

# Supporting Your Child or Teen

**As a parent or caregiver it is important that you take care of yourself in order to support your child or teen through the court and recovery processes.**

**Here are some suggestions:**

- Obtain individual therapy for yourself or attend a parent support group
- Obtain individual therapy for your child or teenager
- Acknowledge your feelings: any feeling you have is okay
- Find a trusted person with whom you can share your feelings, but find a place or time when your child or teen will not hear the discussion
- Be aware of and stop negative thoughts. Therapy will also help you to achieve thought stopping. Examples of negative thoughts are:
  - This is my fault
  - My child will never be the same
  - I will never make it through this
  - I cannot protect my child
- Believe your child's statements and react to them in supportive and comforting ways
- Realize that your child, teen and family can emerge from this experience strong, with better communication skills
- It is also possible for children and teens to learn more empathy for others through this process

# Things to Remember That Can Help Your Child

**As a parent or caregiver there are specific things you can do to support your child or teen through the court and recovery processes.**

**Here are some suggestions:**

- Respect your child or teen's feelings as genuine. Do not discount them
- Give your child or teen permission to share their feelings and reassure them that what they are feeling is normal
- Talk to your child. Listen to him/her. Do not pressure your child or teen to talk about the trauma unless they are ready
- Focus on your child's thoughts and feelings. Messages to send:
  - I believe you
  - I am proud of you
  - I have faith in you
  - You were brave to tell someone what happened
- Recognize your child's appropriate and good behaviors. Help change misbehavior with clear and consistent rules
- Praise specific behaviors
- Maintain routines (ie: meals, school, activities)
- Do not blame your child or teen for what has happened and reassure them that they were not responsible or at fault for what happened to them and/or the family
- Maintain your normal expressions of affection and physical contact with your child or teen

# Common Reactions to Trauma for Children

## ➤ Excessive Fear Reactions

- Avoiding situations and places that are reminders of the trauma
- Withdrawing from physical contact
- Feeling anxious or afraid when alone
- Expressing fear if required to separate from caretakers
- Experiencing nightmares or disrupted sleep

## ➤ Physical Complaints

- Frequent headaches
- Stomach aches
- Body aches

## ➤ Behavioral/Emotional Changes

- Aggression (verbal/physical)
- Depression/withdrawal
- Defiance
- Increased activity level
- Sexualized behavior
- Repetition of the trauma in play
- Bedwetting
- Poor hygiene
- Social problems
- Changed eating patterns
- School disruption



## ➤ Trauma may have more serious consequences for the child or teen when:

- It is inflicted by a caretaker or person in a position of trust
- Penetration occurs in sexual abuse
- It is repetitive, occurring over an extended period of time or there are multiple perpetrators
- There is a lack of support from the family and/or systems
- Other problems such as drug use, financial stressors, mental illness, etc. in the family system

# Trauma Symptoms in Children at Different Developmental Stages

## Infants

- Eating or sleeping problems
- Persistent crying and upset
- Recurrent recollections of the traumatic event(s)
- Separation anxiety
- Head banging and other self-injuring behaviors
- Intense affect
- Inability to evoke protective responses from parents
- Distressing dreams

## Toddlers

- All of the symptoms of infancy
- Posttraumatic play: reenacting some aspects of the traumatic events(s)
- Generalized fears
- Recklessness
- Preemptive and self-protective aggression
- Angry disobedience

## Preschoolers

- All of the symptoms of the early stages
- Increased need for personal space
- Power play in relationships

## Ages 6-11 yrs.

- Nightmares
- Aggression, trouble with peer relationships
- Problems concentrating and paying attention
- Withdrawn and/or emotional numbing
- School avoidance

## Ages 12-18 yrs.

- Antisocial behaviors
- School failure
- Impulsive and reckless behaviors
- Substance abuse
- Self-harm/cutting
- Suicidal thoughts
- Depression and withdrawal
- Anxiety

# 10 Ways to Teach Your Child the Skills to Prevent Sexual Abuse

## 1. Talk about body parts early.

Name body parts and talk about them very early. Use proper names for body parts, or at least teach your child what the actual words are for their body parts. I can't tell you how many young children I have worked with who have called their vagina their "bottom." Feeling comfortable using these words and knowing what they mean can help a child talk clearly if something inappropriate has happened.

## 2. Teach them that some body parts are private.

Tell your child that their private parts are called private because they are not for everyone to see. Explain that mommy and daddy can see them naked, but people outside of the home should only see them with their clothes on. Explain how their doctor can see them without their clothes because mommy and daddy are there with them and the doctor is checking their body.

## 3. Teach your child body boundaries.

Tell your child matter-of-factly that no one should touch their private parts and that no one should ask them to touch somebody else's private parts. Parents will often forget the second part of this sentence. Sexual abuse often begins with the perpetrator asking the child to touch them or someone else.

## 4. Tell your child that body secrets are not okay.

Most perpetrators will tell the child to keep the abuse a secret. This can be done in a friendly way, such as, "I love playing with you, but if you tell anyone else what we played they won't let me come over again." Or it can be a threat: "This is our secret. If you tell anyone I will tell them it was your idea and you will get in big trouble!" Tell your kids that no matter what anyone tells them, body secrets are not okay and they should always tell you if someone tries to make them keep a body secret.

## 5. Tell your child that no one should take pictures of their private parts.

This one is often missed by parents. There is a whole sick world out there of pedophiles who love to take and trade pictures of naked children online. This is an epidemic and it puts your child at risk. Tell your kids that no one should ever take pictures of their private parts.

