



**KNOW**



**SEE**



**RESPOND**

---

## PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL ABUSE



**DAYS  
OF ACTION**



**DARKNESS TO LIGHT®**  
END CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE



# KNOW

## Know What to Ask Youth Serving Organizations:

Between soccer practice, tutoring sessions, and piano lessons, your child is frequently in the care of other adults. It's easy to assume they have the proper policies and procedures in place, but it's important to ask the right questions. Organizations should be ready and willing to talk about their prevention policies and practices. If they aren't – consider that your first red flag.

Below are some questions to help you start the conversation:

1. Is there a child protection policy? Youth serving organizations should have them and they should be clearly defined. Ask for a copy. Find a sample protection policy at [www.fivedaysofaction.org](http://www.fivedaysofaction.org).
2. Does the policy include limiting isolated one-on-one situations? 80% or more of child sexual abuse incidents happen in isolated one-on-one situations.<sup>1</sup> One-on-one interactions should take place in an open, observable, and interruptible setting. Look for isolated spaces in facilities and ask about child protection policies in those spaces.
3. How are employees and volunteers screened? Best practices include an in-depth application, personal and professional references, criminal





background check, and an extensive interview. A background check alone is not best practice. Sexual abuse incidents, like other crimes, only show up on background checks if someone has been convicted.



4. Do older and younger children interact, and if so, how? 40% of children who are sexually abused are abused by older or more powerful children.<sup>1</sup> Supervising contact between children and older/bigger youth requires structure and adult supervision. There should be separate areas and activities for different age groups.

5. Are there clear procedures for reporting suspicions or incidences of abuse? The policy should require that every adult first report disclosures, discoveries, and suspicions to the police or child protective services. Find more tips on what to look for in the polices for reporting at [www.fivedaysofaction.org](http://www.fivedaysofaction.org).

6. Do the staff and volunteers go through mandatory reporter training? Over half of all mandated reporters fail to report suspicion of abuse. In most cases they are simply confused or uninformed about their responsibilities. If you have reason to believe abuse is occurring at an organization, trust your intuition and make a report.

7. Are staff and volunteers trained in child sexual abuse prevention? It's critical that adults are trained to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse. If they are trained, ask the name and do some research into that training. If they aren't, this is a red flag. Find out about Darkness to Light's child sexual abuse prevention training at [www.D2L.org](http://www.D2L.org).

“ It's critical that adults are trained on how to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse.

8. Can parents tour the facilities? You can learn a lot by walking through a facility and observing interactions and structure. Keep an eye out for any secluded areas and examine how the staff interact with the children.



# SEE

## Bystander Intervention

Offenders are often seen breaking the rules and pressing boundaries, making it vital that other adults intervene. As an active bystander you can step up when you see a child is feeling uncomfortable or being made vulnerable. It may be uncomfortable to speak up in this way to other adults, but it's necessary to protect children.

When you see a boundary violation, it's not important that you know the intentions of the person who crossed the boundary. What is important is that you reinforce the boundary. It's okay if your intervention happens in front of others. In fact, setting limits in front of others creates a new norm in that environment. It says to others, "We enforce boundaries." It also tells children that you know what the boundary is and you will protect them.

When intervening in a boundary violation:



1. **Describe the inappropriate behavior or boundary violation** to the person who has crossed it.
2. **Set a limit** on the person who has crossed the boundary. Always make sure the person who has violated the boundary is willing to follow the limit you've set. If not, remove the child to a safer situation.
3. **Move on.** Refrain from making a dramatic scene or becoming highly emotional. Just state the limit in a calm, direct manner.

Can you imagine a situation where you could intervene as a bystander? Use the describe, set a limit, move on process to help you figure out what you would say and do. Being prepared will make you more confident and comfortable.

### example

# 01.

**Describe the behavior:** "It looks like you are forcing Chloe to hug. She looks uncomfortable."

**Set the limit:** "Please stop. We let Chloe decide if and how she wants to show affection."

**Move on:** "Chloe, let's go see what the other children are up to."



## example 02.

**Describe the behavior:** “It’s not okay to be in this room alone with Joey with the door closed.”

**Set the Limit:** “He can only be in here with you if there is another adult and the door is open.”

**Move on:** “I’m happy to stay with you while you talk.”

### Write your own:

People who abuse children often become friendly with the potential victims and their families. They participate in family activities, earn trust, and gain alone time with children. Being vigilant lets the adults in your child’s life know that you are watching. Here are some ways you can be vigilant:

- Let youth serving organizations know you take prevention seriously and your child is educated on his/her boundaries.
- Drop-in unexpectedly on a babysitter
- Attend your child’s swim lesson
- Ask your child about their day and listen closely
- Scan environments for high-risk areas and let them be known to youth serving organizations. This also goes for your home.

