't do.
- Help them build confidence by teaching them life skills.
- Are clear about our values and expectations.
- Help them appreciate themselves.
- Let them know we love them no matter what.

The "Know Power" Behind "No Power"

- 1) *I want you to know it's okay to say NO to anyone, including adults, if they are doing something to hurt you, or something you know is wrong. Or if they're trying to get you to do something you know is wrong.*
- 2) *I want you to know you can say NO again and again. You don't have to be polite and get into a conversation with someone trying to hurt you. You don't have to explain yourself or tell them why you are saying NO. They don't have to understand; they just have to stop what they're doing.*

- 3) *I want you to know that you have the right to say NO whenever it will help you to be Safe, Strong and Free.*

The Special Safety Yell

LOW *It comes from your tummy, not your throat. It's not like a scream or a screech kids do when they're playing. This is important, because when adults hear screeches or screams, they think you're playing, and might not come help you. This is a real YELL—it's different.*

LOUD *When you're in trouble or in danger, you need help fast. And when you need help, you don't have to be shy or polite. Take a very deep breath and let your Yell be the loudest it knows how to be.*

LONG *Because you take a deep breath, your Yell can last longer than a scream or a screech. Let it last as long as your breath lasts. You don't have to cut it short, and you don't have to try to keep it going when you run out of breath. Take another deep breath. Then do the Yell again while you are getting away, getting to safety, and finding someone who can help you.*

1. ***The Yell says to the person trying to hurt you, "I'm a Safe, Strong and Free person! I know what to do! I'm not an easy victim!"***
What's that person looking for? An easy victim. What's the last thing the offender wants? For you to know what to do. An offender can't afford to have attention drawn to the scene. They can't afford to have people get a description of them or their car and give it to the police. So sometimes the Yell by itself is enough to scare away someone trying to hurt you. Sometimes it surprises or shocks the offender for a few seconds—which might be just long enough for you to escape and run to safety.
2. ***The Yell says to everyone within the sound of your voice, "I need help." It can work like a help magnet.***
Sometimes if just one person comes running to help you, the offender will run away. Sometimes other kids hearing you do your Yell will do their Yell, too, and that brings even more people out to help. When someone tries to hurt you, they usually try to do it in secret, because they don't want anybody to be able to help you. Your Yell changes that.

3. ***The Yell gets you going. It's the Yell that powers you.***

One of the easiest things to do when you are in danger and are scared is to freeze. It's also one of the worst things to do.

When you take a deep breath you are getting oxygen, as well as energy, to your brain and your muscles. That will help you be ready to think, and be ready to get away. When you hear your own Yell, it can give you courage.

And don't forget you can yell and run at the same time. Try it. You can start running to safety at the same time you start your Yell.

We call this a Special Safety Yell, because it's only something to use when you are in trouble and need help. It's not something for playing with. It's a Special Yell because it has a special job—helping to keep you safe. If there are times when you want to practice the Yell so you can remember it better, let me know, and we can practice it together.

Strangers and Friends

Many of the people who molest children know how to become a child's friend in a matter of a very few minutes. They know how to get children to let down their guard.

So if we just tell our children, "Beware of strangers!" that might not be enough of a warning. They might be thinking, "George is my friend. He's not like a stranger. He must be okay."

It's important for us to tell children that even someone who acts like a friend *could* try to hurt us. Even someone we know and love and trust *could* try to hurt us. We hope that doesn't happen, but it *could*.

We want to make sure that when our children meet strangers, they meet them in safe ways. But we also want to make sure that when they are with people they know and are familiar with, that they are also safe.

Remember, in 80–85% of the cases of abuse, children are abused by someone they know. This is often someone they love and trust. Someone who should be helping to keep them safe.

All of our best friends were once strangers. We're glad we met them and got to know them. Most strangers are not bad people. They're a very exciting part of life. We want to be able to enjoy meeting them and getting to know them.

But there are safe ways to meet strangers and unsafe ways.

Here's an example of a safe way to meet a stranger: We go to grandmother's for dinner. She's invited a family we don't know, but we eat, talk, and play games together, and we get to know them safely. Perhaps we invite them to our house sometime.

Why is this a safe way to meet strangers?

(Some answers: Because I'm with people who care about me and can help me if I need help. Because Grandmother already knows this family. Because we know why we're there.)

