

# A Parent Guide to Child Sexual Abuse Prevention



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## **Illinois law and mandates**

### **Erin's Law, or Illinois Public Act 096-1524 – Child Sexual Abuse**

In Illinois, Erin's Law requires that all public schools implement child-focused sexual abuse prevention education that:

- Teaches students in grades pre-K through 5th grade age-appropriate information about how to recognize child sexual abuse and tell a trusted adult
- Requires school personnel to be informed about child sexual abuse
- Provides parents and guardians with information on the warning signs of child sexual abuse, plus any needed assistance, referrals or resources to support victims and their families

### **Illinois Public Act 101-0579 – Sex Education Consent Instruction**

Amends the School Code. With regard to a sex education course, provides that course material and instruction in grades 6 through 12 must include an age-appropriate discussion on the meaning of consent.

### **Illinois Public Act 098-0190 – Teen Dating Violence**

Requires educational institutions in Illinois to adopt a policy that states that teen dating violence is unacceptable and prohibited; incorporate education about teen dating violence for students in grades 7-12 and school employees.

### **Illinois Public Act 096-1087 – Sexting**

A minor shall not distribute or disseminate an indecent visual depiction of another minor through the use of a computer or electronic communication device.

## defining child abuse

### **Child abuse**

The physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, or exploitation, negligent treatment, or maltreatment:

- Of a child under the age of 18
- By a person who is responsible for the child's welfare
- Under circumstances which indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or threatened

### **Four types of child abuse**

#### **1. Child physical abuse**

A wide range of behaviors that physically injure or harm a child's body. Some behaviors include burning, punching, shaking, kicking and throwing a child.

#### **2. Child neglect**

Failure to provide nutrition, clothing, shelter, supervision or medical care for a child. Neglect is different from poverty.

#### **3. Child sexual assault**

Any forced, exploitive or coercive sexual contact or experience with a child. Child sexual assault includes:

- Molestation
- Rape
- Incest
- Voyeurism
- Exhibitionism
- Pornography
- Forced prostitution
- Sexual harassment

#### **4. Emotional abuse**

A pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development and positive sense of self.

Emotional abuse includes the presence of a pattern of denigrating language and/or behavior directed at the child, including:

- Profanity
- Belittling
- Criticism
- Rejection
- Threats

Emotional abuse also includes the absence of a pattern of supporting language and/or behaviors directed at a child, including:

- Pride in the child
- Praise
- Expressions of love and concern

## myths and facts about child abuse

**Myth:** Child abuse is a rare occurrence.

**Fact:** Statistics indicate that child abuse and neglect occur frequently.

- Child abuse and neglect are common. At least 1 in 7 children have experienced child abuse and/or neglect in the past year, and this is likely an underestimate. In 2018, nearly 1,770 children died of abuse and neglect in the United States.
- A child tells an average of seven people before they are helped.

**Myth:** Abused and neglected children almost always come from poor, minority, and/or inner-city families.

**Fact:** Child abuse occurs within every neighborhood and school community across the country. However, the Centers for Disease Control does state that children living in poverty experience more abuse and neglect due to lack of available resources.

**Myth:** Sexual assault only happens to girls.

**Fact:** We may not know the full extent of sexual assault against boys because of their tendency not to report. Current research, however, estimates that one of three to four girls and one of four to six boys will be sexually assaulted before their eighteenth birthday.

Unfortunately, statistics don't often capture the prevalence of abuse of children who identify within the LGBT community. Estimates are as high as 2 in 5.

**Myth:** Most children are sexually assaulted by a stranger.

**Fact:** It is estimated that 85% of all child sexual assaults are perpetrated by an adult known and trusted by the child. Only a small percentage of offenders fit the stereotype of a "stranger."

**Myth:** Child abusers are easy to identify.

**Fact:** Child abusers cannot be easily distinguished from other people. They usually are not adults with mental illness. In fact, many offenders are upstanding community citizens.

**Myth:** Most children who are abused do something to cause the abuse.

**Fact:** The child is always the victim. The responsibility for the abuse lies solely with the adult. In the case of child sexual abuse, many offenders will attempt to shift the blame for their actions by accusing the child of being “seductive” or “promiscuous.”

