

# MINIMUM EXPECTATIONS FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

*This document will be used for these intended purposes:*

- 1. To satisfy House Bill 286, Second Substitute Child Sexual Abuse Prevention, sponsored in the 2014 General Session of the Utah Legislature by Rep. Angela Romero, which enacted Utah Code 53G-9-207, provisions relating to child sexual abuse prevention training and instruction in public schools.*
- 2. As a guide for evaluation of possible curricula by the state and possibly by Local Education Agencies throughout Utah.*

## TRAINER EXPECTATIONS

**Method of teaching:** The training of parents, caregivers, and guardians should be oriented to empower them as the primary trainers of their children. The training should include interactive portions.

**Have familiarity with law:** Read and understand Utah's laws in regard to sexual abuse, Utah Code 53E-9-302.

**Cultural differences and/or special populations:** Be mindful of your own cultural upbringing, and teach to the individual in equitable ways.

**Limits of training:** Training should focus on prevention and interruption of child sexual abuse.

## REQUIRED PROGRAM CONCEPTS

*All bolded terms are minimum expectations. Accompanying information should be treated as explanatory to the bolded term.*

**Sexual misconduct:** Any act or acts by any person involving sexual molestation or exploitation of a youth including but not limited to incest, prostitution, rape, sodomy, or any lewd and lascivious conduct involving a youth. Any sexual act by an adult that makes the youth feel uncomfortable. This can include physical and non-physical contact, pictures, inappropriate jokes or communication and other grooming behaviors.

**Statistics:** It is estimated that more than 300,000 children in the United States are sexually abused every year. According to the National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Study, one in four girls and one in six boys will experience some form of sexual abuse before age 18. Fewer than one in 10 cases are reported. More than 88 percent of adults who were abused say they never reported the abuse to authorities. Between 80 and 90 percent of all perpetrators are someone who is close with the family, most likely in the victim's "circle of trust."

In Utah, 5,359 abuse cases were opened in 2014, according to the Utah Children’s Justice Centers. Of the types of victimizations reported, 78 percent were sexual abuse. Twenty-three percent of cases included abuse by a parent, while 25 percent included abuse by another relative.

**Appropriate physical contact:** Clarify the difference between safe/healthy touch and unsafe/unhealthy touch or behaviors that uses language appropriate for grade level. Example: The private parts of your body are the parts of the body that are covered by a bathing suit.

- Safe touch: Anything that feels good and leaves us happy and comfortable. Examples include holding hands with friends, sharing meals, warm hugs from loving parents.
- Unsafe touch: Anything that leaves us feeling unsafe, confusing, or uneasy, excited or uncomfortable. Examples include touches involving special parts that are private to us, or touches that are told to be kept secret.

**Adult responsibilities:** Adults can miss critical opportunities to prevent child sexual abuse because they do not know what to look for, say, and do. By becoming educated, parents and guardians can make the world a safer place for youths. Every adult is responsible for the safety of children. If someone approaches a youth in a sexual way, adults are the ones who need to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly.

**Effects of sexual abuse:** Sexual abuse is extremely prevalent and can cause many different physical and mental health problems. The effects of sexual abuse are numerous and widespread. Survivors report increased likelihood of substance abuse and mental health issues. The side effects include increased risk of suicide and eating disorders. Both male and female victims are more likely to engage in prostitution than if they had not been abused. The economic strain on the community represents the second most expensive crime behind murder, costing the U.S. billions annually. Many victims report that they feel their innocence was taken from them, and that the emotional effects are lifelong and devastating.

**Appropriate adult behavior:** Curriculum should focus on teaching youths what good adult behavior making clear it is the responsibility of adults to keep youths safe. Youths should be taught that they have the right to ask an adult to stop and can report any behavior that concerns them to a trusted adult. Modeling good behavior is a preferred method of teaching.

**Grooming cycle:** Extensive personal actions and behaviors that build trust with youths (and often their parents or guardians) can be a step in the process of abuse. This “grooming” typically takes place over time, and develops into inappropriate physical contact. If an adult or older youth seems overly interested or creates opportunities to be alone with another youth, it is important to be aware and stop the cycle immediately. Parents and guardians who know and recognize these behaviors are better prepared to prevent sexual abuse before it happens. Grooming is a subtle (hard to notice), gradual (slow), and escalating (more and worse over time) process of building “trust” with a youth and often the youth’s parent or other caregiver.