Here's an example of an unsafe way. You're walking home from school. A man leans out his front door as you pass by, calls to you, and says, "Come on in. I have a special game I'd like to show you."

Why is that an unsafe way to meet a stranger?

(Some answers: Because I'm on my own. Because if I go into his house, he might not let me leave when I want to. I don't know why he really wants me to come into the house. He might have another reason besides playing a game. He might be trying to take advantage of me.)

Tell me about the people you know and how you met them. Did you meet them in a safe way or unsafe way?

Whenever someone tries to hurt you, you have the right to say NO, get away, and go get help. If someone you don't know tries to hurt you, you have this right. If someone you do know tries to hurt you, you have this right. Even if it's someone you like or love.

Anytime anyone, no matter who, tries to take away your right to be Safe, Strong, and Free, I want you to come tell me right away.

Getting Away

GO... *Get going as soon as you can. If you see danger or sense danger, you can get going immediately. Remember, you can do your Yell as you are running away from danger.*

GO... *Get going and keep going. Don't stop until you're sure you're safe.*

GO... *Keep going until you get to safety. You can do your Yell while you're running and you can also think while you're running. You can think, "Where is the nearest place where I can be safe? And who can I find to help me?"*

Despite the rarity of stranger abduction, most parents make this potential danger the main focus when talking to their children about safety. Stories in the media magnify our fears. The lessons we've been brought up on, which we pass on to our children, are both impractical and confusing. While on the one hand we tell them "don't talk to strangers," there are times that we all need to ask people we don't know for help. We raise them to be polite, helpful and cooperative, yet it is just these qualities that dangerous individuals count on to lure children into unsafe situations. We want them to see that the world is filled with wonders and to not be afraid to reach out. Yet, to keep them safe, we need to teach them what to do if faced with danger.

Escape Skills

It's disheartening that we have to teach our children such things as Escape Skills. But the alternative is much worse. Not to teach them leaves them vulnerable. Children feel safer and stronger when they know what to do when faced with serious danger.

The key thing we want to get across to children when teaching them Escape Skills is that we are not teaching them to be Power Rangers. Power Rangers are television stars, so they do TV fighting. But real kids need real skills that work in real life. They need down-to-earth, effective Escape Skills.

When we are in danger, we are not making a TV show. We are doing what we need to do to be Safe, Strong, and Free. That means we are not going to BEAT UP someone who is trying to hurt us. We are going to ESCAPE!

We believe that self-defense training is an excellent activity for children. It teaches skills that enhance children's confidence. It's also good for children to hear people who are experts at martial arts—those with black belts and years of experience—say that the more they know about self-defense, the less they have to actually use it! That's because they have learned how to prevent an attack.

That's CAP's goal, too! The more children know about prevention, the quicker they'll be to use it, and the less they'll have to use it.

Let's talk about Escape Skills, but first, let me ask you a question:

What's even better than Escape Skills?

Answer: RECOGNIZING DANGER and GETTING AWAY BEFORE ANYTHING BAD CAN EVEN START TO HAPPEN!

The very first second we see trouble coming, the very first second we get that "uh-oh" feeling, that's the time to get away and get to a place of safety.

That's the very best kind of prevention.

*It's a good idea to always stay **more than two arm-lengths** away from somebody you don't know and are not sure about. That way, if they move toward you to grab you, you still have time to turn and run.*

But even the most aware, alert person can be taken by surprise sometimes.

Let's talk about what to do if someone grabs you and wants to kidnap or hurt you in any way.

What if they cover your mouth with their hand, so you can't do your Special Safety Yell? You can grab their pinkie—their littlest finger—and bend it back and away. This really hurts and will make them uncover your mouth so you can do your Yell. And it might shock or surprise them just long enough so you can break free and start running to safety.

*What else could you do if someone grabbed you? You can **wiggle** your body, your arms and legs, as hard as you can. You could kick them in the shins (the front part of the lower leg where the bone is). You can scrape the edge of your shoe down their shin. And you can stomp on the instep of their foot with all your might. (The instep is the middle part of the foot where the shoe laces of a shoe usually are.)*

You can do these things together, one right after the other: WIGGLE... KICK... SCRAPE... and STOMP.

Even if someone is much bigger than you, these Escape Skills can still help you get away. Why is that? Because you're using your strength against the bigger person's weakness.

