



Safe
Strong
Free

*"Preventing sexual assault and exploitation of children
is the responsibility of the whole community"*



Informationforparents

Keeping children safe

There are many things you can do in a general sense that will help children to feel safe, strong and free.

Help children to be confident and secure by making time to **really listen**. Children who know it is always ok to talk about things that worry them are much less vulnerable to bullying and abuse. **Don't** assume each child automatically knows that you are happy to listen to anything they have to say, make it clear that they can tell you **anything**.

Take time to ensure your child can **identify emotions and empathise** with other people; this is something that sometimes has to be taught and won't always come naturally. Children who understand emotions and can relate to others are able to be resilient and express themselves in healthy ways.

If you ever have **any worries** about your child's wellbeing or communicating effectively with your child about anything, there are many organisations out there that are willing and able to provide appropriate support. Get in touch and we can help.

Continue to **reinforce the ssf strategies every few months**. Use the hints and tips provided in the children's booklets, discuss 'what if' scenarios, or email us for a list of useful online resources.

Reassure your child that their **body belongs to them**, and they have the right to personal space. In certain circumstances e.g. if a doctor needs to examine the child, explain why this is different.



Bullying

What is bullying?

We define bullying as a pattern of behaviour that involves a **power imbalance**, which has a **negative effect** on the victim.

Bullying can be verbal, physical, social or psychological.

What are the effects?

Many children who are bullied feel ashamed or guilty, and that it is their fault. Bullying can have many effects including; fear of going to particular places, low self-esteem, change in mood, nightmares, depression and even suicidal tendencies. Some victims experience physical effects such as skin problems, headaches or pain.

When can bullying start?

Research shows that **children can enter pre-school ready to bully or be a more likely target of bullying**. If subtle behaviours are not challenged, these can become entrenched and escalate as children get older.



Why do some children become bullies?

- Children learn their behaviours by what they see, try and find successful
- Some children learn very quickly that being aggressive can get them their own way
- Many bullies are/have been bullied themselves.

What can you do?

- **Take bullying behaviours very seriously**. Do not allow children of any age to use intimidation to get their own way.
- Teach children **how to show respect** for each other, and treat each other how they would like to be treated. Children will learn best by seeing you do this.
- Help children to **identify feelings in others**, and **how to deal with negative emotions in themselves in healthy ways**.
- Build children's confidence by reinforcing **assertive body language** and behaviours; encourage them to look after each other. Use role play to show them the difference

between being aggressive and being assertive.

- Show children the [link between actions and consequences](#).
- If a child discloses that they are being bullied, it is vital that you [listen and reassure](#). Establish whether it is really bullying, or rather a falling out/minor isolated incident. [Discuss a plan of action with the nursery/school](#). Encourage the child to seek support from other peers and to practice the assertiveness strategies we teach.

- Make sure your child's nursery/school has a [clear bullying policy](#) and actively promotes an ethos of respect.
- Children who bully will need [help to change their behaviour](#). They will need to be shown how to speak and act in respectful ways. Challenge them to think about how they would feel in the other person's shoes. Encourage other children to challenge bullying behaviour.
- If you need further help or advice, [contact us](#) for details of some excellent anti-bullying organisation.



Strangers

Even at pre-school age, many children have the wrong idea about who a stranger is. Do not tell children that strangers are 'bad men', 'someone who will hurt you', or that they will 'take you away and tie you up'. We keep it very simple and say:

"A stranger is someone you don't know."

Most strangers are good people, but you just don't know them.

We make it very clear that young children should not talk to a stranger when they're not with a grown-up who's looking after them.

Do adults confuse children?

Yes!

- Adults often tell children 'Don't talk to strangers' even though they may not know what a stranger is, or that it might be ok if you are with them.
- Adults tell children 'Don't be rude to grown-ups', when they just mean 'Don't ignore Uncle Fred when he says cheerio'.
- Adults tell children to 'Speak when you're spoken to', when they just mean 'I expect an answer when I ask you a question'

We should be specific when giving advice to young children.

What are the facts about strangers?

