

# HELPING FAMILIES PREVENT CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION




We teach children to tell if they are hurt, but sometimes they cannot. Children who have been sexually exploited may be too afraid or ashamed to tell. They may think no one will believe them. Exploiters use this to their advantage. They know concerned adults often wait for a child to say something before taking action. But we cannot wait. Our children need us to be proactive.

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® is working with families to help them actively protect children from sexual exploitation. Families may help reduce the incidence of child sexual exploitation by learning how to recognize and respond to signs of child sexual abuse. Use the following action steps to empower your family and combat child sexual exploitation.

## PROTECT AND MONITOR

- Screen children’s caregivers and check their references. Ask children, “Do you feel comfortable with [caregiver]? Why or why not?”
- Get involved in children’s activities. Ask organizations, “What policies do you have in place to protect children from sexual exploitation?” Examples should include policies about screening, travel, and online communications between children and staff.
- Know what children are doing and who they are doing it with, both off- and online.
- Use role-playing exercises to practice basic safety skills with children – for example, kicking, screaming and yelling if someone grabs them or touches them in a way that makes them uncomfortable.
- Listen to children. Pay attention if they tell you they do not want to be with someone or go somewhere.
- Teach children they have the right to say “NO” to anyone or anything that makes them feel scared, uncomfortable or confused and how to get out of those situations as quickly as possible.
- Be sensitive to any changes in children’s behaviors or attitudes such as sudden mood swings or age-inappropriate knowledge about sexual situations and contact.
- Provide a safe environment in which children are encouraged to frequently share their thoughts and feelings.

## SUPPORT CHILD VICTIMS

-  Reassure children it is OK to tell you anything and you are there to help.
-  Remain calm and nonjudgmental if children disclose abuse or any other problems they may be having.
-  Make sure children know that being exploited is *never* their fault.



If you suspect a child is being sexually exploited, contact law enforcement immediately. You may also make a report to NCMEC’s CyberTipline® at [www.cybertipline.org](http://www.cybertipline.org) or by calling **1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678)**.