

2022 Child Abuse Prevention Guide

A guide for prevention of child sexual abuse and child sex trafficking written for parents, youth serving organizations, and community members.



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Protect Children.
Heal Families.
Prevent Abuse.



The Children's Assessment Center (The CAC) would like to dedicate this guide to all children that have experienced abuse. There are thousands of children who will stay silent about their trauma, and we hope to help them on their journey to heal from abuse.

We are here to help, and you are not alone.

Child sexual abuse is a significant but preventable public health problem. [1]

Child sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that the child does not fully comprehend, does not consent to or is unable to give informed consent to, or is not developmentally prepared for and cannot give consent to. [1]

There is nothing more valuable than our children. It is our responsibility as adults to make sure that they are protected from abuse. Although child abuse is a problem that remains hidden behind closed doors, it is all too common. **1 in 10 children will be sexually abused before their 18th birthday.** [2] Besides the toll that this takes on children themselves, this widespread problem also has substantial financial consequences on our nation. In 2015, the total lifetime economic burden of child sexual abuse in the United States was estimated to be at least \$9.3 billion. [3]

In 2020 alone, almost 62,000 children were served by children's advocacy centers in Texas. [4] 66% of those were child sexual abuse cases. [4] Our children's advocacy center here in Houston, The Children's Assessment Center, provided services to over 4,600 children in 2021. Our hope is that we can prevent this abuse from happening to children instead of providing services after the abuse has already occurred. We believe that the best way to prevent abuse is to provide education to both children and adults. It is important to be aware of situations where abuse may occur and know how to have conversations with children about the dangers that exist in our world today.

Adults are inflicting this horrible trauma on children. Since children cannot consent to sex with adults, all sexual interactions between adults and children are crimes. Most children are victimized by someone they know and trust. 98% of children actually know their perpetrator before their abuse occurred. [2] No child should ever be sexually abused. Children are born innocent, and it takes just this one act to take away that innocence forever. This guide is our invitation to you to learn about prevention and join us in the fight to end child sexual abuse.

You can make a difference in the lives of children. Every child matters.

The Importance of Prevention

Children are a vulnerable section of our community that we must work together to protect. Preventing child abuse can save children from experiences that can never be undone once they have occurred. In addition, child abuse prevention can lead to less negative outcomes for children.

Through prevention of child sexual abuse, we can prevent the increased risk of re-traumatization that may occur during adulthood:

Females exposed to child sexual abuse are at 2-13 times increased risk of sexual victimization in adulthood.

Individuals who experienced child sexual abuse are at twice the risk for non-sexual intimate partner violence. [1]

Factors to Prevent Risk

According to the American Psychological Association, the following factors may help decrease the risk of abuse or neglect:

- Children's optimism, high self-esteem, intelligence, creativity, humor and independence, which enhance their coping skills in the face of adversity;
- The acceptance of peers and positive influences such as teachers, mentors and role models;
- The family's access to social supports, neighborhood stability and access to safe schools and adequate health care;
- The child's experience of love, acceptance, positive guidance and protection from a caring adult, which encourages trust that their parents or caregivers will provide what they need to thrive;
- Parent's or caregiver's respectful communication and listening, consistent rules and expectations, and safe opportunities that promote independence;
- Parents or caregivers who can cope with the stresses of everyday life and have the inner strength to bounce back when things are not going well;
- Parents or caregivers with a social network of emotionally supportive friends, family and neighbors; or
- Families who can meet their own basic needs for food, clothing, housing and transportation and know how to access essential services such as childcare, health care and mental health services. [5]

Parents and Caregivers

Parents and caregivers are often the most trusted adults that children have in their lives. Please communicate to your children that no matter what happens to them, no matter what mistakes they may make, you are a safe space for them and love them unconditionally.

Preventing Child Sexual Abuse [6]

What Parents & Caregivers Can Do

Preventing Child Sexual Abuse

What Parents & Caregivers Can Do

Below are several steps you as a parent or caregiver can take to reduce the likelihood of abuse. Taking steps to prevent child sexual abuse is an important part of protecting children and keeping them safe.

