Stop It Now!
Together We Can Prevent the Sexual Abuse of Children

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NMCSAP is a member of the Stop It Now! network.

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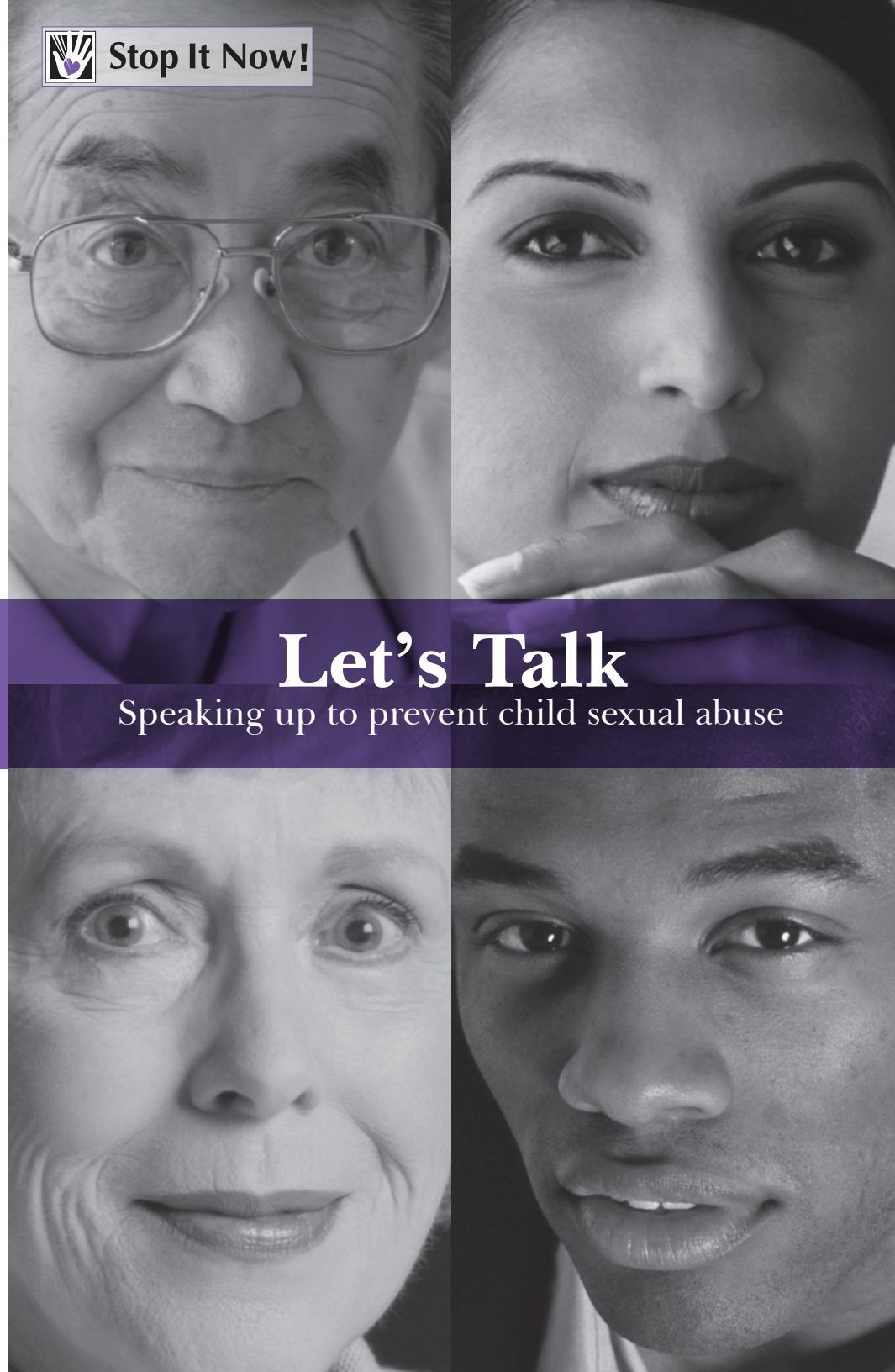
Stop It Now!

Let's Talk

Speaking up to prevent child sexual abuse



INTRODUCTION

"It will be hard to talk with him. But if I don't have that talk, I will always wonder whether I did everything I could to protect my son and the children in this neighborhood."

Talking about sex is never easy. Talking about sexual abuse is even harder, especially when you care about the people involved. If you are reading this booklet, you care. If you are reading this booklet, you may also be worried or concerned about a situation that has some kind of sexual energy (feeling) to it. Something you have seen or heard just does not feel right.

