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Talking to your child if you suspect that they are being sexually abused

Parents are surrounded by messages about child sexual abuse. Talkshows and TV news warn parents about dangers on the Internet, at school and at home. However, parents don't get much advice on how to talk to their children if they are concerned that sexual abuse is occurring.

Talk to your child directly.

- Pick your time and place carefully!
 - Have this conversation somewhere that your child feels comfortable.
 - DO NOT ask your child about child abuse in front of the person you think may be abusing the child!
- Ask if anyone has been touching them in ways that don't feel okay or that make them feel uncomfortable.
 - Know that sexual abuse can feel good to the victim, so asking your child if someone is hurting them may not get the information that you are looking for.
- Follow up on whatever made you concerned. If there was something your child said or did that made you concerned, ask about that.
 - Ask in a nonjudgmental way, and take care to avoid shaming your child as you ask questions.
 - "I" questions can be very helpful. Rather than beginning your conversation by saying "You (the child) did something/said something that made me worry..." consider starting your inquiry with the word "I." For example: "I am concerned because I heard you say that you are not allowed to close the bathroom door."
 - Make sure that your child knows that they are not in trouble, and that you are simply trying to gather more information.
- Talk with your child about secrets.
 - Sometimes abusers will tell children that sexual abuse is a secret just between them. They may ask the child to promise to keep it secret.
 - When you talk to your child, talk about times that it's okay not to keep a secret, even if they made a promise.

Build a trusting relationship with your child.

- Let your child know that it is okay to come to you if someone is making them uncomfortable.

- Be sure to follow up on any promises you make – if you tell your child that they can talk to you, be sure to make time for them when they do come to you!
- All children should know that it's okay to say "no" to touches that make them uncomfortable or if someone is touching them in ways that make them uncomfortable and that they should tell a trusted adult as soon as possible.
 - Let your child know that you won't get angry at them if they tell someone "no." Children are often afraid that they will get into trouble if they tell someone not to touch them.
- Teach children that some parts of their body are private.
 - Tell children that if someone tries to touch those private areas or wants to look at them, OR if someone tries to show the child their own private parts, they should tell a trusted adult as soon as possible.
 - Let children know that they will not be in trouble if they tell you about inappropriate touching.
 - Make sure to follow through on this if your child does tell you about inappropriate touching! Try not to react with anger towards the child.

If you have reason to be concerned about sexual abuse, there may be other signs of sexual abuse as well. [Here](#) is a list of those signs. As you talk to your child about sexual abuse, remember to focus on creating a safe place for your child. Even if they don't tell you about sexual abuse at the time of the conversation, you are laying a foundation for future conversations.