

# STAY SAFE



## A Parent's Guide

Published by the Child Abuse Prevention Programme

## A Message to Parents and Guardians

Most children grow up happy and safe, but we know that from time to time they can encounter upsetting, frightening or unsafe situations. The Stay Safe Programme is designed to help our children deal with these situations.

Recent research has shown that children who participate in the Stay Safe Programme are more likely to tell if they become victims of abuse or bullying, and that parents/guardians and teachers involved with the programme are more likely to respond in a protective and supportive manner.

Since the programme was introduced into primary schools, we've had many requests from parents/guardians to provide more information on preventing child abuse and bullying. In response, this booklet has been produced to explain how you and your school – working together through the Stay Safe Programme – can help keep your child happy, confident and safe.

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# INTRODUCTION

The Child Abuse Prevention Programme (CAPP) was established in 1987 to tackle the problems of bullying and child abuse. To this end, CAPP introduced the Stay Safe Programme into primary schools with the aim of developing the personal safety skills of primary school children.

CAPP is jointly funded by the Department of Health and Children and the Department of Education and Science.

## PERSONAL SAFETY

Children need personal safety skills in order to respond safely to a dangerous, upsetting or abusive situation before it becomes serious. We already teach children about the danger posed by traffic and how to cross a road safely, but we also need to teach them how to handle other unsafe situations. We've found that children are better at learning and remembering personal safety skills when home and school work together.

## BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM

A confident child with high self-esteem is less likely to become a victim of bullying or abuse. So it's important that parents/guardians, teachers and other



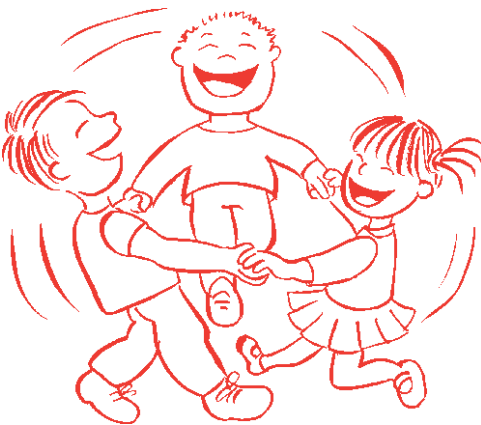
adults in the child's life use every possible opportunity to build the child's self-esteem and confidence. Given that the family is the most important learning environment for the child, every effort should be made at home to promote and develop a child's confidence and self-esteem. Some of the ways this can be done include:

- Showing love and affection
- Providing security
- Encouraging and praising
- Noticing when a child makes a special effort
- Setting realistic expectations
- Allowing your child to be involved in making simple, everyday decisions
- Setting well-defined limits for behaviour
- Showing respect for your child.

## COMMUNICATION

Children enjoy chatting about their everyday experiences and like to hear adults talking about their own childhood. Talking to your child in this way helps open up communication. Taking the time to listen to a child express his or her opinions and feelings increases the child's confidence and encourages the child to be more open with you. Listening and responding to your child shows that you're interested in what he or she has to say.

Children need to be shown that they're loved, cared for and that their views and opinions are valued. You do this as much through listening to your child as talking with them. It's important that your child knows that they can turn to you if they have a problem.



## HAVE YOU TALKED TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT PERSONAL SAFETY?

You may have rules at home about fires, farm machinery, electrical dangers, and so on. You will have taught your child the rules of the road and about water safety. You have probably also talked about strangers. It's also important to ensure your child knows:

- What to do if they feel worried, upset, confused or unsafe about any situation
- What to do if they get lost in a shop or town
- What to do if approached by strangers
- Never to take anything from someone they don't know
- Never to go anywhere without telling you first.

## SOME OTHER ISSUES

It's not enough to simply set rules for your child about safety. Here are some issues you might want to consider:

- Do you listen to your child?
- Do you encourage your child to talk with you?
- How do you respond to concerns your child shares with you?
- Do you always know where your child is, who they're with and what they're doing?
- Who looks after your child when you're not with them? What do you know about your baby-sitter/child-minder, and how well do they get on with your child? You shouldn't be embarrassed to ask for references
- Who can your child turn to for help if you're out?
- What does your child need to know about drugs, alcohol and sexual matters?
- What is your child allowed to watch on TV or video?
- Do you monitor the access your child has to computer games, music CDs and the Internet (see section on 'Safety on the Internet', Page 28). Computer games are rated for age appropriateness in the same way as films are. Music CDs are now rated and carry a sticker to indicate if parental consent is recommended before allowing children to listen to them.

*Personal safety skills are part of the Social, Personal and Health Education Curriculum of all primary schools. Programmes such as Stay Safe, Relationships and Sexuality Education, Walk Tall (drug abuse), Health and Nutrition etc. all form part of this curriculum area.*



# STAY SAFE PROGRAMME

The Stay Safe Programme is a personal safety skills programme for primary schools – both mainstream and special. Its overall objective is to prevent child abuse, bullying and other forms of victimisation.

## WHAT DOES THE PROGRAMME DO?

The programme develops children's ability to recognise, resist and report risk situations or abusive encounters by teaching children:

- To identify for themselves unsafe or upsetting situations
- Simple rules to help them avoid abuse
- To respect and value the rights of others
- The language and skills they require to seek help.

