

Teaching our children about Good touch and bad touch



We as parents need to be aware of well being of our children and should be attentive as well as receptive to their feelings and behavior. When children are abused they feel shame, guilt and fear. They consider themselves responsible for whatever wrong is happening or has happened to them and fear they would be blamed for it so they decide to keep the secret to themselves. We need to assure them it is the fault of the perpetrators, who will be eventually punished under the provision of law and not them.

Each child is “special” and has the right to know everything they can about being safe. So it is our responsibility as adults to share the relevant information with our kids. Following are some of the questions, the answers of which will help us understand this issue better.

1. What is a good touch?

Hugs and kisses and touches from people we know, love and trust are good touches. Good touches give us good feelings and make us feel warm inside. A little girl on dad’s lap, child on his mother’s lap hugging are examples of good touch as both parent and child are comfortable with the touch.

2. What is a bad touch?

Same kind of touches from people we do not know or do not like or do not trust could be bad touches. Bad touches make us feel bad or uncomfortable. It is the touch we would want to stop right away. A child being tickled and is not liking it is an example of bad touch. Hitting, kicking or touching private parts are some other examples of bad touch.

The person getting the touch always gets to say if a touch is good touch or bad touch. So it is for the kids to decide whether they are fine with the touch or not and have the right to say 'No' and immediately stop the person from doing it.

3. What are private body parts?

We need to discuss freely with our kids on this subject and tell them about names of their private body parts. This will encourage them that they should speak up if something happens and should not be embarrassed or scared to talk about their own bodies or of your reaction. We can share with them private parts are the parts of your body you cover with your swimming suit when you go for swimming. Boys and girls have different body parts. Boys' private part is called a penis while girls have two private parts called breast and vagina. Both boys and girls have bottoms. Also, no person, except someone they are comfortable with, is allowed to kiss them on the mouth or touch the mouth in an uncomfortable way. You could also explain this to children with the help of a body chart with diagrams.

4. Do they have Right to say NO to a bad touch?

No one should touch our private body parts except to keep us clean and healthy. For example while being bathed, changing baby's diaper, or when you visit the doctor. They have the right to say NO to any bad touching by an adult. Their body is their own and they have the right to protect it and take care of it. Very small children, for example, under the age of 3-4 can be told that in playschools/schools only the didi is allowed to touch their diaper area and that too only for cleaning purpose.

5. Who to ask for help when someone tried to break the touching rule with you?

It is very important for them to tell a trusted adult such as mom, dad, grandma, grandpa, teachers, counselors etc. if someone hurts them or sexually abuses them. Telling about sexual abuse could be very difficult but the abuse won't stop until they tell someone.

6. Whose fault is it when sexual abuse happens to them?

It is never the child's fault when sexual abuse happens to them. It is the offender who is guilty and will be punished under the provision of law. Trusted adults need to reassure them they are still a good person, lovable and you will love them no matter what!

7. Who are the perpetrators of sexual abuse?

Perpetrators of child sexual abuse are usually someone who is known and trusted by the family of the child. They take advantage of their power, authority or position over the child to gratify themselves. By instinct, a child will stay away from strangers but when an uncle or known person entices them with something, they are bound to obey.

They can be parents, grandparents, older brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, neighbors, teachers, babysitters, coach, tutor etc. The abuser often convinces the child that if they tell anyone about the abuse, something very bad will happen.

8. What should be our next step when we get to know that a child has been sexually abused?

When a child with lot of courage decides to share with you that he/she is being or has been sexually abused, we as adults need to take following steps:

1. Do not overreact or make your child feel ashamed. This will scare the child and he/she will refrain from further divulging the truth.
2. Trust your child and believe in them that whatever they are saying has happened to them.
3. Listen to your child without making comments about the offender or the offence.
4. Reassure your child it's not his/her fault. They did not do anything wrong for which they were punished so.
5. Protect your child from being further abused by keeping them away from the offender.
6. Get help available for the child as soon as possible by reporting the matter to concerned authorities. The counselor should also be approached who will take care of trauma the child sexual abuse survivor is going through and help him/her overcome it.

The long-term effects of child sexual abuse include higher levels of depression, guilt, shame, self-blame, eating disorders, somatic concerns, anxiety, dissociative patterns, repression, denial, sexual problems and relationship problems. Survivors often blame themselves and internalize negative messages about themselves. Childhood sexual abuse is often a traumatic experience that has many consequences throughout the person's life. The effects of childhood sexual abuse last into adulthood and counselors need to be well trained in order to provide the best services possible.

According to CRY (Child Rights and You):

- 8,945 children go missing in India every year.
- 500,000 children are estimated to be forced into the sex trade every year.
- Approximately 2 million child commercial sex workers are between the ages of 5 and 15 years.
- Approximately 3.3 million child commercial sex workers are between 15 and 18 years.
- Children form 40% of the total population of commercial sex workers.
- 80% of these children are found in five metros- Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai and Bangalore.
- 71% of them are illiterate.

In 1998 the India's first study on child sexual abuse was conducted by an Indian NGO named Recovery and Healing from Incest (RAHI). Surveys were conducted on 600 English-

speaking middle and upper class women, 76 per cent of whom reported they had been abused in their childhood or adolescence, shockingly 40 percent reported that they were abused by at least one family member, most commonly an Uncle or cousin.

It is a harsh reality that children in India irrespective of their gender or strata they belonged to have been continuously facing Child Sexual abuse. The horrifying reality would become more evident by having a look on a report recently released by Human Rights Watch termed “Breaking the Silence- Child Sexual Abuse in India”. A comprehensive 82 pages report proves beyond doubt the existence of child sexual abuse across classes. Highlighting inaction against the perpetrators, Human Rights Watch maintains that child sexual abuse in homes, schools and institutions for care and protection of children is quite common.

Child sexual abuse is a complex subject and needs to be dealt with great sensitivity. We need to tell victims who are children sometimes even less than 2 years old, and who mostly suffer in silence, that there are people to help them. We need to share with our children in simple and easy language, tips about their body safety. We can make use of books about the human body to teach them about good touch and bad touch. Therefore as adults it becomes our moral obligation to discuss the above mentioned issues with them rather than shy away from it and feel embarrassed later when it's too late.

Have you discussed the very important subject of “Good touch Bad touch” with your child yet? How did you or do you plan on doing it? I would love to hear your thoughts in the comments below!