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Scouting America

How to Safeguard Your Children:

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO ABUSE PREVENTION

DEAR PARENT

Welcome to SCOUTING! We are so pleased that you have decided to join our movement, and we look forward to working together with your family to raise leaders of character who will shape our future in a positive way.

The programs of Scouting America focus on developing leaders of character. We do this by presenting and reinforcing the values found in the Scout Oath and Scout Law. It is enormously important for our members to have a moral compass and a strong work ethic to go along with it. For more information on the benefits of Scouting, go to www.scouting.org/programs/.

To realize the potential of Scouting, it is critical that we take all possible steps to create and maintain a safe environment for all who participate. That involves understanding personal boundaries and knowing what appropriate behaviors are in Scouting.

Research indicates one of the best deterrents against child abuse is an open and continual conversation between parents and their children.

Opening Purpose

Although this guide is provided as part of your child's involvement in Scouting, the information and skills it contains are designed to support you as a parent or caregiver wherever your child learns, plays, camps, or connects—at home, at school, online, in sports, and in other activities. Whether your family participates in Scouting for a short time or many years, the principles in this guide are meant to support your child throughout their growth and development.

The following information is offered to help your family establish and maintain a safe environment where you can prevent your child or another child from being abused.

Child abuse is something we would rather not talk about, or even think about, but we must. Many of us find it challenging and difficult to begin this conversation with our children, and the risk is that we might never get around to it. There are numerous factors that can lead to abuse. Together, you and your program leader must work together to ensure all Safeguarding Youth and Health and Safety policies are understood and followed.

For more information, see “Additional Resources” on page 29.

The information in this guide is intended to help families feel prepared, confident, and supported—not fearful. It is meant to raise your awareness about many forms of abuse and how to recognize it and report it. It is part of Scouting America’s commitment to creating safe environments for all youth.

Using This Booklet

This booklet can’t address all threats to personal safety for our children in and out of Scouting, but it will inform and empower you to better **recognize**, **respond** to, and **report** most forms of abuse and begin the conversation.

The first section contains information for parents about child abuse and some tips for talking with your child about child abuse.

In the second section, we put that knowledge to work with exercises for you to share with your child.

Research shows that children whose parents talk to them about preventing abuse are better able to protect themselves and are more likely to tell if they are experiencing abuse or have been abused.

WHAT EVERY PARENT SHOULD KNOW

Before we can understand what to do about abuse, we must understand what we mean by *abuse*. Children can experience abuse in many ways:

- **neglect**
- **physical abuse**
- **sexual abuse**
- **emotional abuse**

Often a child who is abused in one way is abused in multiple ways. When we protect a child from one form of abuse, such as neglect, we are often protecting the child from additional forms of abuse.

Abuse often occurs in the home by parents, stepparents, siblings, and other youth and/or caretakers. It also occurs in schools, churches, and youth-serving organizations.

Regardless of what you have heard,

there is no known profile of an abuser or child molester.

However, there are behaviors that children exhibit that may be an indicator that the child is being abused. Abuse can occur despite our screening process, which includes:

- **criminal background checks**
- **reference checks**
- **checks against the Volunteer Screening Database**

For more information on Scouting America's screening protocol, see the *Guide to Safe Scouting,* found at www.scouting.org.

Expert-Informed Safeguarding

Scouting America's approach to safeguarding youth is grounded in prevention, awareness, and partnership. The guidance in this booklet reflects best practices informed by ongoing collaboration with experts in youth safety, including professionals from law enforcement, academia, survivor-informed practice, and other youth-serving organizations.

The overall safety of your child is important to us. If you have any concerns about the safety of your child or the actions of leaders or parents, contact your local council Scout executive immediately.

Reports can be made to your Scout executive, or they can be submitted by text, a phone call, or QR code by using (1-844-Scouts1 or 844-726-8871). By creating two-way, anonymous communications, Scouting America can start a dialogue and get the person making the report the advice or help they need.

The Scouts First Helpline is a resource for incidents involving child abuse or serious risk of harm to children only. It is **not** for general information or questions.

For questions about training, policy interpretation, program, etc., please contact your Scout executive.

Sexual Abuse

When an adult or older youth uses their authority to involve a child in any type of sexual activity, it is child sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse is unwanted sexual activity,

with persons using force, making threats, or taking advantage of

victims not able to give consent.