Learning how to talk about your concerns can help protect a child in your life. It can also make a huge difference in the life of an adult, teenager or child who needs your help.

For more than 10 years, Stop It Now! has been talking with parents, teachers, counselors, daycare providers, and guardians. We have also talked with people who have sexually abused a child, and we have talked with their families. We have talked with many, many survivors of child sexual abuse. Through our work, Stop It Now! has found that when adults talk to other adults about the way someone acts with kids, the talk has made a difference in their lives.

This booklet will help you talk about your concerns. Adult-to-adult discussion is the best way to start making changes. We will help you ask questions about what may be happening. We will help you find out what options are available and how to decide what actions to take. Most importantly, this booklet will help you know when it's time to ask a professional for help.*

*Child sexual abuse is a crime in all 50 states. If you already know that a child is being sexually abused or has been sexually abused, please report the abuse to child protective services or the police.

Written & Produced
by Stop It Now! Staff
Design by JKG Group

If you want to discuss how to have a "Let's Talk" conversation call:

Stop It Now!'s confidential, national toll-free Helpline (1.888.PREVENT) M-F, 9 am to 6 pm EST

For general questions about sexual abuse of children

Stop It Now!
351 Pleasant St., Suite 319, Northampton, MA 01060
Office: (413) 587-3500
Helpline: 1.888.PREVENT (1.888.773.8368)
Email: *info@stopitnow.org*
Website: *www.stopitnow.org*
In collaboration with our network of community-based programs, we reach out to adults who are concerned about their own or others' sexualized behavior toward children. We provide support, information and resources on our Website *www.stopitnow.org*, that
enable individuals and families to keep children safe and create healthier communities.

Child Welfare Information Gateway
Children's Bureau/ACYF
1250 Maryland Avenue, SW, Eighth Floor
Washington, DC 20024
Office: 703.385.7565 or 800.394.3366
Website: *www.childwelfare.gov*
A resource and clearinghouse that collects, stores, organizes and disseminates information on all aspects of child maltreatment.

Prevent Child Abuse America (PCAA)
200 South Michigan Ave., 17th Floor
Chicago, IL 60604-2404
Office: (312) 663-3520 Fax: (312) 939-8962
Website: *www.preventchildabuse.org*
A volunteer-based organization committed to preventing child abuse in all its forms through research, public education, programs, and advocacy. Write for a catalogue of publications.

If you have questions about crisis intervention, treatment or reporting:

Child Help USA
National Child Abuse Hotline
1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)
Website: *www.childhelpusa.org*
The organization provides a broad continuum of programs that directly serve abused children and their families. Adults and children can request local telephone numbers to report cases of abuse or access crisis intervention, information, literature and referrals to thousands of emergency, social service and support resources. All calls are anonymous and confidential.

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)
Charles B. Wang International Children Building
699 Prince Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-3175
Office: (703) 274-3900 Fax: (703) 274-2220
Website: *www.ncmec.org*
A clearinghouse for information about the prevention of child victimization. NCMEC's website offers a wealth of information about child protection.
The CyberTipline, 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678) is a toll-free line to report any information pertaining to the sexual exploitation of children on

CMHS Mental Health Services Locator
Office: 1-800-789-2647 M-F 8:30 AM to 12:00 AM EST
Website: *www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/databases*
This Locator provides you with comprehensive information about mental health services and resources and is useful for professionals, consumers and their families, and the public. You can access this information in several ways by selecting a State or U.S. Territory from the map or dropdown menu.

National Center for Victims of Crime (NCVC)
2000 M Street N.W., Suite 480, Washington, DC 20036 Office: (202) 467-8700 Fax: (202) 467-8701
Toll-free: 1-800-FYI-CALL (1-800-394-2255)
TDD: 1-800-211-7996
Email: *webmaster@ncvc.org or gethelp@ncvc.org*
Website: *www.ncvc.org*
An information and referral center for victims. Through its database of over 30,000 organizations, NCVC refers callers to critical services including crisis intervention, research information, assistance with the criminal justice process, counseling, support groups, and referrals to local attorneys in victim-related cases.

The National Children's Advocacy Center (NCAC)
200 Westside Square, Suite 700, Huntsville, AL 35801
Office: (256) 533-0531 Fax: (256)534-6883
Website: *www.nationalcac.org*
A nonprofit providing prevention, intervention and treatment services to physically and sexually abused children and their families through a child-focused team approach. Call for a local listing or affiliate.