- 1 Know the facts about child sexual abuse.** Sexual abuse is more common than people think. In fact, approximately 1 in 10 children will be sexually abused by the time they turn 18. Sexual abuse can happen to both boys and girls of all ages, races, ethnicities, and family backgrounds. Children are often too scared, confused, or embarrassed to report sexual abuse right away, so it often continues without parents or caregivers knowing about it.
- 2 Know the facts about perpetrators.** Many parents or caregivers already warn their children to be careful around strangers; however, sexual abuse is usually committed by someone that the child knows and trusts. Perpetrators are often family members or close friends of the child's family. Perpetrators can also be older children or youth.
- 3 Talk to your child about their body, about boundaries, and about sexual abuse.** The other side of this resource contains information and tips for talking to your child about these important topics.
- 4 Support your child's participation in school-based safety and prevention programs.** Many schools offer safety and prevention programs to children. You can increase the effectiveness of these programs by getting involved and talking to your child about what they have learned.
- 5 Take steps to increase safety in your child's environment.** Understand that most sexual abuse occurs when a child is alone with an adult or older child. Consider minimizing situations in which your child is one-on-one with an adult (other than a parent or caregiver) or older child. Choose group activities or activities in public places when possible. Conduct background checks, interviews, and reference checks when choosing a childcare provider. Drop in unannounced when other people are caring for your child.
- 6 Teach your child about internet safety.** Teach your child about online predators who target children. Instruct them not to give out personal information or exchange photos over the internet. Teach your child that they should never take photos of their private parts. Monitor your child's internet use and apply parental controls.
- 7 Be familiar with signs and symptoms of abuse.** Knowing the signs and symptoms of abuse may help you recognize abuse if it does occur. Visit cactx.org to learn more.
- 8 Know how to respond to disclosures of abuse.** If a child discloses that abuse has occurred, always believe the child. Listen to them in a calm and supportive way. Responding emotionally may cause the child to think that you are upset with them, that they did something wrong, or that they should not have told you. Remaining calm is important. Let the child know that they did the right thing by telling you. Always report the abuse.

"We must educate our children and make them aware of the dangers that await them on the internet. By making children aware of the risks that exist online and providing needed education to them, the internet will become a safer place for kids to surf and have fun."

Lt. John Colburn
*HPD Houston-Metro Internet
Crimes Against Children Task Force*

"If a child tells you not to promise to keep their disclosure a secret, assure them that they did the right thing by telling you and that you are proud of them for talking to you. Let them know that you will do everything you can to ensure they are safe. But, don't make any promises."

Karen Kennard
Director of CAC Training & Education

Talking to Your Child [6]

Talk to your child about their body. Teach your child the correct names for body parts, which parts of their bodies are considered "private," and that other people should not touch or see these parts of their bodies, except when it is appropriate (such as a parent helping with hygiene or at a doctor's appointment).

Talk to your child about boundaries. Teach your child that their body is their own and that they have a right to say "NO" when they don't want to be touched. Explain to your child that it is not okay for others to touch your child's private parts or for someone to ask your child to touch their private parts. Do not force your child to hug or kiss family members or friends.

Talk to your child about what to do. Explain that sometimes, people who abuse children might be people they trust, such as family members, friends, or even older children. Teach your child to say "NO," go to a safe place, and tell a trusted adult if something happens.

Talk to your child about keeping secrets. People who abuse children often ask them to keep secrets. Teach your child that they should NEVER keep secrets from their parents or caregivers.

Talk to your child about disclosing. Let your child know that they should always tell you if something happens that makes them uncomfortable. Instruct your child to tell you immediately if anyone tries to touch their private parts or engage in any inappropriate activity with them.

Begin having these conversations with children at a very young age. Even very young children can be abused, so starting these conversations early is important. Be sure to use terms that are appropriate for your child's level of development.

Encourage open communication with your child. Speak to your child in a way that is warm, open, and supportive. Important conversations like these should take place in the context of a supportive, trusting relationship.

10 Signs of Child Abuse

Changes in behavior. Abuse can lead to many changes in behavior. Abused children often appear scared, anxious, depressed, withdrawn, or more aggressive.

Returning to earlier behaviors. Abused children may display behaviors shown at earlier ages, such as thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, fear of the dark or fear of strangers. For some children, even loss of acquired language or memory problems may be an issue.

Fear of going home. Abused children may express apprehension or anxiety about leaving school or about going places with the person who is abusing them or exhibit an unusual fear of a familiar person or place.

Changes in eating. The stress, fear, and anxiety caused by abuse can lead to changes in a child's eating behaviors, which may result in weight gain or weight loss.

Changes in sleeping. Abused children may have frequent nightmares or have difficulty falling asleep, and as a result may appear tired or fatigued.

Changes in school performance and attendance. Abused children may have difficulty concentrating in school or have excessive absences, sometimes due to adults trying to hide the children's injuries from authorities.

Lack of personal care or hygiene. Abused and neglected children may appear uncared for. They may present as consistently dirty and have severe body odor, or they may lack sufficient clothing for the weather.

Risk-taking behaviors. Young people who are being abused may engage in high-risk activities such as using drugs or alcohol or carrying a weapon.

Inappropriate sexual behaviors. Children who have been sexually abused may exhibit overly sexualized behavior or use explicit sexual language and may exhibit symptoms of a genital infection.

Unexplained injuries. Children who have been physically abused may exhibit unexplained burns or bruises in the shape of objects. You may also hear unconvincing explanations of a child's injuries.

Click on the document below to access a printable pdf.