The programme also informs parents and teachers about preventing bullying and child abuse, whilst seeking to create a greater public awareness about the problems children can and do experience.

## HOW IS THE PROGRAMME TAUGHT?

Ideally, children are taught the content of the Stay Safe lessons in the classroom

by their usual class teacher, and then discuss the lessons at home with their parents. Teachers and parents work together to ensure that children learn the skills they need to keep safe.

The programme consists of four sets of lessons, as outlined here:

Class	No. of Lessons	Lesson Duration
Senior Infants	9	20 minutes
1st/2nd	9	30 minutes
3rd/4th	9	30 minutes
5th/6th	5	30 minutes

It's recommended that lessons are taught at the rate of one per week.

Additional/supplementary lessons are available for children with special needs. This programme, entitled 'Personal Safety Skills for Children with Learning Difficulties', was introduced in 1996 and was designed for use with children who have visual impairment, cognitive learning difficulties, hearing impairment, physical disability or emotional and behavioural difficulties. See section 'Children with Special Needs', page 14.



### WHAT WILL CHILDREN LEARN?

The lessons teach children about what to do if they're frightened or upset. One of the central messages children learn is that if they ever have a problem, they should tell an adult they know and trust.

### HOW ARE PARENTS/GUARDIANS INVOLVED IN THE PROGRAMME?

It's essential that you're involved in the programme because parents/guardians are the most important people in a child's life, and your child is most likely to turn to you for help when upset or worried. It's been shown that programmes like Stay Safe are most effective when parents/guardians are actively involved in the process.

Before the programme is introduced into your child's school, you may be invited to a parent meeting where the programme will be explained and where you'll have an opportunity to ask questions.

Worksheets to accompany the lessons may be given as homework to your child or may be brought home for you to sign. (The illustrations throughout this booklet are taken from the children's worksheets.) It's important that you use these to discuss the content of the lesson with your child. Doing so will give you an insight into what your child is learning, and present an opportunity to discuss the issues involved in a way more personal than is possible in the classroom situation. It also gives you an opportunity to discuss

personal safety issues with your child and to explain the safety rules that exist in your family. Children have sometimes used the worksheets to tell their parents/guardians about problems.

Before the programme starts:

- Make sure you're familiar with the lesson topics as outlined in the following section
- Talk to your child about the programme. Explain that the programme will teach them how to keep safe
- Decide on a time to set aside for discussion of the worksheets.

## THE LESSON TOPICS

*There are five topics discussed in the Stay Safe Programme:*

*Feeling Safe/Unsafe*

*Bullying*

*Touches*

*Secrets and Telling*

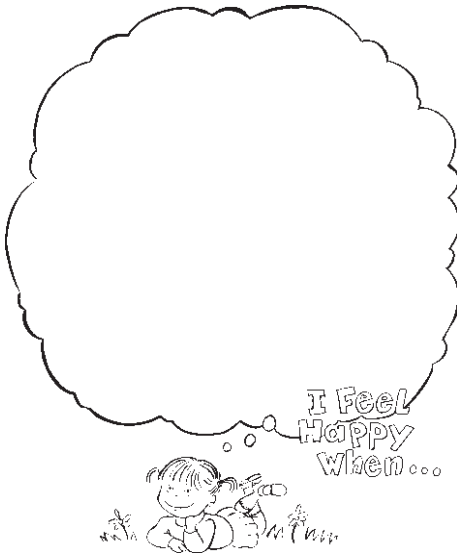
*Strangers.*

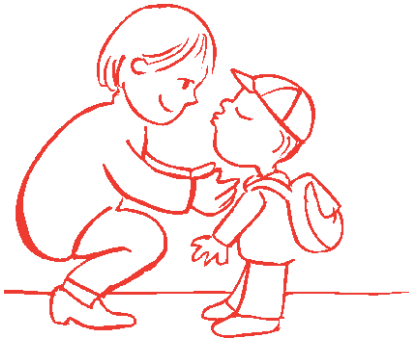
Each topic is dealt with in a way that emphasises positive experiences while acknowledging that there are times when children may feel unsafe, threatened or frightened.

Through classroom discussion, role-play and repetition, children learn simple safety strategies for dealing with problems. Children learn that they should always tell an adult who can help. The overall message is that children will learn to:

- Say 'No'
- Get away and tell.

The content of each topic is outlined on the following pages, accompanied by suggestions that may help when you're discussing the topic with your child.





## FEELING SAFE AND UNSAFE

In this section children learn:

- To recognise and describe when they feel safe/unsafe (safe and unsafe feelings are sometimes referred to as 'yes' and 'no' feelings)
- To anticipate potentially dangerous situations
- Ways of dealing with common situations where they may feel unsafe, such as getting lost
- That they should always tell an adult (parent/guardian/carer) about any situation they consider unsafe, upsetting or threatening.

### *Suggestions for Parents/Guardians*

Discuss with your child times when they feel safe and unsafe and ask him or her to give you examples from the lessons.

Talk to your child about the rules he or she should follow if lost or if a stranger calls to the door or on the phone.

Encourage your child to tell an adult about any situation in which he or she feels unsafe, upset, confused or worried.

## BULLYING

In this section children learn:

- To value friendship
- Skills for making and keeping friends
- To understand about the different types of bullying and the effects of bullying
- That there are no innocent bystanders when it comes to bullying
- How to cope if they're bullied - that they should seek help from an adult if they have a problem with bullying
- That it's not acceptable to bully others.