If you have questions about treatment and recovery related to sexually abusive behaviors:

The Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA)
4900 S.W. Griffith Drive, Suite 274, Beaverton, OR 97005 Office: (503) 643-1023 Fax: (503) 643-5084
Email: *atsa@atsa.com*
Website: *www.atsa.com*
A national organization developing and disseminating professional standards and practices in the field of sex offender research, evaluation and treatment. Call for a referral to a local treatment provider.

The Safer Society Foundation, Inc. (SSFI)
PO Box 340, Brandon, VT 05733-0340
Office: (802) 247-3132 Fax: (802) 247-4233
Website: *www.safersociety.org*
Call for a referral to a local treatment provider (M-F, 9-4:30 PM EST). Also provides services and publications for youth with sexual behavior problems, adult offenders, their families, survivors, treatment providers, and mandated reporters. Call for a free catalogue.

Sex Abuse Treatment Alliance (SATA)
PO Box 1191, Okemos, MI 48805-1191
Office: (517) 482-2085 or (517) 372-8207
Email: *help@satasort.org*,
Website: *www.satasort.org*
Provides a network of support for abusers who are currently in treatment, a newsletter on current issues for sexual abusers and answers general questions about sex offender treatment.

"When I talked to my neighbor about my concerns for his kid, I was so nervous that I was shaking. I was expecting that he would never speak to me again. Instead he seemed almost relieved to talk with someone. He is now getting help. I am so glad I made the decision to bring it up."

HELPLINE CALLER

Option 3: *Green Light.*

You feel confident that abuse is not likely to happen. And you want to do more to be sure a child is protected and safe.

Increased Adult and Community Responsibility:

This is the best news of all. You are not in crisis. You are no longer worried. Now you have the chance to really increase the protection surrounding the people you care about.

If you have tried the ideas in this booklet, you have already taken a big step. You have learned a lot about a very difficult issue. You have started talking with your family and your community. And you have identified supporters and allies for you and the people you care about.

Your family is the place where you have the most power to create safety. Now is an excellent time to create a Family Safety Plan. Be sure that everyone in your family (adult, teenager and child) has someone to talk with. The resource section of this booklet includes many other places you can continue learning about child sexual abuse.

You can also become a resource person to others. Try to share what you've learned with people in your local school, your neighborhood, your civic organization, or your church. This is a chance for you and the adults around you to take on the responsibility to prevent child sexual abuse. When you take the lead, it can make a huge difference to everyone who cares about children. As your communities get involved, the responsibility for preventing sexual abuse becomes easier and easier.

WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

"I can't talk with my father about anything but sports. How can I possibly explain to him that I don't feel comfortable leaving him alone with my new baby."

HELPLINE CALLER

If you feel unsure about what child sexual abuse really is, you're not alone. About half of the people in a recent survey couldn't explain sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse is any sexual activity with a child by an adult or adolescent. These acts can include sexual touching (e.g., touching a person's penis or vagina, oral sex, or intercourse) and sexual behaviors that do not include touching (e.g., peeping, flashing, or showing pornography to a child.) Sometimes an older child may sexually abuse a younger one.

KNOWING WHEN TO SPEAK UP

1. Trust Your Gut

If you have a gut feeling that something isn't right, you might be tempted just to ignore it. But your gut feeling is a reaction to something real that you have seen or heard. By following your instincts, you can learn what's happening around you. By taking action, you can create a safer and more secure environment for a child.

"If you have any doubt in your mind, then there is NO DOUBT you should speak up."

ADVICE FROM A COUNSELOR WORKING WITH SEX OFFENDERS

Here are some of the situations that "Stop It Now!" Helpline callers have told us about. Each of them is different. None of them shows that a child has been sexually abused. But it makes sense that each of the situations made a Helpline caller "uneasy":

___ *"My 33-year-old brother stares at teenage girls and boys at family parties. He constantly comments on their changing bodies."*

___ *"My neighbor doesn't have kids. He always invites the children on the block into his house for treats."*

___ *"My 16-year-old daughter stopped hanging out with her friends. Now she spends most of her free time with an 11-year-old boy in the neighborhood."*

___ *"My child becomes very quiet and seems frightened when we visit with my brother-in-law."*

WHAT TO WATCH FOR WHEN ADULTS ARE AROUND CHILDREN

Have you ever seen someone playing with a child and felt uncomfortable? Maybe you thought, "I'm just over-reacting," or, "He/She doesn't really mean that." Don't ignore comments or behaviors, learn to talk about them or ask more questions about what you have seen. The checklist below offers some warning signs.