Preventing Child Sexual Abuse

What Parents & Caregivers Can Do

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- 4 Support your child's participation in school-based safety and prevention programs.** Many schools offer safety and prevention programs to children. You can increase the effectiveness of these programs by getting involved and talking to your child about what they have learned.
- 5 Take steps to increase safety in your child's environment.** Understand that most sexual abuse occurs when a child is alone with an adult or older child. Consider minimizing situations in which your child is one-on-one with an adult (other than a parent or caregiver) or older child. Choose group activities or activities in public places when possible. Conduct background checks, interviews, and reference checks when choosing a childcare provider. Drop in unannounced when other people are caring for your child.
- 6 Teach your child about internet safety.** Teach your child about online predators who target children. Instruct them not to give out personal information or exchange photos over the internet. Teach your child that they should never take photos of their private parts. Monitor your child's internet use and apply parental controls.
- 7 Be familiar with signs and symptoms of abuse.** Knowing the signs and symptoms of abuse may help you recognize abuse if it does occur. Visit cactx.org to learn more.
- 8 Know how to respond to disclosures of abuse.** If a child discloses that abuse has occurred, always believe the child. Listen to them in a calm and supportive way. Responding emotionally may cause the child to think that you are upset with them, that they did something wrong, or that they should not have told you. Remaining calm is important. Let the child know that they did the right thing by telling you. Always report the abuse.


Talking to Your Child

Talking to your child is an important step in preventing child sexual abuse. It not only provides them with needed information, but also promotes healthy development, increases self-esteem, and fosters a positive relationship between you and your child.

- 1 Talk to your child about their body.** Teach your child the correct names for body parts, which parts of their bodies are considered "private," and that other people should not touch or see these parts of their bodies, except when it is appropriate (such as a parent helping with hygiene or at a doctor's appointment).
- 2 Talk to your child about boundaries.** Teach your child that their body is their own and that they have a right to say "NO" when they don't want to be touched. Explain to your child that it is not okay for others to touch your child's private parts or for someone to ask your child to touch their private parts. Do not force your child to hug or kiss family members or friends.
- 3 Talk to your child about what to do.** Explain that sometimes, people who abuse children might be people they trust, such as family members, friends, or even older children. Teach your child to say "NO," go to a safe place, and tell a trusted adult if something happens.
- 4 Talk to your child about keeping secrets.** People who abuse children often ask them to keep secrets. Teach your child that they should NEVER keep secrets from their parents or caregivers.
- 5 Talk to your child about disclosing.** Let your child know that they should always tell you if something happens that makes them uncomfortable. Instruct your child to tell you immediately if anyone tries to touch their private parts or engage in any inappropriate activity with them.
- 6 Begin having these conversations with children at a very young age.** Even very young children can be abused, so starting these conversations early is important. Be sure to use terms that are appropriate for your child's level of development.
- 7 Encourage open communication with your child.** Speak to your child in a way that is warm, open, and supportive. Important conversations like these should take place in the context of a supportive, trusting relationship.

Remember, you are obligated by law to report suspected child abuse.

If you suspect a child is in immediate danger, call 911.
For all other cases in Texas, call the abuse and neglect hotline at 800.252.5400.

 This is a resource of Children's Advocacy Centers™ of Texas
www.cactx.org

Youth Serving Organizations and Schools

Youth serving organizations work with children in a variety of settings – educational, social, religious, mental health, recreational, etc.. Parents and other caregivers trust that their children are being cared for and are safe while they are in the care of these organizations. It is crucial that these organizations know how to prevent situations where abuse could occur and how to report concerns.

How can youth serving organizations work toward preventing child abuse?

Know Your Staff

Make sure that you are clear in the hiring process that the safety of children is a priority of the organization. Always conduct background checks and check references of employees before they are hired. If possible, continue to run background checks during the course of their employment.

Ongoing Trainings

Training in youth serving organizations should not be a one-time occurrence. Trainings should be ongoing to make sure that employees continue to learn how to best protect children. A pre-test and post-test method can be given to make sure that employees/staff have retained information from trainings.

Boundary Violations

All organizations working with children should have a plan for how to address boundary violations. Understanding what constitutes a boundary violation can be established through trainings within organizations, clear policies, and consistent supervision of staff and volunteers. [7]

Establish Clear Expectations

There should be clear expectations for what happens when boundary violations do occur. Policies should be in place about how to report concerns of abuse within the organization and what the consequences are for those incidents. For example, staff should be informed that they are never to be alone in a car with a child, even if they are returning a child home at a parent's request.

Lead by Example

Supervisors at youth serving organizations should strive to comply with organizational policies, practices, and codes of behavior related to child safety and well-being. [7] Behaviors that are exhibited by supervisors influence staff members and volunteers. [7]

Visibility

"Spaces that are designed to increase the observability of adult-children interactions can enhance child safety by reducing the likelihood of abusive behaviors." [7] Increased visibility can be implemented by use of video/camera monitoring. This can help ensure that a child is never alone with just one adult. Cameras at extracurricular activities hold staff accountable and allow adults access to see that children are safe.

