Helping Organizations Prevent, Recognize & Report Child Sexual Abuse

Overview

Due to recent allegations of child sexual abuse in several high-profile cases across the nation, there is a need for heightened public awareness about the importance of protecting youth from sexual abuse by both strangers and familiar adults.

While children are usually taught the dangers of strangers, sadly some 90% of child sexual abuse is committed by a person whom the child and his or her family know. This child abuse threat needs more attention from adults, teachers, coaches, mentors and just trusted adult friends. Organizations that serve youth also have a strong responsibility to better protect children from becoming victims of child sexual abuse.

Often, children or youth who have endured sexual abuse feel shame and are too traumatized to report their abuser or to even tell a trusted adult. They need help for their emotional or physical injuries. An integral part of preventing, responding to and eliminating this form of child abuse is increasing the awareness of the key signs of this horrible activity.

All organizations that provide activities for youth have one characteristic in common: they provide an opportunity for access to children. For this reason, these clubs, centers, teams, troops, etc., have a clear responsibility to implement safeguards to prevent child predators from gaining access, and to respond to reported incidents, allegations and evidence of such abuse … IMMEDIATELY.

Take the Pledge!

Join the “Chain of Change” and pledge to end the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. Show your support by taking the pledge online: Don’tMissTheSigns.org

I Pledge To:

- Speak out against child sexual abuse and exploitation;
- Speak up for the rights of children;
- Speak with other people in my community about protecting children;
- Listen to children, and believe them, if they talk to me about abuse;
- Pay attention to children’s cries for support and help;
- Encourage children to be assertive and strong;
- Work to change any culture that encourages or makes possible the sexual abuse and exploitation of children;
- Support people and institutions working to end the sexual abuse and exploitation of children;
- Do everything in my power and authority to end the sexual abuse and exploitation of children;

I pledge my eyes, my voice, to protect OUR Children!

How to report abuse:

- Telephone 1.800.962.2873
- Fax 1.800.914.0004
- TDD 1.800.453.5145
- Web FloridaAbuseHotline.com

www.DontMissTheSigns.org
Understanding Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse affects an estimated 42 million people in the U.S., and the number is growing every day. An estimated 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 5 boys will experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 18, and 90% of these cases will be committed by a person the child knows, values, loves and trusts. Child sexual abuse occurs at every socioeconomic level, across income and cultural lines, within all religions and at all levels of education.

Sexual abuse can involve physical contact (touching genital areas under or outside of clothing, oral sex, etc.) or non-contact methods (providing the child alcohol or drugs, looking at inappropriate material, grooming a child). Abusers use normal, trusted roles to exploit the vulnerability of children.

The Grooving Process

Many times, the first stage of child sexual abuse is a series of subtle and gradually escalating behaviors and statements, which is referred to as “grooving.” The grooving process allows the abuser to build trust with one or more children before expressing sexual interest or desire for sexual contact. The child victim may experience a degree of emotional, social or economic deprivation or dysfunction.

Abusers also will “groove” key adults in a child’s life so that the abuser’s relationship with the child is accepted and welcomed.

Warning Signs of Child Sexual Abuse

Children who are being sexually abused exhibit characteristics that can act as warning signs. Knowing what to look for and acting upon observations of these warning signs can potentially save children who are being abused or in danger of abuse. Some of the warning signs of sexual abuse are:

- Frequent bruises or broken bones
- Unexplained sexual behavior
- Sudden emotional withdrawal
- Frequent aggressive behavior
- Night terrors
- Frequent school absences
- Inadequate personal hygiene
- Frequent contact with a particular person
- Prying open a door to a child’s room
- Sleepwalking
- Stay-at-home periods
- Frequent changes in eating habits
- Frequent changes in clothing
- Frequent use of inappropriate language
- Frequent isolation
- Frequent changes in behavior
- Frequent attention by an adult

Additional signs of sexual abuse may include:

- Frequent contact with a particular person
- Frequent changes in eating habits
- Frequent changes in clothing
- Frequent use of inappropriate language
- Frequent isolation
- Frequent changes in behavior
- Frequent attention by an adult

TRIETS OF AN ABUSER

While each situation and child of sexual abuse will be unique, some similarities and tendencies can serve as “red flags” for further investigation of a suspected predator.

Abusers target children who:

- Are lonely
- Are people pleasers
- Have mentally ill parents
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- Have mentally ill parents
- Are people pleasers
- Are people pleasers

Abusers use normal, trusted roles to exploit the vulnerability of children.

Behaviors of a child abuser:

- Sees overly interested in or involved in one particular child
- Has frequent or long time alone with a child
- Provides special gifts or privileges to a child
- Works harder to develop a relationship than the child or caregivers
- Seeks out free, on-demand childcare
- Tactles of an abuser:
- Paying attention to a child who appears emotionally needy
- Accidentally or purposefully exposing himself or herself
- Easily prying open a door to a child’s room
- Frequently contacting the child
- Providing the child alcohol or drugs
- Engaging in contact such as wrestling, tickling, pinning the bottom, etc.
- Showing adult magazines or films, letting the child know

The abuse continues the behavior as a legitimate job/duty to help a child. By implementing and following preventive protocols and codes of conduct all organizations, child sexual abuse is less likely to occur, and your organization can be a place where children thrive.

Reporting Abuse

Under Florida law, anyone who suspects a child may be abused or neglected has a responsibility to report it. It is the responsibility of your organization to investigate cases of suspected abuse. If it is your responsibility to investigate these suspicions to the authorities that have the power and authority to investigate the allegation. The most important thing that you can do is:

- If a child discloses abuse is to believe what the child is saying, validate the child’s feelings and report the disclosure to the state’s abuse hotline.

Reporting is simple and confident. Even if you do not have all of the information about the child or a case, you can still report the abuse. Your information could be critical to saving a child’s life.

You can report in any of the following four ways:

- Telephone: 1-800-962-2873
- Fax: 1-855-844-1506
- TDD: 1-855-453-5145
- Online: FloridaAbuseHotline.com