

# 10 Myths About Child Abuse

**1. Children are seldom victims of sexual abuse.**

Actually, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, in the United States, 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys is sexually abused by the time they are 18. Consider those numbers for a moment. They are shocking and devastating. Those figures alone should motivate parents to seek out prevention strategies.

**2. This kind of thing doesn't happen where we live.**

Actually, child sexual abuse has no socio-economic boundaries. It doesn't care if you are black or white, rich or poor or what religion you practice. It can creep in when you least expect it.

**3. We don't let our children go near strangers.** Actually, 93% of all child sexual abuse occurs at the hands of someone known to the child and trusted by the parents. Even if a child is never around strangers, he or she could be victimized by a neighbor, a coach, neighbor boy, a religious official or family member. Parents who teach only stranger danger are doing a disservice to their child.

**4. My child is not old enough for this discussion.** Actually, the appropriate age to discuss child sexual abuse prevention is when a child is three years old. The conversation can start as simply as "Did you know that the parts of your body covered by a bathing suit are private and are for no one else to see or touch?" Continue the conversation by explaining to the child that he should tell Mommy, Daddy or a teacher if someone touches him on those private parts. Be sure to include any necessary exceptions for potty training, hygiene and doctor visits. Be sure to talk about there is no such thing as secrets and that no one will ever hurt mommy or daddy!

**5. I don't want to scare my child.**

Actually, when handled properly, children find the message empowering and are not frightened at all. Parents do not refrain from teaching traffic safety for fear that their child will be afraid to cross the street. So too should we address the subject of body safety.

**6. I would know if something happened to my child.**

Actually, child sexual abuse is difficult to detect because frequently there are no physical signs of abuse. The emotional and behavioral signs that may accompany sexual abuse can be caused by a variety of triggers.

**7. My child would tell me if something happened to him.**

Actually, most children do not immediately disclose when they have been sexually abused. Contrary to a child who falls down and runs over to tell his parents, a child who has been sexually abused is likely being told not to tell anyone because no one will believe him, that people will say it is his fault, that the disclosure will cause great sadness in the family and that the behavior is their little secret.

**8. We never leave our child alone with adults.**

Actually, children can be sexually abused by other children! Neighbor boys!! The very same lessons that can help prevent children from being sexually abused by adults, can keep them safe from other children. Teach children what touch is appropriate and what is inappropriate, teach them the proper terminology for their private parts and teach them who they can talk to if anyone touches them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable.

**9. I don't want to put thoughts in her head.**

Actually, there is no data to indicate that a child who has been taught about child sexual abuse prevention is more likely to fabricate that they have been sexually abused. According to Victor Vieth, director of the National Child Protection Training Center at Winona State University, "Children do lie, but seldom about being abused. All human beings can and do lie, but it's hard for kids to do it about sex. They can't lie about something they have no knowledge of," he said, "and children don't learn about oral sex on Sesame Street."

**10. It's not going to happen to my child.**

Actually, as the statistics reveal, child sexual abuse is so pervasive that it could happen to any child. This reason is the catch-all. Educated, loving parents have actually said this to me. If one were to ask any parent whose child has been sexually abused if they thought their child would ever be sexually abused, I can guarantee each one would say no. No one wants to believe this could happen to their child. We need to stop denying that it could happen and recognize that there are ways to prevent it from happening. Make the decision to talk to your child about sexual abuse prevention in 2012. It could be the greatest gift you ever give them. By Jill Starishevsky, former NYC prosecutor, author and child advocate.