

## Keeping COMMUNITIES Safe

### Talking to Pre-Teens and Teenagers About Sexual Abuse

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#### What is sexual abuse?

**Sexual abuse** can involve touching or fondling, sexual relations, or even situations that don't involve touching such as taking pornographic photos or making obscene phone calls. Sexual abuse can happen when someone takes advantage of a supervisory position or a significant age difference to coerce, threaten, or force sexual contact. For teens, sexual abuse often involves emotional manipulation or "grooming."

#### How do I get started talking to teens about sexual assault?

Talking to older children or teens about sexual assault doesn't have to be a one-time conversation, and you don't have to say everything at once. Instead, open up an ongoing dialog about safety over time.

- Use natural moments to bring up sexual assault, such as a news item about a rape, attempted abduction, or a television program containing a reference to sexual abuse. Ask a teen about what they have heard and what they know. Give them the opportunity to ask questions.
- Link a discussion about safety with other safety conversations that you have, like dating, friends, or strangers.
- Be open and available for teens to come to you. Reinforce the idea that they can talk to you any time about whatever is on their minds.
- Remind them that *sexual assault is never the victim's fault*.
- Talk about technology. Talk about Internet safety and cyber bullying.

#### What do the statistics say?

Statistically speaking, as many as *one in three girls* and *one in five boys* will experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 16. In addition, about one in four high school and college age women will experience rape or attempted rape.

Most sexual assaults happen to people under the age of 18. Both young women and young men are vulnerable. Sex offenders share common traits, listed below. An offender:

- can be a child, teen, or adult.
- is usually someone you and your teenagers know and like.
- can be a man or a woman, married or single.
- can be of any race, hold any religious belief, and have any sexual preference.

- can be a parent, stepparent, relative, family, friend, teacher, clergyman, babysitter, coach, student, or boyfriend or girlfriend—anyone who comes in contact with your teens.
- is likely to be a stable, employed, and respected member of the community.

An offender's age, education, and intelligence **do not** prevent him or her from molesting a teenager.

### **How can child sexual molesters gain access to teenagers?**

Sex offenders who molest children spend a great deal of time and energy in the process of grooming their victims. **Grooming** means that the molester gains the victim's trust and confidence. Some common ways sex offenders' groom their victims are listed below.

- They pay attention to teens and make them feel special.
- They appear to be someone you and your family can trust and rely on.
- They get to know a teen's likes and dislikes very well.
- They go out of their way to buy gifts or treats a teen would like, including drugs or alcohol.
- They isolate a teen by involving him or her in fun activities so they can be together—alone.
- They may view pornographic and sexually explicit materials with a teen.
- They may prey upon a teenager lacking a father figure or stable home life.
- They may touch a teenager in your presence so that the teen thinks you are comfortable with the way the sex offender touches him/her.
- They may use the Internet, gaming, or cell phones to contact a teen.

### **How can I tell teens which specific behaviors are inappropriate?**

Young people need to identify which specific behaviors feel inappropriate or are warning signs that someone might try to take advantage of them, including:

- someone who tries to isolate them from friends and family, or get them alone to a deserted place.
- someone who tries to give them presents, food, drugs, alcohol, or who tries to share other age-inappropriate activities.
- someone who doesn't respect the teen's opinions or limits.
- someone who ignores or pushes past the teen's personal boundaries.

Encourage teens to leave situations that make them feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

### **How can I help teens stay safe online?**

While the Internet provides a wealth of information and entertainment, it also provides a potential opportunity for sexual offenders who molest children to gain access to children. The best ways to safeguard against the threat of anonymous online offenders are listed below.

- Educate yourself about the Internet and set rules for acceptable online behavior, including *when* children can be online, *for how long*, and *what activities* they can participate in while using the Internet.
- Teach youth that Internet safety means never giving out personal information (regarding themselves or others) over the Internet to people they have never met. This includes never creating a user ID that reveals a full name, age, sex, birthday, or year of graduation. *Offenders can search by these numbers when scanning for potential victims.*
- Instruct a child not to click on any links that are contained within an email sent from an email address they don't recognize. Such links could lead to sexually explicit or otherwise inappropriate websites.
- Many times adolescents feel that they are invincible. Be sure to inform a teen not to respond to email, chat comments, or newsgroup messages that are hostile, belligerent, inappropriate, or in any way makes them feel uncomfortable. If they do encounter a bad experience, encourage them to come and talk to you.
- If a child receives a message or image that is obscene, lewd, or indecent with the intent to harass, abuse, annoy, or threaten, or if you become aware of the transmission, use, or viewing of child pornography/sexually explicit materials while online, contact your local law enforcement and report the incident to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) at 1-800-843-5678 (the lost) or [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com). See the "Additional Community Resources" at the end of this document for more information.