Another type of sexual abuse occurs when an adult or youth crosses clear boundaries in communications or exposes the youth to alcohol, drugs, or pornography. Children can be at risk of sexual abuse anywhere there is access or opportunity, such as:

- **at home**
- **at a neighbor's house**
- **at school**
- **on field trips**
- **at public events**
- **even in Scouting**

A common misconception about sexual abuse is that children are most likely to be abused by strangers.

In fact, the abuser is usually someone the child knows and trusts, and most likely is known to you, the parent.

These adults or youth are most often male, but females also can be offenders.

Sexual Abuse by Adults

Adults who abuse children often start by grooming the adults around them to gain trust before moving on to their intended victims. Adults who abuse children may manipulate, bribe, coerce, threaten, or force a child into feeling like a partner in the sexual activity. They most often use a multistep "grooming" process that focuses on the child's needs and possibly on the child's parents as well. Adults who may sexually harm your child might offer free babysitting services or overnight trips, for example, or make friends with you to gain enough trust to be alone with your child.

Once the potential abuser has identified the target child, characteristically, the grooming process moves to what looks like harmless touching—such as hugging and massages—or exposure and looking for chances to be alone with the child. The person usually seeks a child who craves affection or attention and makes that child feel special by spending a lot of time with them and giving gifts and money. All children are vulnerable to sexual abuse because of their innocence, naivete, and total trust in and dependence upon adults.

A red flag is a leader who violates Scouting America's Safeguarding Youth policy of no one-on-one contact in Scouting and seeks one-on-one contact with youth, especially outside of the Scouting program and utilizing digital or social media for such contact.

When the individual senses that the child has become comfortable with physical contact and has an emotional bond, the physical contact becomes more intense. The individual may prey on the child's natural curiosity about sexuality and may say that they are helping or teaching them sex education. The individual may suggest playing inappropriate games. To create a "special relationship," the grooming may involve:

- **violating rules**
- **drinking alcohol**
- **smoking cigarettes**

Most children don't know they are being groomed until it is too late.

Many abusers are clever enough to trick the victim into believing that they are equally to blame or will not be believed if they tell. Other abusers will manipulate the emotional bond and threaten to withhold love and attention if the child tells anyone. Many children feel trapped, overwhelmed, or ashamed and are afraid to tell.

Some children find it difficult to immediately report or disclose the abuse because of fear or love of the individual abusing them.

Sexual Abuse by Other Youth

It is also possible for a child of similar age or older to abuse another through force, position of authority, or manipulation.

About a third of sexual abuse occurs at the hands of other children, including siblings, relatives, older youth, and youth in positions of authority and supervision who manipulate through bullying behavior using their size or authority.

Overnight activities pose a greater risk of abuse, including sleepovers, campouts, etc. Any peer activity, such as a club initiation or hazing, in which sexual activity is included is a form of sexual abuse and should be addressed and reported immediately.

Adults who learn or discover that youth-on-youth abuse has occurred or who have concerns about youth exhibiting questionable, problematic, or illegal sexual behaviors must take immediate steps to stop it and report. Refer to www.ncsby.org as a resource for additional information.

Responding/Reporting

If you suspect a child has experienced sexual abuse or has sexually abused other children inside or outside of Scouting, call 911 immediately and make a report *as required by your state and child protective services, or CPS.* Additional reporting may be required by your state.

To learn more about sexual behavior of youth, visit the National Center on the Sexual Behavior of Youth at www.ncsby.org. Contact your local Scout executive. If the Scout executive is unavailable, reports can be submitted anonymously by text, a phone call, or QR code at:

1-844-SCOUTS1 (1-844-726-8871).

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is the deliberate injury of a child by a person responsible for the child's care.

Physical abuse injuries can include:

- **bruises**
- **broken bones**
- **burns**
- **scrapes**

Children experience minor injuries as a normal part of childhood, usually in places such as the shins, knees, and elbows. When injuries do not seem to be the typical "bumps and bruises" of childhood or do not match the explanation given, it is possible that the child is being or has been abused.

Blows to the stomach may result in abdominal bruises, even if you can't see a mark. When a child complains of pain or says that they have been punched in the stomach, this should be taken seriously because there may be internal injury.

The following signs are commonly associated with abuse but are not absolutes:

- **explanations of an injury, provided to you by a child or parent, that don't make sense**
- **injuries on a child who has been absent from school or youth activities**
- **complaints of soreness when moving**
- **fear of going home with or to parents**

Neglect

Neglect often involves depriving a child of food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or other necessities of life. Neglect can also involve exposing a child to harmful substances or materials, such as drugs, alcohol, or pornography, or to harmful practices such as violent behavior.

