

POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF ABUSE IN CHILDREN

Remember, these signs and behaviors do not mean that abuse has happened. Instead, these are red flags that signal concern that abuse may have occurred.

- Withdrawing from physical contact such as hugging.
- Loss of appetite, trouble eating or swallowing.
- Reverting to younger behaviors such as bed-wetting or thumb-sucking.
- Cutting or burning self.
- Suicidal thoughts.
- Drug/alcohol abuse.
- Evidence of tenderness, pain or injury.
- Nightmares, trouble sleeping, fear of the dark or other sleeping problems.
- Problems at school or frequent absences.
- Sudden mood swings.
- Fear of certain people or places.
- Knows more about sex than normal for age.
- Stories about a “friend” being abused. Indirect hints about abuse.
- Violent, abusive or sexualized behavior towards peers.

RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURE OF ABUSE

Some children tell an adult about an abuse experience right after it happens. However, many children may wait for months or years to disclose that they have been abused. There are many reasons why a child may delay disclosure, or not tell at all, including fear, confusion, embarrassment, as well as protection of the adults that they love and are dependent on.

The initial reaction by an adult when a child discloses abuse is extremely important, as it can have an effect on the child’s healing process.

If your Little discloses that they have been or are being abused:

- **Listen and believe.**
- **Tell them you’re glad they told you.**
- **Show that you understand and take seriously what your Little is saying.**
- **Assure the child that they did the right thing in telling.**
- **Let them know that it isn’t their fault.**
- **Let them know it’s not okay for adults to act that way with children.**
- **Be calm**— While a strong reaction is understandable, it could upset the child, and lead them to think that you are angry with them, that they should not have told, or that the abuse was their fault.
- **Let the child use their own words**— Any follow up question you ask should be open ended and asked only to clarify meaning. It’s important to not ask questions that lead a child to certain words or answers that confirm your assumptions.

ANTI-BULLYING EDUCATION

Students in New York State are protected by the Dignity for All Students Act (DASA). This act reaffirms student's right to safety and non-discrimination in education, and also provides a set of rules regarding how schools must handle incidents of bullying that are reported in schools.

As a mentor, if your Little tells you that they are being bullied, you should practice supportive listening and show your Little they have you to count on. You can also help a child understand their rights in NYS under the DASA act, and where to go for help if they are being bullied. Encourage them to practice a few good anti-bullying habits as well:

- Try to walk away and not feed the bully's need for drama.
- Join a club, team or group and make friends.
- Stick with their friends when in-between classes.
- Stand up for others being bullied by telling a trusted adult.
- Find a teacher they feel they can trust, and go to them for help.

We seek to provide all children and adults involved with the Youth Bureau a safe and supportive environment free from discrimination, intimidation, taunting, harassment, and bullying. No person shall be subjected to harassment or discrimination by employees, volunteers or other participants while involved in any Ithaca Youth Bureau activities. It is the responsibility of all program participants to create a positive culture that encourages respect.

INTERNET SAFETY

Children use computers and the internet for many positive things, but they must also understand the risks. Children can be curious, rebellious and trusting of adults. They want to appear older, seek adult approval and can be naïve regarding the risks of being online. If your little needs some education on these risks, here are some online habits they should be taught to avoid:

- "Friending" unknown people.
- Posting personal information.
- Sending or posting provocative statements or images.
- Sharing passwords with friends.
- Clicking on pop-ups.
- Choosing offensive screen names.

You can also help your Little adjust privacy settings on social media websites.

Some children may be experiencing cyberbullying. They should be advised to:

- Not respond to the bully.
- Save all messages and share them with a trusted adult.
- Block the bully, change passwords, or set up a new account.

BASIC SAFETY WHEN YOU ARE WITH YOUR LITTLE

Practice some basic, common-sense habits that will maintain safety during your outings with your Little. Here are some ideas:

- Learn contact information and have your Little learn it too.
- Always bring your Match ID and your Little's medical info. card.
- Get to know the needs of your Little's age group.
- Get to know your Little's specific needs.
- Get to know the trusted adults in the Little's life.
- Know who may **not** be a trusted adult in your Little's life.
- Accompany your Little everywhere in public situations.
- Give appropriate privacy in restrooms, but don't stray too far.
- Know what your Little is wearing when you go out.
- Pick a landmark at which to meet if you get separated.
- If you fear your Little is lost, get help from authorities.
- Always tell parents where you are going, and update them if the plan changes.

KEEPING KIDS SAFE—What to tell them about staying safe when they're on their own:

Hopefully, your Little has already learned a thing or two about how to be safe when there isn't a trusted adult around. Here are some tips you can give them yourself:

- Have a plan/know the plan – when they go somewhere, do they know who may pick them up, where to meet, what to do if lost? Do they know their address, phone number?
- Bring a friend. Whenever possible, do they stick with a friend or group of friends?
- Tell people "no". Do they know that it's okay to tell an adult or peer "no" if they feel unsafe or if something isn't right?
- Tell a trusted adult – if something does happen, they should tell a trusted adult soon afterwards.

Remember:

Children who are confident and who feel good about themselves are less likely to be vulnerable to abuse and bullying. Children who feel like they are welcomed and cared for, and who have learned the skills needed to keep themselves safe, are less vulnerable.

As a Big, you have the perfect opportunity to increase your Little's self-confidence and sense of belonging. You are in a unique position to help your Little master some safety skills and improve their overall sense of self-worth and self-reliance.