### *Suggestions for Parents/Guardians*

Talk to your child about the importance of friendship.

Discuss bullying with your child. Talk to your child about why he or she should always respect and never bully others.

Ask your child if he or she has ever been bullied and remind your child of the Stay Safe rules: say 'No' – Get Away and Tell. Talk about times when it is safe to say 'No' to a bully, and get your child to practise saying 'No'. Stress that your child should never be ashamed or afraid to tell an adult, even if he or she has done something wrong.

See page 17 for additional information on bullying.

## TOUCHES

In this section children learn:

- To value and enjoy normal affection
- To understand the meaning of personal and private
- What to do if someone touches them in a way that is unwanted or feels like an unsafe touch
- Never to touch anyone else in a way that they don't like
- To respect the rights of others
- That it's alright to say 'No' to anyone who asks them to do something that is wrong or dangerous – even if asked by an adult
- Never to keep secrets about touches.

From 1st class onwards, children are taught that some parts of their bodies get touched a lot – people might shake their hand, pat them on the head or put their arms around them. Children also learn that other parts of their bodies are private and are not often touched, except when the child is being washed or examined by a doctor or nurse. If the doctor examines them, does she ask them to keep it a secret? Of course not!

It's explained to the children that private parts are those parts of their bodies that are covered by their underwear or swimsuit. Children are taught that it's okay to say 'No' to an adult if the adult asks them to do something that is wrong or unsafe. They're encouraged to tell an adult if anyone asks them to keep a touch a secret.

## *Suggestions for Parents/Guardians*

Talk with your child about the types of touches he or she likes and dislikes.

Tell your child it's okay to say 'No' if an adult asks him or her to do something the child feels is dangerous or unsafe. Remind your child that it's okay to say 'No' if an adult touches him or her in a way that the child doesn't like – for example, some children don't like being tickled, hugged or kissed by some adults.

Discuss with your child safe and unsafe touches and the rules he or she has learned in class: say 'No' – get away and tell. Tell your child never to keep any touch a secret and that he or she should always tell an adult.

## SECRETS AND TELLING

In this section children learn:

- To distinguish between good and bad secrets
- That they should never keep a bad secret
- To identify who they should tell if they have a problem
- The difficulties in telling when bribery or threats are involved
- How to tell – and to keep telling until they get help.

## *Suggestions for Parents/Guardians*

Talk to your child about secrets. Explain the difference between a good and a bad secret. Good secrets are like surprises. Bad secrets make children feel afraid, upset or unsafe, and may involve a threat or a bribe.

Talk to your child about what they should do if somebody asks them to keep a bad secret. Emphasise that nobody has the right to make anyone keep a touch a secret, and that they should always tell an adult about a bad secret.

Make sure that your child knows to come to you if he or she has a problem or is upset about something. Setting aside time to listen to your child is very important. Your child is more likely to come to you when they're worried or concerned about something if they know they'll be listened to. Listening and responding to children shows them you're interested in what they have to say and in their opinions.

Discuss the importance of telling, and ensure your child knows that he or she should never be ashamed or afraid to tell if he or she has a problem. Help your child draw up a list of adults who could be approached for help. These should be people both you and your child trust and your child can easily contact. Explain that adults can be busy and sometimes may not properly 'hear' what's being said. Discuss what your child should do if the adult doesn't listen or understand.



## STRANGERS

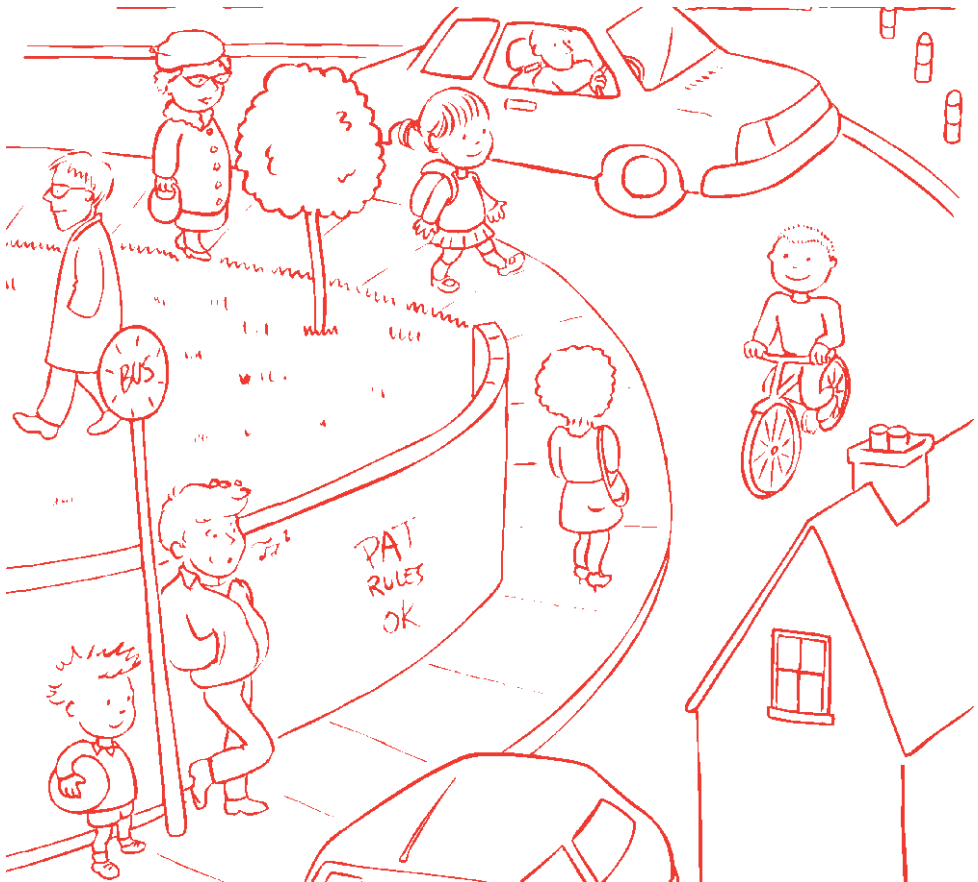
In this section children learn:

- That a stranger is anyone they don't know
- That most strangers are nice people
- Never to go anywhere with a stranger or take anything from a stranger.

## *Suggestions for Parents/Guardians*

Discuss with your child the meaning of the word 'stranger'. It's important to stress that most strangers are nice people and that we sometimes rely on strangers in times of trouble but that, at the same time, there are rules children should always use with strangers.

Ask your child what he or she would do in different situations with strangers, such as if a stranger asks your child for directions or offers your child a lift. Stress that it's not rude to refuse to talk to strangers if your child feels unsafe. Discuss with your child the general rules: say 'No' – Get Away and Tell.





## CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Children with a disability need personal safety skills. Recent studies have found that children with a disability are more likely to experience abuse than non-disabled children for reasons such as the following:

- Poor communication skills
- Limited sense of danger
- Need for intimate care such as washing and toileting
- Lack of mobility
- Reliance on adults for many of their needs

- A variety of carers and care settings
- Need for attention, friendship or affection
- Poor self-confidence and limited assertiveness
- Fear of not being believed
- Limited understanding of sexuality or sexual behaviour.

Children with a disability are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem, feelings of isolation and powerlessness.

Children with a developmental disability have a higher risk of victimisation.

## IF YOUR CHILD HAS A DISABILITY

As a parent/guardian of a child with a disability, you'll be aware of the extra help that your child needs and the extra adults/carers in your child's life. It's important, however, that you encourage your child to be as independent and confident as possible.

You can develop your child's self-confidence and independence by:

- Emphasising your child's strengths
- Allowing your child to make choices and decisions
- Encouraging independence in dressing, hygiene and cleanliness
- Developing appropriate social skills – greeting others, good manners, etc.
- Teaching your child how to say or write his or her name, address and phone number
- Ensuring he or she can ask for directions and make emergency telephone calls
- Recognising the child's need for dignity and privacy. It's important to have rules as to who looks after the intimate needs of your child and to ensure that your child feels comfortable with whatever arrangements are made. It should always be explained to a child what is being done and why

- Discussing 'what if' situations with your child. Children with disabilities may need specific rules for each specific situation. They will need to practise these rules and to practise saying 'No'
- Ensuring your child knows what is meant by 'safe', 'unsafe', 'private', 'secret', 'stranger', 'trust', 'rights', etc.
- Adapting some of the 'Suggestions for Parents/Guardians' outlined in the previous section to suit you and your child. For example, if your child has speech difficulties, it's important that he or she has some other way of letting you know they're upset or need help.

## THE STAY SAFE PROGRAMME FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

'Personal Safety Skills for Children with Learning Difficulties' has been designed by the Child Abuse Prevention Programme to assist the teaching of safety skills to children with special needs. Although targeted at children with a disability in the six-to-thirteen age group, the programme may also be suitable for some older children with special needs.

Lessons for this programme cover the same topics as the main programme, and are divided into five categories to cater for children with the following special needs: visual impairment, physical disability, cognitive-learning difficulties, hearing impairment, emotional and behavioural difficulties.



Use may be made of the material from each of the five categories depending on the needs of the child. There are thirty worksheets to accompany these lessons. Teachers may also use the mainstream Stay Safe lessons to supplement this work.

Considerable time will need to be given to the development of personal safety skills for children with special needs. You may wish to discuss with your child's teacher how you can support the teaching of the programme to your child.

# BULLYING



## What is bullying?

Bullying can be defined as repeated aggressive behaviour of a verbal, physical or emotional nature. It may be carried out by groups or by an individual and can take place anywhere. It can be hurtful, painful, harmful, distressing and frightening.

Bullying can be:

- Physical** Hitting, pushing, shoving, pinching, tripping, etc.  
Interference with a child's possessions, e.g. books, money or lunch  
Forcing another child to do something for the bully, such as homework, 'jobs'.

- Verbal** Name-calling  
Hurtful, insulting or humiliating remarks about a child's appearance, ability, family, race or religion  
Spreading mean, hurtful or untrue gossip or rumours about an individual
- Emotional** Deliberately excluding or isolating a child  
Intimidation  
Belittling someone's efforts  
Ganging up on an individual

Bullying may not always be done 'face to face'. Mobile phones and emails are sometimes used by bullies to send nasty messages to others. Make sure your child knows that they should always tell you if they receive such messages and that sending nasty and hurtful messages is not acceptable.