Do you know an adult or older child who:

- Refuses to let a child or teenager set any of his or her own limits (tells a teenager that only a parent can decide when privacy is allowed in the home, even in the bathroom)?
- Insists on hugging, touching, kissing, tickling, wrestling with or holding a child even when the child does not want this affection?
- Is overly interested in the sexuality of a particular child or teen (talks repeatedly about the child's developing body or interferes with normal teen dating)?
- Manages to get time alone or insists on uninterrupted time alone with a child?
- Spends most of his/her spare time with children and has little interest in spending time with people his/her own age?
- Regularly offers to babysit many different children for free or takes children on overnight outings alone?
- Buys children expensive gifts or gives them money for no apparent reason?
- Offers alcohol or drugs to teenagers or children when other adults are not around?
- Frequently walks in on children/teens in the bathroom?
- Allows children or teens to consistently get away with inappropriate behaviors?

Any one of these behaviors does not mean that a child is in danger. But if you answered "yes" to more than one of these questions, begin to ask your own questions and get help. Trust your gut. For information and advice on how to talk to someone, or for resources, please call our toll-free **Helpline at 1.888.PREVENT (1.888.773.8368).**

If the potential abuse is within your family, just by talking and being willing to listen you have also begun to build a Family Safety Plan. Other steps you can take might be getting other safe adults in your family involved, including friends and professionals in your child's life. This would be a good time for you to set and enforce clear family boundaries or rules when it comes to privacy, touching, and a child's physical and sexual development. Most importantly, stay involved in your child's life and activities. Continue to look at what is happening around you and around the children you care about.

Create a Family Safety Plan

You can help keep your child safe from sexual abuse by creating a safer environment around him/her.

Learn as much as you can:
Learn about the warning signs and what to look for in adults, teenagers and children.

Open communication:
Talk about child sexual abuse with those you are close with.

Set clear family boundaries:
Teach all members of the family to respect privacy in dressing, bathing, sleeping and other personal activities.

Take responsibility:
Speak up when you see something that doesn't seem right to you. Interrupt behaviors and talk with the adult, child or teenager in the situation about what makes you uncomfortable.

Get other safe adults involved:
Be sure that no one in your family feels alone.

Stay involved:
Become a resource person for an adult, child or teen – there may be no more important gift you can give those you love.

For a full description of a Family Safety Plan, see **www.stopitnow.org/safetyplan**.

2. As a parent, guardian, friend or neighbor, you have the right to report the child sexual abuse to your local child protection services or police. You can find the numbers you need in your local phone book. Ask to speak with someone trained in cases of child sexual abuse.

3. Get support. Once you have protected the child, everyone else involved also needs help. Don't forget about the adult or youth with sexual behavior problems and other members of the family or community. Counseling may be available through programs such as rape crisis centers, victim compensation programs, or a community mental health center. They can give you referrals to therapists who specialize in treating sexual abuse. Most importantly, try to find other people who will understand your situation and give you support.

Option 2: *Yellow Light.*

There is no evidence of sexual abuse. No one has told you about an abusive act, yet you are still concerned.

Greater Family Involvement:

Some families we've worked with have said that talking clearly and openly about difficult sexual issues was a wake-up call for themselves and for the people around them.

By taking the steps described in this booklet, you have already begun to create a safer home and neighborhood. You got here because you care, and you are concerned. You may have already begun to act on your concerns. There are two things you can still do: stay connected to the people involved and keep talking about what you see and feel.

WARNING SIGNS THAT AN ADULT MAY HAVE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

Someone you love may be acting in sexual ways that worry or confuse you. These behaviors may be a way for the person to ask for help. Many people with sexual behavior problems wish that someone had asked them what was going on. They wish they had known where to call and how to get help.

Do you know someone who:

- Often has a "special" child friend, maybe a different one from year to year?
- Spends most spare time on activities involving children or teens, rather than other adults?
- Does not have any close adult friends?
- Makes fun of a child's body parts, calls a child sexual names such as "stud," "whore," or "slut"?
- Talks again and again about the sexual activities of children or teens?
- Encourages silence and secrets with a child?
- Talks about sexual fantasies with children and is not clear about what's okay with children?
- Was exposed to violence, pornography, or sexual behaviors as a child and has not dealt with it in any way?
- Masturbates so much that it begins to get in the way of important day-to-day activities?
- Downloads pornography off the Internet and is not willing to show it because children are involved?

