



APRIL 18-22, 2022



**DAYS
OF ACTION**

STAFF RESOURCE BOOKLET



NAME

**STRATEGIES & ACTIVITIES FOR
PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM
SEXUAL ABUSE**



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www.FiveDaysofAction.org

Materials are derived from YMCA of the USA's "Know. See. Respond." copyrighted in 2020.



THANK YOU

for taking action to protect kids from sexual abuse! The Five Days of Action are all about preparing you to give children the safe, happy experience they deserve. Protecting kids from abuse might sound difficult or uncomfortable at first, but just like fire safety or water safety, all it takes is a little preparation!

This booklet will take you through the basic, actionable steps of “Know. See. Respond.” and can be used as a resource beyond the Five Days. It offers tangible steps for creating safe environments where children thrive. You will find tips, exercises, and examples of everyday actions that you can take to ultimately protect kids from sexual abuse.

We know that child sexual abuse is a sensitive subject; if at any time you feel triggered or unsafe, please know that help is available to you. For free, confidential, 24/7 support from trained counselors, text the word LIGHT to 741-741 or call 1-866-FOR-LIGHT.

You can also reach out to:

write down the name and contact information of your organization's support person here



DAY 1: When it comes to child and youth safety, sexual abuse is an issue that often gets overlooked. But it's actually one of the most common threats kids face. The good news is that many children view extracurricular activities as their safe space. That's a big deal! One of the kids in your care might view you as a “safe adult” in their lives. That's an incredible responsibility—you have the power to ensure kids are healthy, cared for, and safe.

exercise
01. List some of the things you already do (or intend to do) to keep kids safe when they're in your care. Be mindful of these things as you go through the week!

take notes here:

TAKE ACTION:

1. Sign the Pledge to Protect and commit to keeping kids safe!
2. When you interact with people this week, greet them with high fives! It might sound silly, but taking this action in the place of other, more physical greetings respects people's physical boundaries while still being friendly and welcoming. It's a small but impactful change! Healthy and respected boundaries are the foundation of child protection.



DAY 2:

KNOW. The circumstances in which sexual abuse happens might surprise you. But, when we understand how abuse happens, we can stop it. Did you know that in many youth-serving settings, the majority of abuse happens between youth rather than between adults and children? This means we must be aware of how kids might act out sexually and take advantage of each other.

. **FACT:** Nearly 40% of children are abused by older or larger children.²

When you think of child sexual abuse, you may not have ever considered that it happens between peers as well. Abuse happens whenever a stronger or more powerful person asserts themselves against the will of another less-powerful person. It often starts with, and becomes an extension of, bullying. Essentially, abuse is a boundary violation.

Respecting another person's boundaries is respecting that person. So, to prevent abuse, first we must set and keep clear boundaries with each other. Sometimes, even just knowing a boundary exists can deter someone from crossing it. Other times, when boundaries are well-established, it's easy to tell when they've been crossed.

One way to protect the children in your care is to make it very clear what your personal and organizational boundaries are, enforce good boundaries by modeling your teaching, and respecting children's boundaries when they share them with you.

exercise List three boundaries you can model this week:

01. *take notes here:*

1

2

3

exercise Look at your list; for each item, brainstorm a couple ways you can model these boundaries. How will you encourage kids and peers to do the same?

02.

take notes here:

TODAY'S ACTION:

1. Talk to the kids in your group about how they like to be greeted when they arrive at your program. Do they want high-fives, waves, elbow bumps (or any other physical affection approved by your organization)? Use this as an opportunity to reinforce healthy boundaries by letting kids decide their greeting. Show them that you respect their desired level of interaction.



TIP:

Your organization should have a pre-existing code of conduct for child safety. This code of conduct is a document that describes how staff, volunteers, and older youth will interact and conduct themselves with children. A good code of conduct is balanced. It allows for interactions that are warm, encouraging, and appropriate; it clearly prohibits interactions that are dangerous, inappropriate, and harmful. It should contain descriptions that reflect the values and activities of your organization.

Review your code of conduct and ask these questions, taking notes on the page to the right for future reference:

- Is your code of conduct shared with parents and children, and/or available on a website? Sharing creates transparency. It helps everyone cooperate with and support the guidelines that staff and volunteers must follow.
- Is the code of conduct posted publicly? Where can you find it?
- Are staff, volunteers, and participating members required to review and sign the code? An in-person review can help everyone remain on the same page about your safeguarding goals.
- What are the organization's guidelines around appropriate and encouraged interactions with children?
- What are the organization's guidelines around harmful and prohibited interactions with children?
- What is the organization's policy on one-on-one situations with children?

exercise Review your code of conduct and jot down important points to know and remember:

03.

OUR CODE OF CONDUCT



DAY 3:

SEE. The signs of abuse aren't always obvious, but they are often there. There aren't usually external, physical signs that a child is being sexually abused. However, emotional or behavioral changes in a child are common. Trauma may be the root of what is typically labelled 'bad' or difficult' behavior.

Here are some signs of abuse to look for:

- Behavioral problems, physical aggression, non-compliance, and rebellion
- Anxiety, depression, fear, withdrawal, and suicidal thoughts
- "Too perfect" or overly compliant behavior
- Nightmare, bed-wetting, bullying, and cruelty to animals
- Lack in interest in friends, sports, or other activities

Red Flags to Mitigate

In the most ideal situation, we can keep children away from unsafe situations and prevent abuse from ever happening. To do this, we have to know how to spot red flags in behavior and our environment. Here are things to think about when it comes to creating safe environments for children:

Physical Environment Red Flags:

- The more isolated a child is, the more vulnerable. Ensure kids aren't left alone in small groups or one-on-one situations (with either peers or an adult).
- Similarly, isolated or obstructed locations can be a safety concern. Find ways to mitigate access to locations that can't be easily observed.
- Moments of transition or chaos can often provide opportunities for acting out. Keep a careful eye on kids' movements during these times.

