

For PARENTS: MYTHS vs. FACTS about child sexual abuse and prevention education

MYTH: “Wow, we live in a really safe neighborhood. In fact, we searched long and hard for the SAFEST neighborhood we could find! We know ALL our neighbors, and feel comfortable that everyone is looking out for each other. I KNOW that my children wouldn’t ever be sexually abused here! I care about my kids – I keep them safe!”

FACT: Child sexual abuse happens to children everywhere - in every neighborhood, in every church group, in every racial and cultural group, no matter how rich or poor we are, no matter how many of our neighbors we know, or don’t know, personally. Sadly, national statistics reported by the U.S. Dept. of Justice say [that as many as 1 out of 3 little girls](#), and as many as 1 out of 5 little boys, may be sexually abused by the time they’re 18. And elementary age children are the most vulnerable to being hurt this way. Children with disabilities are even more at risk. **BOTTOM LINE:** All of our children are at risk for being victimized by sexual abuse, or sexual harassment – and are especially vulnerable if they’re uneducated about it, or unaware that it could even happen at all!

Good-Touch/Bad-Touch® Body Safety Education Curriculum is research-based, comprehensive violence prevention education, providing the language and learning structure we need to teach children about the problem of sexual abuse in a child-friendly, nurturing and supportive way. Good-Touch/Bad-Touch® provides primary prevention education in PreK through 6th Grades (to stop abuse, bullying and sexual harassment before it ever happens to a child at all!), and is based on principles of self-respect and respect and caring for others. The Good-Touch/Bad-Touch® Curriculum is designed for use in PreK – 6th Grade school classrooms, and is also used in other youth group or individual settings. Good-Touch/Bad-Touch® works with many culturally diverse groups, and instructs children with Body Safety Rules – language, skills and behaviors to know so they can participate in their own safety. Good-Touch/Bad-Touch® also provides secondary prevention (intervention) and tertiary intervention (trauma reduction), so that children who have already been abused or hurt can recognize that ALL children deserve to be safe, and that abuse is NEVER the child’s fault.

MYTH: “I’ve already talked with my kids about sexual abuse, and told them never to let any grownup touch their private body parts. I know my child won’t let a grownup do this, and I know it could NEVER happen at their school!”

FACT: Sexual abuse happens when someone FORCES a child, or TRICKS a child, so that the other person can touch the child’s private body parts, or so that the child will touch the other person’s private body parts. Children can do this, grownups can do this, teen-agers can do this. Sexual abuse is about forcing or manipulating a child – so they are

confused and really don't understand what's going on. (*It's not as though the abuser asks the child, "Would you mind if I sexually abuse you?" and the child says, "Sure, go ahead. I'll let you!"*) The offender will say to the child something like, "This is what people do when they love each other." **In the prevention field, this manipulation is called GROOMING the child – a process where the abuser is getting ready, or preparing the child, for the sexual abuse to take place. Another component of the GROOMING process is to ensure the self-protection of the abuser – to ensure that the child will not tell..** And unfortunately, even the child's family and community can be GROOMED by the child sexual abuse offender. Many times, the perpetrator fools families and other members of the local community into thinking that he or she is such a good person, in such good standing in the community, that of course they would *never* have done this terrible crime of sexual abuse! And many times, the children who are victims of the crime of sexual abuse are unhappily left struggling to feel believed by someone they love or trust that this terrible thing, the sexual abuse, actually did happen to them.

In their Good-Touch/Bad-Touch® Curriculum lessons, children at every grade level learn the definition of the words "sexual abuse" as "forced or tricked touch of private body parts" and the concepts are explained at the child's educational and developmental level, so that children easily grasp the body safety concepts taught. The words "sexual abuse" and their definition are taught to the children because these PreK and elementary age children are at risk for abuse victimization if they do not know anything about this problem, and how it could happen to them. With Good-Touch/Bad-Touch®, we want to take the negative power away from these words, and give the positive power of love and understanding back to the child!

MYTH: "Most sexual abuse is committed by someone who's a stranger to the child."

FACT: Someone the child knows, likes, trusts and loves, and/or lives with is the person most likely to sexually abuse a child. *Usually, perpetrators of sexual abuse are not strangers to the children they abuse.* They may be a relative, friend, baby-sitter, people who are in charge of a child – such as a teacher, or other care providers - such as camp counselors or other youth group leaders. The majority of children who are sexually abused *know* their abuser.

In the Good-Touch/Bad-Touch® Curriculum lessons, children learn that the abuser is most often someone the child knows, like, loves or lives with. This is yet another reason why sexual abuse is so confusing to children – the tricks, or manipulations, used by the abuser are confusing to the child. It can make it appear to the child victim of sexual abuse that he or she must somehow be to blame for his or her own abuse, or that the child should have been able to stop their own abuse. This isn't true, and children learn this in their Good-Touch/Bad-Touch® lessons.

FACT: When we talk with our children about this difficult problem of child sexual abuse, we adults need to know this – it can happen, and does happen, to children from other children and from teen-agers, too. So, yes, it can happen at school! When we are talking to our children about this problem, we need to remember that sexual abuse is not

only when someone gets raped – although yes, that is sexual abuse. But sexual abuse also happens to children in lots of other ways – such as when someone takes pictures of a child without clothes on, and posts those pictures on a website; or when someone flashes or exposes themselves to the child; or when someone talks or gestures in a sexually suggestive way to the child; or when someone touches the child in a sexual way.