**Myth:** Only men sexually abuse children.

**Fact:** Studies of female offenders are relatively rare, at least in part because most known sex offenders are male. Females comprise only 1.2% of arrests for rape and 8.0% of arrests for all other sex offenses.

**Myth:** Rape only happens to women.

**Fact:** 1 in 3 female rape victims experienced it for the first time between 11-17 years old and 1 in 8 reported that it occurred before age 10. Nearly 1 in 4 male rape victims experienced it for the first time between 11-17 years old and about 1 in 4 reported that it occurred before age 10.

## prevention of abuse: the theory of vulnerability

### **Prosecution**

Prosecution rates for abuse are unusually low. Few abusers are convicted since most abuses are never reported; abusers are seldom caught, and it is difficult to obtain enough evidence for a conviction. Relying on prosecution for “prevention” of abuse means that abuse will never be eliminated or even seriously curtailed.

The relationship the child has to the perpetrator may create barriers to disclosure. Over 90% of the time, victims of sexual abuse are abused by someone they know and trust. This is a very confusing dynamic for children; the people who tend to abuse them are people that should be caring for them; people they are taught to respect; people who should not hurt them. Because of this, telling can be very complicated. Younger children may be confused, possibly believing that what the perpetrator is doing is normal. Oftentimes victims still care for the person who is abusing them, and may be concerned that telling will lead to the perpetrator getting in trouble.

Fear of consequences not only for the perpetrator, but for the victims themselves and their families, can also make immediate disclosure difficult. Perpetrators may make threats to victims about hurting them or people they care about. Because of the stigmas associated with sex, victims also may believe they are at fault, that no one will believe them if they tell, or that they are impure and dirty. These ideas lead to victims feeling shameful and embarrassed about what happened, and may fear repercussions from parents or family members if they tell.

### **Avoidance**

Advocating avoidance strategies, the other traditional form of prevention, suggests that individuals can control rape by controlling their own behavior. From an early age, girls are taught never to go out alone, never to walk after dark, never to talk to strangers; women are told never to cross dark parking lots, never to open their doors to strangers, and to invest in lights and locks to deter abusers. These avoidance techniques are based on myths about how rape happens. It also assumes rape can only happen to women and girls. Locks do not prevent friends whom you invite into your home from abusing. Looking into the back seat of your car before you get in will not stop your date from abusing you. Never hitchhiking does not protect a person from their partner or boss. Indeed, since most people are abused by someone they know, avoidance techniques are poor strategies against abuse.

## **Effective Prevention: Reduction of Vulnerability**

We can reduce children's vulnerability to abuse by:

- Providing children and their adult community with information and resources that empower them to identify and prevent abuse
- Reducing children's powerlessness and dependency by teaching them assertiveness.
- Increasing children's sources of support and assistance with peer support and a network of trusted adults.



## clues to possible victimization

Sometimes children don't tell us they are in crisis, they show us. A change in children's behavior could be due to the stress of being abused. These changes in behavior can alert adults to their problem.

Abuse and neglect can also sometimes leave physical marks on a child's body that adults can observe. Knowing both the physical and behavioral clues to abuse can help adults intervene on behalf of children.

Keep in mind that some clues can be normal behaviors for a given child at a given time. Therefore, it is important to be aware of new behaviors, extreme behavior, or combinations of the following characteristics.

Abused children cannot be identified by racial, ethnic, religious or socioeconomic class. Abuse crosses all of these lines.

### **Abused children are often:**

- Fearful of interpersonal relationship or overly compliant
- Withdrawn or aggressive, hyperactive
- Constantly irritable or listless, detached
- Affectionless or overly affectionate (misconstrued as seductive)

### **Physical symptoms:**

- Bruises, burns, scars, welts, broken bones, continuing or inexplicable injuries
- Urinary infections (particularly in young children)
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Chronic ailments, stomach-aches, vomiting, eating disorders
- Vaginal or anal sores, bleeding, or itching

### **Activity and habit clues:**

- Nightmares
- Inappropriate masturbation
- Fear of going home or to some other location

- Fear of being with a particular person
- Running away
- Delinquency
- Lying
- Engaging in sex work

**Age-inappropriate behavior:**

- Alcohol/substance abuse
- Age-inappropriate sexual activity or awareness
- Assaulting younger children
- Takes on adult responsibilities
- Thumb sucking
- Promiscuity
- Bed wetting

