

Tips to Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect



Child abuse and neglect are preventable, and there are things we can all do to help.

Teach kids early about [body safety](#), and the importance of not keeping secrets.

- Be open and honest when your child asks questions.
- Talk at a level your child can understand.
- Use your child's own words.
- Do not force your child to hug, kiss or physically touch another person (even with you or other family).
- Encourage your child to talk to you about anything at any time.
- Praise your child for telling you difficult things.
- Use proper names for body parts.

Teach kids and teens how to use the [internet safely](#).

- Have open conversations about being online.
- Set boundaries and expectations for online activity.
- Talk about cyberbullying.
- Monitor your child's internet use.

Be mindful of who has access to or spends time with your child.

Trust your instincts. If you feel uneasy about leaving your child with someone, don't do it.

- Help your child avoid one-on-one interactions with adults or older, more powerful youth—especially if they engage in any of these **red-flag behaviors**:
 - Missing or ignoring cues about a child's personal limits or boundaries
 - Ignoring a child's need for and right to privacy
 - Spending considerable time with children and showing little interest in people their age
 - Treating children more like friends
 - Sharing inappropriate personal or private information with children
 - Having a "special" child friend (who may change each year)
- Ask youth-serving organizations, like schools, camps or early care centers, if they conduct background checks on any employees and volunteers who may interact with children.
- Be prepared to intervene if you witness any of these behaviors from adults or older, more powerful youth:
 - Encouraging silence and secrets with children
 - Finding ways to spend uninterrupted time alone or insisting on being left alone with children
 - Making sexually explicit comments and jokes, pointing out sexual images, or being overly interested in the sexuality or sexual development of a particular child or teenager
 - Talking about a child's developing body

Be mindful of who has access to or spends time with your child (continued.)

- Making fun of children’s body parts
 - Treating younger children as if they’re older, or making comments like, “You’re very mature for your age,” or “You don’t act like you’re 11. You seem older than you are.”
 - Trying to show or encourage a child to view pornography images/videos or other explicit material
 - Check the National Sex Offender Public Website ([nsopw.gov](https://www.nsopw.gov))—which provides the public with access to sex offender data nationwide—before allowing your child to engage with any adults or older, more powerful youth. This includes new dating partners, youth group leaders, coaches or extended family members.
- Note:** The national sex offender list is imperfect and should not be used as a singular tool to prevent child abuse and neglect. Be mindful and limit interaction between your child and anyone exhibiting red-flag behaviors—even if they’re not listed as a registered sex offender.

Practice appropriate boundaries and touch when interacting with the children in your life, and encourage other adults to do the same.

Keep in mind that it’s OK to show support or encourage a child without using physical affection. Verbal praise and verbal communication can be just as nurturing.

Examples of appropriate touch	Examples of inappropriate touch or touch that break boundaries
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Brief hugs or side hugs• Kneeling or bending down to hug and greet small children• Patting or placing an arm around a child’s shoulder and/or back• Handshakes, high-fives or fist bumps• Holding hands for brief periods (e.g., while walking with small children, helping them maintain balance or during prayer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Any form of unwanted contact or affection• Kissing*• Inappropriate or lengthy embraces• Inappropriate dancing or dancing too close• Touching a child’s clothed or unclothed bottom, chest, genitals or any other private areas*• Showing affection in isolated areas (e.g., bedrooms, bathrooms or other private spaces)*• Tickling or wrestling after a child says to stop or appears uncomfortable• Complimenting or commenting on the physique or body development of a baby, child or teen• Snapping bras, giving wedgies or any other similar actions

* These behaviors are generally considered appropriate with a safe parent/caregiver.

Learn more about inappropriate behaviors with children at [stopitnow.org](https://www.stopitnow.org).

Take a [positive parenting approach to discipline](#).

Positive parenting is about teaching children rather than simply punishing them. It doesn't mean being hands-off or allowing them to do whatever they want. The difference is that when reacting to challenging behavior, the focus is providing clear expectations and guidance.

- Pause, breathe and think before reacting.
- Be consistent and follow through.
- Redirect when your child signals that they don't know what to do (e.g., fidgeting, getting rowdy, intentionally bothering their sibling, etc.).
- Enforce clear limits.
- Offer forced choices. Let them know what they can do with two acceptable choices.
- Use [natural and logical consequences](#).

Parents and caregivers: [Take care of and make time for yourself.](#)

- Acknowledge your feelings, [allow yourself to feel them](#) and avoid comparing your feelings to others'.
- Practice [healthy habits](#) and follow a routine.
- Set clear boundaries, and focus on what you can control.
- Give yourself a break each day to do something that's only for you, even if it's just five minutes. Make time for laughter and joy.
- Practice [gratitude](#).



The [Stephanie V. Blank Center for Safe and Healthy Children](#), at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, offers free child protection [trainings and resources](#) to healthcare professionals, parents and educators. [Stay up to date](#) on all learning opportunities from the Blank Center.

Call 911 if you believe a child is in immediate danger.

This is general information and not specific medical advice. Always consult with a doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns about the health of a child.