



# A guide to protecting children and young people with disability and preventing sexual abuse

For parents and carers

A companion to the booklet –  
Protecting children and young people with disability



Government of  
South Australia



## **Minister's Message**

**A guide to protecting children and young people with disability and preventing sexual abuse**

### **For parents and carers**

Creating awareness among children is one of the best ways to protect them.

*A guide to protecting children and young people with disability and preventing sexual abuse* can serve as a starting point for parents – as well as a valuable reference.

A companion to *Protecting children and young people with disability: A booklet for parents and carers*, this booklet contains specific advice on teaching children about relationships, sexuality and staying safe.

It also contains contact details for other resources and support.

As parents and carers you know your child better than anyone else. This booklet provides the facts you need to continue to protect your child and support them to be the very best they can be.

**Jennifer Rankine**

**Minister for Education and Child Development**

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# What you need to know

**The topic of sexual abuse is hard for families and carers to deal with. The information in this resource aims to help keep children safe. Keep it in a place where it can be read more than once if needed.**

It is unclear exactly how frequently sexual abuse of children and young people with disability occurs, but it is known to be significantly more than those without disability.

Children and young people with disability need:

- To be taught about their body parts and bodily changes
- Accurate information about sex and what is sexual abuse
- Ways to express if something is wrong or frightening
- The ability to communicate “no” in an uncomfortable or abusive situation
- To be able to inform someone if they have been abused—and be believed
- Trustworthy relationships and safe people to help them.

**Sexual abuse is wrong.**

**It hurts children and their families and is illegal.**

**Getting help early gives children and young people the best chance of healing.**

Sexual abusers may target children and young people with disability who:

- Are affectionate and trusting
- Don't have many friends and are looking for affection
- Are reliant on others for assistance, particularly for personal care
- Have learnt to passively obey adults, especially carers and others in authority
- Have difficulties communicating and can't easily tell others about the abuse.

Sexual abusers are mostly male, but females abuse too. Sexual abusers may:

- Seek out and target vulnerable people, like children with disability
- Find ways to spend time with children on their own
- Offer to help by providing respite
- Often target children of single parents (mostly mothers)
- Encourage secrets
- Make threats to hide abuse
- Abuse on their own or with others.

# How you can protect your child

Consider how your child learns new things and how you can teach them about sexuality and keeping safe.

## 1

### Sex education

**Start as soon as your child can communicate** (age-appropriate).

**Find out what your child is being taught** at childcare, preschool and at school about sexuality and protective behaviours and repeat this learning at home.

**Find resources to help teach your child** (some are listed at the back of this booklet).

**Teach your child about the body** and which parts are private sexual parts – no-one is allowed to tickle or play with the private sexual parts of others.

**Use age-appropriate vocabulary** regarding body parts so that your child can report sexual misbehaviour – penis, scrotum, testicles, vulva, vagina, bottom, anus, breasts, mouth and tongue.

## 2

### Keeping Safe

**Teach your child about relationships** and personal boundaries.

**Have rules about body privacy** and teach your child to inform you if someone breaks those rules.

**Teach your child about surprises and secrets**, and 'secrets' that must be shared even though they make people sad.

**Help your child to understand** the difference between what is good and WRONG touching.

**Teach your child to communicate 'No, stop that!'** when someone makes them feel scared, sad or uncomfortable.

**Refer to dangerous situations** rather than dangerous people.

# from sexual abuse

## 3

### Outside of the home

**Help your child to identify a range of people they can trust** and approach if they feel unsafe.

**Teach your child how to make healthy choices**, feel good about themselves, problem solve and get help when they need it. Praise their efforts.

**Encourage independence** in dressing, hygiene, toileting and eating where possible.

**Talk with your child about their use of phones and the internet**, chat rooms and social network sites. Teach them how to make safe choices about who to be in contact with.

**Be aware that abuse by siblings, friends and other young people is possible** and is just as damaging as abuse by adults.