When you pull back a pinkie finger, you're using the whole strength of your hand and arm against the littlest finger, which is not very strong at all, and which hurts a lot when it's bent backwards.

When you stomp on an instep, you're using the whole force and weight of your body against the bigger person's instep, and it will shock and surprise them, and probably make them lighten their grip or even let go of you for a couple of seconds.

Remember, these are Escape Skills. They are serious. They are not for playing and they are not for hurting people. You should use them only when you need to get away from someone who is hurting you. And when you are in a situation where you have to use them, use them seriously. That means, use them with all your might and with all your strength.

Telling

Abuse thrives on secrecy. So open communication with our children is one of the very best prevention techniques. Open communication is easier said than done, of course, but practice can help a lot. Practicing is an important part of prevention.

First, we can practice by taking the time to listen to our children every single day, if at all possible. If we listen well to their discoveries and disappointments, their embarrassments and delights, then when they need to come to us about something like abuse, they'll know we really want them to talk with us, and it won't be a big deal.

Second, we can practice by asking our children to pretend that they have an embarrassing secret to tell, and asking them to pretend to tell it to us. Then we can respond as if they were really telling us an upsetting secret by giving them a hug, comforting them, and saying, "I'm so glad you told me." We know kids understand better when we practice things with them, instead of just telling them.

Here are some things you might want to talk with your child about specifically:

Sometimes it's easy to tell a person you trust that you need help. Sometimes you're mad at the person who has hurt you and you're sure that the person you're going to tell will help you.

But there are other times when it's hard to tell someone that you need help.

Maybe you feel embarrassed.

Maybe you feel scared.

Maybe you feel that you'll upset the person you tell.

Maybe the person who hurt you is someone you love and care about and you're scared about getting them in trouble.

But when you need help, even if you feel these kinds of feelings, or if you are feeling shy about telling, I still really want you to tell.

You could just come to me and say: "I have a secret that I'm scared to tell." Then I can help you tell it.

Remember, I always want to be able to help you be Safe, Strong, and Free. And anybody who hurts children is somebody who needs help, too.

Telling: the Two Worst Tricks

Let's talk about the two worst tricks people use to get children to keep a secret:

It's Your Fault

If someone is hurting you or taking advantage of you, he or she might say, "This is all your own fault. You're bad. That's why this is happening to you. You deserve to have bad things happen to you."

If anyone says anything like this to you, I want you to come tell me right away.

If anyone says anything like this to you, they're not your friend.

If anyone says anything like this to you, you don't have to do what they tell you to do. You don't have to keep it a secret. You can come tell me.

Your Mom and Dad Won't Love You Anymore

If someone is hurting you or taking advantage of you, he or she might say, "If you tell your mom and dad about our secret, they won't love you anymore. They'll think you're bad and they won't love you."

If anyone ever says anything like this to you, I want you to come tell me right away.

If anyone ever says anything like this to you, they're lying. They're trying to trick you and take advantage of you.

Mom and Dad (or Grandma and Grandpa) will always love you, no matter what. No matter how bad something seems, or how embarrassed you feel, or how scared you are, please come tell us.

Then we can help you be a Safe, Strong, and Free person again.



Telling: Safe Secrets & Unsafe Secrets

When you keep a secret about abuse, that means you're all alone. If you're all alone, that means you can't get help. But if someone is hurting you, you have the right to get help.

Abusers depend on secrecy. They depend on keeping a child all alone. They depend on tricks. They will tell you lies to keep you all alone. They depend on children not knowing what to do.

What's a Safe Secret?

A surprise birthday party is planned for your friend Chris. It's going to happen on Saturday. Chris's mom invites you, but says, "Keep it a secret!"

Why is this a safe secret?

(Some answers: Because the secret will make Chris happy. Because the secret won't hurt Chris, or me, or anybody. Because I only have to keep the secret for a little while. Because I can tell my mom or dad or grandma or grandpa about the secret. Because it's not a secret I have to keep all by myself.)

What's an Unsafe Secret?

A neighbor tells you to come inside and he touches you in a way that you don't like, or that confuses you or is wrong, and then he says, "This is a secret! Don't ever tell anyone! Not anyone, not ever! If you tell, I'll hurt you, or I'll hurt your mom."

Why is this an unsafe secret?

