

## **A Few Thoughts On Prevention**

I have often been asked “how can I keep my kids safe from sexual abuse? They are sometimes disappointed when my answers are not regarding close supervision and avoiding strangers. These are some points I would make if I was giving a talk on prevention to parents.

**STRANGER DANGER:** Often the first time we discuss sexual abuse prevention we mention "stranger danger"; the guy with candy or the picture of the lost puppy who is so convincing to children and a nightmare to parents. The high profile abductions lately have brought this type of offender to light. Unfortunately, a significant majority of sexual abuse cases are perpetrated by someone the child knows and trusts.

So yes we should tell our children to never get close to or in a car with a stranger and if being taken by force to scream “this is not my daddy - this is not my daddy” But we also need to talk to them about what to do when the offender is the uncle or minister or babysitter. TELL and keep on telling until it stops.

So many sexual abuse prevention programs focus on the "stranger danger" offender and say something like "tell someone you trust"

What if a person you trust is the one who is doing the touching?

Prepare your children for this

**SECRECY:** “Why didn’t you tell me sooner?” Is often the plaintive wail of non-offending parents. A lot has been said recently about the role secrecy plays in the dynamics of sexual abuse. A prominent author, researcher, and public speaker in the sex offender treatment field, Anna Salter, adamantly states that “secrecy is the life blood of sex offenders.”

I would discuss with parents the "secrecy traps" that offenders put kids in. Offenders are good at making kids feel like participants or partners rather than victims. They will say to the child “we have a special relationship that no one else would understand.”

Create close, honest open relationships with your kids so they WILL TELL you. I heard once that a sex offender had the bumper sticker on his car “have you hugged your kid today?” His trip was “If you don’t hug your kid – I will.”

Don’t develop a pattern of going ballistic when your child tells you things he or others did wrong (remember, in many cases of sexual abuse, the victims think they did something wrong)

Don’t create a family pattern of which secrets are common.

Don’t treat sexuality like it is in a separate nasty compartment.

LET KIDS BE KIDS: One Spring I went to a school activity in my daughter’s class where the children recited their favorite poems and did a class performance. It was a small ditty just for two classes of FIRST graders. I was not just shocked, I was appalled and saddened at the way some of the little girls were dressed. My daughter seemed to be the exception in her loose fitting long skirt with leggings among most girls in their slinky-tight-short-shiny stuff. (I can’t even describe it!)

I found myself looking for Jon Bennett.

Parents doll their 7 - year - olds up like Britney Spears and say they are concerned about sexual abuse, then they hop into their SUV’s and say “tisk tisk” at a news report on the price of oil. My point here is parents need to be careful about sexualizing their kids. Do our kids witness their moms spending hours trying to look pretty and talking about their weight? Do they witness their fathers going eye-popping-Looney-Toons at the sight of an attractive woman?

Enough random thoughts

Tim Horton