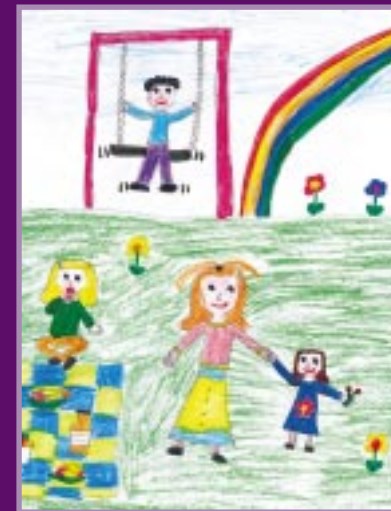
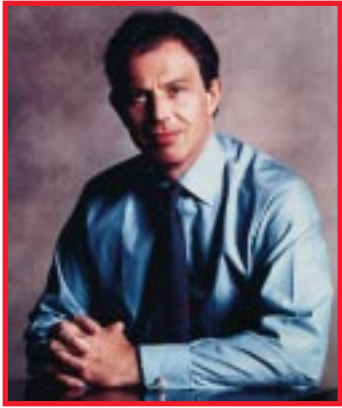


PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN



.....
A guide
for
parents
.....



Foreword by the Prime Minister

Nowadays we are aware of the horrors of child abuse. But we may know less about how child abuse occurs, how to recognise the warning signs, or even how to avoid the most common dangers.

This booklet aims to do just that. Please read it so that you can protect your own children and be able to help your friends to protect theirs.

..... Tony Blair

WHY THIS BOOKLET FOR PARENTS?

The latest Government legislation means our children have never been better protected from convicted sex offenders.

Alarming, the vast majority of sexual abuse is carried out by people who are unknown to the authorities - people who have never been reported or convicted. That is bad news.

The good news is that this booklet means parents can take effective action to stop these 'unknown' sexual abusers from continuing to hurt children.

Developing an original idea into an information booklet that reaches parents stems from a long-term commitment to protecting children.

I hope you will find it a valuable tool in keeping children safe.

Dan Norris MP
Member of Parliament
for Wansdyke
Booklet Co-ordinator



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Child sexual abuse, who might commit it, and how to keep children safe

This booklet gives you some simple steps you can take to make your children safer, and to understand better how and why people sexually abuse children and what is being done to stop them.

Raising children today is not an easy task. We all know that there are dangers in the world and that we must warn children and give them ways to keep safe. Yet none of us wants children to live in fear or to lose trust in people.

We are all aware of the danger to children from paedophiles (people who have a sexual preference for children). Many of us know little about other child sex abusers who may have sexual relationships with adults and have children of their own.

It is hard to believe that someone we know might abuse a child. The idea of anyone - man, woman or teenager - sexually abusing a child causes anger, sadness, and outrage. We hear about the high profile paedophiles from the TV and newspapers. But most sex abusers are not strangers. They live in our communities, in our families and may even be someone we know and love. So, if we want to protect our children, we need as much information as possible about child sex abusers and what to do if we are concerned.

Children also need to know how to get help in case anyone, known or unknown, tries to harm them. Fortunately, the vast majority of children will never be abused by anyone. Most people love and care for children and would never harm them in any way. Our child protection record in the UK is actually quite good compared with many other countries. But any child sexual abuse is completely and totally unacceptable and hopefully this booklet will help keep our children safe.



"The images on television of paedophiles being released really frightened me. Imagine my shock on discovering that my respectable neighbour was abusing children."

WHO ARE THE ABUSERS?

Different kinds of people sexually abuse children:

- Two thirds of victims know their abuser.
- Abusers can be anyone - family members, neighbours, friends, doctors, coaches, youth leaders, vicars, bank managers. They are often respectable people we least suspect.
- Abusers are hardly ever strangers or odd-looking, scruffy men enticing children away with sweets, but that's the image many people have.
- Abusers come from all classes, professions, racial and religious backgrounds.
- Most known abusers are men, although some women sexually abuse their own children and others. Many people don't believe that women sexually abuse children, which makes it hard for children to tell and be believed if it happens to them.
- Adolescents also abuse children. About one third of reported cases of abuse involve teenage abusers.
- Abusers say they often choose single parent families because exhausted mums are especially grateful for help with their children.
- In a research study, KIDSCAPE found that a large number of male sex abusers find victims by offering to baby-sit.