**Educational concerns:**

- Extreme curiosity, imagination
- Inability to concentrate
- Sleeping in class
- Academic failure

**Emotional indicators:**

- Depression
- Phobias, fear of darkness, public restrooms, etc.
- Lack of spontaneity, creativity
- Self-inflicted injuries
- Injuring/killing animals
- Excessive fearfulness
- Chronic ailments

## responding to a child in distress

### **The four steps of problem solving:**

1. Identify the problem
  - An older kid stole my bike
  - The babysitter made me do things I don't like.
2. Examine possible solutions
  - Give up my bike and buy a new one, confront the bully with a friend and say "No!" or tell my mom or dad or a teacher.
  - Try to tell the babysitter "no" or tell a trusted adult.
3. Evaluate each alternative
  - I'd be afraid that I'd get hurt by the bully; a friend would help me feel stronger.
  - If I told a trusted adult they will talk to the babysitter or find a different babysitter.
4. Prepare a realistic plan of action
  - I'm going to tell the bully to give me my bike back and take a friend with me.
  - I want to talk to my trusted adult or talk to the babysitter with my trusted adult.
  - Let the child know they have a right to be safe.

## Handling a disclosure of abuse from a child

### Believe what they are telling you

- Focus on feelings more than specifics about the situation
- Try not to question what they are telling you. Asking “why” questions can make a child feel like it is their fault.
- Use open-ended questions to gather only the information you need to report the incident. Who, what, where, when? Then focus on feelings.

### Assure the child it is not their fault

- Thank them for telling you.
- Let them know how much courage it takes to come forward and tell someone.

### Tell them what action you will be taking in a very gentle, caring way

- Be honest and upfront about what may happen.
- Let them know you are there to support them.
- Never make promises to a child about what the outcome will be, we have no idea how this situation will work out.

Call Department of Children and Family Services if the abuser is a caretaker in the child's life 1-800-25A-BUSE or 1-800-252-2873

## victims with disabilities

### **Statistics:**

- Individuals with disabilities are at least twice as likely to be victims of violent victimization as people without disabilities.
- In a 2013 study, nearly 13% of children who were abused or neglected also had a disability.
- Almost 95% of individuals with a disability, who were victims of violent crime, could identify their perpetrator. 40% were victimized by an acquaintance, 30% were victimized by a stranger, and 15% were victimized by an intimate partner.

### **Vulnerabilities**

Isolation within a community, who rely on caregivers for personal care, and have limited transportation options, can create unsafe situations for people with disabilities. Perpetrators may perceive people with disabilities as easy targets because of societal stereotypes and extremely low rates of prosecution of perpetrators of crimes against people with disabilities. Finally, the severe underreporting of these crimes serves to further compound the overall inability of the system to address this problem.

## handling disclosures from a person with a disability

- Speak directly to the person, not the caregiver.
- Use the same calming techniques for a person with a disability that you would use with anyone else, but be prepared to take more time.
- Limit distractions.
  - *This is relevant for a person who is deaf and is trying to lip read or a person with mental disabilities who may have short attention spans and be highly distractible.*
- Find a quiet location where the person feels safe and comfortable.
- Speak in a friendly, non-authoritative way.
  - *This is relevant for a person who is blind and cannot readily “read” this situation and for a person with mental disabilities who may be confused and may not understand what is happening.*
- Introduce others who are present.
- Minimize differences in size.
  - When speaking to a person in a wheelchair, sit down so you are at eye level.
- Let the person know that it is okay to say, “I don’t know” or “I don’t remember.”
- Give person as much time as needed to respond to your questions.

*Source: University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Disability and Human Development.*

## Grooming

There are a number of specific techniques or ***grooming behaviors*** that offenders use to mask their behavior prior to the abuse, as well as during and after the abuse. Many deliberately establish themselves as the kind of person you wouldn't suspect to be a sex offender because they are "too nice" or an upstanding person in the community who helps people. Trust your gut instinct and then act on it. It is also important to listen for statements or questions from your child that would support your suspicions, and to encourage your child to tell you more about the time they spend with the person.

