

STEPS TO TAKE FOR CHILD'S PROTECTION

To protect ourselves against auto theft or burglary we buy alarms, steering wheel clubs, etc. What steps do we take to protect our children? It's important to recognize, no matter what steps we take to protect our children, there is no full proof mechanism to ensure our children will never be harmed.

Communication – The most important avenue we have is to have an open, comfortable, and safe mechanism for communication with our children. Our Children must know they can come and talk with us about anything. This is harder than one might think and many parents are surprised when they are not the first to know that their child has been assaulted.

Communication must start early and must happen often. Every parent should sit down with their children at an early age and be able to openly communicate with their children about their bodies: this means explaining your child's body parts to them, what they are used for, and more importantly explain that they are in charge of their own bodies.

This talk is not the "Birds and the Bees" talk. This talk is about informing your children about their bodies and what to do when someone touches their bodies in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable. This is the first step in providing your child with the tools to protect themselves against the sexual predator. There cannot be too much emphasis on how important it is to accomplish this early on with your child. (**No magic age**)

Give your child the authority to say no. We often tell our children to obey adults and their elders, but those are the same people who may try and harm your child. So let your child know it is okay to say no even to an adult, if they are uncomfortable.

Parents should have their children practice saying no. Talk with them about how to get out of situations they are uncomfortable with.

It is important to teach our children about strangers, but **statistically speaking, our children are more likely to be assaulted by someone they know.** *One in four girls and one in six boys are sexually assaulted.* Your child should know that if a relative or a friend touches them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable it is okay to say no.

If your child has been assaulted, they need to know they can come to you without fearing you will be angry with them. This is one of the most common reasons children do not tell their parents. Children should know it is their parents' responsibility to protect them, but they cannot do their job if their child does not tell them when someone makes them feel uncomfortable

It is a good idea to talk to your child about spaces and boundaries. **Establish with your child the need to respect boundaries, but also for other to respect their boundaries.**

It is important for children to know that not all grown-ups follow the rules and when the grown-ups break the rules **it is not the child's fault.**

Take time to shower your child with love and attention. A child who is loved and well attended is likely to be much stronger when faced with a predator.

Do not be naïve and think that it cannot happen to your child. This problem stretches across all socio-economic and cultural lines. **Trust in your intuition. If things do not feel right, do not just turn a blind eye.**

Understanding the Sexual Predator

Easy prey – the sexual predator, much like a burglar, will look for the easiest target. However, the sexual predator is much more diligent than the average burglar. **The sexual predator is less likely to attack a child who is well prepared for them.**

A sexual predator may take weeks, months, or even years choosing their victims and preparing them for a sexual assault. They are diligent and may spend much or all of their free time in an effort to establish a sexual relationship with a child.

Situational Vs. Preferential Sexual Predator – A situational predator is a sex offender who does not necessarily desire sexual contact with a child but chooses to establish sexual contact with a child to fulfill a more immediate need for sexual gratification. The preferential sexual offender is a sex offender whose desire for sexual encounters revolves around children.

Predators will align themselves in positions, which allow them easy access to child victims. For instance, they may become involved in adult relationships with women who have children for the sole purpose of sexually assaulting the children.

Sexual predators may try and drive a wedge between a child and the child's parents. For instance, they may allow a child to break rules their parents would normally not allow.

Sexual predator use a process referred to as grooming to lower a child's inhibitions about sex. This is a process of manipulation and coercion that makes some children feel defenseless against the sexual predator. **The predator will use a variety of tactics, such as drugs, alcohol, money, gifts, affection, attention, threats, embarrassment, and pornography as a means to their end.** This is important for the parent to realize, because it will help you understand what you are up against. You must be as equally diligent in protection your child.

Protecting Children Online

It should be made very clear to children that their access to the **internet is a privilege**, which can be taken away at any time.

Rules should be established up front with children. Parents should make it very clear that breaking the rules will result in the loss of internet privileges.

Certain times should be established for internet usage (**Predators are more likely to be on line in the evening hours.**)

Children should only be allowed to use email accounts set up by the parent. Children should not be creating their own email accounts. (**Some internet companies provide free email.**)

Children should never provide their phone number, address, or real name to people online.

Children should never upload pictures of themselves onto the internet.

Children should never arrange for a face to face meeting with someone they have met online.

Computer with internet access should be used in a common place inside the residence. This is the only way to monitor what your child is doing online.

Parents should maintain control over a child's internet access and email account. **Children should know their internet or email is not private** and parents should routinely check their children's email.

Parents should have their children show them internet sites they like to visit.

Many internet service providers (ISP) offer parental controls for the internet. Parents should contact their ISP and ask about them.

Parents should advise their children that **some people they meet on line do not tell the truth**. Some internet users lie about their names, ages, and interests.

Parents should know some people who chat on line will use codes or abbreviations to communicate. If your child is using or receiving these, you should have your child explain them to you. We cannot go through life living in fear, failing to ever give our trust to anyone. Just take the time to provide your children the tools they need to protect themselves. Love them, communicate with them, and pay attention to them.