



If it happens, do not blame yourself. Sexual abuse is a fact in our society. Many individuals who molest children find employment and community activities which give them access to children. The vast majority of abuse occurs in situations where the child knows and trusts the adult. Do your homework well, but remember that community and national awareness are needed before we can stamp out sexual molestation.



Make sure that your child knows that if someone does something confusing to them, like touching or taking a naked picture or giving them gifts, that you want to be told. Reassure the child and explain that he or she will not be blamed for whatever an adult does.

## Observe Physical and Behavioral Signs

Children who may be too frightened to talk about sexual molestation may exhibit a variety of physical and behavioral signals. Any or several of these signs may be significant. Parents should assume responsibility for noticing such symptoms including:

- Extreme changes in behavior such as loss of appetite.
- Recurrent nightmares or disturbed sleep patterns and fear of the dark.
- Regression to more infantile behavior such as bedwetting, thumb sucking, or excessive crying.
- Torn or stained underclothing.

- Vaginal or rectal bleeding, pain, itching, swollen genitals, or vaginal discharge.
- Vaginal infections or venereal disease.
- Unusual interest in or knowledge of sexual matters, expressing affection in ways inappropriate for a child of that age.
- Fear of a person or an intense dislike at being left somewhere or with someone.
- Other behavioral signals such as aggressive or disruptive behavior, withdrawal, running away or delinquent behavior, failing in school.

## Remember, Kids...

**Listen**

If anyone—even someone you know—touches you and you don't feel right about it:

1. Say NO! Get away fast.
2. Tell an adult you trust.
3. Keep telling someone until they believe you.
4. Remember—it wasn't your fault.

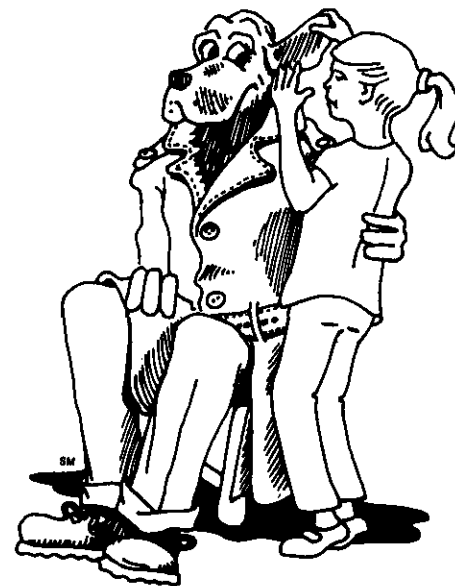
**Talk**

Crime Prevention tips from:  
The National Crime Prevention Council  
1700 K Street, NW, Second Floor  
Washington, DC 20006-3817  
202-466-6272

The McGruff Campaign is substantially funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.

## Preventing Child Sexual Abuse

# It Shouldn't Hurt to be a Kid



Help me, McGruff...

**TAKE A BITE OUT OF  
CRIME®**

CHEEKTOWAGA POLICE DEPARTMENT  
CRIME RESISTANCE UNIT  
275 ALEXANDER AVENUE  
(716) 897-7293

## Listen and Talk with Your Children

Perhaps the most critical child sexual abuse prevention strategy for parents is good communication with their children. This is not only challenging to every parent, but also can be difficult, especially for working parents and parents of adolescents.

**Talk** Talk to your child every day and take time to really listen and observe. Learn as many details as you can about your child's activities and feelings. Encourage him or her to share concerns and problems with you.

**Talk** Explain that his or her body belongs only to them alone and that he or she has the right to say no to anyone who might try to touch them.

**Talk** Tell your child that some adults may try to hurt children and make them do things the child doesn't feel comfortable doing. Often these grown-ups call what they're doing a secret between themselves and the child.

**Talk** Explain that some adults may even threaten children by saying that their parents may be hurt or killed if the child ever shares the secret. Emphasize that an adult who does this is doing something that is wrong.

**Talk** Tell your child that adults whom they know and trust or someone who might be in a position of authority (like a baby-sitter or a teacher) might try to do something like this. Try not to scare your children—emphasize that the vast majority of grownups never do this and that most adults are deeply concerned about protecting children from harm.



## Choose a Preschool or Child Care Center Carefully

Although the vast majority of this nation's preschools and child care centers are perfectly safe places, recent reports of child sexual abuse in these settings are a source of great concern to parents.

**h** Check to make sure that the program is reputable. State or local licensing agencies, child care information and referral services, and other child care community agencies may be sources of information.

**h** Find out as much as you can about the teachers and caregivers. Talk with other parents who have used the program.

**h** Learn about the school's or center's hiring policies and practices. Do they examine references, background checks, and previous employment history before hiring?

**h** Ask whether and how parents are involved. Does the center or school welcome and support participation?

**h** Ensure that you have the right to drop in and visit the program at any time.

**h** Make sure you are informed about every planned outing. Never give the organization blanket permission to take your child off the premises.

**h** Prohibit in writing the release of your child to anyone without your explicit authorization. Make sure that the program knows who will pick up your child on any given day.



## If You Think That Your Child Has Been Abused...

**h** Believe the child. Children rarely lie about sexual abuse.

**h** Commend the child for telling you about the experience.

**h** Convey your support for the child. A child's greatest fear is that he or she is at fault and responsible for the incident. Alleviating this self-blame is of paramount importance.

**h** Temper your own reaction, recognizing that your perspective and acceptance are critical signals to the child. Your greatest challenge may be to not convey your own horror about the abuse.

**h** Do not go to the school or program to talk about your concern. Instead, report the suspected molestation to a social services agency or the police.

**h** Find an agency that evaluates sexual abuse victims—a hospital or a child welfare agency or a community mental health therapy group.

**h** Search for a physician with the experience and training to detect and recognize sexual abuse when you seek a medical examination for your child.

**h** Remember that taking action is critical because if nothing is done, other children will continue to be at risk. Child sexual abuse is a community interest and concern.