### Signs of Child Sexual Abuse

It’s important that we also know what signs of abuse look like in children. Signs that a child is being sexually abused are often present, but they can be indistinguishable from other signs of child stress, distress, or trauma. Signs of child sexual abuse can be physical and/or emotional, with physical signs being less common. It’s important to remember that some children may show no signs at all. To learn more about signs and long-term consequences of abuse, visit [www.fivedaysofaction.org](http://www.fivedaysofaction.org).

- Behavioral problems, physical aggression, non-compliance, and rebellion
- Anxiety, depression, fear, withdrawal, and suicidal thoughts
- “Too perfect” or overly compliant behavior
- Nightmares, bed-wetting, bullying, and cruelty to animals
- Lack of interest in friends, sports, or other activities



# RESPOND

There are three instances in which we need to react to sexual abuse: a child discloses abuse to us, we discover sexual abuse ourselves, or we have a reason to suspect it. When any of these three things happen, be prepared to react.

## Disclosure

A child has chosen you as the person he or she trusts enough to tell. The child has taken a huge risk in telling you. What do you do now? Give attention, compassion, and belief.

“ *Very few reported incidents of child sexual abuse are false.*<sup>2</sup> ”

- Listen calmly and openly
- Don't fill in the gaps
- Don't ask leading questions about the details.
- Ask open-ended questions like, “What happened next?”
- Let them know you believe them and that it isn't their fault.
- Don't overreact. When you react to a child's disclosure with anger or disbelief, the child is likely to feel even more ashamed, shut down, or change or retract the story.
- Say, “I believe you” and “what happened is not your fault.”
- Don't promise that the information will be kept confidential.
- Seek the help of a professional who is trained to talk with the child about sexual abuse. Let the professional collect the details from the child. Head to [www.fivedaysofaction.org](http://www.fivedaysofaction.org) to find Child Advocacy Centers and other resources in your state.
- Report sexual abuse to the police or to child protective services. Be clear and specific.

What do I need to report? Provide the child's name and where the child lives. Tell what the child said to you. Tell what signs you've seen in the child. Tell what behaviors you've observed in the alleged offender, if you know them. Tell what access the alleged offender has to that child. Tell where you are, where the child is, and where the offender is, if known.

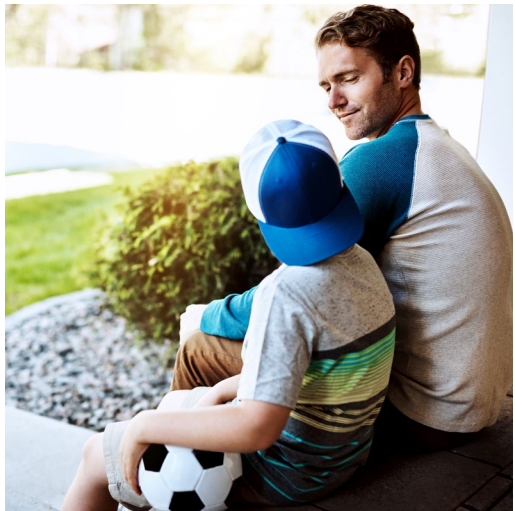


## Discovery

Discovery of sexual abuse means you've witnessed a sexually abusive act by an adult or youth with a child, or know by another way that abuse has taken place. For example, a friend or coworker may have told you something they heard or saw. If you discover child pornography, you've discovered sexual abuse. Child pornography is illegal.

Report a discovery immediately to the police.

What do I need to report?  
Provide the child's name and where the child lives. Tell where you are, where the child is, and where the offender is, if known. Tell what the child said to you, if you have spoken to the child. Tell what interactions you saw between the alleged offender and the child. Tell what other behaviors, if any, you've observed in the alleged offender. Tell what signs you've seen in the child. Tell what access the alleged offender has to the child.