**Know who is in contact with your child.**

**Ask your child who they are in contact with by phone and computer**, and check messages on these devices.

**Get to know who is working with your child** and watch how they work with your child.

**Be clear with carers and teachers** about your child's developmental level, their behaviours and needs.

**If your child is non-verbal ask for a report** on your child's daily activities and routines.

**Ask about supervision and monitoring** of your child when they are in care or at school.

**Ask about policies and practices** that are aimed at keeping your child safe.

# Signs of sexual abuse

## The physical signs of sexual abuse include:

**Sexual abuse occurs when** someone forces or entices a child or young person to take part in sexual activity, either directly or as an observer, via the internet or when photos are taken and sent on mobile phones.

**Sexual abuse can include** inappropriate touching, oral sex, sexual intercourse, exposing children to pornography, using a child in the production of pornography or luring children through the internet for sexual purposes.

**Sexual abusers can be anyone** including family members, close friends, carers and people working with children. Most often the sexual abuser is known to the child.

**Sexual abuse can occur anywhere—** in homes, at school, at camps, on transport and in care situations.

**Trust your own knowledge and gut feelings** about your child and note any changes to their body or behaviour.

- Injuries to private areas—mouth, breasts, buttocks, inner thighs, and genitals
- Discomfort when going to the toilet
- Inflammation and infection of genital areas
- Frequent urinary tract infections/bowel problems
- Getting a sexually transmitted disease
- Pregnancy.

**The likelihood that abuse is occurring increases if there is more than one sign.**

## Other signs of sexual abuse include:

- Acting out sexual behaviour with dolls, toys, siblings and other children
- Explicit sexual behaviour and knowledge that is not age-appropriate
- Changes in behaviour when personal care needs are attended to e.g. being bathed, nappy changed or during toileting
- Sleep disturbances or night terrors
- Abnormal wetting and soiling problems
- Loss of appetite
- Hurting themselves
- Obsessive and compulsive washing
- Out-of-character behaviours
- Increased anxiety
- Aggression, withdrawal or crying
- Telling someone that sexual abuse has occurred or hinting that something has happened.

One sign alone may be an indicator that sexual abuse is occurring or there could be no indicators at all. The likelihood that abuse is occurring increases if there is more than one sign. It is also important to keep in mind that these behaviours may not necessarily be connected to sexual abuse. They may be connected to other problems for which the child needs help.



# Responding to sexual abuse

**Children who report abuse need immediate support and comfort.** It is important to listen to what the child is saying and believe them. Avoid questioning the child about the abuse, leave this to the professionals.

**As soon as possible make notes** recording what the child actually said, the date and time the child made the report and when the abuse may have occurred. Record the actual words the child used to describe the abuse. If the child cannot speak in words, record how they have communicated the abuse. These notes may be used to assist in a prosecution.

**Stop all contact with the person who is suspected to be the sexual abuser.**

## Report abuse

Go to the Police Station and make a report.

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Call for Police Assistance

**131 444**

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Call the Child Abuse Report Line (CARL)

**131 478**

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## Get Help

You know your child best.

- If your child is behaving differently or complaining about something hurting, like their bottom, take them to the doctor. Ask the doctor to check for signs of abuse if this is not offered.
- Be persistent—if you are concerned seek a second opinion.
- You and your child may find counselling helpful.
- The contacts at the back of this brochure are a guide to where to get help.

A close-up photograph of a woman with long dark hair hugging a young girl with curly dark hair. The woman is on the left, looking down at the girl. The girl is on the right, resting her head against the woman's shoulder. The lighting is soft and natural. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**Getting help quickly  
can stop sexual  
abuse and help your  
child to feel better  
sooner.**

## Useful resources

The following resources are a starting point to help you to talk to your child about their bodies, relationships, sexuality and keeping safe. This is only a small selection of resources that are available.

