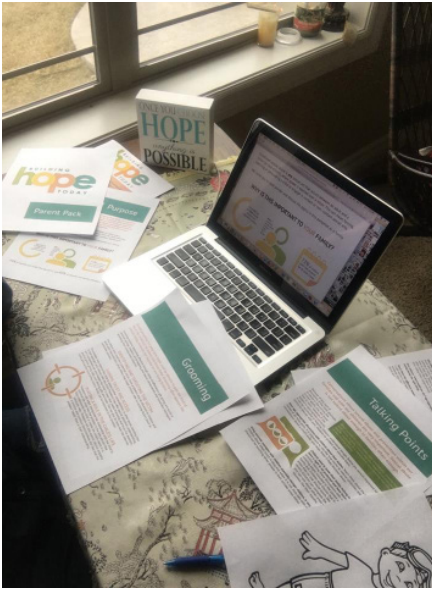




Family Pack

# Purpose

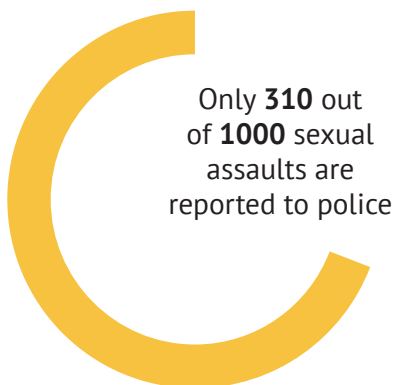


*At Building Hope Today, our mission is to create awareness of the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse, reveal its lasting effects, and safeguard children at risk on our path towards a hope-filled tomorrow.*

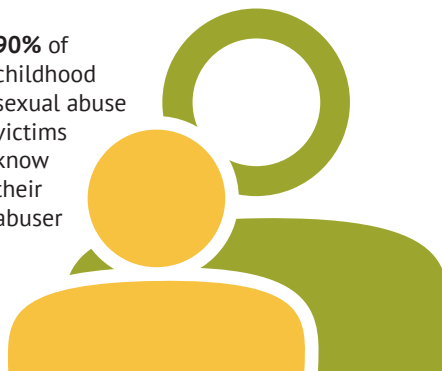
Childhood sexual abuse is **any** sexual act that occurs between an adult and a minor (or two minors), where power is exerted over a minor. This can mean forcing, coercing, or persuading a child to engage in contact or non-contact sexual acts.

We invite you to read, ponder, and discuss the topics in this pamphlet as a family.

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT TO **YOUR** FAMILY?



90% of childhood sexual abuse victims know their abuser



**34%** of victims are under the age of 12, and **60%** of abusers are family members.

# Grooming

*Sexual grooming is a long-term tactic used by abusers to gain the trust of his or her victims(s) to isolate and abuse them. Grooming often appears like normal loving behavior, but boundaries are being broken.*

Grooming involves expressing affection through words of affirmation, gift giving, and social or personal outings. Isolation, secret keeping, sexual conversations and innuendos distinguish grooming from normal adult behavior.

## IDENTIFYING AND TARGETING THE VICTIM

Any child or teen could be a potential victim. Some predators may be attracted to children and youth with characteristics, while others may target children with co-existing factors (such as vulnerable parents.)

## GAINING TRUST AND ACCESS

The predator may observe the child to assess his/her vulnerabilities; in other words, learning how to best approach and interact with the child. Predators may offer special attention, understanding, and a sympathetic ear and engage the child in ways that create friendship and trust. For example, playing games, giving rides, and offering gifts and treats. This can also be done over the Internet. Lastly, gaining the trust of the victim's family can be important to the predator.

## PLAYING A ROLE IN THE CHILD'S LIFE

Predators will often manipulate the relationship with the child to convince the child that the predator is the only person that fully understands the child or meets the child's needs in a particular way. Predators will also exploit natural empathy in a victim and convince them/reinforce the idea that the predator "needs" them or their understanding.



## ISOLATING THE CHILD

Taking the child out of his or her surroundings is one way that the predator can separate the child from others and gain access to the child alone, so that others cannot witness the abuse. (Predators have been successful in molesting their victims when other adults were in the room, but predators tend to gravitate towards secrecy.)

## MAKING RELATONSHIPS

The predator can then strengthen the connection through private communication, including conversations both physical and virtual. (Texts, letters, emails, and other messages, for example.) Admonitions to keep the conversations a secret are often a tactic for the predator to use, as are threats such as disclosure of conversations, physical harm to the child or others, or other traumas. Some predators go so far as to threaten suicide if the secret is not kept.