Equipping Youth

Youth need to have the tools to recognize and report abuse to help themselves and their peers. "Guidance for youth, including teen leaders, should include information on appropriate and inappropriate physical and verbal interactions, the nature of consent and coercion, and the importance of maintaining behavioral boundaries with younger youth." [7]

Maintain Communication

Maintaining communication with parents and guardians of children who attend their organizations can also help prevent abuse. These adults may be able to relay concerns that their children have told them which have not yet been reported.

Awareness

All staff should understand the laws surrounding abuse, neglect, and trafficking. Below is a summary of this guidance through 2020, but does not include any updates from 2021 (such as Senate Bill 9, which addresses trafficking, dating violence, child abuse and family violence):

Guide for Texas School Administrators [8]

Guidance for Texas School Administrators on Addressing Child Abuse, Neglect, & Trafficking

District administrators play an important role in the prevention, recognition, and reporting of child abuse, neglect, and human trafficking. As an administrator, you are in a position to make a positive impact on the lives of the children in your district by implementing policies and practices that support faculty and staff in recognizing and reporting concerns of abuse and that support local authorities in investigating these reports.

Guidance for School Administrators:

Know the laws regarding reporting suspected child abuse and neglect. School administrators should understand the reporting requirements outlined in Texas Family Code Chapter 261 and the penalties associated with failing to report suspected abuse and neglect. The State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) may take action against an educator's certification for failing to report or hindering the reporting of abuse (Texas Administrative Code § 249.15).

Adopt required policies. School districts and open-enrollment charter schools must adopt policies addressing reports of child abuse, neglect, and trafficking and policies addressing sexual abuse, sex trafficking, and other maltreatment of children (Texas Education Code §§ 38.004, .0041). The reverse side of this resource contains more detailed information about these required policies.

Ensure that all school employees receive required training. School administrators must ensure that all employees are formally trained on the prevention and recognition of sexual abuse, sex trafficking, and all other maltreatment of children, including children with significant cognitive disabilities, and must maintain records of each employee's participation in training. The training should be provided to all new employees as part of their orientation and to all current employees not previously trained, and must include:

- Risk factors for sexual abuse, sex trafficking, and other maltreatment;
- Warning signs indicating a child may be a victim;
- Internal procedures for supporting a child who might be at risk;
- Techniques for reducing a child's risk; and
- Information about applicable community organizations that can provide training and resources to students, staff, and parents (Texas Education Code § 38.0041).

Be familiar with applicable training requirements for superintendents and board members.

- Each member of the board of trustees of an independent school district must complete one hour of training every two years in identifying and reporting potential victims of sexual abuse, human trafficking, and other maltreatment of children (Texas Education Code § 11.159).
- Superintendents must complete two and a half hours of training every five years on identifying and reporting potential victims of sexual abuse, human trafficking, and other maltreatment of children (Texas Education Code § 21.054).

Provide programs for students. Each school district must provide child abuse anti-victimization programs in elementary and secondary schools (Texas Education Code § 38.004). In accordance with Texas Administrative Code § 61.1051, each school district and open-enrollment charter school must adopt policies that include programs consisting of age-appropriate, research-based prevention designed to promote self-protection and prevent sexual abuse and trafficking.

Post signs with the child abuse hotline number. Each public school and open-enrollment charter school must post a sign at each campus that includes the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) hotline number and website, along with instructions to call 911 for emergencies and that meets the requirements outlined in Texas Education Code § 38.0042. The sign must be posted in at least one high-traffic, highly and clearly visible public area that is readily accessible to and widely used by students, such as a cafeteria, library, or locker room. CACTX and TEA have worked together to create a poster that conforms to the required specifications. Contact your local CAC to request copies.



Guidance for Required Policies:

Policies Addressing Reports of Child Abuse, Neglect, and Trafficking: Each school district and open-enrollment charter school must adopt a policy governing the reports of child abuse, neglect, and trafficking in accordance with Texas Education Code § 38.004 and Texas Administrative Code § 61.1051. The policy must follow the requirements outlined in Chapter 261 of the Texas Family Code and must also notify personnel of:

- Penalties for failure to report suspected child abuse or neglect;
- Prohibitions against interference with an investigation, including laws that prohibit school officials from denying an investigator's request to interview a student at school (Texas Family Code §§ 261.302, .303) or from requiring the presence of a parent or school administrator during an interview by an investigator (Texas Family Code § 261.302);
- Immunity provisions and confidentiality provisions for reporters;
- Disciplinary actions associated with noncompliance with the policy; and
- The prohibition under Texas Education Code § 26.0091 against making a report based solely on refusal to consent to psychotropic drugs or psychiatric or psychological testing for their child, except as authorized under the law.

