

# Conifer Counseling Informational Page

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## Preventing Sexual Abuse Through Building Protective Factors

One of the most effective ways to reduce the risk of sexual abuse is to talk about it....with your child. Most importantly, don't focus on the fear of being a victim. Coloring a child's lens of the world with fear can lead to isolation and anxiety, thus, inhibiting joy. Instead, focus on the ways in which you can empower your children. When we empower our children and provide them with a sense of control, they become confident in their ability to navigate the world. Empowering and safeguarding our children starts with building protective factors. The following information is truncated from our blog at [www.conifercounseling.com/blog/SAProtectiveFactors](http://www.conifercounseling.com/blog/SAProtectiveFactors).

**Give Your Child the Language to Speak Up:** Improve your child's ability to communicate around their body safety so they can be heard. Use anatomically correct words. Often times, we use euphemisms to create a comfortable distance between our young children and sexuality. It is an attempt to comfort the parent, NOT a developmentally focused parenting technique and can inhibit a child's ability to report abuse.

**Get To Know People In Your Lives:** Take time to learn who is in your child's life. Interact with their friends, their friend's parents, teachers, coaches, caregivers, bus drivers, etc. Trust your instincts and get to know how other parents feel about those people in your child's life.

**Reinforce Your Trust In Your Child:** Let your child know you will trust them about anything they report about abuse or their safety, even if it is about someone the child knows is close to you. Many victims are manipulated by being told they shouldn't talk because no one will believe them or they will get into trouble. Be persistent with a message to your child that you will believe them and they won't be in trouble. Let them know this trust is unconditional.

**Monitor:** While your child may not like you monitoring their social media, friends, and locations; it is not your job to be liked. Sometimes protecting them means exchanging your "friendship" with your child for their safety. Be aware, set limits, and gain knowledge of the communication platforms they are using or people with who they spend time.

**Don't Force "polite" Physical Contact:** How many times have you said "Go give Grandma a kiss" or "Go give your Uncle a hug, you are being rude"? The message we send is it is "rude" or "disrespectful" to deny an adult physical contact with the child, even when the child is uncomfortable AND that adults get to choose what children do with their bodies. Let them decide what feels comfortable and safe for their body by allowing them to say "no" to any adult. This will increase their ability to say "no" in unsafe situations.

**Teach Body Safety:** Bath time is fun! It's also a great way to talk about privacy and body safety! Identify body parts (with anatomically correct names) and talk about how it is only *their* body. Talk about what it means to have private parts of their body and who is safe to touch them. Base the use of bath time and the topics of bath time on age and developmental appropriateness.

**Define Consent:** There are many situations where consent is not always clear or can be manipulated. Explain what consent means and how there are times when it can feel like consent was given, when it was not. You can find age appropriate consent videos on our website! (Listed below)

**Avoid Normalizing Sexualized Behaviors:** Take time to recognize the daily use of words in music, tv shows, magazines, and movies which normalize sexualization and sexual abuse of others. Be mindful of these things and limit your child's exposure. The normalizing of these messages can compromise your child's (and adult's) ability to identify abuse.

In the end, please remember, people are generally good and our day to day lives are safe. Take the route of empowering your children rather than scaring them, so they can thrive with protective factors. Read the entire article and find additional resources at [www.conifercounseling.com](http://www.conifercounseling.com)