(Some answers: Because it hurts me. Because I have to keep it all by myself. Because I am supposed to keep it forever. Because this person scares me. Because I'm not supposed to ask anyone to help me.)

It's Always Okay to Tell a Secret to Someone.

No matter what anyone says, it is always okay to tell a secret to someone who can help you.

You never have to keep any secret ALL BY YOURSELF.

You never have to keep a FOREVER SECRET.

If someone tells you to keep a FOREVER SECRET and keep it ALL BY YOURSELF, I want you to come tell me right away, because that's an unsafe

secret. I want you to tell me even if you're scared to tell me. You can say, "Mom, I have a secret, but I'm scared to tell you." If you do just that much, then I can help you with the rest.

TELL... TELL... TELL!

It takes two to stop a secret:

- A child who's ready to tell and
- An adult who's ready to listen!

NO! RUN... YELL... TELL

Above is a little rhyme of four words to help you remember what to do if you are ever in danger, and this is what it stands for:

NO! is not just a word.

You can say NO with your tone of voice, attitude, feelings, and body.

Saying NO can scare off someone trying to hurt you.

Saying NO can stop someone long enough for you to get away.

RUN even if you're not sure you're in danger.

RUN because it's better to be safe than sorry.

RUN toward a safe place.

RUN toward someone who can help you.

You can do your YELL while you are running away.

Your YELL can bring help.

Your YELL can scare off someone trying to hurt you.

Your YELL can stop someone long enough for you to get away.

TELL someone who can help.

TELL them that you need help.

TELL them exactly what happened.

TELL them who you are getting away from.

Section III: Help for Parents

Part 1. Prevention

How Can You Help Protect Your Child from Abuse?

Helping children stay safe is a big part of parenting. There are many things a parent can do. Here are some ideas for teaching children prevention. The goal is to give them accurate information and skills without instilling fear. For example, give them an accurate vocabulary for all parts of the body. Be as matter of fact when you label “private” parts as when you name arms and legs. This will make it easier for your children to bring all their questions and concerns about their bodies to you.

Privacy

At some point children will want a private space over which they have some control. Whether it’s their own bedroom, a corner of a room in which to keep their special possessions, or a personal diary, the right to privacy is important to support. So is teaching them to respect other’s privacy. Why is this so important? If respect for privacy and personal space is seen as one’s right, then children will recognize that an invasion of their privacy could signal possible danger.

Affection: Saying Yes! Saying No!

With all the media attention on child abuse in recent years, some people feel hesitant about showing affection to children. We believe that affection is part of prevention! A child who feels loved, valued and important is less vulnerable to abuse. In fact, molesters tell researchers that the easiest child to take advantage of is the child who feels lonely, unloved and abandoned.

So it’s just as important as ever to *tell* our children we love them and it’s just as important as ever to *show* them that we love them.

As part of prevention, CAP recommends that parents discover how their child feels about displays of affection through conversations and observing their body language. Children may have strong feelings about when hugs and kisses feel comfortable or safe, and when they don’t. We believe that it is important to honor children’s wishes, and, by so doing, to model respectful behavior. This will help children recognize as potentially dangerous someone who does not respect their wishes regarding touch.

This brings us to that embarrassing or hurtful moment when a child refuses to hug grandma hello or kiss dad goodnight.

Just as children are entitled to their privacy, they should have the right to choose how and when they show affection. Of course we want them to be respectful, and even loving, towards people important to us. But we must also respect *their* feelings. They might be shy now, or only like hugs and kisses from mom and dad. As they get older and more comfortable in the world, they might become more affectionate. It’s safer for them if that happens naturally—because they want to, and not because they’ve been forced or tricked.

Keeping children safe from abuse means giving them the right to say no to any touch that makes them feel uncomfortable or confused regardless of the intent. Children are not always able to distinguish between well-intentioned affection and the mis-use of it that can be the beginning of sexual abuse. If those closest to them give children permission to trust and act on their own inner feelings, they are actually insuring children’s safety in the long run. Allowing them to say no to grandma’s hug or dad’s kiss gives them practice in a safe situation that they can then transfer to potentially unsafe situations.

You can help relatives and friends understand that they are actually helping to keep children safe by respecting their “NO.” Treating a child with respect builds trust and encourages a child’s natural affections.

Communicating with Your Child

Set the groundwork for their coming to you for help by making yourself available for regular talks with them.

