

Keeping children safe from sexual abuse

What families can do



0800 623 1700
helpauckland.org.nz

HELP

Preventing sexual abuse.
Supporting survivors.

What families can do

Sexual abuse still happens a lot in New Zealand – we think around 1 in 6 children are victims – but there are things we can all do to protect children now.

When someone is motivated to sexually abuse a child, they want to do it without being caught.

They look for children who:

- Won't protest,
- Won't tell, or
- Won't be believed if they do tell.

But, if they don't find children like this, then they manipulate or trick a child so they won't protest, won't tell or won't be believed. This is usually called "grooming". If you know what it looks like, you can stop it happening.



Know what grooming looks like

Making children not protest

This can start with gradually pushing past the body boundaries of a child, which confuses them about how and when to stop the person touching them. You might see someone pushing into a child's space, or you might see a child being uncomfortable and trying to move away from someone. A person wanting to abuse a child might also make them feel extra special by spending fun time with them or buying them gifts. Children tend to trust people they like and allow more physical closeness when they trust someone, so watch for this too.

Making children not tell

Two ways of keeping children quiet about abuse are to have a "special secret" with a child, or to threaten and scare them. The "special secret" usually comes after they make a child feel extra special, but this can change to threatening the child at any time. Or they might just threaten a child from the beginning. Threats might be about hurting the child, hurting someone the child loves or even about hurting themselves so the child feels worried. You might not see or hear the threats, but your child might become quieter, start to act younger than their age, or get angry at other people. They might ask unusual questions like "what's jail like"?

Making families not believe children who tell

If someone starts to drive a wedge between a parent and a child, we need to pay attention. They might suggest that the child doesn't love you or speaks badly of you, or that the child is a liar about other things. This is setting you up to think a child is lying about any abuse they tell you about later.

If you see any of this

If you see a person doing any of this to a child, you need to act. Tell the person you are not comfortable with what they are doing and remove the child or seek the child's caregiver to do this. Spend time with the child and ask them how they are feeling, if they are OK. Remind them that you are there to keep them safe and help them with any worries they might have. Ask gentle, open-ended questions as there can be many reasons for changes in a child's behaviour.

If you are concerned about grooming or abuse, ask us what to do next - you can call us, **0800 623 1700** or call Oranga Tamariki **0508 326 459**.

You can also offer the person whose behaviour you are concerned about a place to get help - Safe to Talk - **0800 044 334**, or **text 4334**.

Making your family safer

We can also help our families to develop skills which make it harder for harmful adults or young people to target children and make it more likely that your children will tell you if something happens.

Ways to help a child protest if someone is touching them inappropriately

Teach the child that they are the boss of their own body. Let them know who can touch their body (themselves, and the doctor when their parent is with them). Help them practice being boss of their body by asking if you can tickle them and then stopping when they tell you to. Don't force them to kiss or hug anyone they don't want to. Teach them a safer way of saying hi, like a "high 5" or a cool handshake.

From about 3 years old, teach children touching rules for private parts – you can touch your own, but you can't touch someone else's and they can't touch yours.

Teach them ways to say no if they are touched and don't like that touch – "stop that, I don't like it" is a great phrase for the whole family to use. We teach children to show respect to others, especially adults, but respect needs to go both ways. Require other family members to respect your children's feelings and needs.

Ways to help a child tell

- Talk about "surprises" but have a "no secrets" rule in your home. This means a child will know they don't have to keep a secret and will be more likely to tell you if someone tries to make them.
- Listen – make time for children when they want to tell you something. They will learn that you will listen to the good things and the bad things and help them when they need it.

→ Teach them proper names for genitals so they can be easily understood if something does happen and they need to tell someone.

Ways to help a child be believed


This one is completely on the adults - listen and thank the child for telling you. Tell them that you will get them safe, and then do it. Call us or Oranga Tamariki for help.

HELP 0800 623 1700

Oranga Tamariki 0508 326 459

HELP is here if you need us

24/7 HELP

 0800 623 1700

 Text 8236

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