

Talking to Children about Boundaries

by Dr. Brad Schwall

Violations of physical boundaries with children and youth are very complex involving complicated emotions. Adult abuse of trust and power is never a child's fault. It is difficult as parents to believe that strangers are not the only dangers in children's lives.

Adults and other children are capable of crossing emotional and physical boundaries.

- Talk to your children about the differences between appropriate touch and inappropriate touch.
- Talk about how to know when a situation is not safe, such as being alone and away from others with an adult or demands by an adult or other child to keep actions secret.

Children need to be empowered to set boundaries.

- Encourage children and youth to get away from situations in which they feel uncomfortable or in which they question the appropriateness of the interaction.
- Be aware as parents of your child's interactions with others.
- Establish guidelines for and supervision of your child's interactions as needed.

There are no secrets.

- Encourage children and youth to tell a parent or trusted adult if anything has happened that is questionable.
- Emphasize that they will never be in trouble if they share about someone else violating a boundary.
- By discussing the issue of boundaries, you encourage openness and prevent feelings of shame.

Trust, but remember that all are imperfect.

- Caring and encouraging adults are needed in the lives of children.
- Organizations do make efforts to ensure the safety of children and youth.
- Communicate openly, be alert, empower children and youth to set boundaries, and focus on the benefits of adults who guide children and youth to live life with character, confidence, and resilience.