Policies Addressing Sexual Abuse, Sex Trafficking, and Other Maltreatment: Each school district and open-enrollment charter school must adopt a policy addressing sexual abuse, sex trafficking, and other maltreatment of children in accordance with Texas Education Code § 38.0041 and Texas Administrative Code § 61.1051. The policy must address:

- Methods for increasing staff, student, and parent awareness of sexual abuse, sex trafficking, and child maltreatment issues, including prevention techniques and warning signs; and
- Ways that a child who is a victim of or has been impacted by sexual abuse, sex trafficking, or other maltreatment can get help, including counseling.

Additional Requirements for These Policies:

In accordance with Texas Administrative Code § 61.1051, these policies:

- Must include the current DFPS hotline number;
- Must provide for cooperation with law enforcement and DFPS child abuse investigations without the consent of the child's parents, if necessary;
- Must be distributed to all personnel at the beginning of each school year and must be addressed in staff development programs at regular intervals; and
- May not require school personnel to consult with an administrator prior to making a report of suspected abuse, neglect, or trafficking.

Remember, you are required by law to report suspected child abuse and neglect. If you suspect a child is in immediate danger, call 911. For all other cases in Texas, call the abuse and neglect hotline at 1-800-252-5400.

This is a resource of Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas. For more information visit cactx.org.



If you are looking for school trainings in the Houston area, The Children's Assessment Center is proud to be a TEA registered provider of *"Identifying and Reporting Potential Victims of Sexual Abuse, Human Trafficking, and Other Maltreatment of Children"* for the following:

- Training for School Board Trustees (TEC Section 11.159)
- Training for Superintendents (YEC Section 21.054)



The CAC also conducts free trainings for children in schools. Please reach out to request any trainings or if you have any training needs through our website: www.cachouston.org/training-and-education/

Child Sex Trafficking

Just because our community isn't talking about child sex trafficking doesn't mean that it isn't happening. Children are being traded for money on our streets every single day. Here in Houston, there are more brothels than there are Starbucks. The children at our schools, playgrounds, and streets should not be for sale.

One of the terrifying truths about trafficking is that all children are at risk because children can be groomed in any setting. The majority of children are lured into trafficking by family members or someone they already know and trust – a classmate, an employer, a family member, or even a family friend. During times of social isolation, children are even more at risk of being exploited online. These children come from all kinds of backgrounds – foster care, all socio-economic classes, runaways, the juvenile legal system, and all ethnicities.



Survivors of trafficking are likely to face more negative outcomes throughout their lives. Studies have shown that teenage survivors of trafficking report severe health consequences, including memory problems, substance abuse, insomnia, sexually transmitted infections, and pregnancy. [9] Psychological effects among survivors are also common, including stress-related diseases, anxiety, suicidality, depression, mood swings, and PTSD. [10] Recovering from these effects often requires continued care by trained professionals.

We know that in order to help prevent new child sex trafficking victims, we must get ahead of the problem before it starts. The dangers of trafficking are real, and children need our help. To traffickers, children are an even better commodity to trade than drugs. Drugs can only be used once, but sadly, children can be used for sex over and over again. It is horrific to know that children are being sexually abused every day. **The truth is that all child sex trafficking is child abuse.** Adults make the decision to buy sex from children. Children do not get a choice. They are psychologically manipulated and often forced into living this life of abuse. No child wants to be used for sex. No child should ever have to live with this trauma for the rest of their lives. We need every member of our community to help end trafficking.

How can you recognize a child that is either being groomed or is involved in sex trafficking?

We have included some of the many signs below:

- Sudden changes in the behavior of the child, which may include skipping school, sneaking out of their home, or spending days away without an explanation.
- A child that has more expensive things than usual or has large amounts of money.
- Trips out of state that may be with a “friend” that you have not heard of before.
- A child who suddenly is becoming more private about what they are doing either on their phones or outside of their home.
- A child with unexplained injuries.
- Children who are not aware of what city they are in.

How can you help?

- Know who is dropping off and picking up your child at school.
- Know who your child is going out to social events with, where the events are, and what time they will return home.
- Keep open communication with your child about the dangers of trafficking.
- Attend trainings for parents on the signs of trafficking and how to prevent trafficking in your community.
- Volunteer at organizations in your community that are working to help survivors or to prevent trafficking.
- Establish or encourage children to join groups or attend trainings that raise awareness about the dangers of trafficking.
- If you suspect a child may be involved in trafficking or at risk of being trafficking in the future, please do not approach the situation on your own. Your involvement could place yourself or the child in serious danger. Reporting your concerns and observations to law enforcement is the safest route for your personal safety and for the child. Please see page 19 on how to report these situations.



Call the Texas Abuse and Neglect Hotline at
1(800) 252-5400 or visit txabusehotline.org

Internet Safety

We are all aware that children and teenagers are on the internet more now than ever. Unfortunately, this gives predators access to our children without children ever leaving their homes. 1 out of 25 children will experience a sexual solicitation online (an offender that offers to meet for sex). In order to prevent children from being victimized, we must have ongoing conversations with children about the importance of internet safety and the dangers that exist on the internet. **It is estimated that 750,000 adults seek sex with minors daily.** [11]

If you know of an incident that has occurred on the internet, please see page 19 on how to make a report. Please report any incidents of sexual conversations between children and adults, potential encounters, inappropriate discussions, and inappropriate materials. Your report could help another child from being exploited.

