



THE EAP CONNECTION

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Helping Children to Protect Themselves

No matter how much we love our children, raising them is a demanding and often stressful job. It can bring frustration along with joy. This month we discuss a difficult topic, yet one that is a source of worry for many who care about children.

Physical Abuse

The law is clear regarding what constitutes abuse. In part, federal law states that it's a crime to cause evidence of "...skin bruising, bleeding, malnutrition, sexual molestation, burns, fracture of any bone, subdural hematoma, soft tissue swelling, failure to thrive, or death, and such condition of death is not justifiably explained, or where the history given concerning such condition or death may not be the produce of an accident."

Children are abused in a variety of settings and for various reasons. One can find examples of parents, babysitters, older siblings, relatives, friends, strangers, teachers, even ministers, who have physically abused a child. And the reasons they do so are as varied as the people who act on their impulses. Frustration. Anger. Jealousy. Poor parenting skills. Misbeliefs about what appropriate punishment is. The reasons go on.

Children often don't fully understand the consequences of what is happening to them. They may perceive it as normal. Or if they don't, they may go along with the story that is told for fear of what might happen if they told the truth.

You can help

You can be caring and alert. Share facts with your own children about abuse and how to guard against it. Prepare them so that they can respond appropriately. You can support the child who reports physical abuse or sexual molestation to you. You can be sensitive to feelings of fear and guilt.

If you have concerns about this topic in any way, or would like more information, please contact us. Again, this is a difficult topic, one that we wish didn't exist. Since it does, it behooves all of us to be prepared to respond in ways that protect those who are sometimes unable to protect themselves: our children.

Sexual Abuse

Statistics show that most sexual molestation is committed by relatives, friends or neighbors.

Handicapped and retarded children are susceptible, as are younger children in families with child abuse history. Other risky situations include changes in step or foster parents, and young girls frequently left alone with step or foster fathers.

Educate your children about their bodies. Let them know where it is inappropriate to be touched and the differences between good and bad touch on the rest of their body. Tell them that you want to know if someone makes them feel uncomfortable or if they have concerns about anything related to their body. If you suspect abuse, look for signals like these:

- behavior problems, such as running away or substance abuse
- emotional problems; fear of grownups, anxiety, guilt or crying
- failure to establish or keep friendships
- words or artistic expressions that suggest sexual experience
- telling others about sexual experiences
- suicide attempts
- psychological changes, such as phobia, hysteria or hypochondria

Your Employee Assistance Program can help, for more information or further assistance please call (800) 654-9778