A number of clues suggest that a child might be neglected.

- **The child who frequently comes to meetings with body odor**
- **The child who is frequently unkempt**
- **The child who is living in a dangerous environment**
- **The child with an obvious medical need that goes unattended**

All are showing signs that they could be neglected. So is the child:

- **who is always hungry**
- **who hoards or steals food**
- **who is seldom dressed appropriately for the weather**
- **who regularly talks of seeing a parent drunk or bruised from being hit**

Any time a child shows a need or condition that a reasonable parent would attend to—especially when failure to provide for the need harms the child's physical or emotional well-being—the child is likely being neglected.

How Young Children May Ask for Help

Young children often do not have the words to describe abuse or inappropriate behavior. Instead, they may express feelings, confusion, or changes in behavior as a way of seeking help. Parents and caregivers should be prepared to listen for these clues and respond calmly and supportively.

Emotional Abuse

A child suffers from emotional abuse when continually ridiculed, blamed, humiliated, or compared unfavorably with others.

Emotional abuse damages the child's self-esteem.

Studies find that emotional abuse is just as harmful as, if not more harmful than, other forms of abuse.

It can lead to developmental problems, speech delays, depression, anxiety, and conditions such as low empathy and difficulty with friends.

Emotional abuse can occur when a parent completely ignores, rejects, or regularly threatens to beat a child or when a child struggles to meet a parent's unreasonable expectations in academics, athletics, or other areas. Emotional abuse can also result if an adult or older youth provides a child with alcohol, drugs, pornography, or other harmful substances or materials.

Spiritual Abuse

An often-overlooked form of child maltreatment is spiritual abuse—the incorporation of religion into the abuse of a child. Some studies suggest that adults who abuse children are particularly attracted to faith communities because they find clergy and other faith leaders to be very trusting. If your child is active in a faith community, make sure to ask about what safeguarding youth policies they have in place.

Youth With Developmental Disabilities/Special Needs

Children with disabilities or behavioral problems are at greater risk of abuse than other children. Adults who abuse children believe that youth with disabilities will be least likely to report the abuse. Accordingly, while it is important to teach all children to recognize would-be abusers and to tell a trusted adult about abuse, this message is particularly important for children with disabilities.

Special Considerations

It is vital that parents be forthcoming with unit leaders about any concerns or expectations you have about your child, as well as medication that may influence behavior.

Signs Your Child Might Have Been Abused

The clearest sign of abuse is that your child tells you that someone hurt or scared them or made them feel uncomfortable or you uncover evidence of abuse. Unfortunately, many children never speak of abuse, so it is important for you to maintain communications where your child can openly discuss matters of personal safety.

Remember, reassuring them that they can tell you anything needs to be a continual message you deliver.

If your child has been abused by a parent, relative, sibling, Scout, Scout leader, or someone else close to you, it may be particularly difficult for the child to disclose the abuse to you and also difficult for you to accept. Studies show that children rarely lie about sexual abuse or other maltreatment. So if your child tells you that they have been abused, or if your child is especially uncomfortable with a particular person or situation, always take the behavior as your sign to act. Remember, children communicate with us through their words, actions, and feelings. Communication about abuse is often subtle and indirect. A child may not come right out and say something; instead they may say, "I have a friend who ...," to see how an adult will react. The child who receives a helpful, thoughtful, and sympathetic response is more likely to reveal that they are not actually talking about their friend and tell you about abuse experiences. Listen carefully.

Each child's response to abuse is unique. Signs of stress frequently accompany abuse, but stress can have many causes. Other possible indicators of abuse include:

- **sudden withdrawal from activities the child previously enjoyed**
- **reluctance to be around or, especially, alone with a particular individual, adult, or youth**
- **changes in behavior or in school performance, including lower grades**
- **inability to focus or learning problems with no known cause**
- **hypervigilance (excessive watchfulness as if anticipating something bad happening)**
- **overly compliant behavior or an excessive desire to please**

In addition, a child currently being sexually abused may

- **have difficulty sitting or walking**
- **complain of pain or itching in the genital or anal areas**
- **use sexually explicit language or act out sexual behavior inappropriate for their age**

For more information, take Scouting America's Safeguarding Youth Training at https://my.scouting.org.