Internet Safety Tips for Parents [12]

Keep all computers in a centralized area of the home.

- Having a computer in a centralized area allows parents the opportunity to monitor more closely the internet sites your children visit. This will also make you aware of how much time your child is spending online.

Have your children turn in their phones each night before they go to bed.

- Collect the phones and tablets and return them the next day. This will keep children from visiting internet sites and chatting with strangers in the middle of the night while parents are sleeping.

Turn off the WiFi at night.

- In the event that a child sneaks the cell phone or tablet out during the middle of the night, parents can monitor cell data times to see if their children are using their phones during a prohibited time. With the WiFi disconnected, a child will have to use cellular data to surf the internet. Also, a tablet that works solely on WiFi will not operate with it shut off.

Talk to your children and let them know you are concerned for their safety.

- The internet, cell phones, and technology have become a baby sitter for parents. Many parents do not have safety conversations with their children. Let them know the dangers that lurk the internet and make sure they do not friend or speak to anyone online that they do not personally know. Many predators pretend to be children so that they can friend your child. Children don't view online friends as strangers the way strangers were viewed as the creepy guy at a park. They think these virtual people are really their friends.
- Educate your child on what information should always be confidential (their address, phone number, etc.) to make sure they are not sharing information that could be used by someone else.

- Explain internet boundaries to your child and your expectations. Your child should know that they should not be meeting anyone in person that they have met online.
- Teach your child how to block or report someone online.

Any internet site with a chat function can be a dangerous site.

- While we don't want to scare parents, we do want to make sure they are aware of predators friending and chatting with children on various gaming sites (Fortnite, Roblox, Madden, etc...). Any game that has a chat function gives predators an opportunity to prey on children. If it connects to the internet, there is a potential for danger. Only allow your children to play games online with people they know personally, not virtually.

Tell your children to never, ever, ever send pictures or videos to anyone over the internet.

- Many predators will pretend to be children and they often ask children for pictures. They are very crafty and children do not recognize the harm in sending a picture. Once the image is on the internet, it cannot be taken back. Remind them that whatever they send is permanent. Even when someone they know says they will not send it or share it, they often do. Encourage them to ask a parent before sharing any images with anyone online. Photos can be stored digitally in ways that your child may not be aware. Explain to your child that once they have sent a photo, that photo can't be taken back.

Beware of vault apps.

- Vault apps are secret apps that can be downloaded on a phone. They act to hide photos, videos, and chats so that parents cannot see them. An example of this is the vault calculator app. It works just like any other calculator; however, it allows the user to hide on the back end of the app whatever information they want to keep secret.
- To recognize vault apps, parents can look at the size of the file on the device to determine the amount of memory it is using. For example, a calculator operates at 1mb. If they see a calculator using a higher storage amount, this should alert them that something is wrong. If they view an app that shows to be using a large amount of storage but there shows to be nothing in the app, there is a problem.

If your child becomes a victim of an online predator, do not delete anything.

- Often a parent will panic when they discover their child is a victim. They worry that their child will get in trouble for having pornography on their device or they fear the child will go to jail for sharing images of themselves. Parents often delete the contents on the device to protect the child. By doing this, they have deleted valuable evidence law enforcement needs to prosecute the predator. Law enforcement will never prosecute a child who is a victim of online abuse.
- The parent should place the phone in airplane mode and call the police. Airplane mode prevents anyone from deleting the device via a cloud.

- If the phone is off, leave it off. A signal can be sent via the cloud to delete the contents of the phone. Once powered on, the device receives the signal from the cloud and the entire phone is deleted. Leave the phone off and call the police.

Your child is not too young to know how to hide content on their devices.

- Children these days are very tech-savvy. If they are not, the adult they are communicating online with will be able to help them hide the data. Don't automatically assume your children can not operate a device because of their age. They might be getting help from someone they are chatting with.
- Know your child's passwords and what they are doing on their devices. Although this may feel like it is an invasion of their privacy or personal time, as an adult it is your responsibility to keep children safe.

Please talk to your children. Educate them on the dangers that are present online. If something happens or causes you concern, do not destroy the evidence. Contact law enforcement as soon as possible to help them catch predators that prey on children.

12 Most Dangerous Apps for Children [12]

Apps are both a convenience and a curse. They make our life easier while at the same time creating dangers for our children. Here are 12 of the most dangerous apps for children:



Discord

This is a free app designed specifically for gamers. They can chat via voice or text on this app. This is the number one app currently being used by online predators in the Houston area.



Whisper

Whisper allows you to post secrets anonymously and chat with other users in your area.



