

to limit the number of people who need to discuss the exploitation or abuse with your child.

- Consider the need for counseling or therapy for your child. To ignore the incident, to “sweep it under the rug,” or to act as if it did not happen is not going to help your child deal with the exploitation or abuse. In deciding what counselors to use, look for someone who is experienced in cases of sexual victimization. Seek referrals for qualified individuals from the other professionals who are helping you. When finding such a counselor, ask about the number of children he or she has treated.

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), established in 1984 as a private, nonprofit organization, serves as a clearinghouse of information on missing and exploited children; provides technical assistance to the public and law-enforcement agencies; offers training programs to law-enforcement and social-service professionals; distributes photographs and descriptions of missing children nationwide; coordinates child-protection efforts with the private sector; networks with nonprofit service providers and state clearinghouses on missing-person cases; and provides information on effective legislation to ensure the protection of children per 42 USC § 5771 and 42 USC § 5780.

A 24-hour, toll-free telephone line, **1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)**, is available in the United States and Canada for those who have information on missing and exploited children. The toll-free number when

dialing from Mexico is 001-800-843-5678, and the “phone free” number when dialing from Europe is 00-800-0843-5678. The CyberTipline for online reporting is available worldwide at <http://www.cybertipline.com>. The TDD line is 1-800-826-7653. The NCMEC business number is 703-274-3900. The NCMEC facsimile number is 703-274-2222. The NCMEC web-site address is <http://www.missingkids.com>.

For information on the services offered by our NCMEC branches, please call them directly in California at 714-508-0150, Florida at 561-848-1900, Kansas City at 816-361-4554, New York at 716-242-0900, and South Carolina at 803-254-2326.

A number of publications, addressing various aspects of the missing- and exploited-child issue, are available free of charge in single copies by contacting the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children’s Publications Department at



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Just in case...

Parental guidelines in case your child might someday be the victim of sexual exploitation

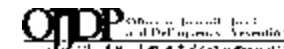


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Parental guidelines in case your child might someday be the victim of sexual exploitation

The instructions in this brochure provide information for your family about what to do if your child indicates that he or she has been the victim of sexual abuse or exploitation. They are calm, straightforward instructions that are not meant to alarm or frighten your child. **We want families and children to be careful and aware—we do not want them to be afraid.**

There is always a chance that a child may disclose past acts of exploitation or general feelings of fear. If this happens in your family, we want you to be prepared to help your child. How you react to your child's disclosure of sexual exploitation or fear is an important part of child protection. Follow the guidelines noted below if your child indicates that he or she may have been the victim of sexual abuse or exploitation.

Don't

- **Panic or overreact to the information disclosed by your child.** With your help and support, you will both make it through these difficult times. Be careful of your facial expressions, as your child will be watching you to see what your reaction is.
- **Criticize or blame your child.** The worst thing that you can do is to express anger at your child for having violated previous instructions. Outbursts such as, "I told you not to go into anyone's home!" will only hurt your ability to help.

Do

- **Respect your child's privacy.** Accompany your child to a private,

comfortable place where he or she can relate the story. Be careful not to discuss the exploitation or abuse in front of people who do not need to know what happened.

- **Support your child and the decision to tell the story.** It is normal for children to fear telling others—especially parents. Make it clear that telling you what happened was the right thing to do and that you will listen and get help. Reassure your children that you'll always love them, no matter what has happened. Remember, children are often told—by a child molester or exploiter—that bad things will happen if they tell what has occurred. Children are especially fearful of punishment, panic, or the loss of a parent's love. Your initial reaction to the disclosure will determine whether or not your child will feel comfortable in telling you additional information.
- **Show physical affection, and express your love and confidence with words and gestures.** Avoid challenges starting with *why* such as, "Why didn't you tell me this before?" or "Why did you let it happen?" **Give positive messages** such as, "I'm proud of you for telling me this," "I'm glad you're okay," or "I know you couldn't help it."
- **Explain to your child that he or she has done nothing wrong.** Your child may well have feelings of guilt and responsibility and assume that he or she is to blame for what happened. Most children are enticed or tricked into acts of exploitation or abuse, and they think

that they should have been smarter or stronger.

- **Remember that children seldom lie about acts of sexual exploitation.** It is important that your child feel you believe what he or she has told you.
- **Keep the lines of communication open with your child.** In the future, it will be vitally important for your child to believe that you are empathetic, understanding, supportive, and optimistic so that he or she will feel comfortable in making additional disclosures and in discussing feelings.

Steps to Take

- If you think your child has been physically injured, seek appropriate medical attention. Remember, often we do not realize that a child who has been sexually exploited is also physically injured. Do not guess. Let the professionals make an independent judgment about treatment.
- You must alert the child-protection, youth-services, child-abuse, or other appropriate social-service organizations. The police, sheriff's office, or other law-enforcement agency must **also** be notified. Many states have established child-advocacy centers that provide all of these services under one roof in a child-friendly environment. And because children should not have to repeat the story of their exploitation or abuse over and over again, some states have established limits to the number of interviews a child is required to give. Many have also installed videotaping