## INITIATING SEXUAL CONTACT

Once the predator establishes power over the child – through coercion, emotional connection, or other tactics – the predator feels that it is safe to start physically touching the child. This touching may not be overtly sexual at first, but it still may be sexually gratifying to the predator. This causal touching could take the form of an arm around the shoulder, a pat on the knee, etc. Gradually, the predator will begin touching the child in more sexual ways. This breaking down of boundaries, slowly and gradually, desensitizes the child, damages inhibitions, and sexualizes the victim in the predator’s mind, which leads to further inappropriate touching.

## CONTROLLING THE RELATIONSHIP

Predators need control in order to remain safe. **Secrecy is vital to the predator, so predators will do what they can to make the child scared to reveal abuse.** The predator may tell children that

no one will believe them. Blaming the child and saying the child “made” (the predator) do this to them, also discourages the victim from speaking about the abuse.

Fear of a sibling or friend being abused as a consequence of revealing the secret is another tactic predators use. Also, shame, or fear of being blamed and getting in trouble, is a powerful motivation for victims to stay silent. Lastly, the predator will use threats to attack the child’s vulnerabilities and protect the secret.



# Talking Points

**Conversations about sexual abuse and prevention within our families and with our children are very important. Sexual abuse is not talked about enough in families often enough.**

Because of this lack of discussion, if the child discloses or abuse is discovered, the trusted adults may not know how to react. However, if the subject is approached correctly,

it can be successful in helping children understand danger. Below are several important talking points to discuss with your children to protect and educate them.

*When parents or trusted adults react emotionally, showing anger, grief, shame, or guilt, children may shut down and further conversation may be compromised. It is important to react in a way that does not lead to this shut-down.*

***Have age appropriate discussions with children about their bodies.*** Teach them about the real names of all body parts. It is important to use the true terms to reduce confusion and negative connotations about a child's body and helps them if they disclose abuse.



***Children need to know their bodies belong to them and they have a right to be protected and have boundaries.*** You can practice having these discussions with children with the coloring pages included in the parent pack. Sit with your family and children to discuss that they have private areas that no one should touch, like where a swimsuit covers. Children can complete the coloring pages and you can talk about other areas that should not be touched, like their mouths.

***Using concrete examples with children, especially younger children, is very important.*** Talk with your children about when touch is okay and when it is not. Also, talk with children about how they should not be touching other people in their private areas either.

**Help your children understand that it is okay to have questions.** Discussion about sex should begin around age 8 so that children hear the information from parents before they begin to learn about it from their peers or other individuals. Remain calm during discussion so that children know it's okay to have these discussions and questions. Acting uncomfortable, embarrassed, or even angry might make a child hesitant from asking questions in the future.

**Talk about a variety of safety tips with your child at various age-appropriate levels.** As children grow, there will be different and important safety tips to address. Talking about safety is helpful in making it more natural to discuss issues about a child's body, sex, what touch is appropriate, and how to stay safe. These conversations will become more natural like when we talk about safety in other issues like if there is a fire or if someone is hurt. Teach them steps that they should take if their safety feels compromised.

**Give children "what would you do?" age appropriate scenarios so they have a chance to practice saying/doing the right thing.**

**Teach them the difference between a safe secret and an unsafe secret.** For example, teach them a safe secret is like keeping a surprise birthday party a secret. Help them understand that if someone says they can't tell anyone (or specifically, can't tell their parents), then that is an unsafe secret and they need to tell their parents.

