

## PARENTING

Being a parent can be the most challenging, exciting and rewarding job you will ever have... and it may be the most important. It can also be the most frightening, frustrating and overwhelming job in the world. The truth is, all meaningful jobs seem overwhelming at times. That is why information, support and encouragement are necessary to help us all be more successful. One of the risks children face in this world is child sexual abuse. It is scary to think about sexual abuse and your own child. It can be especially upsetting if you have been hurt this way. As a parent of a young child, you can do many things to provide safety for your daughter or son and reduce the risk that your child will be sexually abused.

### **Awareness:**

Be aware that child sexual abuse happens more often than most people realize. One in three girls and one in five boys will be sexually assaulted before the age of 16. Most often, the offender will be someone the child knows and cares about. Sexual abuse can happen as young as infancy. Children are often reluctant to tell about abuse. They may think they won't be believed. We can't expect young children to be solely responsible for their own safety. Sharing safety information with children can help lessen their vulnerability and increase the likelihood that they will talk about what's troubling them.

### **Communication:**

- Let your child know that you care about him/her.
- Reassure your child with statements such as, "I will do my best to keep you safe."
- Speak with and listen to your child often.
- Welcome your child's attempts to express feelings, voice concerns and ask questions.
- Speak calmly and in a non-frightening way when teaching about child sexual abuse prevention.

### **Teaching Skills:**

- Teach children about their right to privacy and safety.
- Encourage children to feel that their bodies belong to them.
- Give children accurate information about what is and isn't appropriate touch and behavior, no matter who is doing it.
- Teach children that they can say "No" to inappropriate touch and support them when they do say "No."
- Teach children to tell a trusted adult if they need help or are confused.
- Reinforce safety skills and repeat safety information often.

## SUPERVISION

Children need appropriate supervision. Be selective about who you choose to look after and care for your child. Some things to keep in mind as you select a caregiver:

- How long have you known this person?
- What do you know about how this person treats children?
- How comfortable is your child with this person?
- How comfortable are you with this person?
- Are you welcome to drop in anytime to see your child?
- What do other parents say about how this person cares for their children?

Sometimes sexual abuse happens even when we have done our best to prevent it. If children display any of the following indicators, sexual abuse may be the cause. These behaviors, however, require a closer look to determine what is troubling the child.

- Extremely withdrawn or aggressive behavior.
- Developmentally inappropriate sexual behavior.
- Self-destructive behavior
- Any abrupt, unexplained change in a child's behavior
- Excessive fears
- Hypervigilance (i.e., extreme anxiety, distress, tension)

Child sexual abuse is not a problem you need to face alone. It's important to get help for yourself and for your child. Consider whom in your family, school or neighborhood you could talk for more information and support. Remember, you can also call King County Sexual Assault Resource Center. **You can ACT for your kids!**