- Talk with them about their daily activities. Show your interest and keep the conversation going by using such phrases as: “Tell me about it” or “Then what happened.”
- Be an “askable” parent. Children learn to avoid sensitive topics because they sense a parent’s discomfort. They don’t want to make us angry. Or perhaps they want to protect us. Children feel safe knowing they can depend on you to talk about and listen to whatever is on their minds.
- Let them know you understand by rephrasing their comments. Include a question or statement that acknowledges how they feel.

- Watch and believe your child's body language. He may say nothing is wrong, but his bottom lip is quivering. It's OK to say: "You look sad to me, do you want to tell me about it?" Sometimes asking a reluctant child what is making it hard to talk opens the way for a conversation.

You can even say something like:

When I was young, I worried that my parents would yell at me and blame me if something was wrong. Are you feeling like that?

Give nonverbal support and encouragement too. A wink, smile, pat on the back, squeeze of a hand all help a child know you are there for them.

Discuss Safety Rules

Many parents find it effective to make a list of house safety rules for children at home alone. These rules can be reviewed periodically together to make sure your children remember them.

- **Phone Safety**

Children should never reveal that they are alone. They should say "My Mom/Dad can't come to the phone right now." They should be taught to hang up the phone if they receive an obscene phone call or if someone refuses to give his or her name.

- **Emergencies**

Teach your child to dial 911 to get help quickly. Post a list with the family name and full address next to the phone. Practice with them on a play phone.

- **Answering the Door**

Young children can be taught to ask "Who is it?" and not to open the door unless an adult is present.

- **On-line Safety**

Teach your children that they should never give out their password, or any other personal information, to anyone. Stress that they should never say they'll meet someone without asking a parent.

- **Code Word**

Some families use a secret, prearranged code word when there is a change of plans regarding who is to pick up a child from school or anywhere else.

Putting It All Together: The "What If" Game

The "What If" Game is as old as time, but it's still one of the very best ways to teach prevention skills and concepts at home.

It's simple to play, and yet it's challenging. It teaches serious lessons, but it's a fun way to learn.

You can play it riding in the car on a long trip. You can play it waiting for a bus. You can play it at home when a child says, "I'm bored, there's nothing to do."

It's even more fun, if you act it out when you play it. Then it's like a dress rehearsal of prevention skills.

Thinking

CAP teaches prevention in a way that gets kids thinking and keeps them thinking. This is what you want to do with prevention education at home, too.

There are many different kinds of abusive or dangerous situations that children might face. There is simply no way we can list them all and teach our children the correct response for each one.

So when we are teaching prevention, we want children to learn their basic safety rules by heart. But it's even more important for them to learn how to think for themselves.

The "What If" Game is one of the best ways we know to get kids thinking. It helps to develop problem-solving skills that can be used in all kinds of situations.

How Do You Play?

Once you and your child have agreed to play, you set a scene. For our purposes, it can be a situation in which someone is trying to hurt or abuse the child, or in which there is the possibility for the child being hurt or abused.

Once you describe the situation, you get your child involved by asking, "What would you say? What would you do?"

Then the child responds to the "What If" situation.

You can stop there and talk about the response, or you can continue the game for a while. Here are some ways to make it more interesting.

Add a Challenge

If your child gives a good first response, you can respond in turn with another challenge for him/her. For example:

What if I'm a stranger and I drive up to you on the street and I say,

You: *Hey, kid, come get in the car with me. Let's go for a ride.*

Child: *NO! I don't take rides from strangers.* (Child keeps at least two arm-lengths away from the stranger and the car.)

You: *But I have three cute puppies in the back seat, and I want you to see them.*

Child: (responding to the new challenge) *NO!*
(Child does his/her Yell and runs to a safe place.)

Change Places

Now ask your child to think of a “What If,” and you play the child. Sometimes do the right thing and sometimes do the wrong thing. Let your child correct you.

This role reversal helps kids see how difficult it is to take advantage of a child who knows what to do.

It can also bring up situations that are of concern to your child—things you may never have considered. In addition you may get an insight into a challenge they are actually facing in their life.

Doing Nothing in the Moment, But Telling Later

In the majority of situations, it's best to say NO to the abuser right away. But there are some situations where your child might say, “I would just keep quiet. I wouldn't say anything if my Aunt hit me, because I'd be too scared of her. But I would tell you about it the minute I got home.”

