Keep us safe

- Talk to us about appropriate boundaries in our homes, schools and social settings.
- If you do not know what to do to help us, find someone who does know.
- Believe us when we tell you what’s going on.
- Help us determine who is a trusted adult.
- Encourage us to tell someone.
- Teach us how to ask for help.
- Support us in our decision to talk about what’s going on.
- If you’re concerned that something is happening, talk to someone about it.
- If you feel something is not right, don’t deny your feelings. Look into it further.
- Denial is dangerous and deprives us of our childhood.
- Remind us that our bodies belong to us, and we have the right to 'no'.
- Teach us the correct words for our “private parts”.

For more information

Kids and sexual abuse

A look at sexual abuse from a kid’s perspective and what we all can do to help keep kids safe.

"I didn’t know it was wrong. I thought he was protecting me."

-15 year-old survivor of sexual abuse

The Child Advocacy Task Force of the Action Alliance

The Child Advocacy Task Force is a statewide collaboration to promote a healthy environment free of sexual and domestic violence for all children.

For more information, call 804.377.0335 or visit www.vsdvalliance.org.

Resources in your area:

This brochure was developed by the Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance Child Advocacy Task Force.
He makes me feel special. • I try to stay busy after school so I don’t have to go home. • She told me this was our “special secret” • I didn’t know it was wrong • I trusted her • He said I wanted it • He said it was to protect me • It felt weird that he was touching me there • It just didn’t feel right • I thought it was normal • He said it was only a picture and he wouldn’t send it out.

Did you know?
- We can be victimized by other children or adults, at home, in school, or in other “safe” places.
- Someone we trust could be sexually abusing us.
- We can be exposed to “peeping toms” (voyeurism), unwelcomed sexual touching and fondling, exposure of genitals (exhibitionism), exposure to pornography, oral/anal/vaginal penetration, and sexting.
- Sexual abuse isn’t just physical.

We are being sexually abused when...
Someone in our home or someone we trust is:
- Asking us to do things that makes us feel uncomfortable.
- Telling us to keep secrets from you.

Our instincts tell us this behavior is not okay.
Please pay attention to our behaviors and what’s happening around you.

We sometimes don’t tell you because...
- We feel alone.
- We feel ashamed.
- We are confused.
- We feel helpless.
- We are just learning what love is.
- We feel special and don’t know the abuser is isolating us from trusted adults.
- We worry that the abuser might get in trouble.
- We don’t know how to put it in words.
- We are confused by the attention we are getting.
- We love and trust the abuser.
- We don’t know that what the abuser is doing is wrong.
- We think it’s our fault.

How many children are exposed to sexual violence?
In a statewide survey of adults in Virginia, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 5 men said they had been sexually victimized as children.

Over half (51%) of women experienced sexual assault before the age of 13, as did 39% of men.

Listen to us...
- Believe us.
- Don’t shame us.
- Don’t pressure us.
- Make us feel safe.
- Pay attention to our non-verbal behavior.
- Don’t make us feel guilty.
- Do something about it.
- Speak up for us.
- Remain calm and listen.

And for you grown-ups out there...
Some of us respond differently to violence, but these are some of the ways we might react:

In our bodies:
- It hurts down there.
- My private parts hurt.
- I don’t feel like eating these days.
- I eat to take away the pain.
- My head hurts.
- My stomach hurts.
- It hurts when I go to the bathroom.
- I sometimes walk differently.

In our actions:
- I know too much about sex for my age.
- I’m interested in sexual activities.
- I don’t feel like being around people.
- I don’t like it when people hug or touch me.
- I can’t sleep.
- I do more after-school activities so I don’t have to go home.
- I might try to injure myself.

In our emotions:
- I feel angry.
- I can’t focus on schoolwork.
- I feel overwhelmed.
- I’m sad and feel alone.
- I am more aggressive.
- I feel guilty.

[Source: Childhood Sexual Assault Victimization in Virginia, Division for Injury and Violence Prevention, Virginia Department of Health, August 2004.]