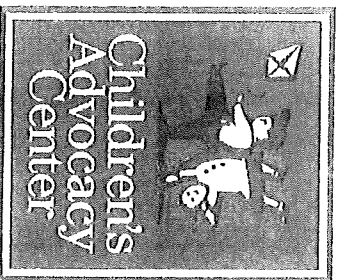


Keep Kids Safe

Prevent Abuse

These are some important steps you can take to protect your children from abuse:

- Talk to your children about sexual abuse, being sensitive to their age level and understanding.
- Teach children that they have private areas on their bodies (the parts that are covered by a swimsuit) that no one may touch.
- Explain to children that they do not have to do everything an adult tells them to do, especially if something makes them uncomfortable.
- Teach children not to accept gifts from acquaintances or strangers and to tell a trusted adult if someone has offered a gift.
- Work with your children to make some basic "safety rules" they should follow. For example, teach them never to go with or get in a car with a stranger.
- Teach children how to say "no" and how to get away from dangerous situations.
- Create open communication with children at an early age. Encourage your children to come to you with their problems.
- Make sure your children know their full name, address, and phone number. Teach them how to make emergency calls by dialing "911" or "0".
- Set rules for using the internet. Teach children that they must not meet anyone they meet on the web in person.
- Choose babysitters carefully, taking suggestions from trusted friends and checking references.
- If you are afraid you may hurt your children, seek help from a family doctor, counselor, or clergy member.



Recognize the Signs of Possible Sexual Abuse
Sexual abuse can happen to any child. Parents should know their children's moods and behaviors and notice any changes. Some changes may indicate other problems, but children who have been sexually abused often display certain signs, including the following:

- Not wanting to be around or alone with certain people, or difficulty trusting others.
- More mature knowledge of sex than is age appropriate, or acting out sexually.
- Changes in appetite.
- Sadness or suicide attempts.
- Depression or lack of interest in activities.
- Fear or avoidance of being touched.
- Fear or avoidance of bathrooms.
- Overly submissive behavior.
- Sleep problems, such as insomnia, frequent nightmares, or bedwetting.
- Changes in schoolwork, such as inability to concentrate or poorer grades.
- Hostility, anger, or frequent fights.
- Feelings of guilt and anxiety.
- Poor relationships with friends.
- Drug or alcohol use.
- Sexually transmitted diseases, such as gonorrhea or syphilis, in young children.
- Torn skin in and around the vagina or anus.
- Swelling in the genitals.
- Frequent urinary tract infections.
- Pregnancy at an early age.



What to Do if a Child Has Been Abused

Children who have been sexually abused often blame themselves. They may think they have done something wrong. Telling about the abuse is very difficult and frightening for them, and they will need much help and support, professionally and personally. If a child tells you he or she has been abused, you can provide support and reassurance by

- Staying calm and objective and handling your own anger and confusion
- Believing the child - children rarely lie about being abused
- Reporting the abuse to the police, the local child protective services agency, or a child abuse hotline - the first priority after abuse has been disclosed
- Immediately letting the child know he or she has done the right thing by telling
- Telling the child that the abuse was not his or her fault
- Assuring the child that he or she will be protected from further harm
- Showing the child that he or she is loved, Taking the child to a Children's Advocacy Center
- Securing counseling for the child and for your family.

How to Report Cases of Abuse

Every case of suspected abuse should be reported. If you suspect a child is being abused, call Childline at 1-800-932-0313. Trained counselors are available to talk with callers confidentially. Any questions? Please call the Children's Advocacy Center of NEPA at 570-969-7313.

