

# Teach Private Parts Safety to Protect Your Child from Sexual Abuse

Former police officer and mother describes how to better protect your child from sexual abuse by teaching private parts safety.

By Kate Power



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We've seen the headlines and heard the horrific stats about child sexual abuse. But for many of us, teaching our young children about private parts safety can fall into the "I must do that" bucket, which means it may never get done or when we do, it's not effective. There are lots of reasons why—we naively think, "it won't happen to my child"; we don't believe the statistics ([1 in 5 girls](#) and [1 in 20 boys](#)—how can that possibly be true?); we want to maintain our child's innocence; we may not feel comfortable with the subject ourselves; we have too many other priorities, etc.

But what if there was a way to make it simple, quick and effective? What if it was actually kind of fun for your child, easy for you, and you didn't need to go into the darkness of the subject matter? Here's how:

## 1. Lighten the mood

It's undoubtedly a serious subject, but young children seldom respond to, "Let's have a serious talk." And let's face it, our private parts are funny—they make funny noises and have funny names. Children know this too—they giggle about the subject and learn lots of different names from their family and friends, whether we like it or not. Acknowledging this first and allowing the laughter to get out of the way both engages your child and clears the path for the serious discussion.

## 2. Make it important

Our adult relationship with our sexual organs can be complex, but to a child, it's simple. They're important to our body's function, and they're vulnerable, so they must be protected. That's really all your child needs to know, but their importance needs to be stressed.

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## 3. Make it memorable

Think back to your childhood and reflect on the lessons you learned best. What made them memorable? Rhymes, colorful drawings and association with positive emotions are powerful memory tools. For example, I started my children's book, "[My Underpants RULE!](#)", with the

following: "What's under my pants belongs only to me, and others can't touch there or ask me to see, but safe grown-up or doctor when I'm not healthy, What's under my pants belongs only to me...."

It is better to make a child feel empowered about their body than scared of the bogey man, which is a myth anyway ([about 90 percent of offenders have a close relationship to the child](#)). So give them simple, clear instructions that come immediately to mind whenever a difficult situation arises.

**More from Parenting:** [10 Myths About Child Sexual Abuse to Reject—to Help Keep Kids Safe](#)

## 4. Teach clear action strategies

Empowerment comes from clarity of action. Research from survivors shows one of the most common responses when first confronted by a predator is to freeze, because they don't really understand what is happening. So the "What would you do if...?" game is a great way to trigger action in moments of stress, because it generates a recognition of the present danger. It's also important to make clear to your child what to do *after* anything happens—that it's essential to immediately tell someone they trust, who they can trust, and that secrets about private parts should never be kept.

**More from Parenting:** [Protect Your Child from Sexual Predators by Breaking through Stereotypes](#)

## 5. Reinforce with repetition

When your child wants to listen to her favorite song again and again, it's not because she's being annoying. It's because that's how young minds learn. Harness this and repeat what you want your child to learn often. I recommend at least once a month. You know a lesson is learned when she can teach it to you without hesitation. Your child will let you know when she's had enough, in any case!

## 6. Start young

The earlier we begin the conversation with our children about protecting themselves, the better. With studies showing the [majority of onset of sexual abuse happening between ages 3 to 8](#), it's important to begin the discussion sooner rather than later. Also, an alarmingly increasing trend is of offenses being committed by another child. We want our children to socialize at an early age, so make sure they're aware of what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

## 7. Raise its priority for you

An educated child is far less likely to encounter difficult situations, because predators look for vulnerability. In fact, silence and vulnerability are what they prey on. Unfortunately, the offense of child sexual assault in the United States exists in all communities and it doesn't discriminate in terms of income level, race, creed or color. The [estimates of 1 in 5 children being sexually assaulted in some way before they're 18](#) are frighteningly real, and many experts feel this is an underestimate. But this isn't about statistics; it's about your child! As a parent you are in the front line of defense against this scourge. Fifteen minutes per month can save a whole world of pain for your child and your family. This has to be a major priority, doesn't it?

*Kate Power is co-creator of the revolutionary new children's book, "My Underpants RULE!, the easy way to teach kids to protect their private parts. A former police officer and mother of three, she aims to empower at least 1 million children by 2020.*

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