There are situations where keeping quiet now, but telling later, is a good prevention strategy. Whenever a child feels they will be hurt worse if they speak up, it's okay for them to wait and tell later.

This is one more reason why it's so important that we focus on helping children think through situations themselves, instead of just telling them what to do. They will more than likely be on their own if or when they face danger or abuse. They will have to make their own decisions in the moment.

Example 1: What If a Bully...

Situation: *You want to play kick ball with a bunch of other kids who always play at recess. You go over to join them, but an older girl tells you, “You can't play with us, because you're not good enough and you look funny.” What would you say? What would you do?* (Parent plays the role of the Older Girl.)

Child: *I have a right to play.*

Older Girl: *No you don't. Not until I say you do.*

Child: *You're not in charge of this game.*

Older Girl: *I am now.*

Child: *NO! I'm going to tell my teacher. She'll let me play.*

Older Girl: *Okay, you can play, but you have to pay me a dollar to play.*

Child: *NO!*

Child: (talking to three kids she knows) *I want to play ball with you, but Theresa says I can't unless I pay her a dollar. Will you help me say NO to her, so I can play with you?*

Example 2: What If a Stranger...

Situation: *You're standing on the corner in the morning waiting for the bus to come. A stranger pulls up in a car and says, “I'm the new principal at your school. I want you to get in the car with me right now and ride to school with me so you won't be late.” What do you say? What do you do?* (Parent plays the role of the Principal.)

Child: *NO! I don't know you.* (Moves away and stays a safe distance from the car.)

Principal: *I'm your new principal, you have to do what I tell you.*

Child: *NO! I don't know you.* (Not getting drawn into the conversation.)

Principal: *Get in this car or you're going to be in big trouble, kid.*

Child: *NO!* (Does his/her Yell, and runs to the nearest safe place where someone can help him/her—maybe back home, maybe a store near the corner.)

Example 3: What If Someone You Know...

Situation: *I'm a new babysitter. I've been at your house once before. We played games all evening while your mom and dad were out. I let you stay up way past your bedtime and let you eat three dishes of ice cream. Now I'm back to look after you for another evening, and your parents have just left. I say, "Tonight we're going to play a special touching game. First, we take off all our clothes. Then we take turns touching each other."* (Parent plays the Babysitter.)

Babysitter: *Okay, let's start. You take off your clothes first.*

Child: *NO! I'm not allowed to play a game like that.*

Babysitter: *But it's fun, and we won't tell your parents we did it. It'll be our secret, just between you and me, okay?*

Child: *NO! I'm not playing that game with you.*

Babysitter: *But you're hurting my feelings. I really, really want you to play. Be nice.*

Child: *NO! I'm not playing that game with you. NO!*

Now what? What should your child do after saying NO?

Here's one more reason why it's good to play "What If." Perhaps as a family you could make a back up plan, just in case something goes wrong with a babysitter.

Maybe you have a neighbor next door who would be glad to be back up. You let her know when you are going out, and your child knows he can run over there if he needs help.

You might be surprised at how many new ideas you'll come up with when you play "What If."



Part 2: Response and Resources

How Do I Know If My Child Is Being Abused?

With certain kinds of abuse there are physical signs that you can see that will immediately start you asking questions about abuse.

For example, if your child often has unexplained bruises or injuries after you leave him with a certain babysitter, you'll start asking, "What happened? Is anyone hitting you? Is anyone hurting you? Please tell me. You won't be in trouble. I want to help you be a Safe, Strong, and Free person."

Other kinds of abuse might be harder to recognize at first, because you only have behavioral signs instead of physical signs, and behavior can be tricky.

The same behavior can have two different causes. Two children can be having nightmares, one because of abuse, and the other because she thinks her parents want to get a divorce.

Two different behaviors can have the same cause. Two average students are being abused. One starts getting D's and F's because she's so distressed. The other suddenly starts getting all A's, working very hard in an attempt to pretend everything is okay, when it's not at all.

So what should a parent do? We can look for signs of stress and find out what's behind them.

Abuse causes kids stress, usually a great deal of stress. But other things can cause stress, too. So when you see stress, you don't want to make any assumptions.

Instead, you want to start open communication with your child. It's time to ask direct questions in a nurturing, comforting way.

