

# How to talk to your child about sexual misconduct

When you and your child trust someone, it can be shocking to learn that they have behaved inappropriately. While we often see it in the news, it can be overwhelming when it hits close to home. It might be difficult to know what to say or how to start the conversation.

## Talking to your child about sexual abuse

First, it is important to understand the facts about sexual abuse. 90% of the time when a child is sexually abused, it is by someone they know and not a stranger. This is important to realize because we often talk to kids about “stranger danger” and we talk less about what to do when it is someone they think is safe or trustworthy. Abuse and traumatic situations can be difficult to anticipate. While some conversations with your child might be uncomfortable, it is important to keep open lines of communication.

1. Use age appropriate and specific language. It’s important to use the appropriate names for body parts so that kids feel comfortable saying them and it is clear what they are talking about when sharing things with other adults.
2. Model healthy boundaries. If a child feels uncomfortable being around or hugging another person, allow them to set physical boundaries that they feel are comfortable.
3. Tell your child that any unwelcome touch is not their fault, is not ok and can be reported immediately.
4. Help your child identify several adults that they can trust or go to if they feel unsafe.
5. Instead of instilling fear, use this opportunity to build self-confidence and strength by teaching tools for healthy boundaries and assertiveness.
6. Understand the fight, flight, freeze response. When people are in a scary situation, some might fight or flee the situations, but others can feel frozen and unable to respond. Explain that this is a normal reaction to fear. This is not their fault. If your response in a traumatic situation keeps you alive, then it did what it is supposed to do.

## This happened close to home. Now what?

Abuse and traumatic situations can be difficult to anticipate. Some kids feel betrayed, hurt, disappointed, scared, overwhelmed and shocked. Everyone can have a different response. Remind your child that you are a safe person to talk to about these big emotions and situations. If you aren't sure where to start, try using some of these statements.

- I want you to know that I'm here to talk about what is going on.
- I might not have all of the answers, but we can figure it out together.
- I'm here to support you.
- I'm here to help.

The most important response is to be open, loving and kind to your child. Your child might not want to talk about it or might not have the words to start the conversation. Some kids might process it quickly. If you notice changes in behavior, difficulty sleeping, acting out, changes in appetite or any other shifts in your child's behavior, check in with them and also reach out to a professional for additional support. If you have concerns, speak to your school's administrator. If you have suspicions of child abuse or neglect, you should report these concerns to the DCS Hotline at 1-800-800-5556. Sylvia's Child Advocacy Center is a great resource for victims of abuse in Boone County. The contact number is 765-484-8410.

### **Phone Numbers for Additional Mental Health Support**

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (2733)

Text HOME to 741741

Integrative Wellness, LLC: 765-680-0071