

Educate your child about *boundaries, body awareness, sex education and safety*

A. Infants, toddlers & preschoolers

1. Set appropriate **boundaries**

- Most sexual abuse starts with the violation of a boundary.
- Teach, model and enforce personal boundaries in the family:
 - Respect others' feelings (be gentle, kind)
 - Respect others' property (don't touch Sis' things)
 - Respect others' body (no biting, kicking, etc.)
 - At this age, most emphasis on child learning to obey without a fuss, delay or tantrum (unconditional obedience).
 - Yet there is a place for beginning to give the child a choice and respecting that: don't force cuddles on him/her
- Teach, model and enforce God's boundaries (10 commandments)
 - Discuss authority structure: child, parents, other authority, God.
 - Give reasons for why we do what we do as "God says so" "God wants us to say kind words"
 - Children should know and obey clearly defined rules; parents use loving, calm, consistent teaching and discipline

2. Teach **body awareness** from infancy

- Which body parts are private
- Repeat many times that their private parts are theirs and not to be touched or looked at by anyone. Natural time to discuss is at bath time or if the child runs out in the family room naked
- Remind them often that if anyone tries to look at or touch their private parts or does anything that makes them feel unsafe or that they don't like, they should tell mommy or daddy
- Use books to describe what "safe" and "unsafe", "comfortable" and "uncomfortable" mean.
- Use and teach correct terms for genitals and private parts
- Difference between good / bad touch and how child might feel
- Many children have already been abused by the time parents talk about sensitive subjects. Teaching them with vocab and knowledge is arming to identify something is wrong.
- Make use of teachable moments through books or stories.
- Teach difference between 'a secret' and 'a surprise'

3. **Safety consciousness:**

It's up to the parents to be aware of the dangers and keep child from harm. Toddlers have no ability to discern safety issues. At this stage, they should be constantly supervised. Make certain other people you leave your child with are safe; and follow through on asking your child about the time spent. Be aware of warning signs in infants and young children.

C. School Kids (ages 4-10)

1. Boundaries:

- Boundaries and authority should be established by now. Now is the time to begin teaching that there are situations when the boundary is not so clear: what if the adult says to do something that is wrong? Feels uncomfortable?
- Don't want to be influenced by world's growing disrespect, but equally dangerous to ONLY teach unconditional obedience
- Confusing: when can they say "no" and when will they be disciplined for saying "no"?
 - **Teach them that people in authority are sinners too, and the exception to God's command to honor and obey those in authority is if they tell the child to do something sinful.**
 - **Obedience without question does not mean obedience without thinking. Teach what is right and wrong (not, do it because I told you to.)**
 - Teach "I have a right to speak up", but how to do this respectfully to those in authority. Teach children boundaries are maintained by ability to say "NO".
 - "When parents teach children that setting boundaries or saying no is bad, they are teaching them that others can do with them as they wish. They are sending their children defenseless into a world that contains much evil. Evil in the form of controlling, manipulative, and exploitative people. Evil in the form of temptations. To feel safe in such an evil world, children need to have the power to say things like:
 - No
 - I disagree
 - I will not
 - I choose not to
 - Stop that
 - It hurts
 - It's wrong
 - That's bad
 - I don't like that touch
- Don't just empower them to say no to strangers but also people in authority or family members. Don't make them show affection when they don't want to (parents feel obligated to family members).
- Continue to foster respect in your family for others' rights to safety, privacy, personal space, opinions. Children who are treated with love and respect for their dignity at home should not fear authority figures. Healthy families allow

children to express their feelings (with self-control of course) without rejection, teasing, ridicule or punishment.

2. Body awareness & sex education

- Teach about correct terms for body parts and answer questions about bodies, sexuality and reproduction with correct, age-appropriate information
- Begin to teach that sexuality is God's gift and that He forbids sexual behavior outside of marriage for our good
- Don't let them go to school without knowing the basics of what sexual abuse is, potentially dangerous situations and what to do about it. Note that the highest risk category is 8-12 years of age. Over 1/3 of *all* sexual assaults are against victims under the age of 12.
- Teach girls and boys about modesty and why it is commanded. Make sure girls are decently dressed for activities (playground peeps)
- Teach it is sin to touch, look at someone else's private parts or pictures of it in magazines or on electronic devices.
- Teach them specifically about what sexual sins are (lust; adultery; fornication; incest Lev 18; masturbation, homosexuality, pornography) and how they are harmful. If children are unaware of sexuality is, or that sexual behaviors outside of marriage are sin, then they may have a vague feeling that something is wrong when they are being abused, but most likely they will say nothing if they aren't sure. Also, this sets the foundation for standing firm on counter-cultural sexuality
- Kids have a lot of questions: answer them specifically and age-appropriately. Don't shy away from the truth: foster open communication and use correct vocabulary.