Responding/Reporting

It is OK to ask a child about suspicious injuries or behaviors. In fact, you should. If the child tells of abuse or gives an answer that doesn't make sense, and you feel the child is in danger, you should immediately contact the local law enforcement agency or state department of children and family services. You also need to contact your local council Scout executive. If the Scout executive is unavailable, reports can be submitted anonymously by text, a phone call, or QR code at:

1-844-SCOUTS1 (1-844-726-8871).

Scouts First Helpline

As part of its "Scouts First" approach to the protection and safety of youth, Scouting America has established a dedicated 24-hour helpline to receive reports of known or suspected abuse or behavior that puts a youth at immediate risk.

Contact your Scout executive or reports can be submitted 24 hours a day by text, a phone call, or QR code by using (1-844-Scouts1 or 844-726-8871).

The Scouts First Helpline is a resource for incidents involving child abuse or serious risk of harm to children only. It is **not** for general information or questions.

For questions about training, policy interpretation, program, etc., please contact your Scout executive.

1-844-SCOUTS1 (1-844-726-8871)

When to use it:

- **Anytime you believe a youth has been harmed or their safety and well-being is at risk, and you cannot immediately reach your local council Scout executive or local council.**
- **If a Scout is bullied because of race, color, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, or disability, and local efforts are unable to resolve the problem.**

If someone is at immediate risk of harm, always call 911.

For more information about reporting requirements, call 911 or see the Child Welfare Information Gateway website at www.childwelfare.gov for your state hotline number.

Bullying/Cyberbullying

Bullying is any intentional, aggressive behavior, often involving an imbalance of power or strength, that usually is repeated over a period of time. Bullying can take many forms, including hitting or punching, teasing or name calling, intimidating use of gestures or social exclusion, or sending insulting messages by phone or computer (cyberbullying). If your child is being targeted, do not blame your child or tell them to ignore the behavior or engage in physical retaliation. Instead, listen carefully and report the bullying behavior to the people responsible for the program where bullying is occurring. For more information, please see Scouting America's Bullying Awareness webpage at www.scouting.org/training/youth-protection/bullying or www.stopbullying.gov.

Victims of bullying behavior are more likely to:

- **be depressed**
- **have low self-esteem**
- **be absent from school or other activities**
- **feel sick**
- **think about death by suicide**

Any information indicating a youth has mentioned or talked about suicide must be taken seriously and reported to the Scout executive so appropriate actions may be taken. If unable to reach the Scout executive, contact the Scouts First Helpline anonymously by text or phone call at

1-844-SCOUTS1 (1-844-726-8871).

Internet/Social Media Safety

Today's youth are spending more time than ever using digital media for education, research, socializing, and fun. Unfortunately, abusers know this, too. Parents play a crucial role in keeping children safe from those who use the internet and social media to access and harm children.

Your child will normally be keen to show and tell you about their favorite game; that's when you can find out whether it has a messaging feature or a way to send pictures, both of which are red flags.

If they can't tell you who they're gaming with in real life, then you may wish to stop the use of that game or application. Parents can limit the danger by setting basic guidelines such as when children go online, what sites they can visit, and having regular check-ins to see and discuss the choices that are being made with technology.

Barbara Sinatra Children's Center Foundation

Scouting America is proud to partner with the Barbara Sinatra Children's Center Foundation to provide additional resources to parents and volunteers to keep youth safe. These resources include the Protect Yourself Rules videos that are a requirement for Cub Scouts to earn their badge of rank each year. To learn more about the Protect Yourself Rules, visit https://fightchildabuse.org/.

Scouting America's Safeguards and Barriers to Abuse

Our goal in Scouting America is to create and maintain a safe environment so that all can benefit from the program. The greatest step we can take together is to put us all in a position to succeed by having rules that we all agree to follow. You should expect your child's Cub Scout pack to follow the Safeguarding Youth policies put in place by Scouting America to provide additional safety for your child and all who are involved in Scouting. These policies are helpful for anyone who works with or spends time with children who are not theirs, and not just in Scouting. They are practices used by teachers, doctors, camp counselors, coaches, and other adults who professionally work with children. Safeguarding Youth policies and Health and Safety procedures continue to be updated regularly. For the most up-to-date information and changes or additions to policies and procedures, go to www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss.

You should discuss these policies with your child so that you, your child, and leaders have a shared understanding of what is expected in Scouting.

Leader Registration Requirements

The chartered organization representative, or in their absence the executive officer of the chartered organization, must approve the registration of the unit's adult leaders.

