

Scouting

Child Abuse: Let's Talk About It

A Statement By The Boy Scouts of America

The Boy Scouts of America is deeply concerned about the general welfare of our children. We hope you will use this article to openly discuss the critical issue of child abuse with other parents and Scout leaders.

The Children's Bill of Rights

1. The right to the affection and intelligent guidance of understanding parents.
2. The right to be raised in a decent home in which he or she is adequately fed, clothed, and sheltered.
3. The right to the benefits of religious guidance and training.
4. The right to school programs which, in addition to sound academic training, offer maximum opportunity for individual development and preparation for living.
5. The right to receive constructive discipline for the proper development of good character, conduct, and habits.
6. The right to be secure in his or her community against all influences detrimental to proper and wholesome development.
7. The right to the individual selection of free and wholesome recreation.
8. The right to live in a community in which adults practice the belief that the welfare of children is of primary importance.
9. The right to receive good adult example.
10. The right to a job commensurate with his or her ability, training, and experience, and protection against physical or moral employment hazards.
11. The right to early diagnosis and treatment of physical handicaps and mental and social maladjustments.
12. The right to fair, unbiased hearings.

BSA Statement About Child Abuse

Child abuse is a fact in our society and a matter of great concern for most parents throughout our country. The Boy Scouts of America shares this concern.

For more than 76 years, Scouting has taught its members basic life values. Today those members make up a large percentage of society's adult population who are also shocked by the magnitude of the child abuse problem. To them, fairness in dealing with others is embedded in the precepts of the Scout Oath and Law which makes child abuse unthinkable and violence unnecessary. Their concern is helping society come to grips with the problem.

Parents react to child abuse in a variety of ways from outrage, to fear, to disbelief, to indifference. Some have the notion that their children will somehow be exempt from this danger. None of these approaches is really useful.

A far more sensible idea, and one that Scouting has long advocated, is to become actively involved with your children. Get to know their leaders, join in planning events, become acquainted with other parents and their children. At home, talk about the meaning of the Cub Scout Promise or the Scout Oath and Law and how they serve as a guide to a clean and healthy life.

Throughout its history, the Boy Scouts of America has been allied with churches, synagogues, schools, and civic groups in an effort to strengthen the ethical and moral values of our children. These organizations need to choose Scout leaders whom they consider positive role models for our children in furthering traditional family values. As a parent you can play an important part in the selection process.

One of the best strategies for child abuse prevention is for parents to have an ongoing communication with their children. Often this is difficult, especially for working parents and parents with adolescents. But it is worthwhile to talk to your children every day and take time to listen and observe. Encourage your children to share their concerns and problems with you. By doing this, you are not an inquisitor, but a concerned parent.

Explain that their bodies belong to them alone and that they have the right to say, "No!" to anyone who might try to touch them. Remind them that if this happens, they should tell you immediately. Assure your children that you will never be angry with them for telling the truth in such instances.

Tell your children that adults may try to hurt children and make them do things they don't feel comfortable doing. Often these people call what they're doing a secret between themselves and the child.

Explain that some adults may even threaten children by saying that their parents may be hurt or killed if the child ever shares the secret. Emphasize that an adult who does something like this is doing something that is wrong.

Tell your children that an adult whom they know and trust, perhaps someone in a position of authority (like a babysitter, an uncle, a teacher, or even a policeman), might try to do something like this. But try not to scare your children—emphasize that the vast majority of people never do this and that most adults are deeply concerned about protecting children from harm.

Being abused is a secret young people feel they must keep because of threats, embarrassment, lack of knowledge, fear of harming a loved one, and the fear that they will not be believed. The effects of this secret abuse are long-lasting and cause severe psychological damage.

Medical and educational therapy is needed to restore individual children to health. For its part, Scouting will continue to improve the quality of life for all youth by:

- Encouraging civic-minded organizations to use the Scouting program for their youth.
- Stressing the importance for these organizations to select and commission only leaders who are positive role models.
- Placing emphasis on timeless human virtues that overcome selfishness.
- Teaching that the pursuit of happiness is mostly achieved through helping others.
- Providing constructive, nonthreatening experiences that build self-esteem and self-reliance.
- Instilling a value system in our youth that includes duty to God and country and a respect for the rights of others.

Observe Physical And Behavioral Signs

Children who may be too frightened to talk about sexual molestation may exhibit a variety of physical and behavioral signals. Any or several of these signs may be significant. Parents should assume responsibility for noticing such symptoms including:

- Extreme changes in behavior such as loss of appetite.
- Recurrent nightmares or disturbed sleep patterns and fear of the dark.
- Regression to more infantile behavior such as bedwetting, thumb sucking, or excessive crying.
- Unusual interest in or knowledge of sexual matters. Expressing affection in ways inappropriate for a child of that age.
- Fear of a person or an intense dislike of being left somewhere or with someone.
- Other behavioral signals such as aggressive or disruptive behavior, withdrawal, running away or delinquent behavior, failing in school.

Finally, do not blame yourself. Sexual abuse is a fact in our society. Many individuals who molest children find work through employment and community activities which give them access to children. The vast majority of abuse occurs in situations where the child knows and trusts the adult. Do your homework well, but remember, a community and national consciousness are needed before we can stamp out sexual molestation in our society.

If You Think That Your Child Has Been Abused

Pay careful attention to your child. Young children rarely lie about sexual abuse. Watch for physical and a behavioral signs of abuse.

Commend your child for telling you about the experience.

Convey your support. A child's greatest fear is that he or she is at fault and responsible for the incident. Alleviating this self-blame is of paramount importance.

Temper your own reaction: recognize that your perspective and acceptance are critical signals to your child. Your greatest challenge may be to not convey your own horror about the abuse.

In the very rare cases where abuse may be related to a Scouting activity, immediately report the suspected molestation to your local Scout council officials and the head of the organization that sponsors your child's pack, troop, team, or post. For child abuse not related to Scouting, each state has an agency designated to receive reports; the telephone number may be listed in the front of your telephone book. Usually this agency is represented in each county by a division which may be called child protective services or family services.

Find a specialized agency that evaluates sexual abuse victims—a hospital or a child welfare agency or a community mental health therapy group. Keep asking until you find a group or an individual with appropriate expertise.

Young children rarely lie about sexual abuse. Convey your support and temper your own reaction.

Search for a physician with the experience and training to detect and recognize sexual abuse when you seek a special medical examination for your child. Community sexual abuse treatment programs, children's hospitals, and medical societies may be sources for referrals.

Talk with other parents to ascertain whether there are unusual behavior or physical symptoms in

their children.

Remember that taking action is critical because if nothing is done other children will continue to be at risk. Child sexual abuse is a community interest and concern.

Make sure that your children know that if someone does something confusing to them, like inappropriate touching or taking a naked picture or giving them gifts, that you want. to be told about it. Reassure your children and explain that you will not blame them for whatever an adult does to them.

Copyright © by the Boy Scouts of America. All rights thereunder reserved; anything appearing in *Scouting* magazine or on its Web site may not be reprinted either wholly or in part without written permission. Because of freedom given authors, opinions may not reflect official concurrence.

The Boy Scouts of America



<http://www.scouting.org>