In their Good-Touch/Bad-Touch® Curriculum lessons, children learn that ALL children are special and they all matter and deserve to be safe, and that it's not ok to hurt anyone else. In the Curriculum, beginning in the 2nd grade, there is a comparison made between bullying and sexual abuse – in fact, bullying is a type of abuse. All children can understand the concept of bullying, so it's easier for them to make the conceptual leap of understanding that just as children bully other children, children (both boys and girls) can sexually abuse other children. And that's just not fair! In Good-Touch/Bad-Touch® children also learn about some of the ways that sexual abuse can happen, to empower them to recognize it if it happens to them, or to their friends, and to teach them some life skills they can take with them to help if they are ever victimized or threatened with the problem of sexual abuse and the resulting confusing, or sad or angry, feelings about themselves.

MYTH: “I'm SO lucky - my child and I have SUCH a great relationship! My child feels comfortable talking with me about everything. I KNOW my child would tell me – and right away! - if he or she was ever touched in a sexual way, or otherwise sexually abused or sexually threatened!”

FACT: If it happens to them, *most children never tell about their abuse.* Most children are afraid that this news will hurt their parents in some way, or are afraid that no one would believe what happened to them, or are afraid that no one would believe that the person who abused them actually did that. Also, most children tell the truth about sexual abuse. Most children don't know enough about the sexual activity they report to be fabricating. The younger the child is when they are sexually abused, or when they tell about being sexually abused, the *likelier* it is that their report is true.

Good-Touch/Bad-Touch® Curriculum lessons emphasize to the children – beginning at the PreK level - the importance of telling a grownup they trust if they are ever abused, hurt or threatened, or confused in any way. The way we get help with any of our problems is to talk about them with someone we trust. But telling is extremely difficult and courageous, for the abused child to do. In Good-Touch/Bad-Touch® lessons, children learn who they can tell, and how to tell. With the Good-Touch/Bad-Touch® Curriculum lessons, the trained Facilitators spend quite a lot of time with children - especially in the upper grades - to help them understand the importance of telling.

MYTH: “I worry about sexual abuse with my little girl – but I really think my boys can take care of themselves. They'll be safe, I know!”

FACT: The fact is, that sexual abuse happens to boys as well as girls. And when it does happen to little boys, very often they think that they should have been able to stop it, or to protect themselves. So they feel angry, or sad, and ashamed, and blame themselves – just like girls do. And again, the fact is, that child sexual abuse is NEVER the child’s fault, whether they are a girl, or a boy. Children do not have the innate power to stop the abuser, if that person is intent on harming the child. But ALL children deserve to learn body safety rules about sexual abuse that they can use to help themselves keep safe from abuse, bullying or sexual harassment.

The foundation of the Good-Touch/Bad-Touch® Body Safety Education Curriculum lessons is respect for self, and respect and caring for others. Both boys and girls learn that they are important in this world, and that many people care about their safety from abuse, bullying or sexual harassment. Especially in the older grades, boys and girls think that boys should be able to keep themselves safe all the time, be tough and never cry. In Good-Touch/Bad-Touch®, boys and girls learn that even if bad things happen to us, we are still good people, and it’s NEVER the child’s fault if sexual abuse happens to them.

MYTH: “My kids already had a short, in-school puppet show presentation about sexual abuse. They heard it last year! Why would they need to hear that again. Let’s move on, and get back to learning the really important things!”

FACT: One-shot deals, such as puppet shows, can be very entertaining to children, but they should NEVER be confused with effective prevention education. Learning and developmental growth theories such as those of Erickson, Piaget or Kohlberg show us that children learn and develop mentally, morally and physically at all different rates, and through different stages. Whatever your children heard in school during the one-time puppet show presentation isn’t nearly comprehensive enough, or repetitive enough, for them to absorb and process all they need to learn at each developmental level about this serious subject of sexual abuse!

The curriculum children are taught in school are constructed according to different educational or learning theories, to help them learn all that they can each year about a subject, such as math, or science, at whatever developmental level they are currently. The subject of abuse prevention education must be constructed in this way, also, in order to be educationally and developmentally appropriate to the child, so that the child can learn and retain the language, skills and behaviors taught.

And the fact remains that children can have a very hard time paying attention at school, and learning about other subjects, if they are being abused, bullied or threatened by someone. Safe environments are vital to children’s learning success – so abuse prevention education is a critical component for every school’s curriculum each year.

Good-Touch/Bad-Touch® Body Safety Education Curriculum was created by Pam Church, in developmentally and educationally appropriate lessons, so that PreK through 6th Grade boys and girls can have a voice in stopping their abuse, to help

prevent it from ever happening to children in the first place, and to reduce the negative trauma of abuse of all types.

Good-Touch/Bad-Touch® Curriculum originated in 1983, and has been revised 11 times to date, to keep current with children's prevention education needs. **Good-Touch/Bad-Touch®** has been researched for effectiveness, is comprehensive violence prevention education, including prevention education about child abuse of all types: physical, sexual, emotional and neglect; bullying prevention, internet safety, Stranger-Danger and bystander safety strategies. The Curriculum helps schools create safer environments for children, is culturally relevant and meets educational standards.

Pam Church also authored the **Good-Touch/Bad-Touch® Training for Adults**, to help empower adults about the complex problem of sexual abuse, so these adults can in turn empower the young children with whom they work. This is a professional development Training that also teaches educators how to work with and help the children in their schools who might already suffer the consequences of abuse, bullying and sexual harassment.