- Insists on hugging/tickling/wrestling with child, even if the child has said "stop."
- Normalizing touches that feel uncomfortable for the child or teen.
- May establish a trusting relationship with the family and friends of a child, in order to have access to the child alone.
- Spends most of their spare time with children.
- Offers special attention to children like gifts and money to manipulate child into keeping the abuse a secret.
- Encourages unhealthy behaviors.
- Destroys the child's trust in others.
- Undermines the way others view the child.



## reporting: rights and responsibilities

In the state of Illinois, school personnel are required to report suspected child abuse and neglect. The following information will assist you in understanding this responsibility.

- School personnel are required to report suspected abuse immediately. You do not need to have proof or evidence of abuse. If you have “reason to believe” a child is being abuse or neglected you are mandated to report.
- A report may be made by phone or by correspondence to the Department of Children and Family Services agency in Springfield.
  - Note: If your call is not an emergency, you do have the option to submit your report online through the online reporting system at <https://dcfsonlinereporting.dcf.illinois.gov/>.
- School personnel should provide the names of the child and the parent(s), the age of the child, and the reason(s) for suspecting abuse or neglect. If you know the name of the person you suspect is abusing the child, this information should also be provided.
- Reporters of child abuse and neglect are immune from any civil or criminal liability.
- All child abuse and neglect report and investigations are confidential, including the identity of the person making the report. The reporter’s name cannot be released without his or her written consent.
- Any person required to report suspected child abuse or neglect who willfully fails to report such abuse or neglect shall be guilty of a Class A misdemeanor for a first violation and a Class 4 felony for a second or subsequent violation. [325 ILCS 5/4.02]
- A person does not need to be required by law to make a report. If any person suspects a child to be abused or neglected, they may contact the Department of Children and Family Services.

## suggested activities for parents & teachers

1. Discuss children's rights, including the rights not to be touched in ways that makes a child feel unsafe or uncomfortable, the right to say no, and the right to get help.
2. Let your children know that you believe in their ability to stay safe and that you will always be there to help.
3. Play the "what if" game with your children. For example, "What if you went home today and there was no adult to greet you? What would you do? Where would you go?" Make each situation age appropriate.
  - For older students, "What if your date becomes physically, verbally, or sexually abusive?" What would you do? Who would you tell?
  - Answer children's questions about nightmares, television programs, real-life tragedies and "what-if's" positively and creatively without ridiculing their feelings or denying reality
4. Encourage children to help other children.
5. Discuss "good" and "bad" secrets, "safe" and "unsafe" touching and how to tell the difference.
6. Discuss consent and setting boundaries with your child at an early age.
7. Educate children about different types of force and manipulation that offenders may use such as: bribes, extortion, guilt, threats physical and authority.
8. Teach children about the importance of listening to their instincts.
9. Incorporate the words "safe, strong, and free" into your family's vocabulary.
10. Engage in family reading on personal safety, consent, boundaries and what do if they feel unsafe.
11. Encourage discussions around feelings (good, bad, scary, happy, etc.)
12. Continue to talk about safe/trusted people. Encourage them to create their own list of trusted adults.

for the community

1. Know your options if you witness child abuse or neglect.

2. When helping a child you don't know well, keep in mind the valuable information they have been given about strangers:

- Stay a safe distance from the child
- Don't touch the child
- Let them know you will help them by calling someone they trust.
- Watch the child's body language

4. Learn more about child abuse and its effects. See what you can do to help in your community by visiting the YWCA Metropolitan Chicago Website at:  
<https://ywcachicago.org/our-work/sexual-violence-support-services/education-training/>

## National and Local Resources

### **Department of Children and Family Services**

1-800-252-2873 (1-800-25-ABUSE)

<https://www2.illinois.gov/dcfs/Pages/default.aspx>

### **YWCA Metropolitan Chicago - Patterson & McDaniel Family Center**

2055 Army Trail Rd. – Suite 140

Addison, IL 60101

Phone: 630-790-6600

24-hour crisis hotline: 888-293-2080

Crisis Text Line: 888-293-2080 (Monday-Friday, 9:00 am – 5:00 pm)

<https://ywcachicago.org/>

### **DuPage County Health Department**

111 N. County Farm Rd.

Wheaton, IL 60187

Phone: 630-682-7400

[www.dupagehealth.org](http://www.dupagehealth.org)

### **RAINN** (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network)

Nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization.