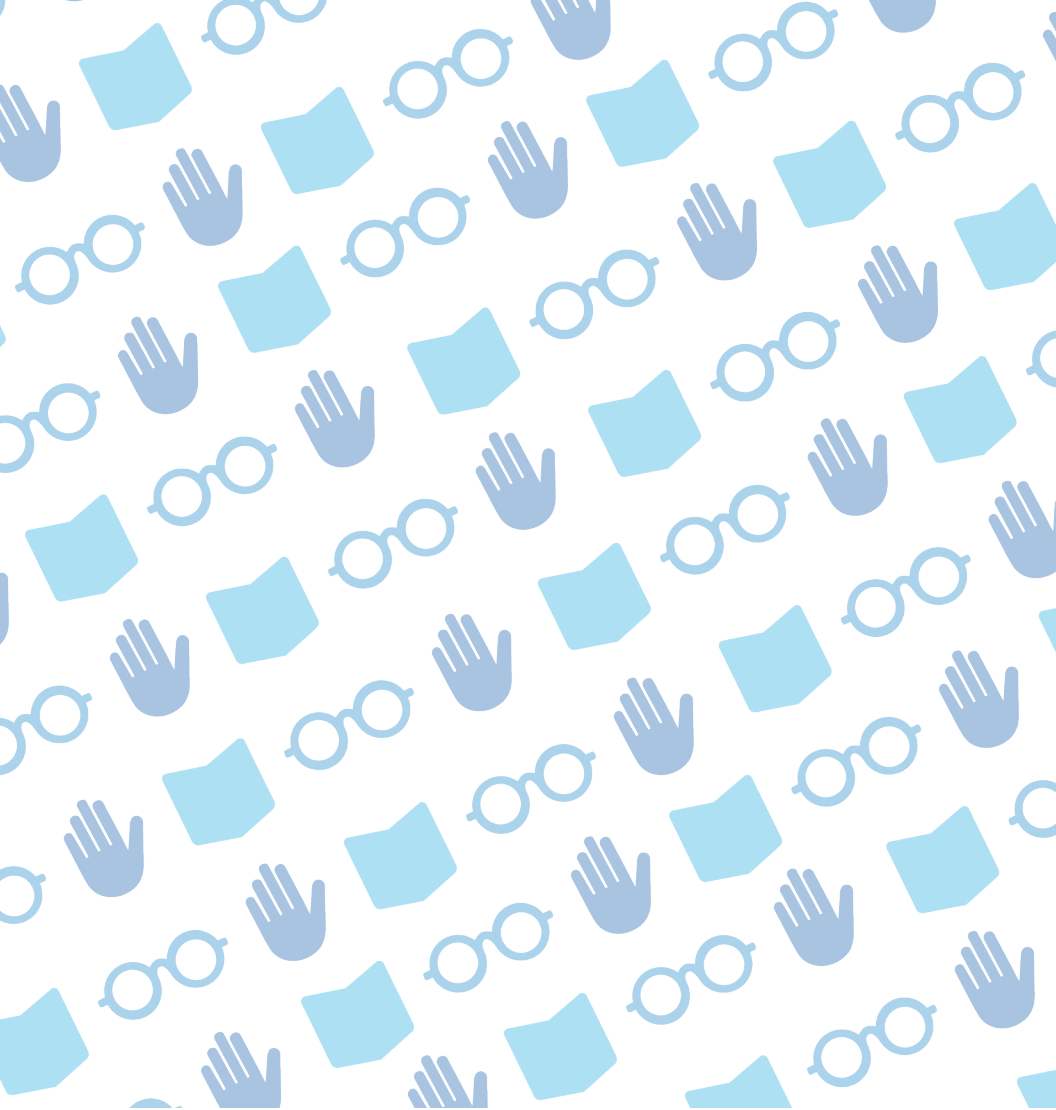
## Suspicion

Suspicion means you've seen signs in a child, or you've witnessed boundary violations by adults or other youth. Suspicion means at a minimum, you need to set limits, or ask some questions. Offenders are rarely caught in the act of abusing a child, but they're often seen breaking the rules and/or pressing boundaries.

“ *The law doesn't require that you have evidence when you report. The law only requires that you have reasonable suspicion.* ”

Remember what you learned about being an active bystander. This is when you need to intervene and set a limit. If there is a pattern of

boundary violations, or if you've intervened and boundary violations continue, you now have reasonable suspicion. Make a report.



**References:**

1. Finkelhor, D. (2012). *Characteristics of crime against juveniles*. Durham, NH: Crimes against Children Research Center.
2. Everson M., and Boat, B. (1989). *False allegations of sexual abuse by children and adolescents*. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. 28(2), 230-235.

Materials are derived from YMCA of the USA's "Know. See. Respond." copyrighted in 2019. Content provided by Darkness to Light. To learn more or get trained to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse visit [www.D2L.org](http://www.D2L.org)