

Just in Case...Guidelines in case your child might someday be the victim of sexual exploitation

The instructions in this brochure provide information for your family about what to do if your child indicates he or she has been the victim of sexual exploitation. They are calm, straightforward instructions not meant to alarm or frighten your child. **Families and children should be careful and aware—not afraid.**

There is always a chance a child may disclose past acts of exploitation or general feelings of fear. If this happens in your family, be prepared to help your child. How you react to your child's disclosure of sexual exploitation or fear is an important part of child protection. Follow the guidelines noted below if your child indicates he or she may have been victimized in this way.

Don't

- **Panic or overreact to the information disclosed by your child.** With your help and support, you will both make it through these difficult times. Be careful of your facial expressions, as your child will be watching to see your reaction.
- **Criticize or blame your child.** One of the worst things you could do is express anger at your child for having violated previous instructions. Outbursts such as, "I told you not to go into anyone's home!" will only hurt your ability to help.

Do

- **Respect your child's privacy.** Accompany your child to a private, comfortable place where he or she may relate the incident(s). Be careful not to discuss the victimization in front of people who do not need to know what happened.
- **Support your child and the decision to tell.** It is normal for children to fear telling others—especially parents or guardians. Make it clear that telling you what happened was the right thing to do and you will listen and get help. Reassure your children you'll always love them, no matter what has happened. Remember, children are often told—by a child molester or exploiter—bad things will happen if they tell what has occurred. Children are especially fearful of punishment, panic, or the loss of a parent's or guardian's love. Your initial reaction to the disclosure will determine whether or not your child will feel comfortable in telling you additional information.
- **Show physical affection, and express your love and confidence with words and gestures. Avoid** challenges starting with **why** such as, "Why didn't you tell me this before?" or "Why did you let it happen?" **Give positive messages** such as, "I'm proud of you for telling me this," "I'm glad you're OK," or "I know it wasn't your fault."
- **Explain to your child that he or she has done nothing wrong.** Your child may have feelings of guilt and responsibility and assume he or she is to blame for what happened. Most children are enticed or tricked into being victimized, and they think they should have been smarter or stronger.
- **Remember children seldom lie about acts of sexual victimization.** It is important your child feels you believe what he or she has told you.
- **Keep the lines of communication open with your child.** In the future it will be vitally important for your child to believe you are empathetic, understanding,

supportive, and optimistic so he or she will feel comfortable in making additional disclosures and discussing feelings.

Steps to Take

- If you think your child has been physically injured, seek appropriate medical attention. Remember, often we do not realize a child who has been sexually exploited may also be physically injured. Do not guess. Let the professionals make an independent judgment about treatment.
- You must alert the child-protection, youth-services, child-abuse, or other appropriate social-service organizations. The police, sheriff's office, or other law-enforcement agency **must also** be notified. Many jurisdictions have established child-advocacy centers providing all of these services under one roof in a childfriendly environment. And because children should not have to repeat information about their victimization over and over again, some jurisdictions have established limits to the number of interviews a child is required to give. Many have also installed videotaping to limit the number of people who need to discuss the victimization with your child.
- Consider the need for counseling or therapy for your child. To act as if it did not happen is not going to help your child address the victimization. In deciding what counselor to use, look for someone who is experienced in cases of sexual victimization. Seek referrals for qualified individuals from the other professionals who are helping you. When finding such a counselor, ask about the number of children he or she has treated.

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children[®] (NCMEC), established in 1984 as a private, nonprofit organization, serves as a clearinghouse of information about missing and sexually exploited children; provides technical assistance to the public and law-enforcement agencies; offers training programs to law-enforcement and forensic, social-service professionals; distributes photographs of and descriptions about missing children worldwide; creates and coordinates child-protection education and prevention programs and publications; coordinates childprotection efforts with the private sector; networks with nonprofit service providers and missing-child clearinghouses regarding missing-child cases; and provides information about effective legislation to help ensure the protection of children per 42 U.S.C. §§ 5771 et seq.; 42 U.S.C. § 11606; and 22 C.F.R. § 94.6.

A 24-hour, toll-free telephone line, 1-800-THE-LOST[®] (1-800-843-5678), is available in Canada and the United States for those who have information regarding missing and sexually exploited children. The "phone free" number is 001-800-843-5678 when dialing from Mexico and 00-800-0843-5678 when dialing from many other countries. For a list of other toll-free numbers available when dialing from specific countries visit www.missingkids.com and from the home page click on the link to "More Services" and then on the link to "24-Hour Hotline." The CyberTipline[®] is available worldwide for online reporting of these crimes at www.cybertipline.com. The TTY line is 1-800-826-7653. The NCMEC business number when dialing in the United States is 703-274-3900. The NCMEC business number when dialing from other countries is 001-703-522-9320. The NCMEC facsimile number is 703-274-2200. The NCMEC website address is www.missingkids.com.

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