Grooming tricks include:

- **Fake trustworthiness** – pretending to be the youth’s friend in order to gain their trust

- **Testing boundaries** – jokes, roughhousing, back rubs, tickling, or sexualized games (pants-ing, truth or dare, strip games, etc.)
- **Touch** – from regular, mostly comfortable non-sexual touch to “accidental” touch of private parts, often over time
- **Intimidation** – using fear, embarrassment, or guilt to keep a youth from telling
- **Sharing sexual material** – capitalizing on a youth’s natural curiosity to normalize sexual behavior by showing pictures, videos, text messages, photos, websites, notes, etc. of a sexual nature
- **Breaking rules** – encouraging a youth to break rules, which establishes secret-keeping as part of the relationship and can be used as blackmail in the future
- **Drugs and alcohol** – breaking the rules (see above) and/or making the youth less able to stop the abuse because they’re under the influence of the substance
- **Communicating secretly** – texting, emailing, or calling in an unexpected way (parents don’t know about it, it happens a lot, the youth is told to keep it a secret)
- **Blaming and confusing** – making the youth feel responsible for the abuse or what could happen to the youth, his/her family, or the abuser if the youth tells anyone

**Where abuse occurs:** Anywhere there are youths (homes, schools, bedrooms, locker-rooms, cars, social media, etc.) Sexual abuse is a crime that fuels off of secrecy and trust. In short, wherever a youth is alone with an adult is a potential place where he or she could be subjected to sexual abuse.

**Trafficking:** Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery in which traffickers use force, fraud, or coercion to control victims for the purpose of engaging in commercial sex acts or labor services against his/her will. These crimes include digital trafficking, including the production and distribution of photographs, videos, and other media of underage victims through online social networks.

**Myth-busting facts:**

- Prevention efforts do matter and by learning the facts, caregivers can make a difference.
- Adults miss opportunities to prevent child sexual abuse because of misinformation and confusing stereotypes. An abuser takes on all shapes and sizes, regardless of social status, ethnicity, race, or creed.
- An abuser is generally someone the family knows and trusts; someone who has easy and consistent access to the youth. The idea that the perpetrator is a “stranger lurking in a dark alley” is most often not the case.
- Sexual abuse doesn’t only happen to girls; it is not only committed by men. Boys and girls alike can be victims, just as women can be perpetrators of sexual abuse.
- Most victims do not become abusers.

**Signs of abuse:** There are many different signs that may be given by a youth who is a victim of abuse. Many signs together could even mean other stressors are occurring in a youth’s life that are affecting their well-being, such as divorce or bullying. However, if a parent or guardian is

witness to a combination of these signs, they should pay close attention and make sure to address it immediately.

**Behavioral signs:**

- Sleeping disturbances
- Sudden personality changes
- Older youths reverting back to younger behaviors
- Unexplained fear or refusal to be around a certain individual, or refusal to go to typical activities
- Sexual reactivity that is inappropriate for the youth's stage of development
- Self-harming behaviors, such as cutting
- Participating in self-defeating behaviors or high risk, such as substance abuse

**Physical signs:**

- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Torn clothing
- Stained or bloody underwear
- Pain or itching in the genital area
- Sudden weight gain, or loss

**Perpetrator information and traits:** Perpetrators can look and act like everyday people. They can be charming, charismatic, and pillars in the community. Perpetrators will attempt to earn trust, thus challenging parent and guardians' instincts and causing them to let down their guard. They are methodical in their efforts to keep up the image they have worked to create. People who society respects and admires can be perpetrators, including those in the workplace. Adults who have access to youths before or after school, or in private situations, are more likely to sexually abuse youths. Any employee, including volunteers, might abuse. Sexual predators in schools are often well-liked or considered excellent teachers. Rumors can an important source of information on educator or caregiver sexual misconduct.

**Risk factors:** Certain traits or behaviors of a youth can put them at higher risk. Those who are insecure, have low self-esteem, feel lonely, or are disconnected are particularly vulnerable. Other factors include if he/she lacks access to information about sex and sexuality, or is exposed to videos, music, or video games that are violent, sexually explicit, or degrading to women. If there is unsupervised access to technology (the Internet, cell phone), or the youth has a disability (cognitive, physical, emotional and/or learning), he or she may be susceptible.

## **LAWS AND RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING PREVENTION AND DISCLOSURE**

**Mandatory reporting and requirements:** In Utah, all adults are legally obligated to report suspected abuse, not just teachers, social workers, or police. Anyone who suspects any type of abuse to any child is required by law to call and report. There is an added importance to reporting for parents and guardians as they are in a position of trust and power. If one suspects a youth is being (or has been) sexually abused, that person should immediately call Utah's 24-hour Child Protection Line: 1-855-323-3237. The hotline makes it easy to share concerns about

a youth with a trained social worker. A person does not need to be certain abuse has occurred to call.