Kik

Kik allows you to post secrets anonymously and chat with other users in your area. This free app allows you to send texts/pictures without those images and texts being logged into the phone history and allows people to get connected in your area with a common interest. This app is used primarily to meet people for dating/hooking up.



Tinder

Users post pictures and images they find attractive can be flagged. If someone flags you as attractive, the app connects the two. This app is primarily for hooking up.



Snapchat

On Snapchat you can capture images or videos and make them available for a specified time. After that, the image/video disappears. It is dangerous because kids feel they can send a sexually explicit image or text and it will disappear; however, nothing sent over the internet disappears. Someone is always capturing the image on the receiving end.



ChatRoulette or Omegle

This allows video chat with complete strangers. Nothing else needs to be said.



Vine

Allows users to watch and post 6 second videos. While most of the videos are harmless, occasionally, porn videos pop up into the feed, exposing children to harmful material.



Vault

We discussed these earlier. They are used to hide messages, images, videos, etc..



Sarahah

Known to be a perfect tool for cyberbullying, this app allows you to send and receive messages without logging in. There is no age restriction for this app.



Poof

Poof hides other apps on your phone. You can select which ones to hide and their icons no longer appear on the phone. If you see the Poof app on the phone, ask them what they are hiding.



Yubo

Yubo is Tinder for Teens. This app allows teens to swipe who they like based on photos. This provides predators with everything they need to contact a child. There is no age verification, so children do not know who they are chatting with.



Skout

Skout uses locations to put people in contact with those nearby. This app allows them to chat, send photos, and virtual gifts.

While these are a few apps, new ones are created every day. Just be mindful of the apps your children use and monitor their devices regularly for suspicious activity.

Tracking Devices and Apps [12]

There are a number of good tracking devices/apps on the market that will allow parents to monitor the internet habits of their children. The apps can be tailored to whatever the need is of the parent. They can track children whereabouts, show internet sites visited, monitor time spent online, etc.. Some of these are paid subscription apps while there are many that are free. Parents can Google “tracking apps” and read the reviews on each one to find the best fit for them.

Website Blocking Information [12]

Please visit these website blocking sites that can assist in filtering out inappropriate material. There are several types of monitoring software on the market. Each software is different and we suggest parents Google search them and read reviews to find one to meet their needs. The situation of each child/family is different and the needs of the parents should be met by the appropriate software. There is no one right answer that applies to every family and every situation. It is best to research and find the best fit for your family. There are many free options available, but these may be limited in what they are able to do; however, any monitoring is better than none at all. Since the internet is constantly changing, parents must make sure that they are also continuing to research how to monitor new situations that their children may encounter.

NetNanny www.netnanny.com

Cyber Patrol www.cyberpatrol.com

CyberPatrol is part of Net Nanny. This is a parental control software that allows parents to monitor what their kids are doing on their devices. It can be used to filter the internet, blocking unwanted content. It can also mask profanity, provide alerts to parents regarding activity, and allow parents to set the total number of hours and times kids can be online. NetNanny is a very popular software that often ranks #1 on reviews when compared to other monitoring software.

CyberSitter www.cybersitter.com

CyberSitter allows for social networking monitoring. This service ranks average compared to other services, and it may have limited reporting features, so for this reason we would recommend NetNanny.

Netsmartz www.netsmartzkids.org

Netsmartz provides cybersafety education for both children and teens. This is the program the Houston Police Department Internet Crimes Against Children Unit (ICAC) teaches to children in schools from kindergarten through high school. It was developed by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) and is tailored for each age group. The Houston ICAC unit teaches this program for free in schools to schools that provide the setting and reach out to request the presentation be given.

Educational Resources

Book Lists for Children [13]

Please see below for age appropriate books for children and books for parents.

Books about sexual abuse (to read to kids, or for kids to read to themselves)

Age 1 to 5

Some Parts are Not for Sharing

by Julie Le Federico

Friendly fish and underwater scenes are used to give a simple message about private body parts and safe touch.

Age 2 to 8

It's my Body: A Book to Teach Young Children How to Resist Uncomfortable Touch

by Lory Freeman

Gives examples of different types of touches to help children to recognize and resist uncomfortable touch. Covers touches that are: nice, acceptable but unwelcome, unpleasant but necessary (for example from doctors) and unacceptable. Stresses a child's right to protect their body.

Age 3 to 7

My Body Belongs to Me

by Jill Starishevsky

An interactive book which uses rhythm to engage the reader. Defines body boundaries, sexual abuse, and emphasizes the importance of telling.

Age 3 to 10

No-No the Little Seal: A Story for Very Young Children That Tells About Sexual Abuse

by Sherri Patterson and Judith Feldman

Encourages children to talk about their worries through the story of NoNo. When his uncle touches him inappropriately and tells him to keep it a secret, NoNo struggles with whether it is wrong to tell and who he can talk to. Includes a guide for parents and a CD of the story with songs.