Child sex abusers are highly manipulative. Be wary if anyone is more interested in your child than in you or always wants to get your child alone.

WHY DO THEY DO IT?

How can seemingly kind and even respectable people abuse children? Some know what they are doing is harmful. Others delude themselves to believe they only want to 'love' children.

These abusers see media images of monster abusers and don't recognise themselves. They feel OK because they kid themselves into believing the abuse does no harm, or even that it's good for the child. Sometimes flashes of reality get through and they become depressed. They push guilt away, often blaming others, including the child.



If abuse stays a secret, abusers carry on. If they or someone tells, this can open the door to treatment, positive change and becoming safer citizens. Today there are some effective treatment programmes run by prison and probation services and by voluntary organisations.

HOW DO ABUSERS CONTROL CHILDREN?

Child abuse is rarely a single incident, unless it is an abduction. Thankfully these are rare. Naturally all parents fear for their children when something horrible and unforgivable happens. But in order to protect children, we need to know that most abusers form a relationship with a child - a relationship which harms the child and often makes the child feel responsible and unable to tell. Secrecy is the foundation and children are trapped before they know what has happened.

Abusers may:

- be good at making friends with children. They can appear to be kind, trustworthy, caring and helpful. They put on a good act which fools parents and children.
- present as both nice and nasty. "I can be loving and kind, but if you don't do what you're told, you'll see another side to me."
- be extremely frightening, using fear, threats and violence to get both adults and children to do what they want.
- live in or join families in order to abuse children.
- look for jobs which put them in contact with children. They work in child care, schools, funfairs, sports or any activities involving children.
- hang around places like arcades, playgrounds, parks and swimming baths to get to know children so they are not seen as strangers.
- offer a combination of gifts, treats, games, outings, money, toys, bribes and threats to children to entrap them. They may threaten physical harm or that the child will lose the love of someone if they don't do what the abuser wants.

"I thought he was the answer to my dreams. A lovely man who adored my kids. He always took my son out alone to "do man's things" he said. When my son told me that Tony was abusing him, I could hardly believe it."

Most abusers try to find out as much as possible about the child and how they can drive a wedge between the child and parent. The more

difficult we can make it for them to come between children and protective parents, the safer children will be.

If the abuser is a member of the family, or even a parent, it is especially painful to face and even harder for children to say no and to tell. We all need to be aware that people who abuse children who are close to them may also use the tactics described in this booklet.

ABUSERS WILL TRY TO FIND OUT:

- What the child most wants - a computer game, a new bike, a day at an amusement park, to learn to be better at football, or how to play the guitar or pass exams, sweets, cigarettes or just someone who will listen to them and give them affection.
- What the child is forbidden to do - smoke, drink, stay out late, watch extra television.
- What the child fears - to be thought weak, to be punished at home, to be lonely, family problems, to be unloved.

Armed with this information, the abuser uses every trick to get the child to go along with the abuse and to keep it secret.

WARNING SIGNS

Often children cannot tell us directly that they have been abused, but do show signs that may alert us. There may be other reasons for their behaviour, but if you notice a combination of some of these, it could indicate they have been sexually abused:

- Acting out in an inappropriate sexual way, perhaps with toys or objects
- Nightmares, trouble sleeping
- Becoming withdrawn or excessively clinging
- Seeming to be keeping a secret
- Personality changes - becoming insecure
- Regressing to younger behaviour such as bed-wetting or thumb sucking
- Unreasonable fear of certain people or places.

HOW ABUSERS KEEP CHILDREN FROM TELLING

Child abusers don't want to be caught and become expert at keeping children quiet. Would-be abusers usually turn away if they see that the relationship between the child and parent is one in which secrets would be hard to keep. The best protection for our children is that they feel they can always tell us anything. It is vital that we know the ways abusers keep children from telling us about abuse.

Abusers are expert at using excuses and ploys to keep children confused and silent, such as:



THE ABUSER says.....

You're special or talented.

Your parents know all about this.

I love you.

Do you want to play.

You enjoy it.

It would kill your mum if she knew.

I am teaching you what adults do - you're so grown-up.

You are so pretty/handsome that I cannot resist you.