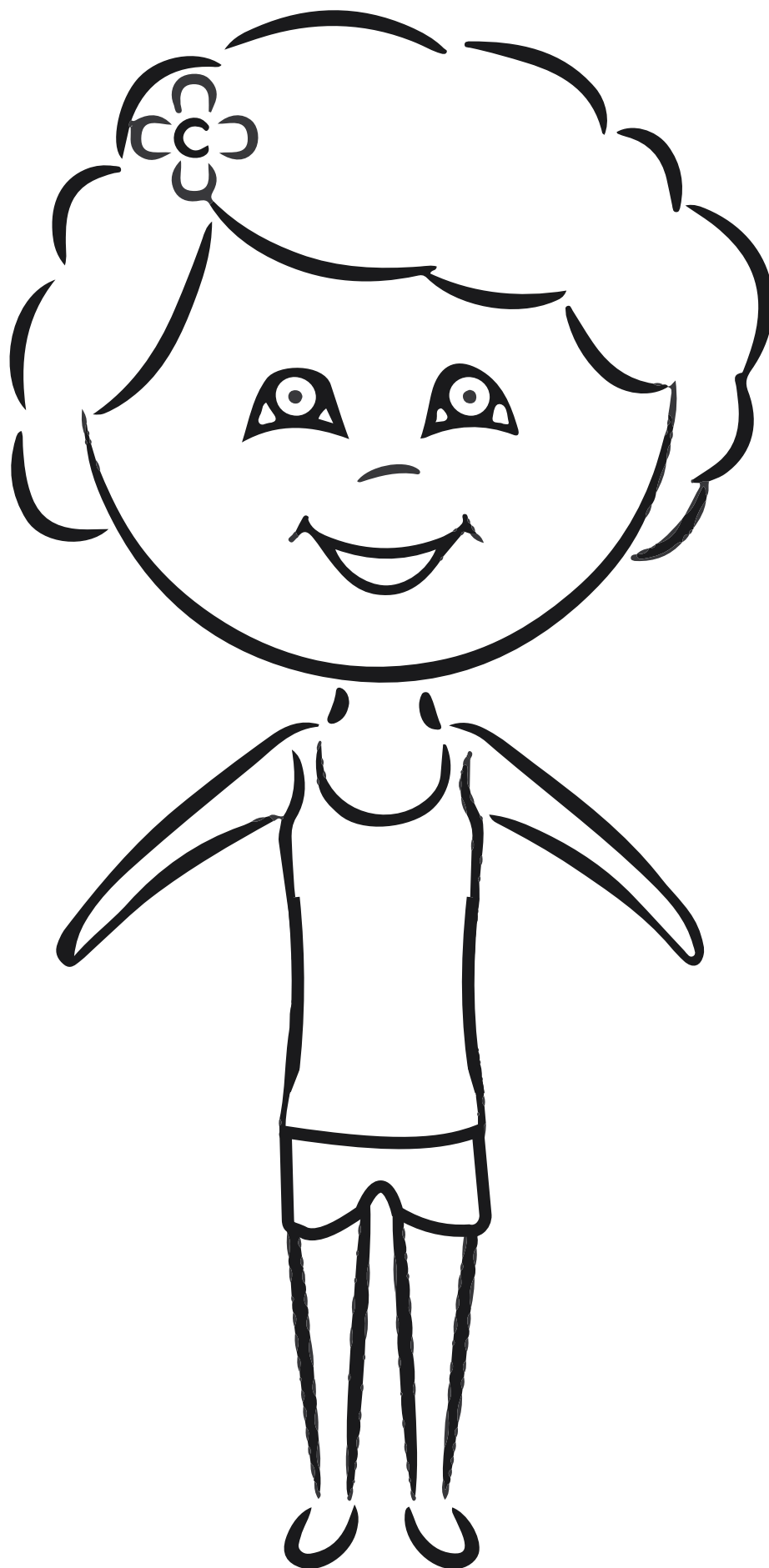
**Empowering our children to be their own advocate.** Children are taught not to say "NO" to adults. A child needs to know that they can say no if they feel endangered or in harms way. It is critical that we accept and allow a child to express their own affection. They may not want to hug or kiss someone, including but limited to loved ones and family members, and we should allow them to express affection as they feel comfortable with in that moment.



**Discuss how grooming tactics can be used against your children.** Use the information in this pamphlet to help children understand these tactics.









# Communication Pathway

After teaching your children about their bodies, unsafe secrets, inappropriate behavior, grooming tactics, and other crucial information, it is important to create a safe way for your children to share things with you when they feel uncomfortable.

Creating a family code word or symbol could help make sure that children feel safe sharing things with their parents, even in a public area. If they feel they have more tools and ways of communicating, children will feel confident and this will build trust between parents and children. The symbol can be drawn on a piece of paper, or the code word can be said when children feel unsafe.

Brainstorm as a family to create this word or symbol and be careful to not share it with anyone outside your immediate family.



# Conversation Tips

## FOR ANY AGE GROUP

Family symbols and password – ***“this is what you say or write down if you are in an uncomfortable situation.”***

Use specific examples about situations that are right and wrong. For young children, you may say ***“at the doctor, they will check your private areas as long as mom or dad are present and that’s okay.”*** ***“You may need help bathing and that is okay,”*** ***“babies need someone to help clean them after they use the bathroom”***.

