



Care House News

Winter 2013

Care House...Providing Hope and Healing to Child Victims of Sexual and Physical Abuse

Don't Wait: Everyday Actions to Keep Kids Safe

The most effective prevention happens before a child is harmed. Kids are immediately safer when parents and caregivers take the time to learn about sexual abuse and its warning signs.

Parents and caregivers who make a commitment to speak up as soon as they have a concern, instead of waiting for certain evidence of harm, play an even more crucial role in a child's safety. Here are some things that you and your family can do to keep kids safe.

Set and respect clear guidelines

Family boundaries

Set and respect family boundaries. All members of the family have rights to privacy in dressing, bathing, sleeping and other personal activities. If anyone does not respect these rights, an adult should clearly tell them the family rules.

How to say no

Demonstrate boundaries by showing children in your own life how to say "no." Teach your children that their "no" will be respected, whether it's in playing or tickling or hugging or kissing. For instance, if your child does not want to give Grandma a kiss, let the child shake hands instead. And make sure, too, that Grandma understands why this is important for the safety of the child.

Proper names of body parts

Use the proper names of body parts. Just as you teach your children that a nose is a nose, they need to know what to call their genitals. This knowledge gives children correct language for understanding their bodies, for asking questions that need to be asked, for telling about any behavior that could lead to sexual abuse.

Okay touch vs. inappropriate touch

Be clear with adults and children about the difference between okay touch and inappropriate touch. For younger children, teach more concrete rules such as "talk with me if anyone - family, friend, or anyone else - touches your private parts." Also teach kids that it is unacceptable to use manipulation or control to touch someone else's body.

Secret vs. surprise

Explain the difference between a secret and a surprise. Both the adults and children in your life need to know how secrets may make kids unsafe. Surprises are joyful and generate excitement in anticipation of being revealed after a short period of time. Secrets exclude others, often because the information will create upset or anger. When keeping secrets with just one person becomes routine, children are more vulnerable to abuse.

Watch out for signs

Inappropriate behavior

Watch for any inappropriate behaviors in other adults or older youth because children, especially young ones, are not as able to recognize these behaviors or to protect themselves.

Technology

Stay on top of your children's use of technology-- Internet, email, instant messaging, webcam use, peer-to-peer social networking sites, and cell phones, including photo exchanges. The illusion of anonymity on these electronic mediums often leads to a breakdown of social rules and expectations, ones that would be assumed if the interactions were face-to-face. Whenever possible, make sure the child's interactions are visible and public. Kids, and even adults, can easily stumble into inappropriate or even dangerous situations and exchanges.





Craft Time: Comfort Box



After experiencing trauma or loss, it is often difficult to remember all the things that make us feel safe and comfortable. During these times, it is important to refocus on what gets overlooked. One way to help you do this is by creating a comfort box filled with items or pictures that will make you feel better inside. Both you and your child can work on comfort boxes together, as half the benefit in making the box is the enjoyment received while filling it up.

First, look for a suitable container or box—a shoe box that could be decorated will do. In the comfort box can go pictures of close friends and family (you decide who gets in), pictures or mementos from special places, miscellaneous items related to special moments, lists of your favorite things, things that make you laugh (i.e. write down some really good jokes), and anything else that brings you comfort.

After you have given proper care and attention to its contents, the result should reward you with a good feeling each time you open it. Designed by you and your child, and for your eyes only, this box is truly a treasure and a positive reflection on your life. Your comfort boxes can be something you and your child turn to when things are not looking as clear as they could be.

Adapted from Hub Pages *Start a Happiness Box? Why Not?*, 2011.



Becoming a Self-Advocate in Therapy

When therapy or counseling works best, it can be a marvelous process of self-discovery, enrichment, trust, and healing. The bond we form with a therapist or counselor can become the healthiest of our lives and can serve as the pattern for transforming all our other relationships into much better, more fulfilling ones.

Any relationship, especially one that digs deeply and explores tough subject matter like core beliefs, life failures, love, and pain, can feel very rocky at times. This is normal and must be expected. With time and hard work, most of us can come out the other side to a much better emotional and rational place.

Understand, however, that not every person and therapist or counselor will necessarily be well-matched. Also, not every therapist or counselor may have the skills needed to assist you with your particular issues. If this appears to be the case for you, it may be time to look elsewhere (Chase, 2006).

Here are several steps you can take to become an effective self-advocate:

- ◆ Educate yourself.
- ◆ Believe in yourself.
- ◆ Determine what it is you want and need and share this information with your health care provider and others involved in your mental health treatment.
- ◆ Think about what makes you feel good about yourself and what life goals you have.
- ◆ Develop power statements.
- ◆ Share any concerns, questions or preferences you have with your health care provider.
- ◆ Remember to stay calm, cool and collected when speaking up for yourself.
- ◆ If you find that you are having trouble speaking up for yourself, try writing down beforehand what you want to share or ask. (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2013)

Need Help?