- You can purchase the books and DVDs. They are also available to borrow from **Sexual Health information networking & education SA Inc (SHine SA)** and some are available from the **Department for Communities and Social Inclusion (DCSI) Library and Information Service – Disability Collection** at Strathmont Centre. This is a public library and free to join.
- Some of the resources listed are available to borrow for parents/carers of a child with disability or learning difficulty from the **Special Education Resource Unit's (SERU) Resource Centre**.
- You could also ask your local library if they have copies or whether the library would purchase a copy for you to borrow.
- Check what other resources are available from the libraries mentioned and what resources are available online.

### Everyone's Got a Bottom

Written by Tess Rowley. Published by Family Planning Queensland (2007).

ISBN 0 9579129 6 X

Available to borrow from SERU or can be purchased on-line:

[http://www.fpq.com.au/pdf/Bottoms\\_Order\\_form.pdf](http://www.fpq.com.au/pdf/Bottoms_Order_form.pdf)

### Hair in Funny Places

Written by Babette Cole.

Published by Red Fox (2001).

ISBN 0099266261

Available to borrow from SERU or available from bookstores.

### Secret Girls' Business; More Secret Girls' Business; Special Girls' Business; Puberty and Special Girls; Secret Boys' Business; Special Boys' Business

Written and published by Heather Anderson, Fay Angelo & Rose Stewart.

Can be purchased on-line:

<http://www.secretgb.com/>

For commercial purchase or parental enquiries

phone: (03) 9859 2867;

mobile: 0413 278 364

or email: [secretgb@hotmail.com](mailto:secretgb@hotmail.com)

### Talk Soon Talk Often

Published by the Government of WA, Department of Health (2011).

ISBN 978 1 921841 01 9

Available in PDF on-line:

<http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/2/1276/2/parentcaregiver.pm>

### Friendships and Dating

Published by SHine SA (2011).

ISBN 0 9751317 7 X

Available free from SHine SA and on-line:

<http://www.shinesa.org.au/?objectid=508918BE-C74E-1C07-C0B06A022A738>

[ED8&topicCategory=&topicKeyword=Friendship+and+dating](http://www.shinesa.org.au/?objectid=508918BE-C74E-1C07-C0B06A022A738&ED8&topicCategory=&topicKeyword=Friendship+and+dating)

### Smart Parenting for Safer Kids

Written by Professor Frieda Briggs.

Published by JoJo Publishing (2011).

ISBN 9780980871005

Available from bookstores.

### **The Facts of Life...and More: Sexuality and Intimacy for People with Intellectual Disabilities**

Written and edited by Leslie Walker-Hirsch.

Published by Brookes (2007).

ISBN 9781557667144

Available to borrow from SERU or to buy from bookstores.

### **Developing Personal Safety Skills in Children with Disabilities**

Written by Professor Frieda Briggs.

Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers (1995).

ISBN 1 853022454

Available to borrow from SERU or can be purchased on-line:

<http://www.fishpond.com.au/Books/Developing-Personal-Safety-Skills-Children-with-Disabilities-Freda-Briggs/9781853022454>

### **Right to Know**

Written and published by the Down Syndrome Society of SA (2006).

Available to borrow from SHine SA and SERU or can be purchased on-line:

<http://www.downssa.asn.au/resources/catalogue.php>

### **Intimacy and Marriage: Sexuality booklets for young adults**

Written by Cindy Dorval. Published by the Canadian Down Syndrome Society (1999).

Available to borrow from the DCSI Library and Information Service at Strathmont Centre.

### **Talking Together...about Sex and Relationships: A Practical Resource for Schools and Parents Working with Young People with Learning Disabilities**

Written by Lesley Kerr-Edwards & Lorna Scott.

Published by the Family Planning Association (2010).

ISBN 1905506120

Available to borrow from DCSI Library and Information Service at Strathmont Centre or can be purchased on-line:

<http://www.fishpond.com.au/Books/Talking-Together-About-Sex-and-Relationships-Lesley-Kerr-Edwards-Lorna-Scott/9781905506125>

### **The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) cyber(smart):**

<http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/>

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**The following resource is an app designed to help a child understand safe touch and different kinds of relationships.**

#### **iModeling Boundaries™ app**

By Mighty Kingdom © Autism SA (2012).

