

# Keep Kids Safe: Addressing Abuse in Our Community

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**Note:** This handout summarizes a great deal of literature regarding abuse and is meant as a concentrated guide on various issues. The goal is to provide you with a framework, knowledge, and strategies you can readily adopt and implement. Though it may appear daunting, addressing these issues can be a natural, logical, and comfortable process.

## General Community:

- Annual – Children’s safety shabbos - Rabbonim and/or professionals address these topics
  - Educating the community and normalizing addressing these issues
- Creating universal precautions and guidelines – A “Culture of Prevention and Response”
  - Develop a comprehensive community safety plan – see the book “Breaking the Silence” (BTS) for details
- Education, Education, & more Education!
  - Aimed at prevention & intervention
  - Must be ongoing & developmentally appropriate – Cannot rely on a one-time “talk”
  - For: parents, school personnel, children, Rabbonim, and community members
  - Should be sensitive to cultural differences e.g., Ashkenazim, Sephardim, etc.
- This is a basic safety issue like any other – It’s our responsibility to address this and overcome our resistance to talking about it (we don’t need to “expose” our children to anything inappropriate to keep them safe)
- Kids don’t panic or become fearful unless you convey high levels of anxiety. At worst what you say may go over their heads & they’ll look at you funny (kids take their cues from us - behavior & emotions more important than our words)
- There is a latent effect where they may not show a response now but should the issue arise they may remember
- Sexual abuse is any interaction between a child and an adult (or older child) in which the child is used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or an observer (NCTSN interview with Esther Deblinger) – Abuse does not require penetration, in fact, penetration is rare. Can include kissing, fondling, exposing private parts, rubbing, showing pornography, etc.
- Remember the **majority** (93%) of perpetrators are familiar to the child and/or family and utilize the relationship to gain access to and the cooperation of the child
  - It is much harder to see and respond when it’s our “own” / when we know the person or they are in our family
  - Survey of Orthodox population – “intra-familial perpetrators were the single greatest source of unwanted sexual contact. This raises the uncomfortable reality that ...in the Orthodox community... it is within the expected safety of the family that the danger of sexual abuse is most likely.” (Pelcovitz (BTS), P. 172)
  - Remember: Abusers don’t wear a sign & nobody is infallible
  - Combat the powerful drive to ignore the signs and to maintain the status quo
  - Trust your instincts – in many cases somebody had a “sense,” “knew,” or could have “known”
  - Abusers can be children too – 23% of reported child sex abuse cases are perpetrated by individuals under 18
  - Stanger abduction/abuse is rare- yet it gets much more of our attention
- **DO NOT** leave it up to children (especially young ones) to avoid harm – **Awareness and Supervision**
  - Perpetrators love unstructured and unsupervised time (e.g., shabbos nap, Pirchei, babysitting, kids playing quietly, adults feeling like they are in same house or building so they are supervising, etc.)
  - Though we can’t rely on children to prevent or avoid abuse we can offer them the best education and tools that we have to help them potentially avoid, stop, or talk about abuse

- Don't promise what you can't guarantee or deliver – parts of the system aren't in your control – be honest!
- Report alleged abuse to civil authorities (RCA resolution 2010) – if a “good from Jew” robbed/assaulted us we'd report (BTS)
- Adjudicate cases in civil courts (RCA resolution 2010)
- Publicize the policies of organizations regarding abuse (e.g., reporting, adjudicating, behavioral guidelines, dealing with allegations, etc.)
- All pediatricians are instructed to inform children at their annual checkup (starting with their next doctor visit) that any unwanted approach/touch/threats should be dealt with by running away and yelling for help as loud as they can (R' Matisyahu put this in place in Lakewood and it has been successful)
- Child Protective Services (CPS) attempts to keep children in homes and families together
  - They will work with our community and its resources to serve the family
- The Orthodox community has professionals and organizations to help you through this
- How the parents and community respond is predictive of how the victims will fare
- Collectively, we can literally save countless lives!
- When addressed properly, children can heal and lead healthy, productive, and happy lives after abuse

**What does NOT Work:**

- Ignoring the victims!
  - We must take allegations very seriously and ACT thoughtfully and appropriately. “The incidence of false reporting of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and incest is extremely low – about 2%” (“Breaking the Silence”, p. 55)
  - Sweeping it under the rug fosters the continuation of the abuse cycle
- **Threats to perpetrator:** including exposing perpetrator to family and/or community, any form of harm e.g., physical, emotional, financial, etc. (**actual** public exposure & strict monitoring can help maintain safety)
  - **This is a serious illness that needs to be addressed** – perpetrators know they are doing something that can lead to all the aforementioned forms of harm but they do it anyway!
- Relocation of perpetrators – they will just prey on other innocent victims
- Silent resignation (i.e., allowing an individual to leave a position without public disclosure) - if there are grounds for resignation there are grounds to protect others outside that organization as well