If you are in need of counseling services, support or information please call us at (586) 463-0123. We are here to help.



Cooperative Co-Parenting

The goal of co-parenting (at a minimum) is to contain the anger and conflict expressed between homes in order to cooperate and compromise on issues of the children's welfare. The bottom line: cooperative co-parenting allows children to be children and adults to be their parents. Here are some guidelines to follow.

1. Work hard to respect the other parent and his or her household. Agree that each parent has a right to privacy and do not intrude in his or her life. Make space for different parenting styles and rules as there are many healthy ways to raise children. Do not demean the other's living circumstances, activities, dates, or decisions and don't try to control your ex's parenting. If you have concerns, speak directly to the other parent, but realize they may not share your concern.

2. Schedule a monthly (perhaps more often) "business" meeting to discuss co-parenting matters. You can address schedules, academic reports, behavior training, and spiritual development. Do not discuss your personal life (or your ex's); that part of your previous relationship is no longer appropriate. If the conversation turns away from the children toward old personal battles, simply redirect the topic back to parenting matters or politely end the meeting. If you cannot talk with your ex face-to-face due to excessive conflict or hurt, use email or speak to their answering machine. Do what you can to make your meetings productive for the children.

3. Never ask your children to be spies or tattletales on the other home. This places them in a loyalty bind that brings great emotional distress. In fact, be happy when they enjoy the people in their new home ("I'm glad you enjoy fishing with your step-dad."). If children offer information about life in the other home, listen and stay neutral in your judgment.



4. When children have confusing or angry feelings toward your ex, don't capitalize on their hurt and berate the other parent. Listen and help them to explore their feelings without trying to sway their opinions with your own. If you can't make positive statements about the other parent, strive for neutral ones.

5. Children should have everything they need in each home. Don't make them bring basic necessities back and forth. Special items, like clothes, an iPod, or a comforting teddy bear for younger children, can move back and forth as needed.

6. Try to release your hostility toward the other parent so that the children can't take advantage of your hard feelings. Children can manipulate parents and stepparents much more easily when adults harbor angry feelings toward one another.

7. Do not disappoint your children with broken promises or by being unreliable. Do what you say, keep your visitation schedule as agreed, and stay active in their life.

8. Make your custody structure work for your children even if you don't like the details of the arrangement. Update the other when changes need to be made to the visitation schedule. Also, inform the other parent of any change in job, living arrangements, etc. which may require an adjustment by the children.

9. Regarding children who visit for short periods of time or spend time in another home: Sometimes it is tempting to only do "special activities" when all of the children are with you. That may leave some children feeling that they aren't as special as others. Do special things with differing combinations of children (it's alright if someone feels disappointed he or she wasn't able to go). Let the lives of those living with you remain unaltered, as much as possible, when other children come for visitation. Keep toys and possessions in a private spot where they are not to be touched or borrowed unless the owner gives permission (even while they are in the other home).

10. If you and your ex cannot resolve a problem or change in custody or visitation, agree to problem solving through mediation rather than litigation. Legal battles tend to escalate emotional and spiritual battles between homes. Avoid them if at all possible.

Adapted from Ron L. Deal Copyright, 2009. www.SmartStepfamilies.com



ICE SCULPTURES

amazing art,
science and
messy play for
kids



Start off your ice art by going on a scavenger hunt to see what interesting containers you can find around the house. A mix of shapes and sizes will give you lots of variety in your sculpture building blocks. Some ideas include: used tin cans, pots, scoops, plastic packaging and trays, shells and cups.

Then mix food coloring with water and use that to fill the containers. (Be generous with the food coloring to make stronger colors.) Great teamwork and hand-eye co-ordination are involved in pouring out the jugs of water. Discuss how water gets bigger when it freezes, so make sure to leave space at the top of each container. You can test out some color theory too, mixing red and yellow coloring to make orange, and red and blue to make purple. Try filling some of the containers part way and then topping them up once the first lot of water freezes to make layered colors in your ice blocks.

Then into the freezer they go! The water could take anywhere from a couple of hours to overnight to freeze, depending on how big the containers are, so plan ahead or you might end up with impatient kids! If your temperatures are cold enough you could place your containers outside overnight and let nature work its magic.

Now you are ready to make your ice art! (Running the containers under the tap for a few seconds helps to release the ice from their pots.) Place baking trays with raised edges onto towels, so you can catch any melting water, and then set about playing and creating!



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