Any one of these signs does not mean that a child is in danger. But if you see a few of these signs in someone you know, begin to ask questions. If you need help with how to approach the person, or any other support, please call our toll-free **Helpline at 1.888.PREVENT (1.888.773.8368).**

"I finally approached another mother in my neighborhood about my concerns for this family. I was so glad to talk with her and hear that she shared some of my thoughts."

HELPLINE CALLER

Healthy Sexuality in Children

This booklet focuses on adults talking to other adults. We know that sometimes a child or teenager can sexually abuse a younger child. You may need to talk with your son, daughter, or other young person who may be sexually acting out. Use the same guidelines for adults, but talk in a way that a younger person can understand. If you want some suggestions, call the Stop It Now! toll-free Helpline at **1.888.PREVENT (1.888.773.8368)**.

2. Learn More

You may be thinking to yourself, "Maybe the things I've noticed are normal." In order to know what's normal and what's not, you can learn about healthy sexual development of children at different ages. Although it may be scary, also take the time to learn about the warning signs in a child that could tell you that he or she was sexually abused. Lastly, learn the warning signs in adults or teenagers that show they may be abusing or at risk to sexually abuse a child. These are the signs that you may have already seen in them or in their interactions with a child.

3. Begin a Journal

It often helps to write down what you have seen or heard, even if it "seems like nothing." Each of your journal pages should include what you heard or saw, when it happened, where it happened, and who was involved. When you talk with someone about their behaviors, it can help to refer back to what you wrote about in your journal. (For a sample journal entry, go to **www.stopitnow.org/journal.**)

4. Find an Ally

Before you begin a conversation about what you have seen or heard, it can be helpful to talk with someone else who knows the other person well. A family member or close friend may share your concern. You also might hear something like, "Mind your own business," or "Don't start trouble." These responses don't mean that your concerns aren't real. The other person may need time to get comfortable with the subject. You may need to ask more than one person to find someone who understands. It is helpful to know at least one person who cares about you, can talk with you about your concerns, and who can offer you support.

Option 1: *Red Light.*

You have learned that a child has been sexually abused.

The System Response:

If you learn that someone has sexually abused a child, take a deep breath. You may have a very difficult road ahead, but you are not alone. Help is available.

1. If you are a parent or guardian of the child involved, take your child to a professional therapist or counselor who specializes in child sexual abuse issues. That person can help you help your child. He or she can also help you decide what the next best steps are to support your child.

Consider Professional Help

If you know or suspect that your child has been sexually abused, consider taking your child for an assessment by a professional who has experience working with children who have been sexually abused. There is also specialized treatment for adults, teenagers, and children who are at risk for sexually abusive or inappropriate behavior with a child. A family doctor, social worker, or psychologist who works with this issue will be able to assess the level of risk in a situation and talk with you about the decision to report. Please note that these professionals are also mandated reporters. If a child has been sexually abused, they must report the abuse
to the police or child protection services.

If you need help in finding a local listing or need to talk with someone immediately about your situation, call the **STOP IT NOW! toll-free Helpline**

"Conversations do not have to be confrontations. It is too easy to lash out in fear or anger, especially if you are afraid of what you might hear. Planning how you want to talk may be as important as what you will say."

ADVICE FROM A COUNSELOR

3. Ending the First Talk

Remember, this is not a one-time conversation. Often it takes several talks to really reach someone. Your job is to keep the conversation focused on your concerns. If the listener gets defensive or angry, don't be surprised. If you can, stay connected to your calm self instead of matching the other person's anger. If there is too much anger and fear, you can stop and say that you will need to talk again at another time. Be clear that you still have concerns. You both may need time to think. However, if you become concerned for your immediate safety or that of a child, seek help from a domestic violence program, child protection services, and/or the police.

WORDS TO END WITH:

"Hey, I've said a lot. Maybe you need time to think about it all. I'll check in soon to talk some more."

or

"Can we both think about what we've said and agree to talk again in a couple of days?"

4. Debrief

You may have learned things that scare you. You may feel guilty about not saying something sooner. You may have more questions that you would like to ask. Take the time to share what you have gone through with your ally. You might now need time to think about what else you may want to do. If you don't have someone to talk with, you can call the Stop It Now! Helpine for support. The helpline can give you information about resources for everyone in the situation.

"It's so helpful to practice this conversation with you. I can't imagine talking to my friend without having talked it through with someone else ahead of time."

