



HELPING ORGANIZATIONS
**Prevent, Recognize & Report
Child Sexual Abuse**



Safer, Smarter
COMMUNITIES



LAUREN'S KIDS



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 that 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.



Understanding 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 be sexually abused before the age of 18, and 90% of these cases will be committed by a person the child knows, loves and trusts. Child abuse occurs at every socioeconomic level, across ethnic 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 (flashing, voyeurism, pornography, invitation to touch another person's genitals, etc.).

Youth-serving organizations can become targets of abusers because they offer the potential for frequent interaction with children. Abusers can use participation in youth-serving organizations to find a child target because:

- ✖ They can gain access to a child while also appearing as a dedicated and respected person in the community.
- ✖ Fellow employees, volunteers and parents believe they would know or notice if abuse were occurring.
- ✖ Fellow employees, volunteers and parents don't believe abuse could happen.
- ✖ The abuser conceals the behavior as a legitimate job/duty to help a child.

By implementing and following preventive protocols and codes of conduct at your organization, child sexual abuse is less likely to occur, and your organization can be a place where children thrive.

Traits of an Abuser

While each situation and act(s) of child sexual abuse will be unique, some similarities and tendencies can serve as "red flags" for further investigation of a suspected predator.

Behaviors of a Child Abuser

- ✖ Seems overly interested in or fixated on one particular child
- ✖ Frequently has or tries to gain time alone with a child
- ✖ Provides special gifts or privileges to a child
- ✖ Works harder to develop a relationship with a child than with adults or caregivers
- ✖ Offers free, on-demand childcare

Tactics of an Abuser

- ✖ Paying attention to a child who appears emotionally needy
- ✖ "Accidentally" or purposefully exposing himself or herself
- ✖ Openly praising nudity as "normal"
- ✖ Giving gifts or money, taking the child special places, providing the child alcohol or drugs
- ✖ Engaging in physical contact such as wrestling, tickling, pats on the bottom, etc.
- ✖ Showing adult magazines or films, letting the child know he/she can come to them for sexual information or concerns
- ✖ Telling the child that he or she needs to examine the child's body for some reason
- ✖ Asking questions about the child's sexual development, fantasies, masturbation habits, or giving the child more information about sex than is appropriate for the child's age or developmental level
- ✖ Staring at the child or looking at his/her body in a way that makes him/her uncomfortable

The Grooming 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 “grooming.” The grooming process allows the abuser to build trust with and desensitize a child, preparing him or her to be tricked into being abused. Children most at risk for grooming are children who have experienced a degree of emotional, social or economic disadvantage or dysfunction.

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

Abusers often target children who:

- ✖ Are loners
- ✖ Are people pleasers
- ✖ Have mentally ill parents
- ✖ Have parents who are addicted to drugs or alcohol
- ✖ Have unstable home lives
- ✖ Have busy home lives, with parents who are missing or unavailable
- ✖ Are vulnerable due to special needs

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 abuse are:

- ✖ Frequent bruises or broken bones
- ✖ Frequent school absences
- ✖ Sudden emotional withdrawal
- ✖ Sudden aggressive behavior
- ✖ Night terrors
- ✖ Acting out in school
- ✖ Displays of irrational fear of certain places, situations or people
- ✖ Social isolation
- ✖ Inadequate personal hygiene
- ✖ Returning to younger behaviors, such as bed-wetting
- ✖ Child suddenly acquires new unexplainable toys, money, clothes, etc.

Reporting Abuse

Under Florida law, anyone who suspects a child may be abused or neglected has a responsibility to report it. It is not the responsibility of your organization to investigate cases of alleged abuse; it is your responsibility to immediately report these suspicions to the authorities that have the power and authority to investigate the allegations. The most important thing that you can do when

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

You can report abuse in any of the following four ways:

Phone: 1.800.962.2873

Fax: 1.800.914.0004

TDD: 1.800.453.5145

Online:
FloridaAbuseHotline.com



Protocols & Conduct

Every youth-serving organization has policies in place to keep children safe, but it's important to examine those policies to ensure they protect against child sexual abuse by predators who may seek to access an organization as staff or a volunteer. It is essential to train your team to report protocol violations and actual signs of abuse.

Implement Background Checks

- ✘ Conduct background checks, including criminal history and sex offender registry lists, of any staff and volunteers who have contact with children.
- ✘ Develop a clear list of prior offenses that upon discovery would preclude an adult from working with youth in your program.
- ✘ To be fair, establish an appeals process.

Establish Rules For Adult/Youth Contact

- ✘ Adopt a policy that no adult will be alone with a child who is not their own, including time alone in a car.
- ✘ Two adults will be with a child at all times, including when escorting a younger child to the bathroom.
- ✘ If an adult must have a sensitive conversation with a child privately, another adult must be physically present with visual contact even if out of earshot.
- ✘ On overnight trips, adults may not stay in a room or tent with children who are not their own.

Respect Privacy

- ✘ Separate showers and bathroom facilities or times for males and females, adults and children
- ✘ No photography or video recording in showers or bathrooms (this includes children with cell phone technology)
- ✘ Children have privacy when changing clothes, showering or using the bathroom

Report Protocol Violations and Suspected Abuse

- ✘ Train volunteers and staff to report any violations of these protocols immediately.
- ✘ Train volunteers and staff to report suspected abuse or a child's disclosure of abuse to the state abuse hotline, even if they don't have all the facts or are not 100% sure.

Important Dos & Don'ts

DO

Respect a child's privacy.

Report protocol violations immediately.

Report suspected grooming behavior immediately.

Report abuse if you suspect abuse or a child discloses abuse.

DO NOT

Do not be alone with a child at any time. Instead, practice the buddy system – always have two adults present when with a child. This includes car rides, bathroom visits, overnight functions/events, etc.

Do not be with a child who is changing clothes or taking a shower.

Do not have one-on-one physical contact with a child.

Do not ask a child to keep secrets.

Do not sleep in the same room with a child who is not your own.

Do not record or have surveillance in any area customarily considered a place of privacy (such as the bathroom or shower). Do not watch others violate this protocol.

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:

DontMissTheSigns.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

Learn more:

LaurensKids.org



Safer, Smarter
COMMUNITIES



LAUREN'S KIDS