



# Childhoods — ARE WORTH — **PROTECTING**

Darkness to Light + Child Abuse Prevention Month

**A GUIDE FOR ADULTS**



EVERY CHILD DESERVES

# A CHILDHOOD DEFINED BY SAFETY, TRUST, CURIOSITY, AND JOY.

CHILDHOODS ARE WORTH PROTECTING.

We all have a role to play in protecting children.  
Not someday. Not when something happens.  
**Right now.**

Child sexual abuse is preventable—and communities are strongest when adults are equipped to take action before harm occurs.

This **Child Abuse Prevention Month**, we're calling on safe adults everywhere—parents, educators, leaders, and advocates—to step into that role with confidence.

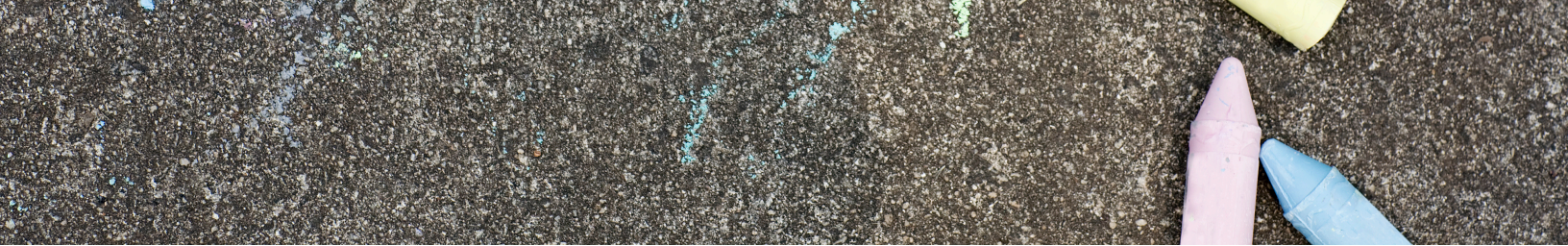
Use this toolkit to turn awareness into action and help create environments where children feel safe, supported, and able to thrive.

Because when we act together, prevention isn't just possible—it becomes reality.

**Thank you for being part of the movement to protect childhoods.**

Darkness to Light is here to support you with tools, training, and guidance along the way.  
To learn more or connect with our team, email [Media@D2L.org](mailto:Media@D2L.org).





## HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is designed to help you take simple, meaningful steps to protect children.

Start by moving through **Darkness to Light's Five Steps to Protecting Children™**— each page will guide you with practical actions you can take right away.

You don't need to do everything at once. Focus on one step at a time, and build from there.

At the end, you'll find **downloadable resources and shareable graphics** to help you continue the conversation and take what you've learned into your community.

### INSIDE YOU'LL:

**Learn** the facts and understand the realities children face

**Identify** ways to create safer environments

**Practice** how to start conversations with children

**Recognize** signs of abuse and what to look for

**Take steps** to respond safely and responsibly



# THE REALITY WE CAN'T IGNORE



## STEP 1: LEARN THE FACTS

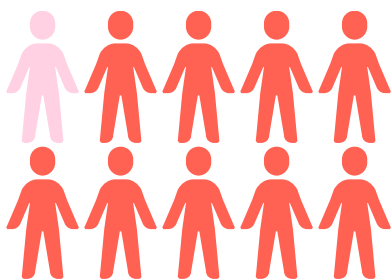
Understanding the *realities* children face is the foundation of prevention. When we know the facts, we can recognize risk, take action, and better protect the children in our lives.

### Start Here (5 Minutes):

- Read** the facts below
- Learn** one new fact
- Share** one fact with another adult

### Here's what every adult should know:

## 1 IN 10 CHILDREN



in the U.S. are sexually abused before their 18th birthday.

### **facts:**

## 90% OF CHILDREN

who are abused are abused by someone they know and trust.

## 60% OF ABUSERS

are acquaintances, teachers, neighbors, or community leaders.

## 30% OF CHILDREN

who are sexually abused are abused by immediate or extended family.



## The more you know, the more you can protect.

Get a simple, shareable guide to understanding child sexual abuse—including risk factors, consequences, and reporting. Start with the facts—then share what you learn.



### Try This Today:

- Share one new fact with a friend or family member

#### Sample Text Message

“I learned today that 90% of children who are abused are harmed by someone they know and trust. It really changed how I think about prevention—because if we don’t understand the risks, we can’t help protect kids.”

#### Sample Social Post

1 in 10 children will experience sexual abuse before their 18th birthday. If we don’t understand the realities, we can’t recognize the risks—or prevent harm.

Awareness is where prevention begins.



# YOU ARE A SAFE ADULT



## STEP 2: MINIMIZE OPPORTUNITY

The realities we can't ignore are exactly *why* your role matters. Prevention begins with a single safe adult—someone who chooses to notice, to listen, and to protect.

### Start Here (5 Minutes):

- Look** at one environment where children spend time (home, school, sports, church)
- Identify** one situation where a child could be isolated with an adult
- Talk** with another adult about how to create safer environments



## Safe Environment Check

*Use this quick check to assess spaces where children spend time.*

- Are **interactions** visible to others?
- Are **boundaries** clear and consistent?
- Are there **safeguards** in place for one-on-one situations?
- Would a child feel **comfortable** speaking up here?



## **ONCE YOU'VE IDENTIFIED WHERE RISK EXISTS, THE NEXT STEP IS MAKING ONE SMALL CHANGE.**

Start with one small change to create a safer environment.

