

refer parents to community services and self-help groups.

Unlike preventive efforts for neglect and physical abuse, which have been aimed at the potential offender, prevention of child sexual abuse has centered on education of children to protect themselves. Materials are available for parents that describe sexual abuse and its prevention.[†] Helpful games such as “What if the babysitter wants to wrestle and hug but tells you to keep it a secret?” can be used to explore dangerous situations in advance and help children learn the importance of saying “no.” They need reassurance that no matter what the other person says or does, the parents want to know about it and will not punish them. Even if children participate in the activity before telling their parents, they must be reassured that it was not their fault. It is equally important to teach children safety in terms of potential risk situations. Several suggestions for parents regarding protecting and educating children against possible molestation are presented in the [Family-Centered Care](#) box. The nurse is frequently in a position to discuss the topic of abuse with parents and to provide guidelines. In addition, parents need to be made aware that “nice” people, including friends and relatives, can be offenders; parents should carefully observe how others act toward the child. A sudden change in the child's behavior and a response such as “I don't like Uncle Bob anymore” are clues to investigate the relationship. In the event of any doubt, prevent further solitary encounters with this person and the child. It is sometimes to the child's great misfortune that parents do not take certain comments seriously, such as “He hugs me too tight” or “I don't want to go with him.” Casual parental statements such as “He just loves you” or “You do whatever adults tell you to do” can place children in jeopardy. Health professionals must alert parents to such dangers and guide them toward an appreciation of the problem, providing concrete guidelines toward child education and protection.

Family-Centered Care

Preventing and Dealing with Sexual Abuse of Children

Sexual assault of children is much more common than most people