**Parents:**

- The importance of the parent-child relationship cannot be emphasized enough!!!
  - The greatest preventative measure is having a healthy **relationship** with children and children feeling good about themselves and the supports around them- the relationship is key!
  - Everything else is secondary – don't allow secondary concerns to damage the relationship
  - “Early childhood education must have a long-term perspective. Parents must build such a warm relationship with their child that the relationship will survive and assist the child even during the difficult period of adolescence.” (Wolbe, R' Shlomo, Planting and Building, p. 24)
- Create relationship where they can talk about anything (even if it is wrong/inappropriate)
- Expressing that you always want to know what happened to them or what they did- even if they feel bad about it or think you will be upset – react in ways that will foster their openness with you
- Reiterate that you will always love them no matter what they do
- Empathy is the cornerstone of relationships
  - Empathy: “the capacity to understand and respond to the unique experiences of another” (Ciaramicoli, p. 4)
  - What is the experience of the child? – attempt to see the world through the eyes of the child
  - Utilize active and reflective listening and have a lively interest

Open communication – develop safe, supportive, and secure relationships

- Listening is usually more crucial & beneficial than talking- also address child's non-verbal communication
- Undivided attention and eye contact is integral to healthy development (“special time,” phone/blackberry-free time)
- Children with healthy self-esteem are less impacted by stressors, make “bad victims,” and are more resilient

- Predators carefully choose their victims and frequently target vulnerable children such as children with: special needs, learning disabilities, low self-esteem, depression or anxiety, family stress, prior history of victimization, etc.
- “One of the most important essentials of chinuch is personal example” (Wolbe, R<sup>3</sup> Shlomo, p. 31)
  - The need to feel like we are “doing something” makes us forget importance of modeling
  - Your behavior, non-verbal communication, and mood are more important than your words
  - First prepare yourself for dealing with the issue at hand (like the O<sub>2</sub> masks on airplane)
    - Have to work out our own “stuff” and our history to properly parent our children
      - Coherence of our own narrative (i.e., life history) is predictive of our children’s attachment
      - Children can pick up when we are ready to talk/hear or when we can handle their emotional expression. (Children have only disclosed abuse when they felt grownups were “ready”...)
- Education provided by parents
  - We are communicating values about relationships, intimacy, emotions, communication, etc. from birth
  - Education is a process, not a one-time “talk” - it should become more advanced, comprehensive, and explicit as child ages. (Educate to minimize and prevent issues and prepare children for their experiences)
  - Take your cue from the child
  - Must be in accordance with the child’s way – *chanoch la-na’ar*... Match the educational method, communication, and approach to child’s unique personality, way of thinking, & psychological makeup
- Get a sense of what child needs – don’t go over their heads and don’t ignore what they need
- Importance of play as child’s form of communication, working through, mastery, and healing
- It is fine not to have answers to everything – take questions and allegations seriously and follow-up on them
- You do not need to do this alone – reach out to your supports and consult with people with expertise
- If you sense your child is out of sorts, seems “different,” has difficulty functioning normally, or you have concerns, get a professional consultation

**Areas of Education to Focus on:**

- If you don’t teach your children about their bodies, development, sexuality, and intimacy, who will?
- Address issues of body awareness, good/bad touch, right to say “NO”, etc.
  - Give children language to talk about these issues e.g., properly name their body parts
  - “Your body belongs to you. No one has a right to tickle you or touch you in a way you don’t like” (Uncle Willy’s Tickles, p. 20)
  - Model dealing with uncomfortable situations
  - Can educate through and in play – puppets, people, imagination, role-play – create scenarios in play for child to process and deal with
  - Use dolls, stuffed animals, toys, books, and multimedia as educational and expressive tools
  - Utilizing role plays/what if game (e.g., unwanted hugs/kisses, unwanted tickles, “I will show you mine”...)
    - Samples/ Practice: “Pretend I want to give you a kiss, but you don’t want one. Ask me for a hug instead ... Remember to look at me, stand up tall, and use a strong voice when you talk to me.”
    - “You can say no to not okay touches too... Let’s practice now. Stand up tall, look at me & in a loud strong voice say “No,” “Stop,” and “I don’t like that”
    - “Sometimes you might be too scared or forget to say “No” or run away. That’s okay because the most important thing is to Tell, Tell, Tell a grown-up who you trust....” (Let’s talk about taking care of you, p. 41- 43)
  - Help child be successful by giving lots of encouragement and prompts regarding what to say & do
  - Utilizing books e.g., Let’s Stay Safe! By Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz (Mesorah Publications)
  - Teaching that it’s not chutzpa to say “No” regarding their bodies, even to a grown up
    - Children expressing themselves and their feelings to adults is not chutzpah- depends on how it’s done
    - Respect does not mean blind obedience – blind obedience is dangerous
  - They SHOULD tell another grown up about something uncomfortable someone did
    - Even if another grownup says not to tell (tell a parent!)
- Empowering children: Respect their choices, they can say no, they aren’t forced to talk/hug when don’t want to, etc.