You wanted to play this game.

Here is some money/sweets/bribes.

You will be in big trouble if you tell - you'll be taken away from home.

You could have said "No".

THE CHILD thinks.....

He gives me treats and takes me out. He got me in the team.

Dad/mum told me to be good for the babysitter, doctor, aunt.

She's mum and she loves me. She won't hurt me - mums don't.

Yes, please. I love dare games!

Well, it sometimes does feel nice. Maybe he's right.

It would.....

It must be OK if adults do it.

I attracted him. It's the way I dress/act.....

It's my fault.....

I should not have taken it - now no one can know.

I don't want to be taken away...I won't tell anyone.

Why didn't I? I'm bad or stupid.

"My child's behaviour changed. She cried and clung to me when I left her with the babysitter we had used for several weeks. It turned out that the babysitter had started abusing her and told her I wouldn't love her anymore if she told anyone. Poor little thing - she was too scared to speak.

Looking back I now see the signs - I wish I'd known before what to watch out for."

WHAT MAKES CHILDREN VULNERABLE?

Abusers give various reasons about how they chose their victims. Some say they prefer girls or boys, or a particular colour eyes or hair or children of a certain age. They may target one child in a family because the child is likely to keep a secret. Some also say they look for things which make it easy to get children to go along with the abuse and to keep quiet. They may seek out children who are:

- too young to tell
- innocent and trusting
- curious and friendly
- looking for attention
- lacking confidence and self esteem
- unhappy
- lonely
- vulnerable because of school or home problems
- disabled or unable to communicate



Obviously we love, care for and supervise our children as much as possible and would never abuse them. We need to find out as much as we can about the carers we leave our children with and make sure they have been thoroughly checked out. We also need to be aware that our children could be at risk from someone we know and love. As parents we can best protect our children by knowing about the dangers and by helping children to know what to do and where to go for help.

LEAVING CHILDREN IN THE CARE OF OTHERS

When children are in the care of other people, it may be a good idea to:

- Check on anyone left in charge. Don't just write or take recommendations at face value - talk to referees.
- Check with other parents if leaving children in a nursery, play group or any kind of activity group.
- Ensure that any sports clubs used by children have a written code of practice on child protection.

- Ask staff and volunteers if they have agreed to be police checked.
- Find out who and how many people will be in charge of children.
- Find out if the group is registered or involved with the Local Authority.
- Drop in once or twice to see what is happening and to find out if your children are happy.
- Follow your instincts. Refuse to leave children if you are not happy with the arrangements.
- Be aware of changes in your children's behaviour which might indicate that something is not right (see "warning signs" page 4).
- Be alert to children not wanting to go with someone or stay with them. Sometimes children say things like, "I don't want you to go out tonight", when they really mean "I don't want to be left with that person. He or she scares me."

WE CAN TEACH OUR CHILDREN

Children need to know that you will be there for them if they are abused by someone they know. It may help to teach them:

- that no one, even someone they know, should ever ask them to keep touches, hugs or kisses secret.
- it is never the child's fault if someone does this or abuses them in any way.
- that if anyone touches them in a secret, confusing or frightening way they should tell. This feeling may come before the person tries to abuse them.
- that if something bad does happen to them, they should tell you about it and you will help sort things out.
- that you will not be angry if they tell you even if they think they've done something wrong or it involves someone they know or someone in the family.

It is a good idea for us to talk about touching and secrets with our children and to ensure that we are there to listen to their concerns.

"The nursery I leave my daughter in is excellent. They have an open door policy - parents are always welcome. The staff have been police-checked and they are all trained in child care. My little girl loves it there - sometimes she doesn't want to come home!"

"I look for a child who seems to be lonely or sad or looking for attention. Then I take my time gaining her trust and becoming her friend. In time she will do anything I ask."

An abuser

"I've talked with all three of my children about never keeping secrets about touching and telling me if anything happens. I've also told them I will always love them - no matter what happens and no matter what anyone else may tell them."

WHEN DO YOU LET THEM OUT?

Parents are concerned about when they should first allow children to venture out in pairs or alone. One mother said that she would allow her children to be independent 'next year'. She said her only problem was that when next year came, it was always too soon.

