How to respond to child sexual victimization within the community

While child abduction is rare, it is a parent's worst nightmare. When a child is victimized through abduction or sexual assault, it affects the entire community. Questions often arise, such as, "How can I keep my child safe?" and "My child is terrified, what should I do?" Adults need to empower children with age-appropriate information without inciting panic and fear. It is important to re-establish their sense of security.

It is important for parents to assess risk that exists in their child's life and daily routines. There is a difference between information parents need to know and age-appropriate information children need to learn. The following information outlines ways parents can get started:

What parents need to do

- Reassure children that they are safe.
- Be patient and always answer a child's questions with age-appropriate information. Children do not need and cannot handle details of child victimization. They need to know that trusted adults are taking care of matters and that they are safe.
- Protect children from media exposure. Information conveyed through the media is not meant for children and will only create more fear.
- Be emotionally available. Many children who feel stress become more clingy, anxious and emotional. It is a positive sign if a child feeling distress reaches out to you for support. Be calm and supportive.
- Keep routines. Consistency and predictability will help children reestablish a sense of security and control.
- Know where your children are at all times. Be familiar with their friends and daily activities.
- Teach children to always get your permission before going anywhere with anyone.
- Introduce daily personal safety skills so they become second nature.
- Take a look your child's daily routine and learn ways to increase his/her safety, such as when playing in the community, attending programs and activities, etc. For more information visit **www.commit2kids.ca** and **www.kidsintheknow.ca.**

What children need to know

Buddy System
There is safety in numbers. A child is less likely to be targeted if s/he is with someone else. If something does happen, help is quickly accessible.

If asked to go and your parents don't know – shout No!
Always have permission from your parents/guardian before going anywhere with anyone or before accepting gifts from anyone.

Shout No – Run and Tell Someone
Be assertive. If someone tries to take you somewhere, don't worry about being polite. You have the right to shout "No", run away and tell an adult immediately.

Trust your instincts
Pay attention to weirdness – this is a danger warning. If you ever feel uncomfortable with the way someone is acting (or in any situation), leave and tell a trusted adult about it. Talk about weirdness with a trusted adult!

Speak Secrets
Secrets that that you are told never to tell or make you feel confused or uncomfortable should be shared with a trusted adult. This includes "secret" touching, touching private parts, being asked to take naked pictures, given drugs or alcohol, or being asked to secretly spend time with someone. No child should have a secret they feel they have to keep forever.

Make safety a habit

During times of crisis we are often reminded about the importance of teaching children about personal safety. As adults, we often shy away from teaching children about sexual abuse and abduction, feeling we will frighten them. Safety education helps build a child's confidence and critical thinking skills, and prepares them for dangerous situations that they may encounter.