All types of bullying are damaging and quite often difficult to detect – particularly verbal and emotional bullying – due to the secrecy upon which it relies. In many cases of bullying, the victim is too frightened to tell. The most successful bullies are those who can keep their victims quiet by threatening or humiliating them.

There are no innocent bystanders when it comes to bullying. As parents, teachers or children we all have a part to play in ensuring that those around us can live a life free from bullying.

### HOW WOULD YOU KNOW IF YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED?

The following may be indications that your child is being bullied. It's important to bear in mind, however, that many 'signs' of bullying can also be signs of other difficulties. No one sign on its own should be seen as absolute proof that bullying has occurred. It's important to investigate unexplained changes in your child's behaviour.

If your child is being bullied he or she may:

- Be unusually anxious, nervous or tense
- Develop sleeping problems, such as nightmares, bed-wetting, sleeplessness
- Develop eating problems
- Have unexplained bruises, scratches, etc.
- Come home regularly with books, clothes or other possessions damaged or missing
- Constantly ask for or steal money (to pay a bully)
- Begin to bully others
- Become reluctant to go to school, to go out to play or to continue with other usual activities
- Become reluctant to walk to or from school or other activities
- Show a deterioration in school performance
- Isolated or withdrawn
- Become anxious or evasive when asked if he or she has a problem
- Children may make excuses for any of the above.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOU SUSPECT YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED?

**Ask** It's often not easy for children to tell, so it's important to ask your child about bullying. Let them know that they can tell you if they have a problem.

**Listen** Listen to what your child tells you. If your child feels that he or she is being bullied, acknowledge this.

**Talk** Discuss the problem with your child and how it might be resolved. Your child should not be encouraged to retaliate as there may be a risk of injury.

Help your child to understand that bullying is wrong and that victims should never blame themselves when bullying takes place.

**Get help** Identify the places where the bullying is happening.

If the bullying is school related, talk to the class teacher and/or school principal. It may help to make an appointment. It is important to have your facts straight before raising the issue with the school. If the bullying is related to a club or activity the child attends, talk to the group leader. Explain to the teacher or group leader what has been happening and how your child feels. Discuss with them how you might work together to stop the bullying.

Enlist the help of friends to support your child – invite friends in to play or to go on family outings.

Talk to other parents/guardians. Discuss with them how you could work together to support each other and your children.



## THE SCHOOL RESPONSE

The prevention of bullying should be part of a written Code of Behaviour and Discipline in all primary and post primary schools.

A school policy to counteract bullying behaviour should ensure that:

- Your child's complaint is investigated and recorded
- The situation is monitored over a reasonable time
- Your child is supported in school
- The incident is treated in a confidential way
- You are kept informed about progress.

## PRACTICAL ADVICE YOU CAN GIVE YOUR CHILD IF HE OR SHE IS BULLIED

Tell your child to:

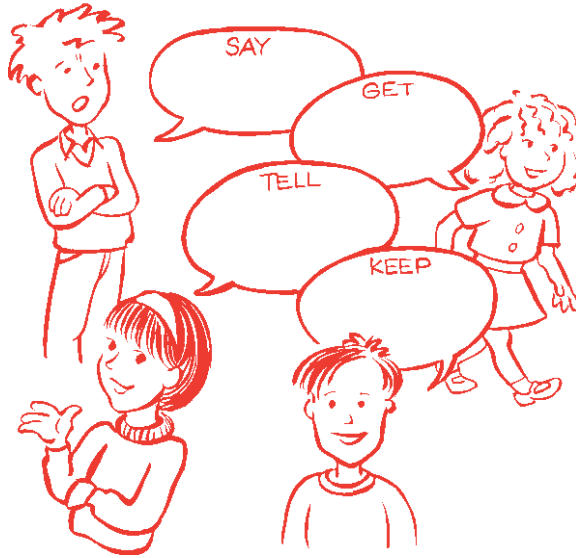
- Avoid situations where he or she may be alone with the bully
- Avoid situations where he or she may be confronted by the bully
- Walk away smartly if you see him/them approaching
- Tell a parent or teacher about any bullying – even if the bullying is against someone else
- Remember the Stay Safe rules: Say 'No' – Get Away and Tell an adult who can help.

Teaching your child the following self help strategies would be useful in situations where contact with the bully is unavoidable.

- Not crying or showing temper – this is frequently what the bully wants to see
- Standing up straight and trying to look confident
- Speaking firmly, clearly and slowly
- Looking the bully in the eye and saying 'No'. (Developing a response to nicknames at home, such as laughing off slagging or casual taunts can be very helpful).

Most children, with a little help, overcome this problem quickly.

# Personal SAFETY RULES



## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PREVENT YOUR CHILD FROM BEING BULLIED?

It's important for your child to learn that he or she has a right to say 'no' and to tell of any situation that they find uncomfortable or threatening.

A child needs to have good self-esteem and confidence to say 'no' and to tell. The more confident your child is, the less likely he or she will become a victim of abuse. You can build up your child's self-esteem and confidence in the way that you praise, encourage, talk with and listen to your child.

Provide opportunities to talk over little difficulties, problems or fears with your child. Listen to what he or she is saying to you.

Let your child know that he or she can tell you if they have a problem. Remember – if your children can't come to you with their little problems, they're less likely to come to you with their bigger ones.