You might ask general questions about stress, *"Are you having a hard week? Is anything making you unhappy? Are you worried about something? How can I help?"*

You can also ask specific questions about abuse. They may be harder to ask, but they can make a big difference in helping a child who is being abused to start talking with you. For example:

"Is anyone hitting you? Is anyone touching you in a way that scares you or confuses you or feels bad? Is anyone hurting you? Is anyone telling you to keep

something a secret? Is there something you wish you could tell me, but are afraid to? What can I do to help you right now?"

There are many behavioral signs which *definitely* indicate stress, which *might* indicate abuse, and which, in either case, need to be looked into immediately:

- Very aggressive behavior
- Sudden regressive behavior (i.e., bedwetting, soiling, thumbsucking, baby talk)
- Sudden extreme mood swings
- Age-inappropriate expression of sexualized behavior or vocabulary with adults or peers
- Abrupt appetite changes
- Sleep problems: recurrent nightmares, fear of sleeping alone
- Withdrawn behavior
- Depressed behavior
- Isolation, losing friends
- Sudden change in school performance, increased absenteeism
- Chronic unexplained stomach illnesses, vomiting
- Eating disorders
- Urinary tract infections, genital or anal itching or bleeding, venereal disease
- Strong dislike of a particular person or place
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Self-mutilating or suicidal behavior or thoughts
- Running away, delinquency

If your child exhibits any of these signs, you'll want to know why, and you'll want to know what you can do to help. Communication is the key. The more children feel we understand, and want to understand, what they're going through day in and day out, the more willing they'll be to confide in us in a crisis.

What Do I Do If My Child Is Being Abused?

1. Believe Your Child.

The *first* thing to do is focus on your child. You will probably be quite upset yourself, and that's understandable. Don't forget to take care of yourself during this crisis. Find an adult you can talk to about your feelings.

But there are some key things your child needs to hear from you immediately:

I believe you.

Children are afraid you won't believe them, especially if the abuser says the child is lying. And especially if the abuser is someone you like or love.

I'm glad you told me.

Children are often afraid that if they tell, they'll make things worse. They're afraid they'll upset you so much by telling, that you'll be mad at them.

It's not your fault.

Abusers usually try to make the children feel guilty. They might say, "You like this as much as I do." Or, "This is all your fault, because you're bad."

You're not alone.

Children often feel they'll be abandoned once they tell about abuse.

I'm going to help you.

Abused children often feel hopeless, as if there's something permanently wrong with them now.

I love you.

Abused children often feel unlovable.

An abused child may need to hear you say the above statements many times, before letting them really sink in, and believing that you really mean them.

You might also want to turn these statements into questions, to get your child talking about his or her feelings:

- *Were you afraid I might not believe you?*
- *Were you worried that I might be mad at you for telling?*

- *Were you feeling like it was your fault that the abuse happened?*
- *Were you feeling like nothing could be done to help you?*
- *Were you scared that I wouldn't love you?*

2. Find Out the Whole Story.

Some people ask, “How do I know if my child is lying about abuse? What if she’s just making it up?”

The question of lying is a very important one.

The problem is that the way children most commonly “lie” about abuse is by not telling the whole story. They omit pieces of the story. Sometimes important pieces. You might ask, “Who did this to you?” They might answer, “I don’t know.” But they do know who did it.

They don’t tell you, they “lie,” because they want to protect someone whom they’ve always liked, but who is now abusing them. Or because the abuser is someone you like or love and the child knows this and wants to spare your feelings.

But in cases like this, we’d have to say the children are not really lying. They are just very scared. And it’s our job to help them feel safe enough to tell the whole story.

What about a situation where a child says she was molested, but in fact she wasn’t molested? There are relatively few cases of children telling this kind of lie about abuse. However, it does happen, and when it does, it’s very serious.

But again, what’s the rest of the story?

For example, in bitter custody battles, sometimes one parent forces a child to lie about the other parent. But if an adult forces a child to tell a terrible lie about someone he or she loves, isn’t that abuse? And doesn’t the child need serious help?

What if a child lies without being forced? This is an extremely rare situation, but say a teenager lies about abuse to retaliate against an adult they’re mad at. That teenager still needs help, because that’s such a serious lie to tell. Something serious is going wrong in that teen’s life that needs immediate attention.