National Hotline - 1-800-656-HOPE/ 1-800-656-4673

[www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)

### **Parent Help Line**

1-855-427-2736- Mon-Sun 8a.m.-8p.m.

<https://www.nationalparenthelpline.org/>

### **U.S. Department of Justice: Americans with Disabilities Act**

Phone: 800-514-0301

TTY line: 800-514-0383

<https://www.ada.gov/>

### **Family Resource Center on Disabilities**

20 E. Jackson Blvd., Rm. 300

Chicago, IL 60604  
Phone: 312-939-3513 / Toll-free at 800-952-4199  
<https://frcd.org/>

**DuPage Crisis line:** 630-627-1700

Individuals experiencing a crisis can contact Crisis Services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

<https://www.dupagehealth.org/183/Crisis-Services>

**National Child Abuse Hotline:** 1-800-4A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)

24-hour hotline with resources to aid in every child abuse situation. All calls are confidential.

**Eating Disorder Hotline:** 800-931-2237

The National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA) is the largest nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting individuals and families affected by eating disorders.

Helpline phone hours are Monday-Thursday 11AM-9PM ET & Friday 11AM-5PM.

Helpline chat hours are Monday-Thursday 9AM-9PM ET & Friday 9AM-5PM.

For 24/7 crisis support, text 'NEDA' to 741741

[www.nationaleatingdisorder.org](http://www.nationaleatingdisorder.org)

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.

[www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

**National Runaway Safe line** 1-800-RUN-AWAY (1-800-786-2929)

The mission of the National Runaway Safeline (NRS) is to keep America's runaway, homeless and at-risk youth safe and off the streets.

**DuPage Family Shelter Service Metropolitan Family Services**

24 Hour Hotline - 630-469-5650

Domestic Violence Services

<https://www.metrofamily.org/FSSofMFSD/>

**Hamdard Center** A community health **center** providing healthcare and support services for diverse communities in the Chicagoland area facing financial and domestic challenges.

630-835-1430

<https://www.hamdardcenter.org/>

## **Websites**

### **Kids Health**

We aim to give families the tools and confidence to make the best health choices.

[www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)

### **Pandora's Project**

Non-profit organization dedicated to providing support, and resources to survivors of rape and sexual abuse and their friends and family.

[www.pandys.org](http://www.pandys.org)

### **Love Is Respect**

love is respect is the national resource to disrupt and prevent unhealthy relationships and intimate partner violence by empowering young people through inclusive and equitable education, support, and resources.

<https://www.loveisrespect.org/>

### **Self-Injury: S.A.F.E. Alternatives:**

At S.A.F.E., tries to create a "culture of safety" in which the injurer comes to realize that self-injury destroys relationships, but safety brings people closer to them.

[www.selfinjury.com](http://www.selfinjury.com)

### **Family Equality**

Family Equality's mission is to advance legal and lived equality for LGBTQ families, and for those who wish to form them, through building community, changing hearts and minds, and driving policy change.

<https://www.familyequality.org/resources/talking-with-our-children-about-consent/>

### **Cyber Safety- Internet Safety**

Everyone should know how to be safe when surfing the web, but internet safety tips and tricks are spread out all over the web without a go-to resource. Since the majority of internet scam and virus victims are students and young people, Open

Colleges is a perfect place to post the very first full guide to being safe on the internet.

<https://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/cyber-safety/>

## **Books You Can Read with Children**

C is for Consent; Eleanor Morison (ages 1-5)

Let's Talk about Body Boundaries, Consent & Respect; Jayneen Sanders (age 4-10)

Your Body Belongs to You; Cornelia Maude Spelman (ages 3-6)

The Trouble with Secrets: Karen Johnsen (ages 3-8)

My Body Belongs to Me: Jill Starishevsky (ages 3-8)

A Secret Safe to Tell; Naomi Hunter (ages 3-8)

I Said No! A Kid-to-kid Guide to Keeping Private Parts Private; Zack & Kimberly King (ages 5-11)

Consent (for Kids): Boundaries, Respect, and Being In Charge of You; Rachel Brian (ages 6-10)

The Swimsuit Lesson: Jon Holsten (ages 6-12)

## **Books For Adults**

Body Safety Education: A parents' guide to protecting kids from sexual abuse:  
*Jayneen Sanders* (ages 3-12)