## **6. Teach your child how to get out of scary or uncomfortable situations.**

Some children are uncomfortable with telling people “no”— especially older peers or adults. Tell them that it’s okay to tell an adult they have to leave, if something that feels wrong is happening, and help give them words to get out of uncomfortable situations. Tell your child that if someone wants to see or touch private parts they can tell them that they need to leave to go potty.

## **7. Have a code word your children can use when they feel unsafe or want to be picked up.**

As children get a little bit older, you can give them a code word that they can use when they are feeling unsafe. This can be used at home, when there are guests in the house or when they are on a play date or a sleepover.

## **8. Tell your children they will never be in trouble if they tell you a body secret.**

Children often tell me that they didn’t say anything because they thought they would get in trouble, too. This fear is often used by the perpetrator. Tell your child that no matter what happens, when they tell you anything about body safety or body secrets they will NEVER get in trouble.

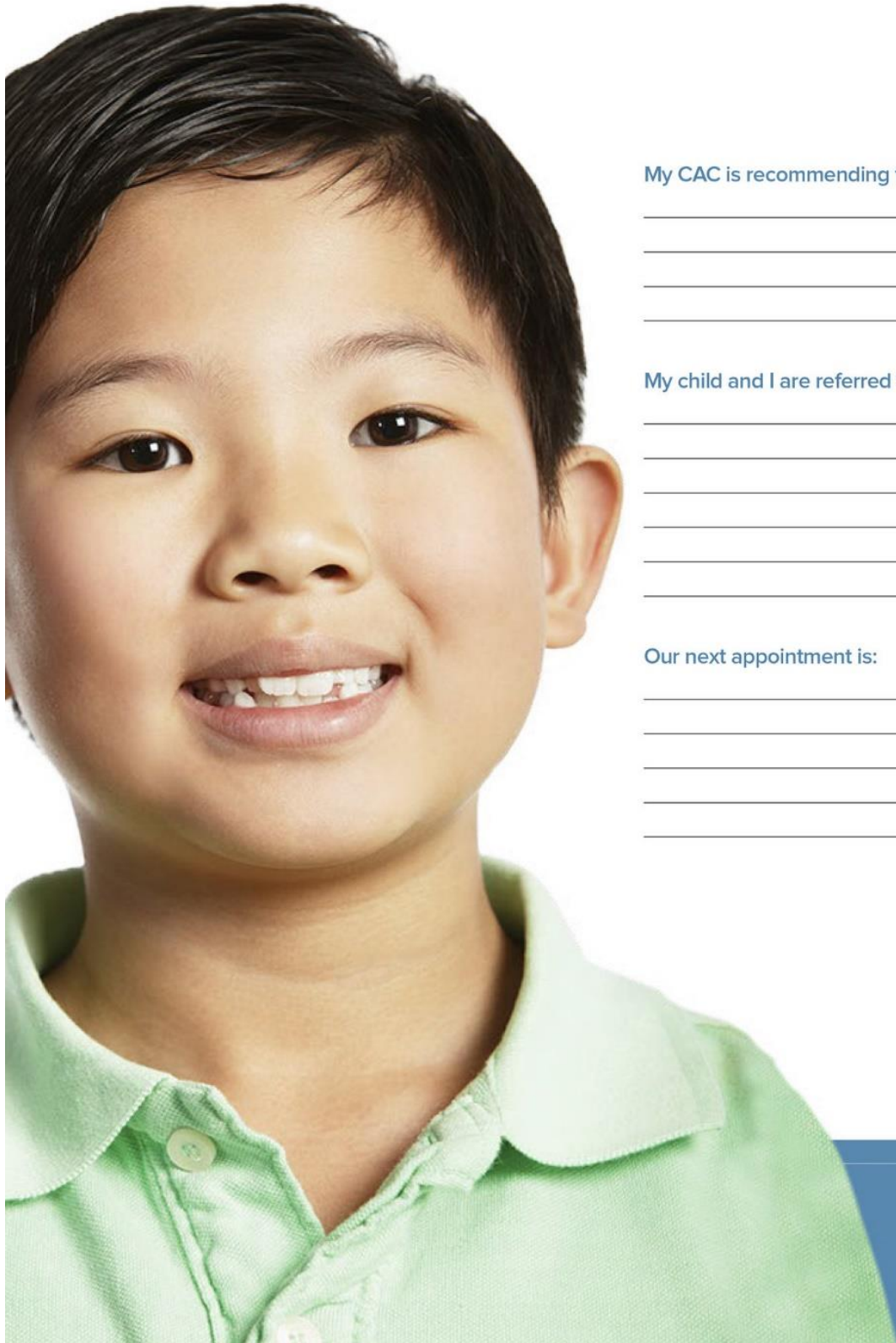
## **9. Tell your child that a body touch might tickle or feel good.**

Many parents and books talk about “good touch and bad touch,” but this can be confusing because often these touches do not hurt or feel bad. I prefer the term “secret touch,” as it is a more accurate depiction of what might happen.

## **10. Tell your child that these rules apply even with people they know and even with another child.**

This is an important point to discuss with your child. When you ask a young child what a “bad guy” looks like they will most likely describe a cartoonish villain. You can say something like, “Mommy and daddy might touch your private parts when we are cleaning you or if you need cream — but no one else should touch you there. Not friends, not aunts or uncles, not teachers or coaches. Even if you like them or think they are in charge, they should still not touch your private parts.”

*One discussion is not enough. Find natural times to reiterate these messages, such as bath time or when they are running around naked. And please share this article with those you love and care about and help me spread the message of body safety!*



My CAC is recommending follow-up:

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My child and I are referred to:

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Our next appointment is:

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