Registration includes:

- **Completion of application including criminal background check and mandatory Safeguarding Youth training**
- **Volunteer Screening Database check**

Safeguarding Youth training is required for leaders when renewing their registration or at unit charter renewal.

Adult program participants must register as adults and follow Safeguarding Youth policies. Up-to-date Safeguarding Youth and Health and Safety information is available at www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss.

Adult Supervision

Two registered adult leaders 21 years of age or over are required at all Scouting activities, including meetings. There must be a registered female adult leader 21 years of age or over in every unit serving females. A registered female adult leader 21 years of age or over must be present for any activity involving female youth. Notwithstanding the minimum leader requirements, age- and program-appropriate supervision must always be provided.

All adults staying overnight in connection with a Scouting activity must be currently registered as an adult volunteer or an adult program participant. Adult volunteers must register in the position(s) they are serving in.

Cub Scout Programs – Overnight Exception: Cub Scout parents or legal guardians taking part in an overnight Cub Scout program with their own child or legal ward are not required to register as leaders. All adults must review the *How to Safeguard Your Children: A Parent's Guide to Abuse Prevention* booklet that can be found in the front of each Cub Scout Handbook. In addition, the parent or legal guardian must be accompanied by a registered leader at any time they are with youth members other than their own child/ward. All other overnight adults must be currently registered in an adult fee required position.

One-on-one contact between adult leaders and youth members is prohibited both inside and outside of Scouting.

- **In situations requiring a personal conference, the meeting is to be conducted with the knowledge and in view of other adults and/or youth.**
- **Private online communications (texting, phone calls, chat, IM, etc.) must include another registered leader or parent.**
- **Communication by way of social media (Facebook, Snapchat, etc.) must include another registered leader or parent.**

Discipline must be constructive.

- **Discipline must reflect Scouting's values.**
- **Corporal punishment is never permitted.**
- **Disciplinary activities involving isolation, humiliation, or ridicule are also prohibited.**

Responsibility

Leaders must ensure that all participants in Scouting activities abide by the Scout Oath and Scout Law.

Adult leaders and youth members share the responsibility for the safety of all participants in the program, including adherence to Safeguarding Youth and Health and Safety policies.

- **Adult leaders are responsible for monitoring behavior and intervening when necessary.**
- **Physical violence, sexual activity, emotional abuse, spiritual abuse, unauthorized weapons, hazing, discrimination, harassment, initiation rites, bullying, cyberbullying, theft, verbal insults, drugs, alcohol, and pornography have no place in the Scouting program and may result in revocation of registration.**

All leaders are required to adhere to the Scouter Code of Conduct located in the *Guide to Safe Scouting*: www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss.

Accommodations

Separate accommodations for adult males and females and youth males and females are required.

Tenting

- **Separate tenting arrangements must be provided for male and female adults as well as for male and female youth.**
- **Youth sharing tents must be no more than two years apart in age.**
- **In Cub Scouting, parents and guardians may share a tent with their family.**
- **In all other programs, youth and adults tent separately.**
- **Spouses may share tents.**

Lodging/Cabin Accommodations

Whenever possible, separate cabins or lodging should be provided for male and female adults as well as for male and female youth. Where separate accommodations cannot be provided due to group size or limited availability, modifications may be made. Where completely separate accommodations are not available, additional supervision is required.

- **If adults and youth of the same gender occupy single-room accommodations, there must be a minimum of two adults and four youth, with all adults being Safeguarding Youth trained.**
- **Physical separation by other means, including temporary barriers or space, should be used only when no other arrangements are possible.**

Restrooms

Separate shower and latrine facilities should be provided for male and female adults as well as for male and female youth. If separate facilities are not available, separate times should be scheduled and posted.

Privacy of youth is respected.

- **Adults and youth must respect each other's privacy, especially in situations such as changing clothes and taking showers at camp.**
- **Adult leaders should closely monitor these areas but only enter as needed for safeguarding youth or health and safety reasons.**

Preventing Disclosure/Pressure to Keep Silent

When someone behaves inappropriately or causes harm, they may try to keep a child from telling by asking for secrecy, minimizing what happened, creating fear, offering rewards, or applying pressure. This could be done by adults or by other children.