**Choose one to start this week:**

- Keep interactions visible and observable
- Avoid one-on-one situations when possible
- Set clear boundaries for communication (in person and online)
- Talk with another adult about creating safer environments

### **YOUR COMMITMENT**

**Write down the one change you will make this week:**

**This week, I will:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



# START THE CONVERSATION



## STEP 3: TALK ABOUT IT

Starting conversations about safety doesn't have to be complicated. What matters most is creating a space where children feel safe, supported, and heard.

### Start Here (5 Minutes):

- Choose** a natural moment (car ride, bedtime, after school)
- Say** one simple sentence about safety
- Remind** them they can always come to you

### What to Say (Simple Ways to Start)

You don't need the perfect words—just start with something simple.

- *“You can always tell me anything—even if it feels scary.”*
- *“Your body belongs to you.”*
- *“If anything ever makes you uncomfortable, you can come to me.”*

***Want more guidance? Explore additional tips to help you start and continue these conversations.***



**VIEW MORE TIPS FOR TALKING ABOUT IT**





## CONVERSATIONS BUILD PROTECTION.

Talking regularly about safety helps children know they are safe—and that they can come to you when something isn't right.

### Try This Today:

- Say one simple sentence about safety
- Ask an open-ended question (e.g., “What makes you feel safe?”)
- Remind them they won't get in trouble for speaking up



# KNOW WHAT TO LOOK FOR



## STEP 4: RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS

When we recognize the signs early, we can take action.

### Start Here (5 Minutes):

- Review** the signs below
- Think** about children in your life
- Choose** to be more attentive to the children in your life this week

**Signs of abuse aren't always obvious, but they are often there.**

### Behavioral Changes

- Sudden withdrawal or mood changes
- Fear of certain people or places
- Regression (bedwetting, clinginess)
- Age-inappropriate knowledge or behavior

### Physical or Emotional Indicators

- Unexplained injuries or discomfort
- Changes in sleep or appetite
- Anxiety, depression, or sudden fearfulness

### What a Child Might Say

- “I don’t want to go there” (without explanation)
- Hints or indirect disclosures
- Sudden secrecy or reluctance to talk

### Red Flag/Grooming Behaviors

- Insisting on time alone with a child
- Giving gifts or special attention
- Ignoring boundaries or rules
- Trying to create secrecy



## Every moment you notice matters

When we recognize the signs and respond with care, we create safer outcomes for children. You don't have to be perfect—you just have to be present, calm, and ready to listen.

SCAN QR CODE



**SCAN THE QR CODE FOR MORE INFORMATION ON RECOGNIZING & REPORTING HARM**

### If You Notice Something Concerning:

- Stay calm and present
- Listen without interrupting or judging
- Take what the child says seriously
- Avoid asking leading questions
- Don't promise to keep secrets

**CONTINUE TO STEP FIVE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT REACTING RESPONSIBLY**



# TAKE ACTION



## STEP 5: REACT RESPONSIBLY

When a child shares something—or when you notice signs—how you respond matters.

You don't have to have all the answers. Staying calm, listening, and taking action can help protect a child and support their healing.

### Start Here (5 Minutes):

- Practice** how you would respond if a child shared something with you
- Remember:** stay calm, listen, and believe
- Learn** what steps to take to report or seek help



## HOW TO RESPOND WITH CONFIDENCE

1. Stay calm
2. Listen and believe
3. Reassure them
4. Take next steps

If you're concerned:

Document what you notice  
Talk to a trusted professional  
Follow your state's reporting guidelines

SCAN QR CODE



SCAN FOR MORE INFORMATION  
ON RECOGNIZING & REPORTING HARM

**Situation:** A child suddenly doesn't want to go to a place they used to enjoy (practice, a relative's house, a program).

**A safe adult might say:** "You used to really like going there. Can you help me understand what's changed?"

**If they hesitate:** "You're not in trouble—I just want to understand how you're feeling."

**Why this matters:** Changes in behavior are often the first sign something isn't right.

**Situation:** A child suddenly hides their screen, gets anxious about messages, or doesn't want you near their phone.

**A safe adult might say:** "I noticed you seem a little stressed when you're on your phone. Is everything okay?"

**Why this matters:** Online interactions are a growing space where harm can occur.



# PROTECTING CHILDHOOD STARTS WITH YOU.

This month, you've taken meaningful steps to help protect children—because childhoods are worth protecting.

**But this is just the beginning.**

You've learned the facts, created safer environments, started important conversations, recognized the signs, and prepared to respond.

**Now, take the next step.**

Use the graphics below to continue the conversation, raise awareness, and help create safer environments for children in your community.



[DOWNLOAD](#)



[SHARE](#)



[TALK ABOUT IT](#)

**"IF JUST ONE ADULT HAD KNOWN WHAT TO LOOK FOR, THINGS COULD HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT."**



# WHAT YOU DO NEXT MATTERS MORE THAN YOU THINK

BECAUSE CHILDHOODS ARE WORTH PROTECTING.



Behind this campaign is the courage of survivors—and the adults who chose to act.

For Debi Ray-Rivers' daughters, what should have been safe, ordinary moments of growing up were disrupted when they experienced harm within a trusted relationship—an experience that changed everything for their family.

Their story reflects a difficult truth: abuse often goes unseen, especially when it involves someone a child knows and trusts.

What's worth protecting is more than a moment—it's a child's sense of safety, their innocence, their voice, and the future they deserve.

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