



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

# CREATING A CHILD SAFE ENVIRONMENT

## RESOURCES

National Child Abuse Hotline	1.800.422.4453
National Center for Missing and Exploited Children	1.800.843.5678
Baker County Sheriff's Office	904.259.2231
Clay County Sheriff's Office	904.264.6512
Jacksonville Sheriff's Office	904.630.0500
Nassau County Sheriff's Office	904.225.5174
St. Johns County Sheriff's Office	904.824.8304
YMCA of Florida's First Coast	904.265.1775



**KNOW**



**SEE**



**RESPOND**

**STRENGTHENING THE FOUNDATIONS OF COMMUNITY**  
YMCA OF FLORIDA'S FIRST COAST | [FCYMCA.org](http://FCYMCA.org)

**Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Guide  
for Parents and Caregivers**

YMCA OF FLORIDA'S FIRST COAST



## ABOUT THE Y

The Y is the leading nonprofit committed to strengthening community by connecting all people to their potential, purpose and each other.

Working locally, we focus on empowering young people, improving health and well-being, and inspiring action in and across communities. By bringing together people from different backgrounds, perspectives and generations, we ensure that we all have access to the opportunities, relationships and resources necessary to learn, grow and thrive.

### YMCA OF FLORIDA'S FIRST COAST

- Located in 5 counties: Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau and St. Johns
- 117,000 total individuals served annually; 29% subsidized\*
- 15 wellness branches
- 60+ youth serving program locations

### TOGETHER, WE'RE A BETTER US

The Y isn't a building. It's people from all backgrounds and walks of life who come together to improve their lives, nurture their families and strengthen their community, together.

Every day we work to make a meaningful and measurable difference in the lives of others by focusing on three areas of impact:



#### Youth Development

Empowering young people to reach their full potential



#### Healthy Living

Improving individual and community well-being



#### Social Responsibility

Providing support and inspiring action in our communities

## COMMITMENT TO CHILD PROTECTION

At the First Coast YMCA, it is our most important work to create safe spaces for children and teens to play, to learn, to be healthy, to discover who they are and what they can achieve, to eat well and to give back. We are committed to doing everything we can to protect children physically and emotionally. This means educating ourselves and our community about child abuse and how we can work together to stop abuse.

It is our responsibility as adults to prevent, recognize and react responsibly to child abuse. All adults, especially parents and guardians, need to know the facts, be aware and act appropriately.

### CREATING SAFE SPACES

At the Y, employees work in partnership with volunteers to serve children and teens through a variety of programs including childcare, camp, aquatics, sports and leadership development.

### Our Required Screenings

To keep children in our programs safe, we provide multiple layers of protection, including a comprehensive process of screening our employees and volunteers:

- Statewide Background Screenings
- National Background Screenings including Social Security Number Validation and Social Security Number Trace
- Personal and Professional References

### Our Training

Employees and volunteers complete annual child abuse prevention training programs to ensure they understand the problem of abuse and know the warning signs. Our staff and volunteers are mandated to report any suspected child abuse.



## Our Standards

- Staff are not allowed to babysit children they meet through the YMCA.
- All staff and volunteers sign a Code of Conduct.
- Staff and volunteers are prohibited from working one-on-one with youth, interacting with youth outside of program areas (including babysitting) and contacting youth over social media. If you observe an employee or a volunteer violating these policies, please alert us.

\*Mentoring programs, like the YMCA's Take Stock in Children Program, often require employees and volunteers to be in a one-on-one situation, but the mentor and student should always meet at their school in public areas in view of others at all times.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO

At the Y, we believe it is an adult's responsibility to protect children from abuse. There are 5 steps you can take now that will help you to take action, if necessary, to protect a child.

A child is six times more likely to tell about abuse if asked.



## DARKNESS TO LIGHT'S 5 STEPS TO PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN



### 1. Learn the Facts

- 1 in 10 children are sexually abused.
- Over 90 percent of them know their abuser.



### 2. Minimize Opportunity

Eliminate or reduce isolated, one-on-one situations to decrease risk for abuse.



### 3. Talk About It

Have an open conversation with children about our bodies, sex and boundaries.



### 4. Recognize the Signs

Know the signs of abuse to protect children from further harm.



### 5. React Responsibly

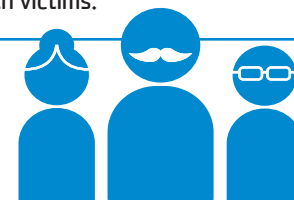
Understand how to respond to risky behaviors and suspicions or reports of sexual abuse.

