The Basics of Sexual Violence Prevention

Awareness

• Sexual violence can happen to any child or youth and is much more common than we have believed.
• Sexual violence in any form is harmful to children and can have long-lasting health effects.
• Your attitude is important. Your children’s beliefs and behaviors will likely reflect the values and attitudes you have.

Prevention

• Open communication is good prevention.
  • Let your child know you are interested and available to talk.
  • Look for “teachable moments.”
  • Talk openly about body safety.
• Support your child in developing interpersonal skills.
  • Promote self-confidence.
  • Suggest participation in leadership training opportunities.
  • Raise awareness of other people’s feelings.
• Start talking before something happens. Children of all ages need to know they have your permission to tell someone NO if they don’t like the way they are being touched.
  • Realize that sexual abusers control children through secrecy.

For more information on sexual violence go to the Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development website at www.icyd.org.

Additional resources for families, caretakers, educators, and youth leaders may be found in the document “Preventing Child and Youth Sexual Harassment, Abuse, and Assault: A Resource for Iowa’s Families,” published by the Iowa Department of Education. The publication is available on the district website at bit.ly/WDMCS_B2S.

Who Can Help?

Resources and Guidance for Victims of Sexual Violence

• Medical: If a child has been abused or assaulted, they need to be seen by a medical professional.
• Legal: Local law enforcement will assist by filing a police report, investigating the crime, and apprehending a suspect.

Crisis Counseling and Advocacy

• Iowa Sexual Abuse Hotline (1-800-284-7821 – 24-hour support, information referral)
• Child Abuse Reporting Hotline (1-800-362-2178)
• Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development (www.icyd.org)

Resources for Families with Children Ages 5-10

• How to Protect Your Child from Child Abuse (www.BSA-IA.org)
• No Way, Don’t Go There, and I Don’t Think So (www.girlscouts.org)
• Families are Talking (www.siecus.org/pubs/families/FATNewsletterV3N3.pdf)

Resources for Families with Children/Youth Ages 11-13

• Harassment Free Hallways: How to Stop Sexual Harassment in Schools (www.aauw.org/ef/harass/index.cfm)
• Safe Schools and Healthy Students Initiative (www.sshs.samhsa.gov/initiative/resources.aspx)
• Stop It Now! (www.stopitnow.org)

Resources for Families with Youth Ages 14-18

• See It, Stop It, and Get Organized (www.seeitandstopit.org)
• National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center (www.safeyouth.org)
• Teen Dating Violence (www.atg.wa.gov/violence/points.shtml)
Types of Sexual Violence

Sexual Harassment
Sexual harassment is unwelcome visual, verbal, or physical behavior of sexual nature that interferes with a person’s education.

Types of harassment:
• When a person in authority demands sexual favors in return for a benefit for the child or youth.
• When a child or youth is subjected to sexual conduct that creates an offensive, hostile, or intimidating atmosphere.

Sexual harassment can include behaviors such as:
• Making sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or comments about a person’s body or sex life
• Looking or staring at a person in a sexual manner
• Touching, grabbing, pinching, or brushing up against someone in a sexual way
• Flashing or mooning
• Blocking passage in a sexually suggestive or offensive way
• Spreading rumors about a person’s activities or relationships
• Writing sexual messages, love notes, or sexual graffiti
• Pulling clothing down or off
• Calling a person a sexual name
• Spying on someone or using camera phones to take pictures of someone while showering or dressing
• Forcing kisses or other sexual advances
• Forcing someone to look at sexual pictures or materials
• Using computers, text messaging, or other technologies to circulate demeaning information or pictures

Prevention Tips for Families
• Model appropriate behavior
• Set clear expectations for your child’s behavior toward others
• Talk about healthy dating relationships
• Request a copy of your school’s harassment policy

Red Flags—What to look for as a family member if your child or youth has been sexually harassed:
• Avoiding school or wanting to cut class
• Avoiding talk about school activities
• Finding it hard to pay attention; signs of social withdrawal or depression
• Suddenly having lower grades
• Wanting to change schools or even drop out
• Dropping out of chosen classes or field of study
• Losing interest in activities that were previously important
• Engaging in abusive behavior towards other children, siblings, or a family pet
• Using inappropriate sexual comments, jokes and/or gestures in their social interactions

What to Do If Harassment Happens to Your Child
• Listen and don’t be too quick to judge.
• Don’t ignore the harassment.
• Report it to school administration or someone in charge of the activity. Ask that the school/organization keep you informed of actions taken and future plans to prevent further harassment.
• Keep a written record of the incidents of harassment.
• Support your child while at school or other activities. Make sure that another adult knows about the harassment such as a teacher, counselor, or other staff person.

Sexual Abuse
Sexual abuse is forced or coerced sexual behavior that may occur more than once, often within a trusting relationship.

Most victims know their perpetrators. It can involve a series of behaviors, such as:
• A trusted adult or older family member spends time regularly with a child. Adult appears very caring and generous with his/her time and possibly gives the child extra attention and gifts.
• The adult may begin to test the child’s boundaries by sexually touching him/her in a game-like manner.
• Over time the touching may become more involved.
• The abuse may continue as long as the child likes the attention, believes the behavior is normal, does not feel hurt or threatened, or doesn’t believe he/she will be believed if they tell.

Prevention Tips for Families
• Know who your child is spending time with and what they are doing.
• Develop a safety plan so your children know what to do if they are ever in a frightening or dangerous situation.
• Do not allow your child to use the Internet without appropriate supervision.
• Confirm that there is always adult supervision at teenage parties.
• Talk with teenagers about the increased risk of assault if they are at parties where there is drinking.

Red Flags—What to look for as a family member if your child or youth has been sexually assaulted:
• Trouble sleeping or nightmares
• Anxiety or worry about certain people or situations
• Frequent crying spells or sadness
• Sudden mood swings
• A change in eating habits
• Mental confusion or a lack of concentration
• Increased behavior problems at school
• Increased anger and/or sexual behaviors
• A greater sense of secretiveness

What to Do If Your Child Is a Victim of Sexual Assault
• Support and comfort your child and help him/her feel safe.
• Tell your child that you believe him/her even if the story is not entirely consistent—they rarely make up stories of assault.
• Seek medical assistance as soon as possible.
• Seek crisis services or counseling for your child/youth and other family members
• Report the sexual assault (and the name of the offender, if known) to law enforcement authorities.

Sexual Assault
Sexual assault is any forced or unwanted sexual contact or activity. It typically occurs one time rather than being repeated.

Sexual assault can occur in the form of touching, such as:
• Being asked or forced to touch “private parts” or having their “private parts touched”
• Playing sexual games
• Forcing a child or youth into prostitution

Sexual assault can also occur as a non-touching sexual activity, such as:
• Sharing pornographic material
• Exposing oneself to a child/youth
• Inappropriately photographing a child/youth in sexual poses
• Forcing or encouraging a child/youth to watch or hear sexual acts
• Verbally or emotionally assaulting a child/youth in a sexual nature
• Placing or sending obscene telephone calls or emails
• Asking a child/youth for a sexual act

Prevention Tips for Families
• Help your child develop skills in assertiveness and self-protection.
• Know who your child is spending time with and what they are doing.
• Develop a safety plan so your children know what to do if they are ever in a frightening or dangerous situation.
• Do not allow your child to use the Internet without appropriate supervision.
• Confirm that there is always adult supervision at teenage parties.
• Talk with teenagers about the increased risk of assault if they are at parties where there is drinking.