So in each and every case, when a child tells us he or she has been abused, we need to keep communication open and keep it going until we

know the whole story. That’s when we’ll know how to make an action plan that’s going to be the right one.

Remember, you don’t have to do it all by yourself. You can call the Department of Social Services (DSS) which has the legal power to investigate abuse. Or you can call your local police department if the abuser is a stranger.

There are skilled physicians and other staff at Children’s Hospital in Boston who can give your child a complete medical exam with regard to abuse.

You don’t want your child to be alone and suffering. And we don’t want you to be alone either. There are people who want to help and know how to help. You have the right to get help right away if your child tells you about abuse.

3. Take Action Based on the Whole Story

Healing starts from the very first minute when your child tells the secret, and you say, “I believe you and I’m glad you told me.”

But once the whole story is known, you, along with a trusted professional such as your child’s pediatrician or school social worker, can make a plan for healing to make sure your child makes the best and quickest progress possible.

Where Do I Get Help?

Making a Report

It can be very hard to pick up your phone and ask for help. You might feel upset or embarrassed. But remember that the people at the other end of the line are very used to talking with parents who are worried or upset about their children.

If you believe your child has been abused by someone the child knows, you can call the Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS). They have the power to investigate and take legal action to protect your child.

Dept. of Social Services: 1-800-769-4615

You can call this number anonymously if you want to, and decide after talking with the staff person whether or not you want to give your name and number.

You can also call this number anonymously if you know of a child who is being abused and you want to make a report without giving your name.

If your child has been abused, molested, or assaulted by a stranger, you can call your local Police Department.

Talking with a Counselor or Therapist

You can call the following numbers to ask for advice or help. You can talk with counselors or therapists who have lots of experience working with abused children and their families, as well as adults who were abused as children.

Parental Stress Service Telephone Counseling: 1-800-632-8188

Child At Risk Hotline: 1-800-792-5200

What If I'm the Abuser?

Parental Stress

Parenting, under the most ideal conditions, is a difficult job. Unlike other jobs, there is no special training program to prepare new parents and build their skills.

There are many reasons why raising children is stressful. Here are several reasons that have been agreed upon by mental health professionals and educators:

- **Emotional Involvement:** Often, when we are emotionally involved, we may have unrealistic expectations of what children can achieve. Sometimes a child may remind us of ourselves as children. This may result in more pressure on that child to succeed in ways that we want them to—to live out our own dreams. This can result in stress for both parent and child. When we expect something from a child that he or she is unable to do, we get frustrated. Without supports and taking time out, that frustration can lead to abuse.
- **Reminder of Your Past:** The child reminds you of someone you don't like or of an uncomfortable period in your past.
- **Financial Stress:** We all want to provide for our children. Yet, when being unemployed or being a single or teen parent makes it difficult for us to provide necessities, pressures build.

- **Juggling a Job, Relationship, and Parenting:** This often demands every ounce of energy we have, and can be extremely stressful.
- **Isolation:** Parents are often isolated from each other and can't provide the supportive function that extended families used to serve. Parenting alone can be stressful.
- **Lack of Positive Parenting:** Parents who were deprived of nurturing, limit-setting parents, or who were abused or shamed as children, may continue this cycle of abuse. Sometimes stress builds up inside like a pressure cooker. One day, when the pressure is too much, they may lose control and cross the line from discipline to abuse. When this happens, the cycle of child abuse is complete—passed down from one generation to the next.

What Can Parents Do to Stop this Cycle?

Be aware of the times when your “pressure cooker” lid is about to blow. Are there particular times of the day (like dinnertime) or particular situations in which you find it hard to “keep your cool?” When you feel yourself about to blow up, there are several things you can do:

- Go into another room, or put your child in another room, to give yourself a chance to cool off. Go for a walk, if possible.
- Call a friend and “vent” your feelings.
- Call your local Parental Stress Hotline, or Parents Anonymous, an organization that offers groups for parents who feel they might cause harm to their child.

Whenever possible, use other forms of discipline than hitting or spanking. Make an agreement with yourself never to use physical discipline when you are angry.

Form your own “parent exchanges” so that you can be available for each other in times of need. Members support each other by providing help as needed, such as meals or babysitting. Join a parenting class or support group in your area. Often, just talking with other parents about common problems can relieve parental guilt and stress.