Open iTunes to buy and download apps.

For more information go to

<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/imodeling-boundaries/id498872394?mt=8>

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**The following resource provides useful information to victims of crime and is available at South Australian Police Stations.**

#### **Information for victims of crime: Treatment, impact and access to the justice system**

Published by the Government of SA, Attorney – General's Department (2011).

ISBN 0 7308 8605 0

Available in PDF on-line:

<http://www.voc.sa.gov.au/Publications/Booklet/booklet.asp>

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**The following resource provides general information on the topics of abuse and neglect to parents and carers of children and young people with disability.**

#### **Protecting children and young people with disability: A booklet for parents and carers**

Published by the Government of SA, Department for Education and Child Development and Department for Communities and Social Inclusion (2012).

ISBN 9781921649271

Available in PDF on-line:

<http://www.families.sa.gov.au/pages/protectingchildren/>

# Contacts

## Australian National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline

Reporting or complaining about abuse or neglect of a person with a disability over 18 years at home, in the community or any other location.

**Phone: Toll free: 1800 880 052**

**TTY: 1800 301 130**

**NRS: 1800 555 677**

**[www.disabilityhotline.org](http://www.disabilityhotline.org)**

## Child Abuse Report Line

Reporting child abuse or neglect of children up to 18 years.

**Phone: 131 478 (24 hour service)**

## Women's and Children's Health Network

### *Parent Helpline*

Provides information on child health, development and parenting for children birth to 5 years.

**Phone: 1300 364 100**

Further information on child health, development and parenting is available at:

**[www.cyh.com](http://www.cyh.com)**

**[www.parenting.sa.gov.au](http://www.parenting.sa.gov.au)** (Parent Easy Guides)

## Department for Communities and Social Inclusion

### **Disability SA**

Provides information and resources on disability issues.

**Phone Information Line: 1300 786 117**

**Email: [disabilityinfo@dcsi.sa.gov.au](mailto:disabilityinfo@dcsi.sa.gov.au)**

**[www.dcsi.sa.gov.au](http://www.dcsi.sa.gov.au)**

## Department for Education and Child Development

### *Parent Helpline*

For general concerns about a preschool or school.

**Phone: 1800 222 696**

## Department for Education and Child Development

### **Special Education Resource Unit (SERU)**

72a Marlborough Street  
HENLEY BEACH SA 5022

**Phone: 8235 2871**

**<http://web.seru.sa.edu.au/>**

## Disability Information Resource Centre (DIRC)

195 Gillies Street  
ADELAIDE SA 5000

**Phone: (08) 8236 0555**

**[www.dircsa.org.au](http://www.dircsa.org.au)**

## **DCSI Library and Information Service – Disability Collection**

Strathmont Centre  
696-710 Grand Junction Road  
OAKDEN SA 5086

**Phone: (08) 8266 8556**

**Email: [disability.library@dcsi.sa.gov.au](mailto:disability.library@dcsi.sa.gov.au)**

**[www.dcsi.sa.gov.au/library](http://www.dcsi.sa.gov.au/library)**

## **Education and Early Childhood Services Registration and Standards Board of South Australia**

For concerns with an early childhood education and care service.

**Phone: 1800 882 413**

## **SHine SA**

Provides services and information to improve sexual health.

**Phone: (08) 8300 5300**

**Email: [SHineSALibrary@health.sa.gov.au](mailto:SHineSALibrary@health.sa.gov.au)**

**[www.shinesa.org.au](http://www.shinesa.org.au)**

## **Victim Support Service**

**Phone: 8231 5626 or  
1800 182 368 (Country Toll Free)**

**The information in this publication is available online at [www.macswd.sa.gov.au](http://www.macswd.sa.gov.au) and can be provided in an alternative format or another language upon request.**

**Phone: 1300 786 117**

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