- Explicitly teach about secrets that don't feel good & that they should never be kept
  - Differentiate between secrets and surprises and explicitly teach that no secret that is supposed to be kept forever is ok – must tell mommy or daddy about any secret that's uncomfortable or supposed to be forever
- Differentiate between **tattling**/snitching and **being safe** & a good friend. Be careful about dangerous mixed messages
  - Tattling is telling something for the purpose of getting someone else in trouble
  - Telling in order to be safe or help one's self or a friend is doing the right thing
  - Encourage children to tell when they have a problem (rather than punish for tattling or say its *lashon hara*)
  - They will stop tattling when it doesn't get the other child in trouble
- It is never *lashon hara* to tell a grown up about a safety issue or anything that makes the child uncomfortable
- Encourage children to keep seeking help until they feel like they are safe and being heard
- Reinforcing “running and screaming” and any material or skill used in a curriculum in a different setting (e.g., review and practice what was learned in school)
- Ensure exposure to proper tznius, boundaries, conversations, reading and media material in our homes & other places
- Battle against the forces attempting to objectify people & focus on individuality, subjectivity, and self-esteem
- Red flag: Older children shouldn't have very strong feelings towards or against any casual adult in their lives (Schulman)
- Adolescents should also learn about *yichud*, the inappropriateness of being exposed to pornography, & that they need to let adults know about and handle situations when they see or experience something questionable or inappropriate
- Teach children that grown-ups and older kids do NOT need help changing, in bathroom, or with their private parts
- Not addressing abuse properly is much more detrimental to life (mental health, *shidduchim*, becoming “at- risk”) than addressing it
- Don't cave in to fear tactics e.g., threats of ruining *shidduch*, community alienation, rejection by yeshivos, etc. - “Adult survivors report being more angry with those who failed to protect them than perpetrator himself” (BTS , p. 47)

**Additional points for parents addressing abuse with their children:**

Reasons for not disclosing (“Breaking the Silence” p. 55):

- Abuser told them it was a “secret” or threatened to harm them or their family members, they fear the abuser, they still love/respect the abuser, they feel ashamed & at fault, they felt important, enjoyed the relationship and special attention, they may have experienced physical pleasure, **they do not believe that anyone will believe them**

Sample Script of 5 major points to convey for preschoolers- (exact words not important) from Susan Schulman, M.D. cited in D. Pelcovitz's talk “Keeping Kids Safe” and written in the book “Breaking the Silence” p. 30

1. Mommy and Daddy love you and nothing you do will change that and nothing will take it away. If you did something bad, I may not like what you did but I will always love you. I want to hear the good and bad things that happen to you.
  2. Three kinds of touch: Yes: like when mommy hugs you and you feel good. No: Like a friend hits you – it hurts! I don't know touch: Doesn't hurt but makes you feel funny - Say no! Run away, and tell Mommy about it.
  3. No one is allowed to hurt you or make you feel sad or scared. If someone is hurting you or making you feel bad tell me about it, I will try to find out what happened and stop it.
  4. The area covered by your bathing suit is your private area. Sometimes, when you're little, your teacher may help you in the bathroom and that's ok, other than that you are not allowed to touch someone else and no one is allowed to touch you in the area covered by your bathing suit. You are not allowed to show those parts to anyone and no one is allowed to show you. If anyone does this, say: no, my mommy doesn't let me, go away from the person, and tell your mommy what happened
  5. If anyone tells you ‘do not tell your mommy’, be sure to tell mommy right away! I will give you the biggest hug if you tell me about it.
- **Remember Parents Are the Most Important People In Children's Lives & Abuse Is Largely Preventable!** When a parent “**CARES**” children are safer! (**C**ommunication, **A**wareness, **R**elationship, **E**ducation, and **S**upervision)

