

SECRET SURVIVORS

USING THEATER TO BREAK THE SILENCE

TOOLKIT AND DISCUSSION GUIDE + DOCUMENTARY

One Approach to Prevention: Talk to Children About Child Sexual Abuse

Adapted from the book “My Body Belongs to Me” by Jill Starishevsky

<http://www.mybodybelongstome.com/>

- Keep in mind, especially when leading a group discussion with children, that you may be talking to a child who has already been sexually abused in some way and is keeping it a secret. Be sensitive and avoid making the child feel guilty for not having told right away. Convey that it is okay for the child to tell someone even if he or she has been keeping it a secret for a long time.
- Teach children the correct terms for their body parts. This will give them the language to help them feel comfortable talking to you about their body.
- Ask the child: *What would you do if someone touched you on your _____? Who would you tell? Why is it important to tell?*
Encourage the child to say they would tell a parent/teacher right away because it's their body.
- Discuss the importance of the rule “no secrets.” Put this rule into practice:
If someone, even a parent, step-parent or grandparent, says something to your child like, “I’ll get you an ice cream later, but it will be our secret,” insist politely that you don’t have secrets in your family. Then turn to your child and repeat, “We don’t do secrets. We can tell each other everything.”
- Encourage children to tell you about things that happen to them that make them feel scared, sad or uncomfortable. If children have an open line of communication, they will be more inclined to alert you to something inappropriate early on.
- Encourage children to trust their feelings – if something doesn’t feel right, they should get away as soon as possible and tell you about it.
- Identify a “safety zone person.” Teach children that they can come to you to discuss anything, even if they think they will get in trouble. Convey to them that you will listen with an open mind even if they were doing something they should not have been doing. A “safety zone person” can be anyone who a child feels comfortable confiding in should something happen to them and they are reluctant to discuss it with parents. The safety zone person should be advised that they have been chosen and should be instructed to discuss the situation with the parents in a timely manner. Keep in mind that child predators often “entice” their prey with something inappropriate such as allowing a child to watch an adult movie or miss school, letting them smoke a cigarette or drink alcohol. Children will often be reluctant to tell about inappropriate touching for fear they will get in trouble for the drinking or missing school. Explain to children that they if someone touches them inappropriately, they should tell the parent or the safety zone person, even if they did something forbidden.
- Teach children that they are and should always be in control of their bodies by encouraging them to set their own boundaries with all adults around them, and respect these boundaries. For instance, ask a child, “is it okay if I give you a hug right now?” or “can I pick you up?”

before doing so. Encourage children to greet all adults by waving hello, shaking hands or giving a 'high five.' If a child would like to give a more intimate greeting (such as a hug or kiss on the cheek), let the child assert that. Do not let any adults - even relatives like grandparents, aunts/uncles, cousins, etc. – shame children for setting boundaries. When adults force children to greet adults with a hug, kiss or other physical contact they are not willing to give, adults send the message that adults' needs/desires trump those of children. This message reinforces the conditions that allow child sexual abuse to occur.

- More than 80% of child sexual abuse cases occur in one-adult/one-child situations. Choose group situations whenever possible rather than leaving a child alone in the care of a single adult or a single older child.ⁱ

ⁱ Darkness to Light, "7 Steps to Protecting Our Children," 2002. www.d2l.org/atf/cf/%7B64AF78C4-5EB8-45AA-BC28-F7EE2B581919%7D/7%20Steps%20to%20Protecting%20Our%20Children.pdf