

# PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

**The problem of child sexual abuse is well known.** We must take special efforts to guard our children from harm. As a parent, what can you do to protect your children?

**Maintain a close relationship.** Most children are molested by someone they know, such as an uncle, parent, cousin, teacher, babysitter, or neighbor. This underscores the importance of parents maintaining a close relationship with their child. Children need to know they can tell their parents anything. Many children who have survived sexual abuse say something like this, "My mother would never have believed her favorite brother was doing that to me."

**Talk and listen.** Children should feel comfortable telling parents about someone who frightens them or tries to touch them in a private area. Parents should discuss their children's activities when they return from spending time with a friend or a babysitter. This helps the parent understand what is going on in the child's life, and it gives the child an opportunity to talk about anything troubling them. Parents should be aware of where their children are, and who they are spending time with.

**Secrets and surprises.** The difference between a secret and a surprise is difficult for many children to grasp. Explain the difference to your child and encourage them to tell you if *anyone* tells them to keep a secret from you. A few surprise parties might be spoiled before children grasp the difference between a secret and surprise, but the child's safety is most important.

**Body ownership.** Emphasize a child's right to control access to his or her own body, and explain that no one should ever touch him or her in a "private area."

**Safety in numbers.** Instruct children to avoid playing alone, and to avoid using public rest rooms alone.

**Contingency plan.** Give your children a list of people to whom they can turn when they sense they are in danger. For example, discuss who they should go see at school or the mall if they feel threatened. Discuss a "contingency plan" for the child to follow if he or she is ever touched inappropriately.

**Strangers.** Teach children to be wary of overly friendly strangers. Emphasize they should never listen to strangers who claim, "Your parent sent me to pick you up."

**When a molester is encountered.** Instruct children to run away and tell an adult if they encounter a child molester. Explain it is okay to comply with the molester's demands if they are

physically threatened. Always contact law enforcement about close calls. The next child may not be as fortunate.

It is sometimes difficult to teach children to defend themselves from child molesters without robbing them of their childhood. Prevention can be taught by using Bible stories where biblical characters like David encountered danger, and the Lord sustained them. Our Christian faith can be very comforting in helping children deal with the dangers of this world.

## If Abuse Occurs

How families and friends deal with the abuse of a child makes all the difference in his or her recovery.

**Express love and listen.** Express love for the child and believe the child's story. Do not interrogate him about what happened, and be sure your child does not get the impression you do not believe him. Support and praise the child for telling what happened and encourage him to resume normal activities as soon as possible.

**Show empathy, belief, and a lack of blame.** Explain that the abuse they suffered was not their fault. Remind children who feel guilt that God will forgive us of anything (1 John 1:9). Ask the child if she wants to be hugged or cuddled before touching her. Some children will be afraid of any physical contact after suffering abuse.

**Be understanding.** Often a child will not report abuse immediately. In these cases be understanding, not judgmental. Offenders frequently threaten the survivor's life, or that of their loved ones. In some cases, molesters kill animals in front of the child to emphasize the point.

**Be calm.** Parents must be willing to discuss the event with the child without getting upset. Avoid showing shock or disgust when the child reveals what has happened. Do not force children to talk about what has happened to them, but keep communication lines open by creating an atmosphere where he or she feels safe to talk. Parents may find it helpful if the child draws how he or she feels or describes what happened using dolls. These third-person methods make it easier for children to discuss the abuse and deal with their trauma.

**Never discuss retaliation.** Avoid discussing retaliation against the perpetrator. This often results in the victim's silence out of fear for the safety of family members, which delays the recovery of the child.

**Seek professional help.** Survivors of sexual abuse should be taken to a physician for a medical exam and for counseling to help overcome the trauma. Families whose children have been sexually abused may need counseling, since many blame themselves.

## Special Resources

As Christians, we have special resources to help victims and parents cope with the trauma of sexual abuse. These resources are usually ignored by professionals. We have the Bible, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Children and their families can cast their anxieties upon Christ and know He cares for them (1 Peter 5:7) and is making intercession for them.

Meditation upon biblical passages can help survivors overcome guilt and resume normal lives. Remind survivors the offender cannot destroy their soul despite harming their body (Matthew 10:28), and wherever they go, the Lord goes with them holding their hand (Isaiah 41:13).

Families can be comforted through the knowledge that the Lord is a refuge in times of trouble (Psalms 9:9; 46:1). Remember the power of prayer, and that Romans 8:26 tells us that the Spirit helps us in our weakness when we do not even know what we should pray. The Holy Spirit can also soothe like nothing of the world. It was Jesus who referred to the Holy Spirit as the Comforter in John 14:16.

**About the Writer:** Edward E. Moody, Jr., Ph.D., was elected executive secretary of the National Association of Free Will Baptists in July 2019. Prior to his election, Dr. Moody pastored Tippett's Chapel FWB Church in Clayton, North Carolina. He additionally served as professor of counselor education and associate dean of the School of Education at North Carolina Central University. Named North Carolina's Counselor of the Year in 2016, Moody holds a Ph.D. in counselor education from North Carolina State University, an M.A. from Middle Tennessee State University in clinical psychology, and a B.A. from Welch College in pastoral training. He is author of *Surviving Culture*, *First Aid for Emotional Hurts: Helping People Through Difficult Times*, and the *First Aid for Your Emotional Hurts* training series, along with numerous professional journal and magazine articles. Eddie and his wife Lynne have two adult children, Mackenzie and Mitchell.

Adapted by permission from *Contact* magazine for **Better Together Resources**. Permission granted for churches, ministries, and other organizations to duplicate for educational and ministry use.



BETTER TOGETHER RESOURCES  
@BETTERTOGETHERNAFWB