For older children, you can say things like ***“High fives and pats on the back are okay but hugs and massages are not,”*** ***“you can say no to getting kissed”***.

For teens you can use examples of the settings they are in like ***“at BLANK practice, the coach might show you a mechanical correction, but you can say no to them showing you through touch”*** ***“you may want to hug or kiss a friend, and they may want to hug or kiss you, but it is not something they or you have to accept.”***

## TODDLER & YOUNGER CHILDREN

Discuss proper names for body parts and how private parts are private and special but no different than the rest of their body. This way, they don’t feel shame or a negative connotation,– ***“so this is your arm, this is your nose, this is your bottom, (these are your breasts and this is your vagina, or this is your penis).”***

Teach that when it comes to his/her body, NO means no. ***“You can say no if mommy or daddy make you uncomfortable, or if anyone else does.”***

Talk about the uh-oh feeling – always tell a caregiver when you are feeling scared or confused about something. ***“If you are scared or confused, you can come tell mommy or daddy.”***

## PRESCHOOL AGE

Discuss no-touch zones. ***“Let’s sit down and talk about our no-touch zones”***. Parents can use the coloring activities here to help children understand.

Discuss proper boundaries between people. ***“People have personal space, a ‘bubble,’ and we all have the right to that personal space. If someone tries to touch you, or if you are trying to touch someone’s personal space, that is not okay”***.

Teach how to say “no!” to uncomfortable or confusing touch. ***“You do not have to do anything that makes you uncomfortable. If someone wants a hug or kiss, or to touch your no-touch zone, you say NO”***.

Teach how to yell for help – ***“If you say no, and someone doesn’t listen, you can call out for an adult to help or call 911”.***

Lastly, secrets are not always safe - ***“we like surprises but secrets are not always something you want to keep. If someone wants you to keep a secret, it is okay to come tell mommy or daddy”.***

## **ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AGE**

Create a list of five trusted adults to call about any problem - ***“Trusted adults are people you can tell if you have been in, or are in, an uncomfortable situation. So mommy and daddy are trusted adults at home, at school you could go to your counselor”*** and so on.

Buddy system – ***“We do not want to be in isolated situations with adults or other children alone, so always try and stay with people and avoid uncomfortable places”***

Online safety - ***“when you are using the computer, we will talk about where you go online and what we want to supervise for your safety”***

Age appropriate sex discussion - Children learn about sex between 3rd and 4th grade from their peers. Talk with them about what sex is, around age 8 is appropriate for most children.

## **JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL AGE**

Respect is a basic right in all relationships - ***“You have the right to be treated with respect. So, if you say no or don’t want to do something in a relationship that needs to be respected”***

Open Communication - ***“In any relationships you have, you can come to Mom and Dad if you are uncomfortable and unsure about what is right and wrong”***

Sex, sexual health and more - ***“You can come ask any questions about your body, differences between boys and girls, sexual intimacy, or anything else. It is important that you can learn about ....(whatever issue they have)”***

Internet & Phone safety - ***“if someone older than you is trying to talk to you on the Internet or by phone, this may not be safe or appropriate. It is important that you know how this could be manipulative. Also, sharing pictures can be dangerous so this is what you should and shouldn’t do”***

Safety in Sports, hanging out, other group activities - ***“Whenever you are outside of the home and with other people, make sure you do not end up alone with adults or other children in isolated situations. If you end up in that situation know that you can call or text mom or dad.”***

## **HIGH SCHOOL AGE**

Internet & Phone safety - ***“if someone older than you is trying to talk to you on the Internet or by phone, this may not be safe or appropriate. It is important that you know how this could be manipulative. Also, sharing pictures can be dangerous so this is what you should and shouldn’t do”***

Listen to your gut instinct – leave situations or people that feel wrong. ***“We can normally tell when something doesn’t feel okay, you can trust that feeling and reach out to get help if you feel like you need it.”***  
***kiss a friend, and they may want to hug/kiss you, but it is not something they or you have to accept.”***



# CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT

THIS CERTIFICATE PRESENTED TO

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MY CHILD IS NOT A TARGET

This certifies your family has become more aware and more prepared to fight and protect children against sexual abuse. This certificate symbolizes your knowledge and understanding of the seven steps of grooming, as well as identifying signs of sexual abuse victims.

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DATE

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SIGNATURE