## **LIST OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES ON LAWS AND INFORMATION RESOURCES REGARDING SEX OFFENDERS AND SEXUAL ASSAULT**

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### **Where can I find more information in Washington State?**

- Official State Government Website <http://access.wa.gov/>
- Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs: [HTTP://WWW.WCSAP.ORG/HELP.HTM](http://www.wcsap.org/help.htm)
- King County Sexual Assault Resource Center (KCSARC): <http://www.kcsarc.org/>
  - KCSARC's Education And Prevention Department 425.226.5062
  - KCSARC's 24-Hour Sexual Assault Resource Line 1.888.99.VOICE
  - General Sex Offender Information:  
[http://www.kcsarc.org/sex\\_offenders\\_safety.htm](http://www.kcsarc.org/sex_offenders_safety.htm)
- King County Sheriff's Office <http://www.metrokc.gov/sheriff/>
- Seattle Police Department's Sex Offender Website <http://www.seattle.gov/police>
- Washington Department of Corrections: <http://www.doc.wa.gov/>

- Offender Transition: <http://www.doc.wa.gov/cpu/>
- Washington Juvenile Rehabilitation Association (JRA): <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/jra/>
  - Juvenile Sex Offender Treatment: <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/jra/SOTreatment.shtml>
- Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs: <http://www.waspc.org/index.php>
  - WASPC's Sex Offender Information Center: <http://ml.waspc.org/>
- Health Profession Quality Assurance (can be used to check if licensed practitioner has had license suspended or revoked due to sex offense): [https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/hpqa1/Application/Credential\\_Search/profile.asp](https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/hpqa1/Application/Credential_Search/profile.asp)

## **Local**

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- For a list of Community Sexual Assault Programs, go to <http://www.wcsap.org/help.htm>
- Contact your local police department for additional community resources.
- Contact your county sheriff's department for additional community resources.

## **Federal**

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- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA): <http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpc/ferpa>
- Center for Sex Offender Management: <http://www.csom.org/>

## **Publications**

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- Training for School Staff on Juvenile Sex and Kidnapping Offenders: Legislative Report – House Bill 2101: <http://www.k12.wa.us/InstitutionalEd/pubdocs/FinalTaskForceReportHB2101.pdf>
- Notification to Schools of Registered Juvenile Sex or Kidnapping Offenders: Legislative Report – Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 6580: <http://www.k12.wa.us/InstitutionalEd/pubdocs/FinalTaskForceReportHB2101.pdf>

## **Legislation**

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- Senate Bill 6580: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/billinfo/summary.aspx?bill=6580&year=2005>
- House Bill 2101: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/billinfo/summary.aspx?bill=2101&year=2005>

**If there are any other resources that you believe should be on this list, please e-mail links to [Kathleen.sande@k12.wa.us](mailto:Kathleen.sande@k12.wa.us)**

## **As an adult, should I be concerned for my own safety?**

Children are not the only ones who need to be aware of the dangers of sexual assault. Unfortunately, even a seemingly nice, normal person you know can turn violent. However, some people are more likely to be sexually coerced than others. To keep yourself safe, pay close attention to the following behaviors in people. Traits you should watch for include:

- Individuals, who do not listen to you, ignore what you say, talk over you, or pretend not to hear you. Such individuals generally have little respect for others and would be more likely to hear your “no” as meaning, “convince me.”
- People who ignore your personal space boundaries (like standing too close or touching in a nonsexual way).
- People who express anger towards other people. Hostile feelings can easily be translated into hostile acts. Such individuals often get hostile when they hear “no.”
- People who do what they want regardless of what you want. If a person does this in little ways (for example, if (s)he makes all the decisions about what to do and where to go without asking your opinion), then (s)he may also be likely to make the decision about whether you are ready to have sex.
- People who try to make you feel guilty or accuse you of being “uptight” if you refuse their sexual overtures.
- Individuals who are excessively jealous or possessive.
- Individuals who have wrong or unrealistic ideas about intimate relationships (for example, it is a partner’s “duty” to have sex). Such partners are not likely to take your objections to sex seriously.
- People who use alcohol or drugs heavily.

## **As an adult, how can I reduce my own risk of sexual assault?**

- **Be aware of your surroundings.** Take note of threatening situations or behaviors that intimidate you or make you feel uncomfortable. Remember that relationships can be abused. If someone stops respecting your wishes or limits, they may be the kind of person who would take advantage of you.
- **Plan ahead.** Always let someone know where you are, where you are going, and when you expect to return. Arrange to have someone available to help you in case of an emergency.
- **Trust your instincts.** Don’t second-guess your gut feelings. If a situation does not feel right, leave. Remember that even people you know well may try to coerce you.
- **Be confident.** Stay alert. Make eye contact. Be assertive.
- **Take action.** If you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, speak out immediately. Name the behavior and say you want it to stop (For example, “You’re standing too close. Move away.”). In a strong clear voice say, “No,” “Enough,” or “Stop.” Call out for help. It’s your right to fight back if you feel safe enough to do so.