Program Requirements

- **The buddy system should be used.**
- **The use of smartphones, cameras, mirrors, drones, etc., in places or situations where privacy is expected is prohibited.**
- **All aspects of the Scouting program are open to observation by parents and leaders.**
- **Scouting America does not recognize any secret organizations as part of its program.**
- **Hazing and initiations are prohibited and have no part during any Scouting activity.**
- **All forms of bullying and harassment, including verbal, physical, and cyberbullying, are prohibited.**
- **Inappropriate public displays of affection are prohibited.**
- **Sexual activity is prohibited.**
- **Appropriate attire is required for all activities.**

Reporting Requirements

Adult leaders and youth members have a responsibility to recognize, respond to, and report Safeguarding Youth violations and abuse.

Mandatory Report of Child Abuse

If you see or suspect a child is being abused, stop the abuse immediately and report it. All persons involved in Scouting America programs must report any instance of child abuse to local law enforcement and, in some states, also to the state's child protective services, or CPS. This includes any good-faith suspicion or belief that a child is or has been physically or sexually abused, physically or emotionally neglected, exposed to any form of violence or threat, or exposed to any form of sexual exploitation, including the possession, manufacture, or distribution of sexually exploitive images, online solicitation, enticement, or showing of obscene material.

This duty cannot be delegated to any other person. After reporting to law enforcement, the matter must also be reported to the Scout executive so appropriate actions may be taken. If the Scout executive is unavailable, reports can be submitted anonymously by text, a phone call, or QR code at:

1-844-SCOUTS1 (1-844-726-8871).

Ensure notification has been made to parents/guardian. Failing to report suspected child abuse may be a criminal law violation in your state. It is important to note that all states allow immunity from criminal and civil liability for good-faith reporting of suspected abuse, even if it is later determined to be unfounded.

For more information, please see your state's reporting statutes on the Child Welfare Information Gateway website at www.childwelfare.gov.

Additional Scouting America Reporting

Safeguarding Youth Policy Violations

- **Serious Safeguarding Youth policy violations or behaviors that put a youth's safety at risk must be reported to the local council Scout executive.**
- **Alternatively, policy violations may be reported to the Scouts First Helpline when the local council Scout executive is not available.**
- **Online reporting is also available at www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/incident-report.**

Speaking With a Child Who Discloses or Indicates Abuse

When speaking with a child who discloses or indicates abuse, your role is to become the *trusted adult*. A trusted adult is someone with whom a child can talk freely about their feelings and problems and who provides healthy guidance and support.

When informed about abuse, a trusted adult

- **gets actively involved**
- **sees something and stops it**
- **suspects something and reports it**

Seek advice from an expert when you are unsure.

Adults should recognize that talking with children about abuse, especially sexual abuse, is not comfortable for anyone; however, a child's first time telling someone—and your response—may have lasting effects. If a child reports that they have been abused, it is important that you listen to all that they have to say. Then, respond calmly and support the child through the reporting process. Tell the child it wasn't their fault, and express belief in the child's disclosure by simply stating, "I believe you." This will further support and validate the child's statement. You do not need details from the child. However, you should get the following information:

- **name and address of the child alleging abuse, if known**
- **name and address of the alleged offender, if known**
- **location of the alleged abuse**
- **nature (e.g., sexual, physical, emotional) and extent of the alleged abuse**
- **approximate date of the last incident (if an older child)**

Parents Reporting Violations of Scouting America Safeguarding Youth Policies

If an adult leader or someone else in Scouting is trying to convince your child that their advancements or awards are solely dependent on that person's approval or if that person is asking your child to do anything that seems inappropriate, contact your local council Scout executive immediately.

Safety Is Never a Secret

Sometimes adults—or other children—may say, "Don't tell," "You'll get in trouble," or "This is just between us." Remind your child that anything related to safety can always be shared with a trusted adult.

EXERCISES ON PERSONAL SAFETY AWARENESS

Now that you understand the types of abuse, the barriers that we have put in place to minimize abuse, and the steps to take when you suspect abuse has occurred, let's focus on helping you empower your child. Concerned and connected parents and caregivers are a strong component of all child abuse prevention strategies. You have an important role to play in prevention!

Many parents find it difficult to talk with their child about abuse. However, it is important to provide a foundation for a child to understand personal safety and encourage them to come to you with questions and concerns. The personal safety exercises in this section, to be used in conversations with your child, will help you with this process. They focus on five very important areas that can minimize the chances of abuse for your child:

- **Why should I check with a parent first?**
- **Who are my *trusted adults*?**
- **What are my personal boundaries?**
- **What if someone asks me to keep a secret?**
- **How do I talk about touches and private parts?**

Five Topics to Cover With Children

NOTE: Completing the exercises described in these pages fulfills the requirements for your Cub Scout to earn their badge or rank and must be completed for each rank earned. Scouting America recommends that these exercises be conducted on a regular basis throughout the year.

