



April is ...

## Child Abuse Prevention Month

### Protecting Teens from Sexual Abuse

The following information is excerpted from an informative article, *Protecting Teens from Sexual Abuse* by Pamela S. Stevens at <http://sex-offender-registry-review.toptenreviews.com/protecting-teens-from-sexual-abuse.html>

Please use the above link to access the article in full.

When it comes to sexual abuse, protecting teens is complicated. Teenagers seek relationships outside the family for friendship, security and even advice. In addition, they may be confused or embarrassed about their own developing sexuality, which makes communication difficult and protecting them nearly impossible.

#### What can parents do?

**Don't Put Discussions Off** It is your job to take the first steps in opening the lines of communication and talking to your child about their personal rights and personal boundaries in an age appropriate manner.

- ✓ By age 11-12 children should fully understand the consequences of sex and know what is appropriate and inappropriate in dating.

**Build a Strong Support System** Studies show that incidences of high-risk teen behavior are less in families where teens feel that they are respected and supported as an individual. With this kind of support, hopefully your teen will feel comfortable discussing their concerns with you or coming to you for help.

- ✓ Children should feel that they can talk to you about anything without worrying about being yelled at, ridiculed, embarrassed or experiencing fear.
- ✓ Speak to your child logically and with respect - do not become excited and overreact.

**Help Your Children Define Their Personal Rights** Believe it or not, many teens who get caught up in an inappropriate relationship with an adult blame themselves because they do not know what their personal rights are or what kind of behavior to expect from adults.

For example, teach your children...

- ✓ that is OK to say no to adults if things they are asked to do make them feel uncomfortable
- ✓ they should trust their instincts
- ✓ it is NOT okay for them to engage in sexual behavior with adults
- ✓ they deserve to be spoken to with respect and never feel coerced
- ✓ no one has the right to touch them without their permission
- ✓ alcohol and drugs may make it hard for them to maintain their boundaries and can cloud their judgment.
- ✓ both parties respect each others personal rights and boundaries in a healthy relationship





**Help Them Build Up Their Self Esteem** Teens who do not feel good about themselves or who are at odds with their family may turn to other adults for support. This type of behavior is extremely dangerous: this is exactly what abusers are looking for. They approach the teen and take advantage of their low self esteem, give gifts like liquor or drugs, further isolate them from the family, and attempt to become their "friend."

To counteract this danger you should help your teen

- ✓ find something that they can feel good about; a hobby, a sport, work or art. Hobbies or employment can help them feel confident, build a sense of accomplishment and value their individuality.
- ✓ Teach them how to take care of themselves. Give them responsibility.
- ✓ Communicate how much you value their independence, accomplishments and their ability to be responsible, while letting them know you are supportive and available.

### **Abuse is something that needs to be stopped, not ignored.**

Offenders should be turned in. Seek counseling for abused children to help alleviate confusion, anger and possible self esteem issues. Never blame the child for the abuse. Parents should also seek help to learn how to get through their hurt and anger and to find ways to help their child and family connections heal. In summary, it is important that your teen feel comfortable talking to you about sexual topics, know their personal boundaries and have the confidence to voice their rights. If abuse has happened, get help and turn the person in...

**silence only protects the abuser!**



For more information or assistance, call the Erie diocesan *Office for the Protection of Children and Youth* at 814-824-1195 or email Mrs. Karen Streett at [kstreett@eriercd.org](mailto:kstreett@eriercd.org)