HELPLINE CALLER

If you are unsure of what to say or how to say it, you can call our toll-free Helpline. Our trained staff members can help you get focused and practice. We can also give you resources to have available in case the person you are talking to wants help right away. The Helpline is available Monday through Friday, 9:00AM - 6:00PM, Eastern Standard Time. The toll-free number is **1.888.PRE-**

5. Think About What You Want to Say

Think about what messages you want to get across. Choose just a couple of the most important points for your first talk. You may want to say that you care and let the person know you are open to talking. You might offer to be a resource to the person and the family. If all the people involved are members of your family, you may also want to talk about what you have seen or heard and set clear boundaries for the family about privacy.

6. Practice Saying the Words Out Loud

You need to be able to describe your concerns about the sexual behaviors you see. Remember, no one finds it easy to talk about behaviors towards children that may be sexual. If you have found an ally, you might ask that person to help you practice your conversation ahead of time. If you don't have an ally yet, practice what you want to say out loud to yourself. It might feel strange at first. But if you've heard yourself saying the words, it will be a lot easier to say them to someone else.

7. Choose a Time and Place to Talk

Think about where you want to have this conversation. Choose a place that is safe, comfortable, and relatively private. Then ask the other adult if he or she can meet with you. This sounds formal, but it could be as simple as, "Can you stop by for coffee and a talk tomorrow morning? What time would be good?" or "Let's talk after the kids go to sleep."

HAVING THE TALK

"When I got up the courage to talk to my son, he surprised me by admitting right away that he needed help."

HELPLINE CALLER

Deciding Whether it is Safe to Talk

If someone has a history of anger or violence, it may not be safe to have this talk or to talk alone. Think through with your ally whether you can have the talk AND be safe. If you decide it is not safe, take the time to find some outside resources to help you.

1. Begin a Conversation

If you really feel it, start with the simple words, "I care about you." People are more likely to listen and change if they feel loved and have hope that life can be better. Many people who struggle with thoughts or feelings they don't understand feel alone. They don't know who to talk to. We have heard from adults and teenagers who have sexually abused, that hearing "I care about you" made a huge difference to them. It helped them feel less alone. We have also heard from many people with sexual behavior problems that they wished someone had asked directly, "What is going on?"

If the talk becomes too difficult, or either of you becomes really angry, stop. Consider what your next steps will be. You may need to involve other adults. You may simply say, "Let's try again tomorrow." This talk is not your only chance; it is just a beginning.

WORDS TO START WITH:

"I have been struggling with how to talk with you about this. Let me start by telling you how much I care about you. I couldn't live with myself if I didn't ask you about this."

2. Explore the Situation Without Accusation

Think about the conversation as a chance to talk about behaviors – what you saw and what you heard. Talking about your possible conclusions is not always helpful as a first step. Say directly to the other person: "This is not an accusation." If you are speaking with a co-parent, stress that you are concerned (as you know they are) for the safety of your child.

"I see my role as helping him grow and take responsibilities for his actions. I am trying to have more frank conversations and not use so many euphemisms such as 'loose hands' or 'people like you'."

MOTHER OF A 13-YEAR-OLD BOY WITH SEXUAL BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

If someone says, "Don't worry, I can handle this," it may be true. But it still makes sense to stay involved and be willing to check in again in a few days or a few weeks.

If you truly want someone to tell you what they have done or what they are feeling, you need to first say the words out loud.

Here are some Do's

Do separate the person from the behavior:

"I feel uncomfortable when you talk about 12- or 13-year- old girls in such a sexual way. I think that there are other, more positive ways, to notice these smart young girls."

Do ask direct and simple questions:

"Do you get 'turned on' when looking at children or a particular child?"

Do name the specific behaviors that you have seen and state your reaction:

"I've noticed you staring a lot at your 5-year-old niece when she's changing clothes. Are you aware of that? It makes me uncomfortable when I see you doing that." "We have never talked about this, but I have seen you get an erection when Jenny sits on your lap. I don't feel comfortable with that."

Do follow-up with more questions when the answers you hear are not clear or complete:

"When you say 'we were just fooling around,' can you tell me what you mean? I have seen you touch his (or her) private parts even when you wrestle."

Here are some Don'ts

Don't jump to conclusions:

"I guess you're not the nice guy I thought you were. What are you, some kind of pervert preying on kids?" Remember you are talking to someone you know and care about.

Don't generalize:

"I am concerned about how you act around young girls."

Don't use general labels:

"Did you sexually abuse our son?"

Don't accept answers until they give you the information you need:

"I guess it's OK. Everyone 'fools around' once in a while."