3. Safety consciousness

- As children begin to have more independence, teach "stranger-danger"
 - What is a stranger?
 - Can we tell if someone is unsafe from looking at them?
 - Blow the myth of stereotypical molester: young, clean, "nice", rich, friendly, female. It can be ANYONE!
- Emphasize that risks are much greater from people who are NOT strangers!
- Teach your child to always have a buddy with him any time he/she needs to go somewhere away from the group (bathroom, store, park, etc.)
- Rule: Always check with Mom or Dad before going somewhere. Kids at this age still need parents to oversee their safety. Not always having knowledge or ability to discern dangers.
- Teach how to recognize a potentially dangerous *situation* (not a potentially dangerous person, because we can't see from outside who is safe/unsafe)
- Discuss safe ways of answering the phone, opening the door

- Teach self-defense skills; discuss action plans for if they find themselves in a dangerous situation. Teach them to run, scream “help” “no”. Practice it! Permission to bite, kick & scream if someone grabs them or harms them.
- Specify what they need to do if approached by anyone for sexual activity
- Point out what tricks people can do that might lead to dangerous situations in which they could be physically or sexually harmed; or gradually led into sexual abuse without even knowing it

D. Tweens and Teens (10-19)

1. Boundaries:

- Help teens set limits for themselves and others that are biblically based and how to communicate that to their friends and others
- Discuss what to do if they are in a situation in which someone violates their boundaries: here love, open communication and trust come into action. Permission to call you any time of day or night to come pick them up.
- Empower your teen to trust his/her intuition (that is cultivated in normal family interactions, in which you listen to your teen, allow him/her to follow up on his/her own intuition, and provide positive feedback on their actions)
- Do they need help becoming more assertive? Are they able to say no and mean it?

2. Body awareness & sex education:

- Pre-teens: don't be too late with sex education about specifics of male/female bodies and reproduction.
- Teach positively about marriage, God's gift of sexuality, His protective walls of purity, abstinence till marriage, modesty, respect for women & girls. Peers will share the information (very negative); be sure you don't wait too long.
- Continue an open discussion about sexual perversions that have become acceptable in today's society. Listen to what your child has to say and find biblical grounds why those practices are wrong and how to deal with such who live unbiblically in the area of human sexuality. There are good books/resources to use to teach about their bodies, personal safety, boundaries, sexuality.
- Be aware that there can be tremendous peer pressure in locker rooms or from peer communications as kids as young as 10 brag about their sexual exploits (often untrue), which have led to **countless** kids abusing younger children (siblings) in order that they aren't different from peers; or teens seek or allow sex experiences online just so they don't have appear different from their peers.
- Empower them to stand up for what is right to their peers (socially & sexually) and to be unashamed of their Christian witness about saving their virginity for their future husband or wife. Discuss and give biblical & practical reasons why

abstinence is the better option, give opportunities for them to practice at home responding to various scenarios they might meet with at school, etc. Also, make your child aware of the serious consequences teens have who interact sexually with any other child/teen.

- When your teen begins to date:
 - set clear expectations for both boys and girls to respect each other's purity during the dating period
 - talk openly about the temptations and pain that comes from soiling oneself with sexual sin before or outside of marriage
 - Solomon warns his son about sexual temptations and pitfalls abundantly in Proverbs!
 - Encourage teen and boy/girlfriend to discuss and set their own biblical boundaries
 - Have ongoing open communication about how they are doing in regards to their boundaries and invite them to use you as accountability partners
 - Set house rules that reinforce expectations for purity and abstinence
 - Do not allow casual dating, and if this practice is common among your teen's friends, go through the dangers of date-rape and help your teen come up with an action plan. Back to boundaries.

3. Safety consciousness

- Older they are, more independence and less supervision from you. Risk of dangerous situations may increase, but so will their ability to discern risks.
- Alcohol, drugs, peer pressure are bigger risks. See section on boundaries.
- Make sure they know how to recognize potential safety issues of walking, exercising, driving, or parking in crime-prone areas or desolate areas (forest, empty or dimly lit parking lots, parks). "Take a buddy" still applies!
- Self-defense class (martial arts) may be a good idea
- At this age, the greatest danger by far comes to them right at home: on their electronic devices. See section below "Internet safety" under minimizing opportunity.

Taken from Rev. A.T. Vergunst presentation on sexual abuse.
