

Protecting Kids from Abuse

Question: Do you ever worry that your kids will be sexually abused by sitters, neighbors, family, or friends?

Response:

Yes, we worry.

We worry for a good reason. It seems like there are weekly articles in our paper of sexual molestation by coaches, relatives, friends, neighbors, and even clergy. One in three girls and one in seven boys will be molested during childhood⁽¹⁾. While that statistic seem outrageous, from my limited counseling experience it really doesn't seem to be too exaggerated. It's an ugly world isn't it? As you can imagine, the results can be devastating.

I'm sure this is an incomplete list. I am no expert in this, but here are some of the things we've tried to put into place in our family.

1. Be with your kids.

Ephesians 5:12 For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.

If you could take away the "secret" part of it, you could prevent a lot of the ugly things people do. One way to do that is to stay with your kids and watch over them as much as possible. Keep your kids in your home, and not at the neighbors'. Obviously, there are times when you need to be gone, but it's far too easy to fall into the trap of running around all over while a sitter watches the kids. In fact, in our society it is commonly preached that parents "need a break" and "need to get away." Certainly we need some peace, and we need some rest at times, but not at the expense of the children that God has entrusted into OUR care. When you must be away, take precautions; but try to be away as little as possible.

Train your kids to be with you so that you don't always need a sitter. Train them to be able to play quietly while you meet with someone in your home, or sit on a blanket and play while you're at a meeting at church or school. Older kids can read a book or help with younger siblings. Work toward that goal.

2. Warn your kids of dangers.

Give age appropriate warnings. For younger kids they can be real simple.

- Some people try to hurt children.
- Some people try to steal children.
- Some people try to touch children where they shouldn't.
- Some people try to trick children (give examples to them of what a stranger might say).
- If someone tries to take you they are going to hurt you. Do everything that you can to get away no matter what they say.
- Read [The Swimsuit Lesson](#) by Jon Holsten

3. Set boundaries.

We need to take heed of the statistics we read and do something about it. Proverbs 27:12 says, "The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it." We see potential danger in this area and need to take action. Kids need boundaries. They need them with strangers, but they also need them with those that they are close to. About 80% of abusers are not strangers, but are known to the children.⁽²⁾ Here are some boundaries to consider:

- No one else should touch your private areas.
- No one else should see your private areas.
- No one else should be alone with you or any of your brothers and sisters behind a closed door.
- Adults (particularly men) may not have close, exclusive, personal relationships with our kids.
- Adults may not take our kids on one-on-one activities like hiking, swimming, etc...
- We greatly restrict allowing our kids to go on sleepovers.

4. Screen your sitters.

Our church just did about 40 background checks on our children's ministry workers. You'd expect that of an organization that cares for your kids wouldn't you? Yet many parents will allow someone into their home to watch their children whom they know little to nothing about. Pick sitters that have good character, upbringing, and dispositions. The teenaged neighbor girl may be available and easy to use in a pinch, but do you really know her?

I'm sure this is discriminatory, but I'm recommend using only female sitters. We usually don't allow male relatives, friends, and neighbors to watch our kids. Most sexual predators are men.

Be careful of using a sitter just because someone else uses him/her. Other parents may not be as discriminating.

5. Tell your kids what to do if approached sexually or if someone tries to take them.

- Scream like crazy!
- Kick, yell, fight, bite, claw eyes out, etc...
- Tell us about it.

6. Try to identify abuse.

Abuse is certainly a terrible thing. We want to do everything we can to prevent it. However, it does not have to be the end of the world. It is very serious, but if it happens we can get through it with God's help. The catch is that we're really like to know about it if it happens so that we can help our kids work through it. We ask our kids lots of questions to try and find out what happened in our absence.

- Did anyone touch you inappropriately while we were gone? Has anyone ever touched you inappropriately?
- Did anything happen that someone told you not to tell mommy or daddy?
- Did anything happen today that made you feel uncomfortable?
- Did anyone see your private parts?
- Is there anyone you don't feel comfortable around and don't want us to use as a babysitter?
- Did anyone take you or any of our other children behind a closed door?

Lastly, I'd just remind you to be in faith. There are many dangers in the world and we cannot protect our kids from all of them. You should certainly take reasonable precautions, but you don't need to keep your kids locked up. Trust God to give you discernment, to watch over your kids, and to help you get through anything that this evil world brings.

Psalms 32:8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.
NIV

(1) Earnest Zarra III, *It Should Never Happen Here*, © 1995, p. 14

(2) Earnest Zarra III, *It Should Never Happen Here*, © 1995, p. 17

More resources:

[Sexual abuse](#) - Focus on the Family

[Talking to Your Kids about Sexual Abuse](#) - Focus on the Family