See also page 4 on Personal Safety.

## WHY DO CHILDREN BULLY?

There are many reasons why children bully. It may occur because of something else in the child's life, such as a new baby, a death in the family, a sudden illness or problems at home or at school.

Children who bully have often been bullied themselves. Some bullies suffer from a lack of self-confidence and have low self-esteem. Some may be attention-seekers, trying to impress others by their bullying behaviour. Children who are under pressure to succeed at all costs may try to bully their way to success.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOUR CHILD IS A BULLY?

- Talk to your child and try to find out what the problem is. Children who are prepared to admit being involved, will find it much easier to get the problem solved and change their behaviour. They should be encouraged to do this.
- Don't punish bullying by being a bully yourself. Hitting or shouting at the child will make the situation worse. It is important that the child feels that your support will help solve the problem.
- Children who bully are often ashamed when the truth is discovered and will need reassurance that you will help re-establish their standing with others in a way that creates good will all round.

- Some young people may not realise that they are bullying. Others deliberately set out to hurt. Let the child know that it's wrong to bully. Explain how the victim feels. Try to get your child to understand the victim's point of view.
- Contact your child's teacher/principal and let them know about the problem. Parents and teachers working together can help the child. Other people who care for your child may also be able to help with this problem.

## WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT FROM THE SCHOOL?

The school policy to counteract bullying behaviour should outline how incidents of bullying are dealt with. It should ensure:

- A fair hearing for your child
- Clear information about the nature of the incidents
- Information about what will happen next. You or your child may have to sign an agreement or sanctions may be imposed
- Confidentiality
- A system of support for the bully
- The situation will be monitored and feedback provided to parents.

The Department of Education and Science has issued guidelines on bullying to all schools.

# CHILD ABUSE

It's difficult to understand why anyone would want to hurt a child or make them feel bad about themselves. But whatever the reason, abuse is always wrong and is never the child's fault. It's always the responsibility of the abuser.

There are four different types of abuse – neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse.

A child may be subjected to one or more forms of abuse at any given time.

## TYPES OF ABUSE

**Neglect** Where a child's needs for food, warmth, shelter, nurturing and safety are not provided, to the extent that the child suffers significant harm.

**Physical abuse** Where a child is assaulted or deliberately injured.

**Emotional abuse** Where a child's needs for affection, approval and security are not being met and have not been met for some time by the parent or carer.

**Sexual abuse** Where a child is used for the sexual gratification of another.

More detailed information is available in *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children*, produced by the Department of Health and Children (1999).

## POSSIBLE SIGNS OF ABUSE

While the following may be indications of abuse, it's important to remember that there could be other explanations. Many of the 'signs' of abuse can also be signs of other difficulties. *No one sign on its own should be seen as absolute proof that abuse has occurred.*

It's important to note that some children may never give us any sign that they're being abused. Sometimes, a child will seem unaffected by an incident, but parents/guardians should still be alert for reactions. It's always important to investigate unexplained changes in your child's behaviour.

**Neglect** Inadequate provision of food, clothing, shelter

Children persistently being left alone without adequate care and supervision

Exposure to danger

Persistent failure to attend school

Inadequate medical care

Exploited or overworked.

**Physical abuse** Unexplained injuries such as bruising, burns, scalds, bites, marks

Untreated injuries and repeated fractures.

Pain, itching, bruising, blistering, bleeding or infection in the genital area which may cause difficulty when walking or sitting.

**Emotional abuse** Persistent lack of praise, encouragement, love, attachment or stimulation

Rejection, serious over-protectiveness

Inappropriate non-physical punishment, e.g. locking in bedroom for long periods

Exposure to domestic violence

Inappropriate expectations of a child's behaviour

Constant verbal harassment through criticism, ridicule or threats

Every child who is neglected or abused sexually or physically is also emotionally abused.

**Sexual abuse** Hints about sexual activity

Sexually explicit behaviour or play with toys or others

An understanding of sexual behaviour beyond their years, e.g. child may be able to explain sexual acts in detail or may draw pictures that have an explicit sexual content

Unusual reluctance to join in normal activities which involve undressing, e.g. games/swimming

## CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child sexual abuse is often the most difficult form of abuse to detect because of the secrecy upon which it relies. It rarely involves just a single incident and usually occurs over a number of years. In many cases of sexual abuse, the victim is often made to feel guilty for what is happening to them.

Child sexual abuse can take many forms, from incidents such as indecent exposure and obscene phone calls to abuse involving full sexual intercourse. Even a seemingly minor incident might affect a child, and it's a mistake to assume that abuse is only serious when it involves intercourse.

### Who are the victims?

Children can become victims of child sexual abuse at any age – from infancy to adolescence. Children are most at risk between the ages of four and eleven, and both sexes are equally at risk. Boys may find it more difficult to disclose their victimisation. Victims come from every social background. Children with disabilities are more vulnerable and may therefore be more at risk of abuse (see section 'Children with Special Needs', page 14).

### Who are the abusers?

The abuser may be male or female, of any age and of any social background.

Many abusers that we know about are young men in their teens or early twenties.

A sexual abuser will normally try to develop a special relationship with a child – the child is targeted, groomed, tested and finally abused. Sexual abuse is habitual and compulsive. Most sexual abuse is committed by someone the child knows and trusts, such as a family member, relative, baby-sitter or neighbour.