### Yeshivos:

- Run mandatory programs for children, parents, and school personnel regarding prevention and intervention
- Develop team inside school to implement policy and address these issues. Also have an outside consultant
- Absolutely no **concealed private** time with students. Concealed private time is immediate grounds for firing (the seriousness of issue, policy, the consequences, and lack of access should be a deterrent to perpetrators)
  - Policies must be clearly stated and publicized (see Torah Umesorah & Breaking the Silence policies)
  - Strict and immediate consequences for any policy infractions must be enforced
- Windows on all classrooms and meeting rooms (no meetings in locked rooms)
- Any private meeting takes place in a room with window and/or with another staff member in hearing/seeing distance
- [If unable to have windows – video cameras in all class/meeting rooms with banks of monitors in **multiple** locations (e.g., secretary’s desk as well as at least one other location). Additionally, information should be stored (easy to do digitally) in case no one is manning the bank and to deal with any allegations.]
- No male staff member is to take children to bathroom alone – always need a 2<sup>nd</sup> staff member present (advisable for female staff as well)
- No staff member to take children to any secluded area alone e.g., park, museum, etc.
- Require criminal background checks for all workers with access to youth (see RCA resolution 2005)
  - Should also include all school staff e.g., janitors, cooks, etc. & outside contractors
  - Fingerprinting for all aforementioned individuals (checking names & prints against available databases e.g., FBI, Megan’s Law, family watchdog etc.)
- Reduce access to any potentially secluded areas

### Restaurants/Stores:

- Employees and other customers (non-caregivers) never allowed to be alone with children
  - If a child goes to a part of the store not visible to the staff, a staff member should maintain the child in his/her sight at all times (similar precautions used by stores suspecting someone of shoplifting)
  - If there is only one employee in store, all dealings with children should be done as openly as possible (e.g., close to the store window, front door, main part of store, etc.)

### For the uncommon case of a non-familiar perpetrator:

- Children should never go anywhere private or get a ride with a stranger (even a “safe helper”). Children need express permission from their parents to go somewhere private or take rides with anyone
- Children should not have their names (even their first names) visible (e.g., on *yarmulkes*, backpacks, etc).
- Parents should be advised to supervise any *meshulach* and/or guest (no unrestricted access to children)
- Kids should be supervised at *mikvaos*, parks, bus stops, etc. (with more than one adult providing supervision)

### Bibliography/ Resources:

- **Breaking the Silence – Sexual Abuse in the Jewish Community** edited by: David Mandel and David Pelcovitz.
- **Child & Domestic Abuse Torah, Psychological, and Legal Perspectives Volumes I & II** by Eidensohn and Shulem. Emunah Press
- **Talking to Your Children About Intimacy: A Guide for Orthodox Jewish Parents.** By Sara Diamant.

### Books for Children:

- **Magination press:** <http://www.apa.org/pubs/magination/index.aspx> - they have some wonderful books for children on a variety of topics including abuse
- **Let’s Stay Safe!** By Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz Illustrated by: Tova Leff (Mesorah Publications)
- **Uncle Willy’s Tickle – A child’s right to say no** by Marcie Aboff and Kathleen Gartner
- **“Let’s talk about it”** – series of children’s books on body safety, coping, general safety, etc. books available at [http://www.hope4families.com/Lets\\_Talk\\_Book\\_Information.html](http://www.hope4families.com/Lets_Talk_Book_Information.html) (has good information on site as well)

### Additional Resources:

- [http://www.netsnet.org/nctsn\\_assets/pdfs/caring/caring\\_for\\_kids.pdf](http://www.netsnet.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/caring/caring_for_kids.pdf) ([www.netsnet.org](http://www.netsnet.org) is good global site for trauma)
- [http://www.d21.org/site/c.4dICIJOkGcISE/b.6035035/k.A41/Darkness\\_to\\_Light\\_End\\_Child\\_Sexual\\_Abuse.htm](http://www.d21.org/site/c.4dICIJOkGcISE/b.6035035/k.A41/Darkness_to_Light_End_Child_Sexual_Abuse.htm) -also have Stewards of Children online program for parents (low cost \$10 per person) & good general site [www.d21.org](http://www.d21.org)
- **Magen New York:** Phone: (347) 455-1669 Email: [Magennewyork@gmail.com](mailto:Magennewyork@gmail.com) & Safety Kid at: [www.safetykid.org](http://www.safetykid.org)