Age 5 to 10

'I Said No!: A Kid-to-Kid Guide to Keeping Private Parts Private

by Zach and Kimberly King

Explains what private body parts are, good and bad touching, scenarios of what someone may say, what to do if you feel uncomfortable, who trusted adults are and what to do if no one listens or believes you. Includes advice on reading the book with children.

Books about healthy sexuality (for you to read to kids, or for them to read themselves)

Age 2 to 6

What Makes a Baby: A Book for Every Kind of Family and Every Kind of Kid

by Cory Siverberg

A straight-forward book about human reproduction and birth.

Age 3 to 6

Amazing You!

by Dr. Gail Saltz

Presents straight-forward information about reproduction, birth, and body differences.

Age 8 and up

Sex Is a Funny Word: A Book about Bodies, Feelings, and You

by Cory Siverberg and Fiona Smyth

A comprehensive healthy sexuality comic book for kids that includes children and families of all makeups, orientations, and gender identities, also includes information about boundaries and touching.

Age 10 and up

The Girl's Body Book (The Boy's Body Book): Everything You Need to Know for Growing Up You

by Kelli Dunham

A comprehensive book that covers puberty, common questions about body changes, drug and alcohol use, school, managing emotions, relationships, friendships, families, and future planning.

It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex & Sexual Health

by Robie Harris

A comprehensive book that covers puberty, reproduction, birth, hygiene, sexual abuse, sexually transmitted illnesses and healthy relationships.

Book List for Parents, Caregivers, and Adults [13]

What Your Child Needs to Know About Sex (And When)

by Fred Kaeser. Mr. Kaeser

This book offers advice for having positive conversations with children; beginning when they are young. Mr. Kaeser also has a blog. Reading the blog is a free way to get lots of the same (good) information

How to Talk to Your Kids about Sex

by Dr. John Chirban

This book offers advice on how help children view their sexuality positively and how to have on-going conversations about sexuality, and relationships. Dr. Chirban also has a blog entitled, "The Age of Un-Innocence: Confronting Difficult Topics with Kids." Located on Psychology Today's website.

From Diapers to Dating: A Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Children

by Debra Haffner

This book is a practical guide that offers parents a way to have on-going conversations about sexuality and dating. It focuses on pre-school to middle-school aged children.

The Sexwise Parent

by Janet Rosenwieg

This book offers information on protecting kids from bullying and abuse as well on advice on talking with kids about sexuality. Dr. Rosenwieg also provides information about how sex offenders manipulate boundaries, and ideas about keeping your children safe in different environments.

Websites

Please see below for resources online related to child sexual abuse and child sex trafficking.

Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas www.cactx.org

Learn more about membership association for Texas' children's advocacy centers.

The Children's Assessment Center www.cachouston.org

Resources on how we protect children, heal families, and prevent abuse.

National Children's Alliance www.nationalchildrensalliance.org

Learn more about the national movement to keep children safe.

United Against Human Trafficking www.uaht.org

Information on human trafficking education, prevention, and services.

The Polaris Project www.polarisproject.org

Human trafficking awareness and the National human trafficking awareness and hotline.

Monique Burr Foundation www.mbfpreventioneducation.org

Child sexual abuse education and curriculum for children.

Darkness to Light www.D2L.org

Sexual abuse prevention and awareness education for adults.

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children www.missingkids.org

Resources regarding missing and exploited children.

Netsmartz www.netsmartz.org

Cybersafety education for children and teens.

National Sexual Assault Hotline www.RAINN.org

Sexual assault resources and other information.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Suicide prevention information and hotline.

Reporting Abuse

Child Abuse

The law requires any person who believes that a child is being abused, neglected, or exploited, to report the circumstances to DFPS. If you believe a child has been abused, molested, neglected or otherwise maltreated, please report it by calling the Texas Abuse and Neglect Hotline at 1-800-252-5400 or visit txabusehotline.org.

You may also report child abuse to law enforcement by calling 911.

Human Trafficking

Call 911 to report immediate trafficking concerns to law enforcement. The sooner a report is made, the more likely law enforcement will be able to help with the situation.

Additionally, to make a report about human trafficking, please call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888, or text "Help" or "Info" to 233722

Internet Safety

Please report any incidents of abuse/solicitation to their local law enforcement officials by calling 911. In addition, you may report any tips to the CyberTipline at Cybertipline.org or 1-800-THE-LOST

Learn more about
making a report here!



Conclusion

If you have any questions or are interesting in learning more about how you can help protect children, please reach out to your local children's advocacy center.

To truly protect children from abuse we must raise awareness on how widespread and dangerous this issue is. Once abuse has occurred, there is no taking it back. These are experiences that will change the rest of their lives. **Our children deserve better.** We must work together to prevent child abuse before it starts. It is the responsibility of every member of our community to keep as many children safe as possible. Please help us prevent this abuse before it starts. Our children are depending on you.

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The Children's Assessment Center

Protect Children. Heal Families. Prevent Abuse.



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