### BEHAVIOURAL SIGNS AND EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS WHICH MAY INDICATE CHILD ABUSE

- Very aggressive or very withdrawn behaviour
- Lack of concentration (change in school performance)
- Bed-wetting, soiling, skin disorders, unexplained complaints (pains, headaches, etc.)
- Nightmares, changes in sleep patterns, loss of appetite
- Excessive fear of adults
- Difficulty in relating to adults or other children
- Low self-esteem and poor self-confidence
- Running away (common with adolescent victims).

*Remember – no one sign on its own should be seen as absolute proof that abuse has occurred. It's always important to investigate unexplained changes in your child's behaviour.*

### EFFECTS OF CHILD ABUSE

The effects of child abuse differ from one individual to the next, and depend on the age of the victim, their relationship with the abuser, and the extent of the abuse. Perhaps the greatest long-term injury to a child is the sense of betrayal felt towards the person who has abused the child, particularly when the relationship between victim and abuser is a close one.

The effects of abuse may lie dormant for many years, and can often be triggered by events later in life, such as the onset of puberty, by marriage or by the birth of a child.

With treatment and counselling, most victims come to terms with the abuse and go on to lead normal lives.

### WHY DOESN'T THE CHILD TELL SOMEONE?

Children can find it hard to tell because:

- They may be bribed or threatened to keep the abuse secret
- Sometimes children are led to believe that the abuse is normal and acceptable
- They may not have the language to talk about what has happened
- The abuser may try to make the child feel guilty or responsible for the abuse.

Sometimes children are not believed – it's assumed they're making up stories or imagining things. But children rarely make up stories about abuse.

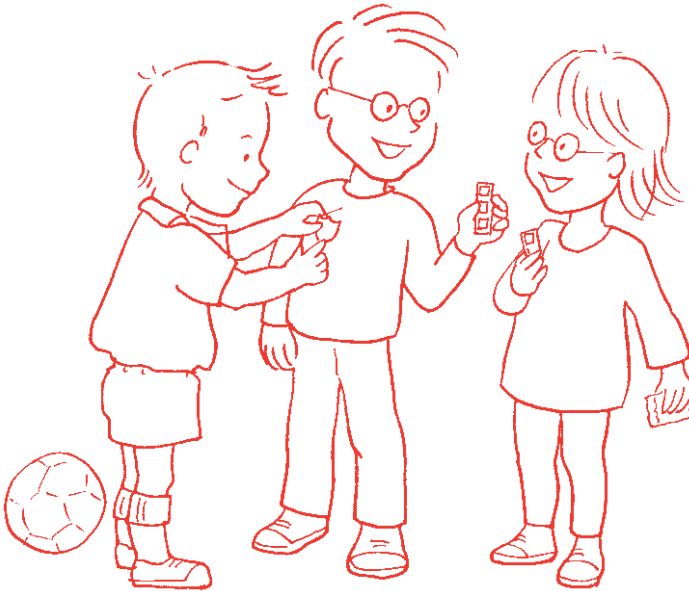
## WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU SUSPECT THAT A CHILD IS BEING ABUSED?

It can be difficult to know whether or not your suspicions about child abuse are real. Before you act on them, you need to consider whether any alternative explanation might exist and ask yourself these questions:

- Is there any other reason why the child or parent might be behaving in a particular way?
- Is there a pattern to this type of occurrence?

- Did you or anyone else see what was happening?
- Has the child said anything to indicate that he or she is being harmed?
- Could the signs or injuries have been caused in some other way?

If you've considered these questions and are still concerned, it's likely that you have reasonable grounds to take some action. It's important to remember that everyone has a duty to protect children and to co-operate with professionals where necessary.



## WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF A CHILD TELLS ABOUT ABUSE?

- Listen to the child. Don't probe or push the child for explanations
- Accept that the child has had an upsetting experience. Don't deny the problem, no matter how difficult this may be
- Control your feelings, stay calm and try not to panic
- Comfort the child and reassure them that they are not to blame and were right to tell you about what happened
- Act quickly – don't delay in getting help
- If you think a child is being abused or is at risk from someone inside or outside the family, get in touch with the social worker or other health professional in your local health-board centre. If it's an emergency and outside health-board hours, you should report it to An Garda Síochána. Under the law, nobody will be penalised for making a report of child abuse to the Health Board or An Garda Síochána as long as the report is not malicious and their intentions are genuine.

*The Department of Education and Science has issued guidelines to all teachers outlining procedures that should be followed if they suspect abuse or if they receive allegations or disclosures of abuse.*

## ADULTS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED CHILDHOOD ABUSE

Some readers may themselves have been abused as a child. Many will have coped well, especially when supported by family and friends. Adults who have experienced childhood abuse often find it necessary and helpful to talk to a supportive person – such as a professional counsellor – in a safe and confidential environment. There are several organisations providing support and advice on such counselling (see the list of relevant organisations at the back of this booklet). Your local health-board social worker can also advise you.