**How to react:** When a youth discloses sexual abuse, the reaction plays an important part in whether the youth will continue to confide, or will shut off. Parents and guardians should actively listen as the youth share experiences and ask themselves: Am I showing care and love, or am I quick to cast aside their experiences in response to my own uncomfortable feelings? Youths will pick up on everything from our mannerisms to our attentiveness (or lack thereof), and potentially judge themselves “guilty” or “dirty” according to how they feel their parent or guardian perceives them. It is important to learn what to say, and what *not* to say.

Establish trust in the following ways:

- Don’t “interview” the youth; allow law enforcement and professionals to do that.
- Help the youth feel comfortable.
- Reassure the youth the abuse is not his or her fault.
- Don’t react with shock, anger, or disgust.
- Don’t force a youth to talk.
- Don’t force a youth to show injuries.
- Use terms and language that the youth can understand.
- Don’t teach the youth new terms or words; speak clearly and simply.
- Find out what the youth wants from you.
- Be honest with the youth.
- Confirm the validity of the youth’s feelings.
- Be supportive, and help the youth understand that he or she does not have to carry the burden alone.

**What to expect when you report:** Try to have as much information on hand as possible, including the name of the youth and his or her parents/caretakers; the youth’s date of birth, address, school or child care provider; and, the nature of the concerns. The system is set up to handle an investigation in a way that considers the well-being of the youth. By following the appropriate steps for reporting, chances are the youth will not be traumatized further by multiple interviews and the case will remain untainted by outside sources. After reporting potential abuse, you are turning over the information to authorities and have no legal right to further details.

## **PREVENTION**

**School policy:** Each school has procedures and prevention policies set in place to protect against sexual abuse and sexual predators. Parents and guardians should educate themselves on schools’ programs and work closely with school officials to reinforce these practices at home. Coordinate efforts in both the school and home environments to provide a clear and unified discussion of abuse, its terminology and signs, and the proper ways to report when one suspects abuse.

**Minimize risk:** Set clear boundaries and rules with a youth's time, and think carefully about the safety of situations in which older youths have access to younger children. Parents and guardians should ensure multiple adults are present to supervise. Consider the safety of any isolated, one-on-one settings, and choose group situations whenever possible. Caregivers should monitor youth's Internet use because perpetrators use the Internet to lure youths into physical contact.

**Trust your intuition:** When reflecting on someone's behavior, consider the following: Does it seem odd? Does it make you feel uncomfortable? Does it seem to happen all the time or too often? Has anyone else commented or noticed? If the answer is yes, then trust your instincts and act. Confronting the person, or reporting what you suspect, may save the life of a child.

**Set and respect family boundaries:** All members of the family have rights to privacy in dressing, bathing, sleeping, and other personal activities. If anyone does not respect these rights, an adult should clearly tell them the family rules.

**Right to say no:** Teach youths the right to say no when anyone wants to touch anywhere normally covered by a swimming suit. Teach youths to say NO loudly. Explain that doing this will not get them in trouble. Teach youths about "bad secrets" and the difference between a surprise and a secret. Empower youths with the right to privacy and to say no, but pair it with the understanding that the adults are the ones responsible for correct behavior.

**Communication:** Parents and guardians should talk to youths about sexual abuse with clarity and confidence. All prevention efforts are strengthened by the reinforcement of prevention concepts by caregivers. Practicing what to say will help to prepare for the conversations. Making sure youths have the words they need to describe situations that make them feel mixed up or uncomfortable. Experts suggest when talking to youths about body parts, that it is best to use the correct names, i.e. penis and vagina. When nicknames are used it can make it difficult or confusing for the youth to report.

**Accountability:** Youths shouldn't have the burden of preventing sexual abuse by themselves. Adults must act on their commitment to keeping youths safe by learning to recognize and respond to inappropriate behaviors around youths, before a youth is harmed, and reporting if something has occurred.

**Safety plans:** Make a plan ahead of time about:

1. What are the boundaries are for adult interactions with youths, including social media, internet, and texting boundaries?
2. What will be said if there is behavior that violates those boundaries?
3. How will the parent or guardian report abuse (what number to call, what information is needed, etc.)?
4. How will the youth report abuse?