

Protecting children from sexual abuse

Most children will enjoy a happy childhood, full of love, support and opportunities for growth. Relationships with parents, siblings, the extended family and friends will help them develop necessary social skills to fulfil their need to be included in the community and excel with others.

Unfortunately, a few children will be exposed to negative relationships, some of which can be extremely harmful. This document aims to increase awareness of sexually abusive relations and guide parents and professionals on how to create safe environments for children to grow and interact safely.

Key Facts:

- Some forms of sexual abuse include having intercourse with a child, touching a child's genitals for sexual pleasure or producing pornographic images of children.
- 1 in every 10 minors will suffer sexual abuse by the age of 18.
- About 93% of victims suffer sexual abuse by someone known to them or their family.
- About 82% of victims below the age of 18 are girls.
- In 88% of sexual abuse cases, the perpetrator is male.
- Approximately one third of perpetrators is an older child. In the remaining cases, the perpetrator is an adult.
- Children with disabilities and younger children who cannot yet communicate with others are particularly vulnerable.
- Remember that if abuse occurs, the perpetrator is to blame and not the child or yourself.

Guidelines:

- Sexual abuse is **preventable** by creating safe spaces and knowledgeable adults and by encouraging children to talk.
- Ensure professionals and parents are aware of **guidelines** for safeguarding children from sexual abuse.
- Adopt an **open door policy** for classrooms, therapy rooms and leisure activities.

1

Melody Learning Center e. K. * Inhaberin: Silke Johnson * Stadtgrabenstr. 8 * D-78187 Geisingen *

Eingetragen Amtsgericht Stuttgart

HRA 733193**

0049/ 1520 966 2756 * info@melodycenter.ch * www.melodycenter.ch

- Observe physical signs or changes in behaviour or mood during daily routines that could indicate ongoing distress (e.g., marks around private parts, complains about pain, reduced appetite, disturbed sleeping pattern, unexplained nervousness or crying, disturbed toileting habits, etc.).
- Notice if your child seems to know or describes **things that you would not expect them to know** according to their age and developmental stage (e.g., a pre-school child describing sexual acts).
- Teach your child what kind of **behaviour** is **acceptable by others** and how to **calmly say “No”**. For example, tell them who can see their private body parts (e.g., doctors) and instruct them to say “No” to anyone else trying to touch them or asking them to touch their own body parts.
- **Children with disabilities** are particularly **vulnerable** and should be educated on **healthy social relationships** and **sexuality**. This includes training on **basic life skills** that increase their **independence**, such as toileting, dressing, bathing, naming body parts including genitals, etc. This will reduce the amount of high risk situations they are exposed at and increase their ability to communicate any concerns to you.
- Whenever there is **one-to-one teaching** involved in a setting, home, school or activity clubs, we should have **safeguarding measures** in place. Especially high risk situations, such as toilet, dressing, swimming and similar should involve **two adults** at all times. If staff resourcing is an issue and you cannot have two adults present, **adopt alternative measures**: offer training, issue guidelines for children safeguarding, check adults’ criminal background and professional references, conduct frequent random checks and supervision of activities, adopt one-way mirrors in one-to-one work rooms, film sessions.
- Parents should be **allowed to watch educational** sessions frequently and whenever this is not possible, alternative means of training them and protecting children should be in place (e.g., film videos that can later on be examined together with parents).
- Teach children to say “No” in a calm way and **respect their wishes**. Children should be able to **make choices** that are proportionate to their developmental level and in their own benefit. For example, they should be able to choose not to kiss or hug a relative and shake hands instead. Keep expectations for achievement and maintain a structure that helps kids to develop autonomously but keep these expectations in a balance with individual autonomy and the fact that children have changing needs and the right to choose. Educators should not expect or teach full compliance to any child; they should instead seek to develop every child’s full potential by **respecting their preferences and adopting evidence-based practices**.



Read the benefits of offering choice at <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40489-018-00154-7>

- **Risk assessments** should be conducted by schools and afterschool clubs (or parents, when professionals are employed at home) and children safeguarding measures should be put in place. Ask your child's school about such guidelines and if they do not have a policy, share the present document with them.

Resources:

- Chicago Children's Advocacy Center <https://www.chicagocac.org/resources/sexual-abuse-resources/preventing-sexual-abuse/>
- Child Mind Institute <https://childmind.org/article/10-ways-to-teach-your-child-the-skills-to-prevent-sexual-abuse/>
- Darkness to Light <https://www.d2l.org/the-issue/statistics/>
- National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-sexual-abuse/?utm_source=meganav&utm_medium=&utm_campaign=
- Stop It Now! https://www.stopitnow.org/sites/default/files/documents/files/prevent_child_sexual_abuse.pdf
- The National Center for Victims of Crime <https://victimsofcrime.org/media/reporting-on-child-sexual-abuse>
- RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/children-and-teens>

Created by Dr Katerina Dounavi
Psychologist (EuroPsy), Behaviour Analyst (BCBA-D)