Behavioral Red Flags:

- Kids can be naturally tactile; this isn't bad in itself. But when kids ignore or intentionally violate another person's personal space and/or physical boundaries, it can be cause for concern.
- Bullying. Physical or verbal aggression should be a red flag, especially if the bully uses over-sexualized language. As mentioned in the previous days, bullying may be a precursor to crossing sexual boundaries.
- Youth that sneak off or regularly find ways to try and be alone with their peers—even if two youth seem to be in a relationship with each other—this can still be a major safety concern.

exercise

01.

Now that you know what red flags are, think about the opposite: what might safe environments and healthy behaviors look like?

take notes here:



exercise 02.

What are some personal examples of how you could respond to red flags? Jot down some ideas of what you could do or say. Then discuss your ideas with your peers; does your organization have a protocol for safety concerns like these?

take notes here:

TODAY'S ACTION: 1.

Today's action is a race, a competition, and a scavenger hunt: Break out into small teams. Throughout the day, have each team look for and note down elements in your environment that are protective against abuse or help keep kids safe. **The first team to find 10 elements and turn them in wins a prize!**

What you need:

- Individual teams
- A judge, who reviews the lists and hands out the prize
- A prize
- Team spirit & creative thinking

Examples of potential safety elements: windows in classrooms and doors so no one is isolated; group activities with multiple leaders observing; isolating spaces like closets are locked or secured, etc.

use this space for your list!



DAY 4:

RESPOND. There are three instances in which we need to react to sexual abuse: a child **discloses** abuse to us, we **discover** sexual abuse ourselves, or we have a reason to **suspect** it.

Speaking out can be scary. What if you don't know all the details? What if you aren't 100% sure? **Report anyway.** Legally, you do not need proof that abuse is occurring to make a report, only reasonable suspicion. Reporting child sexual abuse is key to preventing and intervening in abuse.

TIP: If a child disclosed abuse to you, they have taken a big risk. What you do next is very important. Take a deep breathe and give attention, compassion, and belief. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Listen calmly and openly.
- Don't fill in the gaps.
- Don't ask leading questions about the details.
- Ask open-ended questions like, "What happened next?"
- Let them know you believe them and that it isn't their fault.
- Don't overreact. When you react to a child's disclosure with anger or disbelief, the child is likely to feel even more ashamed, shut down, or change or retract the story.
- Say, "I believe you" and "what happened is not your fault."
- Don't promise that the information will be kept confidential.
- Report sexual abuse—even if it's only suspected abuse—to the police or to child protective services. Be clear and specific. Let them guide you as to next steps for taking care of the child.

exercise 01.

What are some specific ways you can respond to a child who discloses abuse to you?

take notes here:

TODAY'S ACTION:

1. Partner up and practice what you might say if a child tells you they've been harmed. Then, practice reporting a child's disclosure to your supervisor.

2. As a group, come up with a call-and-response that you will all **recognize**—it could be something silly like "Marco!"/"Polo!" or it could be something more specific like "Safety!"/"Matters!" Whenever one member calls out the first part, everyone else from the group who hears it should respond with the second part. Use this as a memory device to remind you that if a child comes to you, it's your responsibility to respond appropriately!



DAY 5: This is a lot of information about how to protect children from child sexual abuse. Feel free to take a few days to think about the information in this booklet, talk it over with your spouse, friends, and family, and refer back to it as often as needed.

exercise Now that you have completed this booklet, review your notes.
01. List some action steps you are going to incorporate into your life to better protect children from abuse:

take notes here:



DEBRIEF ACTIVITY:

Using a deck of cards (or if a deck is not available, the website <https://deck.of.cards>), debrief your experience this week. Deal two or more cards to every person and invite reflection or comments specific to the suit they've been dealt:

HEART: reflect something felt by the heart during the week.

SPADE: share something that was dug up during the week, or perhaps something that was cultivated.

DIAMOND: identify something that was precious or valuable

CLUB: consider something that will grow in the future.

You can conduct this discussion as a whole group, in pairs, or small groups. Feel free to take notes below to help you reflect!



RESOURCES

Congratulations on completing the Five Days of Action. We hope you feel empowered and excited to protect the children in your care! Remember, child safety doesn't end today—this is information you can use anywhere, at any time. Below are some resources you can access if you're ever faced with abuse:

Sexual Abuse Hotline:	1-866-FOR-LIGHT or text the word "LIGHT" to 741-741
ACA's 24-Hour Service to Camps in Crisis:	800-573-9019
Praesidium's YMCA Helpline:	855-347-0751
State-specific Resources:	D2L.org/get-help/resources/
How to Report Abuse:	D2L.org/get-help/reporting/

Use the space below to write down resources specific to your organization or community, so that you have them on hand if you ever need them.

References:

1. Townsend, C. Rheingold, A.A., (2013) *Estimating a child sexual abuse prevalence rate for practitioners: A review of child sexual abuse prevalence studies*. Charleston, S.C., Darkness to Light. Retrieved from www.D2L.org.
2. Finkelhor, D. (2012) *Characteristics of crimes against juveniles*. Durham, NH: Crimes against Children Research Center.
3. Julia Whealin, Ph.D. (2007-05-22). "Child Sexual Abuse." National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, US Department of Veterans Affairs.

Materials are derived from YMCA of the USA's "Know. See. Respond." copyrighted in 2020. Content provided by Darkness to Light. To learn more or get trained to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse visit www.D2L.org

