

Sexual abuse – how to keep kids safe

Recent media coverage of child abuse cases has many parents wondering how to keep their children safe and what signs to look for if they're concerned that their child may have been sexually abused.

"It's an uncomfortable topic, but child sexual abuse is actually a common experience," said Deborah Wise, professor at Pacific University's School of Professional Psychology. "Studies show that as many as one in four girls and one in six boys experience sexual abuse, and it is important that children have basic knowledge to protect themselves from potentially dangerous situations."

If children want to know what sexual abuse is, parents can explain, in a developmentally appropriate manner, that child sexual abuse is when a person much older than the child touches their private parts without their permission, suggests Wise.

"A parent might tell a child, 'If that ever happens to you, I want you to know that it's okay to tell me, it's not your fault, and I will do everything in my power to make you safe,'" she said.

"Children need to be able to talk about their bodies in ways other adults understand. They need to be taught the correct names for their body parts, and the difference between 'OK touches' and 'not OK touches.' Even very young children can understand that hugs, kisses and high fives are OK. It also can be helpful to talk with chil-

dren about how they feel when they've experienced an OK touch," she said.

"Children can typically understand that the body parts that go under bathing suits are private, and that anyone who touches those parts (other than, for example, a doctor examining a young child or a parent bathing a child) is 'not OK.' They have to understand that their bodies belong to them. Parents can help them with that too, by not making them kiss family members they don't want to kiss, for instance. It's helpful if parents generate a list of which adults it might be safe to talk with if a child experiences a 'not OK touch.'

Wise also reminds parents to let the child know that secrets about 'not OK touches' are not appropriate, and they never need to keep those kinds of secrets, no matter what anyone says.

"Children should be told that if they ever experience a 'not OK touch,' they can say no, get away as quickly as possible, and tell an adult immediately."

Children can exhibit many different symptoms following experiences of child sexual abuse, and Wise notes that these symptoms don't necessarily mean abuse has taken place. However, symptoms that have been commonly observed among sexually abused children include feelings of sadness or anger, nightmares, avoidance of certain people, places or feelings, difficulty

concentrating, irritability, jumpiness, and aggressive or sexual acting out behaviors. In addition, children sometimes repeat their sexual experiences in play with toys, or talk about being 'damaged' or concerned that something is wrong with them.

"Parents who suspect that child sexual abuse has taken place should ask their child what's wrong, and let the child tell them in their own words," said Wise. "If a child does disclose sexual abuse, it's very important that the parent or child-care worker report the abuse to local social service agencies, who will investigate the allegations. It's the parent's job to provide support and try to get the child the help needed, not to investigate the allegations."

Wise specializes in helping children and adolescents cope with experiences of child sexual abuse. She may be contacted at 503-352-2615 or by email at <dwise@pacificu.edu>.

Pacific University's Psychological Service Center provides training to students who are committed to careers in professional psychology and to deliver high quality services to the community. The Center provides psychological services to children, adolescents, and adults throughout the greater Portland area. Intellectual and personality assessment, neuropsychological and vocational assessment, individual child and adult therapy, couples, and family therapy, group therapy, and consultation are offered.

Tobacco quit-line again in place after state finds money to restart

After an eight-month hiatus, Oregon's Tobacco Prevention and Education Program, which is credited with saving lives and money has been reinstated. The reinstatement includes the return of the toll-free Oregon Tobacco Quit Line.

State budget woes caused the Legislature last April to shift voter-approved cigarette tax revenues to the state's general fund. Partial funding of \$5.815 million was recently reinstated.

"It's good news for everyone that tobacco prevention and education efforts are back," said Mel Kohn, M.D., state epidemiologist in the Oregon Department of Human Services. "Tobacco use costs Oregon more than \$1.8 billion per year due to premature death, illness and medical costs. Eighteen Oregonians die every day from tobacco-related illnesses. This program reduces these high personal and financial costs."

The tobacco prevention and education program has generated considerable success since its inception in 1996: 75,000 fewer adult smokers, 25,000 fewer youth smokers, 1.5 billion fewer cigarettes sold annually and 60,000 fewer adults using smokeless tobacco.

Part of the reason for this success is the program's toll-free quit line. Callers first began dialing up tobacco cessation specialists in 1998. Since then, more than 60,000 Oregonians

have called seeking help in trying to stop smoking or chewing tobacco.

Six month follow-up surveys showed that more than 20 percent of callers reported being tobacco free, a success rate more than double that of people who try to quit on their own, studies show.

Other components of the overall program such as community, tribal, multi-cultural and school-based efforts are set to begin during early 2004.

The Oregon Tobacco Quit Line toll-free number is 1-877-270 STOP (7867), or Spanish 1-877-2 NO FUME (66-3863).

Presentation on skin cancer for Tuality seminar

An overview on skin cancer will be presented during a Cancer Awareness seminar hosted by Tuality Healthcare on Monday, January 19, 6-7:30 p.m. at the Tuality Health Education Center, 334 SE Eighth Ave, Hillsboro.

It's never too early to plan for next summer's sunny days – and the effect the sun has on your skin. Thomas Gilberts, M.D., internal medicine specialist, will discuss skin cancer.

Discover more about the common types of skin cancer, risk factors and warning signs to be aware of, and how to help prevent it.

Ike Says . . .

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the Blacktail numbers in our area, though, this season should have been scrapped when ODF&W cut five days off the rifle deer season.

I have been waiting and watching the Healthy Forest Initiative to see how it is supposed to work. President Bush signed this bill into law and now we will get to see, first hand. What I still have not figured out is how, after we reduce the fuel loads and harvest a few (maybe a lot of) merchantable trees in the process, we will be able to call the job done. While this initiative is being carried out over twenty years, the undergrowth will be growing right back in behind the workers. What are we going to cut down

for merchantable timber the next time? We have to face the fact that trees and brush are going to grow and that fires are going to happen; it's the way it is! What we can do is create firebreaks around cities and other sensitive areas, but we will never be able to totally protect all of those who choose to live in the forests.

Enjoy the outdoors in 2004, and have a safe and happy New Year!

Izaak Walton League Nehalem Valley Chapter meets on the third Thursday of each month at 7:00 p.m. Call 503-429-7193 for location of meeting.



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