

Excerpts from *Child & Family Canada*'s web site, section on "Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Initiatives"

Limitations of some approaches to child sexual abuse prevention

Stranger Danger

Over 80% of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by trusted adults who are known to the child and have ready access.

No, Go, Tell

Trying to teach children to stand up to a perpetrator fails to acknowledge the power imbalance between a child and an adult or teenager. It assumes the child recognizes the act as abuse. In addition, expecting children to say no and go tell can suggest they are somehow to blame if they don't say no and don't tell.

Good Touch/Bad Touch

It is unwise to put forth the idea that all sexual touch is bad. Also, sexual abuse does not always create uncomfortable feelings. Offenders often manipulate or seduce the child gradually, pushing the child's boundaries so that a violation seems minor. In addition, many of the actual behaviors (caressing, stroking) are pleasurable. The seduction may involve treats or privileges. Children who have been abused may misinterpret the bad touch message to mean there is something bad about them for being involved in and possibly even enjoying the activity.

Vital elements of prevention approaches

Recognition of inappropriate touch

Rather than trying to teach a child to use their feelings to decide whether a touch was inappropriate or not, teach them a straightforward safety rule. "It is not okay for a bigger person to touch or look at my private parts, unless I need help because my private parts are hurt or sick. It is not okay for a bigger person to ask me to touch or look at their private parts." When children are taught to use a safety rule as the primary decision-making tool, they demonstrate the ability to recognize unsafe situations. They do not necessarily recognize an unsafe situation when asked to use their feelings to decide.

Teach children how to resist

Children learn best through active participation. It is not enough to tell children to say no and go tell. They need the opportunity to practice through role-plays.

Reassure children that abuse is not their fault

This concept needs to be repeated often. Young children's egocentricity gives them the tendency to blame themselves.

Proper names of body parts should be used

Perpetrators of sexual abuse count on us to teach children not to talk about sex. By talking about genitals and age appropriate sexual matters to children in a respectful manner, we stop teaching by exclusion that all these things are secret and not to be talked about.