



DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES PARENT LETTER

Children with developmental delays and disabilities have unique gifts and unique needs, but one need universal to all children is the need for developmentally appropriate personal safety education.

Unfortunately, child abuse occurs at every socioeconomic level, across ethnic and cultural lines, within all religions and at all levels of education. Ninety percent of the time a child is being harmed it's at the hands of someone they – and their parents – know, love and trust.

Sadly:

- 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 5 boys will become victims of child sexual abuse before their 18th birthday.
- 1 in 5 children are solicited sexually through the Internet before the age of 18.
- More than 90% of individuals with a developmental delay or disability will be sexually assaulted at least once in their lifetime.

The stats are staggering, but the solution is clear: 95 percent of child sexual abuse IS preventable through education and awareness.

The following resources are designed for your family to use to help prevent abuse and protect childhood. This information complements the activities and information found in your child's chronological age tabs.

Developmentally delayed children sometimes do not have the cognitive ability or the learned strategies to handle difficult situations they may encounter, so it is important for parents to help to develop these safety tools and strategies with their child.



It is important for developmentally delayed children to develop and internalize the concepts of “safe” and “unsafe.” When they recognize the characteristics of a safe situation, a safe secret, and a safe touch, they will also be able to recognize when they feel unsafe. Helping your child to recognize when a situation or someone feels safe or when something or someone is scary, threatening, icky, or just not quite right is the first step in building a set of protective strategies that your child will use for a lifetime. Remember, if your child feels unsafe, then they are unsafe.

The purpose of this resource is to empower them with the ability to recognize, communicate, and protect themselves in potentially unsafe or abusive situations by arming them with a few basic protective principles:

- The understanding of the concepts of safe and unsafe, being able to recognize safe and unsafe situations for themselves and others, and recognizing warning signs, such as secrets, touches, or threats, help children recognize and communicate unsafe situations
- Children need to have Grown Up Buddies or Trusted Adults, adults they trust, whom they can go to whenever a situation arises that makes them feel scared or uncomfortable

- Children have the right to be part of any decision that affects them...“Nothing about me, without me.” Children have a say in their care.
- Children have the ability and right to use their voice to stop an unsafe situation, that it is ok to report any situation that makes them feel unsafe, and they have the right to be heard and helped
- The private parts of our body and our body boundaries and personal space are to be respected
- A trusted adult must know where a child is, what they are doing and who they are with at all times

It is very important to involve your child in the activities identified in your family’s safety plan and to adapt them to meet the unique needs of your child. Sharing these strategies will help your child to understand how these are tools for them to use to make safe choices and decisions and to communicate the need for help if they are feeling unsafe. Initiating discussions with your child will help them see that they have the personal power within themselves to recognize boundaries that will help them make safe choices and decisions. Children can use that power to help themselves by recognizing warning signs that alert them to unsafe situations.

For more information, visit LaurensKids.org.