Abduction and/or abuse of children by strangers is **very rare**, much less common than abuse by known adults. However, it does still happen. Many of your friends or relatives may know of cases where a stranger attempted to attack or abduct a child they knew.

Predatory strangers work very hard to seem friendly and 'safe' to children, and will use subtle tricks to entice them.

The attraction of sweets, games or fun activities is still used today.

Some regular strangers may unwittingly offer things to children out of kindness, but children cannot tell good strangers from bad, so the rule must be **'never'**.

If a child has been assaulted by a stranger, they won't always tell. They may be afraid of getting into trouble or may have been threatened. This is another reason why **the child must know that they can talk to you about anything**. They need to know that you won't be angry with them.



What if my child gets lost?

It's very important that children know what to do if they get lost.

You should work out a plan with the child and remind them of it often.

You will need to judge what you think the child is capable of e.g. can they find the customer service desk in the shop? Should they just stand and shout for me as loud as they can?

What if I find a child that is lost?

Keep out-with touching distance, because you are a stranger to the child. Take responsibility for the child's safety and get other people to help by checking nearby areas. Alert the police (or security if you are in a shopping centre). Don't move a child unless they are in a dangerous place e.g. the middle of a road.



Secrets

Who abuses children?

Child abusers are a diverse group. They come **from all walks of life** and have different reasons for their attraction to children. Most are men, but not all. More often than not, they will appear safe, ordinary and very good with children. They use a variety of clever methods to access children and groom them. **Sexual abuse is equally prevalent across all classes and backgrounds.**

How can we make children less vulnerable?

- With young children, you can be very matter-of-fact in telling them that **kisses, cuddles and touches should never be secret.**
- **Don't force children to kiss or cuddle someone when they don't want to.** It is better to deal with a hurt relative than have the child think they have no choice over touches to their body. The child could blow a kiss instead, draw a picture as a present or even shake hands!
- Remain **approachable**; what has been said before about listening is hugely relevant here.
- **Abusers target children with low self-esteem** or who seem lonely. Make time for children, talk with them regularly, and help them to develop friendships.
- You may already use the word 'secret' in your family. Abusers use the innocent nature of secrets in a negative way to stop children from telling. You may want to **distinguish between 'surprises' and 'secrets'**

and encourage your child not to keep secrets from you.

- Children don't always have the words to explain things to you. Any **sudden change of behaviour or habits** needs to be explored.
- Ask questions if it's not clear what the child is saying to you. Ask 'where', 'when', 'who', 'what happened before/next'. Do not ask children 'why'. Be aware that **abusers are devious and will often use harmless names for their abusive acts e.g. 'tickles', so that no notice is taken if the child complains.**
- Physical signs of abuse should never be ignored. Neither should a child **acting, talking or playing in a sexual way** displaying knowledge beyond their years. Many other indicators of abuse can also be attributed to other causes, but these need exploring in any case.

What if a child tells me they have been abused?

If a child does disclose experiences of abuse, make sure they are **believed**. Stay **calm**, listen and reassure them that they have **done the right thing**. Young children generally do not have the capacity to lie about these things. It is important to act early and **report** it – the child needs help.

What if I suspect abuse?

It can be extremely difficult to report someone that you know, especially when you are not sure if it is definitely abuse. However, any suspicions must be reported to Social Work Services or the Police as they are the only agencies that can investigate. **If you do report suspected abuse, you are not starting something that cannot be stopped if the professionals involved feel that everything is ok.** If it is not reported, it cannot be looked into.

What do ssf staff do if they are concerned about a child?

We work within the **Highland Council Child Protection Guidelines** and follow the same protocols as other nursery/school staff. Concerns would be shared with the Head Teacher/Service Manager, who then decides whether the information needs to be shared in order to protect the child. The Project Worker would complete an ssf concern form which is passed onto the Project Coordinator and followed up within seven days. No confidential information is shared by us out-with the people who need to be immediately involved.



If you would like to help us in the valuable work of ssf, please do get in touch. We appreciate help with anything from working with children to IT skills or fundraising. Whatever your skill is, we will find a use for it!

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