## TYPES OF CHILD ABUSE

- 1. Emotional:** Threatening a child or using words that can hurt a child's feelings and self-esteem; withholding love and support from a child
- 2. Physical:** Causing injuries to a child on purpose, such as bruises, burns, scars or broken bones
- 3. Sexual:** Having sexual contact in any form with a child, including exposing, fondling intercourse, pornography or internet solicitation
- 4. Neglect:** Not providing children with enough food, clothing, shelter, medical care, hygiene or supervision

People who sexually abuse children look and act just like everyone else. Abusers can be neighbors, friends, family members and even other kids. A process called grooming allows offenders to slowly build trust with a child so they can gradually initiate and maintain secret sexual relationships with victims.

Child abusers can be parents, caretakers, friends, neighbors or even other kids.



## GROOMING BEHAVIOR

- Spend time building a friendship with the child and slowly gains the trust of the family
- Gives gifts to the child and/or gives the child special attention
- Does things for the child that parents may not be able to do
- Lays the foundation for future sexual secrets by encouraging harmless secrets
- Breaks down physical boundaries over time by playing physical contact games like tickling, wrestling or giving back rubs
- Gives the child opportunities to break rules such as abusing alcohol or drugs or viewing pornography
- Takes pictures and video of the child

## WHY CHILDREN DON'T TELL

- The abuser tells the child that his/her parents will be angry.
- The abuser confuses the child about what is right and wrong.
- The abuser tells the child that he/she will hurt his/her family member.
- The abuser tells the child they are playing a game or it is a secret.
- The abuse may encourage the child to break rules set by his/her parents, causing the child to fear punishment.
- The child will think it is his/her fault and think he/she should have done something to prevent it from happening.

## SIGNS OF ABUSE

- Unexplainable bruising or other physical markings
- Disturbed sleeping or eating patterns
- Abrupt changes in behavior-anxiety: clinging, aggressiveness, withdrawal or depression
- Fear of a certain person or place
- Discomfort with physical contact



The First Coast YMCA offers a complimentary virtual child sexual abuse prevention course called Stewards of Children®. For more information, visit [FCYMCA.org](https://www.fcyymca.org).

## TALKING WITH CHILDREN

Having age-appropriate, open conversations about our bodies, sex, and boundaries is an important step in protecting children. Children need to know they can talk to someone who will listen and respond in a supportive way, not make them feel ashamed or afraid about what has happened.

### 1. Talk to your child.

Have an open and honest discussion with your child on a routine basis about his or her experiences in our programs, school, sports and other activities. Encourage your child to tell you or another trusted adult if anything happens to him or her.

#### How to talk to your child about difficult topics:

- Start conversations at a young age and be open to talking to your child about his/her body. When age appropriate, talk to your child about sex.
- Teach your child words that help him/her discuss his/her private body parts comfortably with you.
- Teach your child that he/she has your permission to say "No" if an adult or another child tries to touch his/her private body parts.
- Tell your child that he/she can say "No" to an adult friend, family member or another child if he/she acts inappropriately.

### 2. Drop In

Visit your child's programs. There is no need to provide advance notice. At the Y, we welcome you to stop by anytime to see how things are going.

## 3. Trust Your Instincts

If something seems "strange", don't wait to report it. Please speak up and inform one of our employees. Know the warning signs of abuse.

### Special Attention

Listen and watch for signs your child may be receiving special attention not given to others in their program. This may include favors, treats, gifts, rides, increasing affection or time alone, particularly outside the activities of school, child care or other activities.

## 4. Ask Questions

Every once in a while, ask your child:

- What does safe mean to you? How do you know when you are safe?
- Is anyone scaring or threatening you?
- Is anyone asking you to keep secrets?
- Has anyone said anything to you that made you feel bad?
- Is anyone touching you in a way that you don't like or you are not sure about?

## RESPONDING WHEN YOUR CHILD DISCLOSES ABUSE

If your child tells you that he/she has been hurt by someone, stay calm and listen. If you react with anger or disbelief, your child may feel ashamed or guilty and can shut down.

- Understand that your reaction has a powerful influence on your child
- Ask open-ended questions, i.e. "What happened next?"
- Believe your child and make sure he/she knows it
- Thank your child for telling you and praise his/her courage

**If you know or suspect abuse is happening, trust your instincts and get help. Please contact the appropriate authorities to report suspected incidents of child sexual abuse.**

A child may tell you pieces of what happened or pretend it happened to someone else to see how you will react.