*Remember – with help, children can recover from bullying and abuse and lead normal happy lives.*



# SAFETY ON THE INTERNET

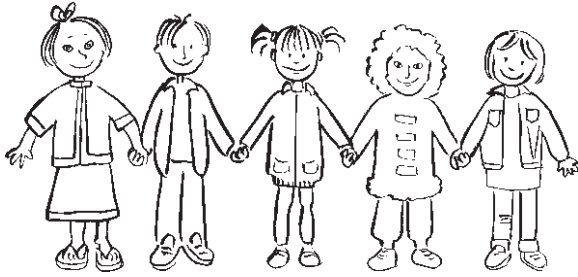
Children increasingly use the internet as a source of both fun and education. While it is indeed a wonderful resource there can be dangers attached to using the net and it makes sense to take some basic precautions. Children may access sites containing material that is pornographic, violent or racist in nature, or may receive unsolicited email containing nasty messages. They may also end up spending way too much time online, neglecting friends and other activities.

## WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- Keep the computer in a family room facing outwards where it can be more easily monitored by parents. This is probably the single most important thing you can do to help children be safe online.
  - Take an interest in what your children are doing online. Get them to tell you about the sites they are visiting and to show you how to use email and chat rooms if you don't already know. Find out what sites they access at school.
  - Talk to your children about what kind of Web sites and chat rooms are suitable for them to visit. Let them know that you will be monitoring their use of the net.
  - Limit access to the Internet to certain times
- You can check the record of accessed sites in the temporary internet files folder or history folder. There are filtering programmes available, which control access to information on the Internet. These can be downloaded from sites such as [www.netnanny.com](http://www.netnanny.com) or [www.cyberpatrol.com](http://www.cyberpatrol.com).

## MAKE SURE YOUR CHILDREN KNOW THE FOLLOWING SAFETY RULES:

- Never to give out personal information such as their address, telephone number, parents' work address/telephone number, or the name and location of the school without permission.
- Never to send photographs or anything else via email without first checking with a parent.
- If they come across anything that makes them feel in any way uncomfortable they should turn off the monitor and tell a parent right away.
- That people they chat to online are not always who they say they are. They should never agree to meet someone without first checking with their parents.
- Never to answer any messages that are mean or upsetting.
- Never to use bad language or send mean messages online.



*If you wish to find out more about the topics covered in this booklet there are materials available at main bookshops and libraries and from some of the organisations mentioned on the next page. The Stay Safe programme is available for viewing at many libraries, and Stay Safe materials are available for purchase from:*

**The Child Abuse Prevention Programme, Bridge House, Cherry Orchard Hospital, Ballyfermot, Dublin 10.**

**Tel: 01-6206347**

**You can e-mail us at:  
[staysafe@indigo.ie](mailto:staysafe@indigo.ie)**

**or visit our web site at:  
[www.staysafe.ie](http://www.staysafe.ie)**

# ORGANISATIONS

## LOCAL HEALTH BOARD

If you have concerns about the welfare of a child or if you have concerns that a child is at risk of abuse you should contact your local health board. See local telephone directory for local numbers.

## BARNARDOS

Christchurch Square, Dublin 8,  
Tel (01) 4530355  
Barnardo's is an organisation working to improve the quality of children's lives by providing a range of services to children and their families.

## BULLYING BEHAVIOUR RESOURCE AND RESEARCH CENTRE

Department of Teacher Education,  
Trinity College, Dublin 2  
Tel: (01) 6081240  
Provides a service to teachers, parents and others seeking information and advice about bullying

## BULLYING HELPLINE 0502-20598

Run by the National Association of Parents, this helpline is open to victims of bullying and their parents.

## CAMPAIGN AGAINST BULLYING

Tel (01) 288 7976  
C.A.B. is a voluntary organisation which provides information and offers support and advice on bullying to victims and their families.

## C.A.R.I. FOUNDATION

110 Drumcondra Road. Dublin.  
Tel: (01) 8308529,  
2 Garryowen Road. Limerick  
Tel: 061 413331  
Provides services for victims of abuse and non abusing members of their families.

## CHILDLINE TEL: 1-800 666 666

This is a service run by the ISPCC for any child in trouble or danger.

## DISABILITY FEDERATION OF IRELAND

2 Sandyford Office Park, Dublin 18.  
Tel: (01) 295 9344  
Aims to help member organisations deliver the best possible range of services for people with disabilities.'

**GARDA-DOMESTIC VIOLENCE &  
SEXUAL ASSAULT INVESTIGATION  
UNIT**

Tel 6663430/34/37

This unit provides a service to the public by way of information and advice. It monitors and oversees all cases of child abuse, sexual assault, domestic violence and rape nationwide.

**ISPCC Tel: (01) 679 4944**

The I.S.P.C.C. is a child protecting, child centred society which has as its primary aim the protection of every child's right to a safe passage through childhood.

**NATIONAL PARENTS' COUNCIL  
(PRIMARY)**

16 Cumberland Street South, Dublin 2.  
Tel (01) 6789980

NPC represents the view of parents on all important educational bodies.

**PARENTLINE TEL (01) 873 3500**

Provides a phone line which offers support and advice to parents particularly in times of stress.

**RAPE CRISIS CENTRES**

The Rape Crisis Centres offer counselling and advice to victims of rape and sexual assault. See local telephone directory for local numbers.

**VICTIM SUPPORT**

29/30 Dame Street, Dublin 2.

Tel: (01) 679 8673

Victim Support helps people come to terms with the experience of being a victim of crime. It offers advice, help, support or a sympathetic ear to anyone affected by a crime.



**HEALTH  
PROMOTION  
UNIT**