There is no 'right' age for all children. Much will depend upon your own circumstances, where you live, and how mature your children are. It is a decision that parents will make best.

KIDSCAPE asked 4000 parents about giving children independence. Most parents allowed children:

- from age 9 to cross local roads to run short errands
- from age 11 to use local transport in daylight hours
- from age 12 to go with a friend to a cinema or shopping unsupervised for several hours during the day
- from age 15 to be out with friend during evening hours, coming home before eleven p.m.

All the parents questioned said they worried when first giving children independence and continued to worry a little no matter how old their children were!

OUT ALONE

Having decided about when to give more freedom and independence to our children, here are a few helpful guidelines. They should:-

- stay with friends or with a group and not wander off alone.
- walk to and from school with a friend or a group.
- beware if they are in a shopping centre, arcade or disco and someone offers them money to do a job or errand. Don't do it - it could be a trick.
- go towards people - into a shop or even knock on the door of a house - if they think that they are being followed.
- always tell you where they're going and when they'll be back.

"The first time I let my little boy cross the road alone, I was so nervous. He'll never know how relieved I was when he came rushing in to tell me of his success or how I hid in the bushes and watched his every move!"

TALK WITH THEM ABOUT:

- not talking to or going with strangers, including people they've only met for a short time. Some children take people out of the category of stranger very quickly. It might help to make a list of who our children CAN go with without checking with you first.
- a family code word. Tell your children that if anyone tries to collect them for you, the person will always know the code word. "No Code, no Go."
- yelling and running if anyone tries to grab them or pull them into a car, or to entice them away. Practice with them.
- being wary of public toilets and to go in with a friend, if possible. Get out quickly if anyone approaches them.
- always carrying a travel pass or phone card so they can get home or call you. Teach them how to make a reverse charge call.
- having your permission to break any rule to keep themselves safe.

TRAVELLING

When your children are old enough to travel on their own, work out with them some safety suggestions such as:

- to travel in a train carriage where there are other people.
- to carry enough money for their return trip and never spend it on anything else.



- to work out with you what to do if they miss their train or bus. How would they get home? Is there someone they could call?
- to know safe places on their daily walks or routes they can go into if they are being followed.
- to be alert if someone is following them or trying to get them on their own - alert the driver or guard. Never leave the station or bus if someone is following them. Stay on and wait for assistance or ring the police or home.

"My teenage son was approached by a man saying that he lost his dog in a nearby park. He asked my son to please help him. Fortunately my son said he had to get home and he didn't go. Later we read that a man had abused another boy in the park after luring him there to help find his dog. If we hadn't warned our son, it could have been him."



- to be aware when walking of the people around them - wearing a personal stereo cuts down on alertness. If they think they are being followed, go into a shop or any place with people. Do not go into isolated places.
- never to go up to a car to give directions to someone. Just pretend not to hear and keep going.
- to make a loud fuss to attract help if someone tries to lure them to a quiet, isolated place by threatening them while they are still in a public place. It is safer to stay in the public place.

Because children and young people are often embarrassed to draw attention to themselves, it is vital that we help them work out strategies in advance of anything

happening. Otherwise they might freeze and not be able to think if they are confronted by someone out to harm them.

"My 13 year old daughter was walking home when a couple drove up and stopped to ask her for directions. She leaned into the car to see their map, when suddenly the woman tried to pull her into the car. My daughter yelled her head off and pulled back, falling to the ground. The car sped off when people came over, attracted by all the noise. We were so lucky."

WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT ABUSE

Children often find it difficult to tell their parents or anyone else about being abused. If you are worried or suspect that your child has been abused, talk to him or her. It may be that there is another reason for their behaviour or unhappiness. If they have been abused, they may not tell you everything all at once. Try not to push them; let them tell in their own time.

Talking to your child

- Stay calm and be reassuring.
- Listen - do not put words into their mouth.
- Try not to get angry and upset on their behalf.
- Say you are glad that the child told.

What should you do?

It is a very confusing time for parents and children. We don't want to make matters worse by frightening children because we need to be in control for their sake. But we also don't want to make it seem that it doesn't matter by not reacting at all. Having comforted your child and ensured that they are safe and being looked after, you may find a quiet place on your own to:

- ring the police immediately, depending upon the circumstances.
- ring your local Social Services or the NSPCC for advice.

