

## Grooming & Offender Behaviors

The offender is a predator, and the child is their prey. An offender relies on a process known as “grooming,” in which they use various methods to lure a child into their trap. They get to know the child, gain the child’s trust, and get the child to like them, depend on them....and keep their secret. An offender is careful and calculated, and they typically target vulnerable children or those desperate for attention - both in person and online. Parents and caregivers, themselves, can often fall victim to an offender’s tactics. There are wonderful people in your circle who truly do have your children’s best interest at heart. But there are others that don’t. Offenders might:

- befriend parents and quickly offer to babysit or drive children to appointments or commitments
- seek out jobs that allow access to children
- volunteer for youth organizations
- loiter in parks, stores, sporting arenas, or amusement park environments
- spend large amounts of time lurking and observing behaviors in chat rooms, on video games, and on social media
- become foster parents

**It’s so important to monitor your child’s activities, digital communication, and online presence and exposure. You are not prying - you are PROTECTING!**

**Make sure your child knows if they see something in their text thread, on their apps, or in a game that makes them uncomfortable and anxious, they can show you without fear of punishment.**

## Reduce Your Child’s Risk

### **Talk to your child about private body parts.**

Explain private body parts are the parts of the body covered by a swimsuit and teach your child the name for those parts just as you would the rest of their body.

### **Teach your child about privacy & boundaries.**

No one has the right to touch or look at their bodies if they don’t want that to happen. It’s very important to note and explain the exceptions for bathing, potty issues, and medical exams.

**Let children express their affection on their own terms.** Do not force a child to hug, kiss, sit on laps, tickle, wrestle, etc. Let your child know it’s okay to say “no” to any action that makes them uncomfortable, scared, or confused.

**Teach your child there are no secrets between you and them.** They should feel comfortable talking with you about anything - good, bad, fun, sad, easy, or difficult.

**Be aware of adults or teens who want to spend time alone** with your child, offer your child special gifts or toys, or who want to take your child on a special outing or event alone.

**Insist on an open door policy for parents/caregivers** at daycare, school, church, and sporting practices. Monitor and participate in activities from time to time if possible.

**Discuss “what to do” scenarios.** Help your child to understand best practices for suspicious instances when left alone with an older teen or adult, being home alone, being offered opportunities or gifts in exchange for secrecy, meeting an online friend in person, etc.



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## Prevention Information & Safety Tips

How to talk to your child about body and online safety

[amycenter.org](http://amycenter.org)





## Statistics & Info

- 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 20 boys is a victim of child sexual abuse.
- Self-report studies show that 20% of adult females and 5-10% of adult males recall a childhood sexual assault or sexual abuse incident.
- During a one-year period in the U.S., 16% of youth ages 14 to 17 had been sexually victimized.
- Over the course of their lifetime, 28% of U.S. youth ages 14 to 17 had been sexually victimized.
- Children are most vulnerable to child sexual abuse between the ages of 7 and 13.
- Most young victims do not recognize their victimization as sexual abuse unless they have been taught sexual abuse prevention.
- According to the National Institute of Justice, 3 out of 4 adolescents who have been sexually assaulted were victimized by someone they knew well.

A child who is the victim of prolonged sexual abuse usually develops low self-esteem, a feeling of worthlessness, and an abnormal or distorted view of sex. The child may become withdrawn and mistrustful of adults and can become suicidal.

If you suspect your child is a victim of sexual abuse, contact your local law enforcement agency immediately or call the Illinois Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS) hotline at 800-25-ABUSE (800-252-2873).

The Amy Center's Prevention Educators teach children age-appropriate ways to recognize, prevent and/or stop, and report child sexual abuse. It is also very important that parents/caregivers learn about body safety, appropriate boundaries, the "grooming" process, predator "red flags," and more warning signs and effects of abuse.

## Understanding Allegations & Disclosures

We know that most child abuse victims do not report the abuse, and those that do frequently do so years later - often into adulthood. The reasons for delayed disclosure are complex, but in many cases, children just do not have the vocabulary to understand or explain what is happening. That's why when a child does come forward to disclose abuse, they are demonstrating an act of bravery.

Since most children lack the vocabulary to explain what is actually happening, it's even more unlikely they have the vocabulary to make up a false allegation. Even teenagers are unlikely to be able to fabricate a serious allegation of abuse or sexual assault, maintain that story, and be able to answer questions from investigators.

Recanting is more common than a false report. The reasons are complex, but children may say abuse is not happening when it actually is for several reasons. The most common are:

- They're afraid they may get in trouble, usually because a perpetrator has told them they would be if they told.
- They're unsure what is happening to them. This is most common among very young children.
- They don't want to believe the abuse is happening, so they try to ignore it.
- They don't want to get someone they know or love in trouble.

In any of these situations, children may recant that abuse did not occur when it actually did. False reporting accounts for as little as 2% of all child sexual abuse reports. **This means 98% of child sexual abuse reports are true or have significant validity to them.**

## Identifying Abuse

### WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

Child sexual abuse is any sexual act between an adult and a minor or between two minors when one exerts power over the other resulting in an adult or child forcing or persuading a child to engage in any type of sexual conduct.\* Child sexual abuse includes touching and/or looking at private body parts, voyeurism, exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, and communications of a sexual nature (in person, in writing, by phone or digitally). ANY video or photo recording of sexual acts involving a child is child pornography. The commercial sexual exploitation of a person under 18 through pornography, prostitution, and/or erotic entertainment is child sex trafficking. Child pornography and sex trafficking IS child abuse and is illegal.

*\*Darkness to Light, 2013*