

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT PERSONAL SAFETY – COMPILED BY OHEL PROFESSIONALS

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SEXUAL ABUSE: PREVENT, POLICE, PROSECUTE

By: David Mandel, CEO, OHEL

There are several ways we, as parents, educators and the community, can work together to even more effectively prevent the occurrence of child sexual abuse.

Parents should speak to their children at several different stages in the child's life, while schools must adopt a strong program to educate students, faculty and parents as well as monitor and adhere to mandated reporting protocols.

Increased Prevention In Our Schools

Tens of thousands of children attend private and day school.

Typically a school administrator or principal will interview and complete an extensive reference check prior to hiring. This is all good. But there is one important missing piece of information - a criminal background check on the potential employee, as advocated by Elliot Pasik, Esq., amongst others.

Our schools are filled with wonderful and loving dedicated principals and teachers, who professionally teach and shape generations of children.

But, as in every large group, there may be a very small number of individuals who are a danger. So the question becomes: How do we identify them and prevent them from entering our school system?

Social service organizations have for many years been mandated to do criminal background checks which includes fingerprinting of all employees. The system also sends information to employers of any new criminal proceedings against a person already in their employ. For example, if a long-standing employee of ten years was convicted of a felony assault, the employer would immediately be notified.

Why is this important? It's playing the odds. It's only a matter of time before a hit comes back on an employee in some yeshiva or day school with a criminal record and possibly a history of sexual abuse against a child. There are very few individuals in our community who have been convicted of crimes related to child sexual abuse, and even fewer on Meagan's List. It may be a long shot, but we always want the odds to be in favor of our children.

Increased Policing With Law Enforcement

In September 1999, I penned an article entitled SECRETS urging parents who believe their child was sexually abused to report to the police, *"The concept of protecting one child [from shame and stigma] by not reporting this to the police, virtually assures that other children will be hurt in the neighborhood park."* In a dozen subsequent articles in newspapers and magazines, the importance of working with police and district attorney staff to prosecute child molesters was emphasized.

In *Breaking the Silence: Sexual Abuse in the Jewish Community*, a book edited by Dr. David Pelcovitz and myself, Rav David Cohen describes the imperative of adhering to mandated reporting laws including contacting the police when sexual abuse takes place.

Increased Prosecution of Criminals

Only by pushing such individuals into the criminal justice system can we prevent them from harming other children. Why? Because the reality is that only once child molesters are actually prosecuted and have a criminal record, we will know who they are, and through background checks, we can keep them from jobs that have access and opportunity to children.



OHEL professionals are available to provide support and counseling to any individual and family, as well as visit any school, day camp, overnight camp, summer community, workplace or any group that may benefit from such a discussion.

Please call 1-800-603-OHEL or e-mail info@ohelfamily.org.

- 1 Reassure your children the world is basically a safe place.
- 2 Parents should let their children know it is safe to speak to them. Most children actually do want to speak and share information with their parents.
- 3 Parents should prepare together for their conversation with their child and give the same message.
- 4 When you speak to your child, be in the right frame of mind and devote your full attention to this discussion.
- 5 Use simple language and give clear practical examples that are age-appropriate for each of your children. Give several examples, not only "no one can touch you under your bathing suit." There are many other types of "touches," e.g. on top of clothing, tickling, chills, over-friendly hugs.
The person who may inappropriately touch your child is often someone he or she knows; it is usually not a stranger.
- 6 Depending on your children's ages, determine if you need to have one-on-one conversation or a conversation with several children together.
- 7 Every child, at every age, has questions. Children are likely to be embarrassed or don't understand what to ask. Encourage questions.
- 8 Tell your children this is an ongoing dialogue. You must revisit this subject periodically, whenever you have an appropriate opportunity. Don't avoid this conversation but at the same time, don't push. You don't want to scare your child off.
- 9 Plan a response to "red flags."
- 10 Respond supportively. Don't ignore, disbelieve or punish your child for disclosing. Don't be afraid, ashamed, or overreact. Consult with an experienced professional specialist.
A child knowing that his/her parents believe and support him/her is key to healing.

OHEL has produced a short 13 minute DVD titled, "Unwanted Touch, The Most Important Conversation You Can Have With Your Child" featuring Dr. David Pelcovitz and David Mandel.

To order copies of this brochure or DVD or view the video online please visit www.ohelfamily.org/unwantedtouch