You may be worried about what might happen if you ring the authorities. Remember that they are concerned to help children. Most studies show that children have been glad of help from police and social services, even if it may have been frightening at first. Depending on what has happened, the police and social services may be involved.

This may be the most difficult thing you've ever had to do. But remember that it takes a lot of courage for children to tell about abuse. If nothing happens and no action is taken, children may never feel safe enough to tell us again.



WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

- The police may decide that there is enough evidence to take the case to court and will need to interview your child.
- Whoever the abuser is, even if they are someone in your family or someone you know, it isn't a good idea to confront them. Most abusers will deny anything happened or that it "only happened once" and that it will never happen again. This usually isn't true. Abusers need outside help to stop their behaviour.
- The alleged abuser is likely to be arrested and may be charged.
- You may be worried about what will happen to the abuser if it is someone close to you. For some it is possible to get help to change and live a better life. Telling may be the best thing you did, not only for your child, but for the abuser.

- Your child may be needed to give evidence in court, and will need help and preparation to cope. The social worker, court welfare officer, Victim Support, NSPCC and ChildLine can all offer help and advice.
- Get help and support for yourself and your child from your GP, therapist, social services, your religious community and from friends. There are booklets available, such as *Why My Child?* free from KIDSCAPE.

"I didn't know where to turn after I found out my youngest child had been abused. The police and social services were so kind to my whole family. It was a horrible time for all of us, but we're through it now. I still get weepy once in a while, but the Samaritans and Victim Support have been a godsend."

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP YOUR CHILD?

Children who have been abused may suffer emotional distress and experience behaviour problems or feelings of panic. These may continue on and off for a while. Much will depend on their individual experience. But a loving and safe family plus counselling can help your child recover.

Don't forget that you may also need help and support to see you through - phone a helpline, talk to friends or relatives you trust or try get in touch with other parents in your situation.

LAWS

Sex Offenders Act 1997

In 1997, the government implemented the Sex Offenders Act, which includes a requirement that those convicted of sex offences against children must notify the police of their name and address and any changes to these details. Their names and addresses are placed on the Sex Offenders Register and that information is kept up to date on the police national computer. This means that the police find out when a convicted child sex offender moves into their area and can monitor the situation. It will also help the police identify possible suspects in any future offence.

Sex Offender Order

This is a new measure aimed at protecting children from predatory sex offenders. The police will be able to apply for an order if the abuser has a previous conviction for a sexual offence, and if his present actions are such as to give the police concern that the public needs to be protected from him. The order will prohibit the abuser from certain activities such as lingering outside a school or playground. It will remain in force for a minimum of five years. A breach of the order can result in stiff penalties which could include a prison sentence of up to five years.

Dangerous Severe Personality Disorder Policy

The Home and Health Secretaries have jointly proposed that there should be new legal powers for the indeterminate but reviewable detention of dangerous and severely personality-disordered individuals. Like the Mental Health Act provisions, these powers would be available whether or not someone was before the courts for an offence. These individuals would then not return to the community unless it was safe for them to do so.

The government is looking at several further proposals with the aim of keeping children safe.



WHERE TO GET HELP

Ring the Police or Social Services, listed in your local directory - or contact your GP.

CHILDLINE 0800 1111
Telephone counselling and advice service 24 hours
for children and young people in trouble or danger

CHILDREN'S LEGAL CENTRE 01206 873820
Gives advice about law and policy 2pm - 5pm Mon-Fri
affecting children and young people in England and Wales

KIDSCAPE 0171 730 3300
Offers free child protection 10am - 4pm
leaflets with a SAE and a
telephone helpline for parents 2 Grosvenor Gardens
of bullied children. London SW1W 0DH

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE PREVENTION
OF CRUELTY TO CHILDREN (NSPCC)** 0800 800 500
Helpline for anyone, including children,
concerned about, involved in, or at risk of child abuse

PARENTLINE 01702 559900
Available to anyone parenting 9am - 9pm Mon-Fri
a child to talk through any 12 - 6 pm Sat
concern or worries

SAMARITANS 0345 90 90 90
Helpline for anyone in distress 24 - hours

VICTIM SUPPORT 0845 30 30 900
Offers victims of crime practical, confidential
and free help from trained volunteers and staff

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