Why should I check with a parent first?

Many abusers are known to the child as a family friend, relative, Scouter, or older youth, so it is important to focus safety messages on the behavior of a person, not the relationship to the child. Teach your child to check with you first before agreeing to go anywhere with another person. Tell your child never to go anywhere with anyone who will not let them check with you first. If the person refuses, your child has the right to step back from the person, make noise, say "NO," run away, and tell someone.

Tell your child that your permission is required before they may accept an invitation from a Scout leader or another parent to an activity outside of Scouting and that all such invitations must be reported to you. Scouting America recommends that parents not allow one-on-one contact and insist that two adults are present (two-deep leadership) at any Scouting activities for their children.

Try this exercise to help your child remember to check first. Brainstorm times and situations in which your child should always come to you before going somewhere with someone. Include such situations as going into a house or vehicle, changing plans, being offered gifts, and being asked for help.

Talk through and role-play the following scenarios:

"What if a neighbor asks you to come into his house to see his new puppy?"

I would tell him that I need to check with you first. I would come home and check first before I went over to their house.

Ask the child about other responses.

"What if you are playing in the park and a nice person asks you to come to a different part of the park to help him or her find something they lost?"

I need to check first before changing my plans so that my parents know where I am.

Ask the child what other ways they could respond.

"What if an older youth friend of your brother is spending the night and wakes you up to sneak outside?"

I also need to check first before helping an adult or teenager. Adults and teenagers usually ask other adults for help. I can help if I check first and you come with me to ask my parents for permission.

What are my personal boundaries?

Try this exercise to help your child learn to create and maintain personal boundaries that make them feel safe. This exercise is designed to empower kids to tell people that they are uncomfortable and want another person to leave their personal space immediately. Discuss what private parts are and where they are located. Lessons on personal boundaries should begin early in a child's development and should cover belongings, emotions, and their body. Focus on asking permission and receiving consent. Tell your child that any time someone touches them in a way that they do not want to be touched, they have your permission to take some big steps back and say "NO," and then go tell a *trusted adult* what happened. Explain that stepping back can give them room to think and move. Then have your child practice taking big steps away from a person and saying "NO" in a firm voice. Explain to the child that regardless of what the adult or teenager says—or what your child was doing or has done—you will believe and protect them.

Talk through the following scenarios. Ask them how they could use "NO" to create space for themselves in these situations.

"What if someone drives up, gets out of their car, and starts walking toward you to ask you for directions?"

"What if another kid your age continues to hug you even though you have asked them to stop?"

"What if you are spending the night or on a campout and someone touches your body while you are sleeping?"

Prepared, Not Afraid

Scouting America's approach to safeguarding youth is grounded in preparation rather than fear. Talking with children about personal safety should be as routine as discussing seat belts, bike helmets, or fire drills.

How do I talk about touches and private parts?

Young people should be told that the parts of their body covered by their swimsuit are their private parts, and they have the right to say no to being touched there. Body parts should be called by their appropriate names to assist in developing a healthy and positive body image. Encourage your child to say no and then tell you if someone tries to touch or look at the child's private parts or wants your child to touch or look at their private parts.

It is important to remind children that if they get tricked into a scary or confusing touch or if they freeze and are unable to say no, it is OK and not their fault. Children should be encouraged to tell as soon as they feel comfortable doing so. Keep the lines of communication open by reminding them that they can talk to you about touches, even a long time after something happened.

Try this exercise to help your child resist someone who is trying to touch their private parts. Pose these scenarios, and then discuss the solutions.

"What if your friend's babysitter or another youth asks you to wrestle without clothes on?"

"What if that same friend asks you to keep the touching games secret?"

"What if your Scout leader touches your private parts or shows you their private parts?"

For more information, see "Hot Chocolate Talk" under "National Resources."

Who are my trusted adults?

Young people should have at least five adults identified by you with whom they can talk freely about their feelings and problems and who provide healthy attention and affection. A child who has such a network of *trusted adults* will be more difficult for an adult who abuses children to groom. The list of five adults might change depending on the child's circumstances. Prior to Scouting or other activities, parents should discuss with their child who they will turn to if someone is violating a rule or making them uncomfortable.

Try this exercise to help your child identify trusted adults. Explain that a trusted adult is someone the child knows well who is willing to listen and offer advice when needed. Trace your child's hand on a piece of paper. Ask your child to write or draw a person on each finger that they can go to for help or advice. Help your child determine the trusted adults. Explain that if a situation occurs where a trusted adult is needed, your child needs to remember this list. And if one of the people on the list cannot help, or is the one causing the problem, your child should go to another person on the list. Remind them that they can also say "NO" if a trusted adult is making them feel uneasy or uncomfortable.

Ask your child these questions, making sure the options are understood. Ask who their trusted adult would be and how they could talk to them about what happened.

"What if something happens on a camping trip (or at a neighbor's house, or at a friend's house) that makes you feel afraid or confused?"

"What if someone is making you feel uneasy or uncomfortable, and the first person you tell can't, doesn't, or won't help you?"

"What if one of your *trusted adults* is making you feel unsafe or uncomfortable?"

What if someone asks me to keep a secret?

Adults who abuse children often try to groom children by convincing them to keep secrets about activities that they would not want their parents to know about (drinking, smoking, pornography, etc.). A child wanting to keep those activities secret might also see any abuse as something to keep secret. Your child must feel like they can come to you and be heard about little concerns as well as big problems. Tell your child it is not OK for people to ask them to keep a secret from you or another caregiver. Give your child a simple, automatic solution. Let your child know that they can come to you about anything and that you will still love and support them.

Try this exercise to help your child understand the difference between *secrets* and *surprises*. Tell your child that a secret is something that is hidden from others. A surprise is something that we keep quiet about for a short period of time and then everyone finds out together, like what you bought someone for their birthday. Surprises are usually OK, but secrets can be harmful if they cover up something unsafe or scary. Say that if your child is not sure whether something is a secret or a surprise, they can always ask you or a trusted adult.

Ask your child what to do in the following situations. Ask them how they could determine whether this is a surprise or a secret.

"What if a bigger kid says he will give you $20 if you play a secret touching game with him?"

"What if an adult says that you don't need to bring a buddy because they have a surprise that is just for you?"

"What if someone you know asks if he can email you a secret picture or asks you to pose for naughty pictures?"

Putting It Together

Reviewing these five personal safety rules and allowing your child to design their own "What If" games can help make personal safety awareness less scary and more accessible for your child and the whole family. The most important points to make sure your child knows are as follows:

- **Check with a parent first.**
- **Have a buddy with you at all times.**
- **Maintain your personal space.**
- **Avoid secrets.**
- **Know who your *trusted adults* are.**

Consider having a "Family Safety Night" at the beginning and the end of every school year or new activity. Reviewing rules about bike helmets, fire escape plans, and calling 911 should lead into conversations about abuse, bullying, personal safety awareness, and online safety so that they can be treated like any other concern.

Scouting America's Safeguarding Youth program is based on

- **parental involvement**
- **chartered organizations**
- **leader selection and monitoring**
- **each leader's knowledge of and adherence to Scouting America Safeguarding Youth and Health and Safety policies**
- **commitment of all adults to the safety of youth**
- **recognizing, responding, and reporting**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Safeguarding Youth webpage:
www.scouting.org/training/youth-protection

Safeguarding Youth Training: https://my.scouting.org

Safeguarding Youth policies and Health and Safety procedures continue to be updated regularly. For the most up-to-date information and changes or additions to policies and procedures, go to www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss.

***Guide to Safe Scouting*:** www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss

Scouts First Helpline: 1-844-SCOUTS1 (1-844-726-8871)

Scouter Code of Conduct: https://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/HealthSafety/pdf/Scouter_Code_of_Conduct.pdf

Scouting America incident reporting:
www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/incident-report

State-by-state mandatory reporting information:
www.childwelfare.gov

NATIONAL RESOURCES

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children—information on digital/online safety and reporting: www.missingkids.org

NetSmartz: www.missingkids.org/NetSmartz/home

CyberTipline: 800-843-5678

www.childhelp.org; 800-4-A-Child (800-422-4453)

Prevent Child Abuse America: preventchildabuse.org

Committee for Children: www.cfchildren.org

Hot Chocolate Talk:
www.cfchildren.org/blog/2018/03/the-hot-chocolate-talk/

www.stopbullying.org

www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org; 800-273-8255

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