

Teaching Children to Protect Themselves

Teaching Children to Protect Themselves

A resource for teachers and adults
who care for young children

Freda Briggs with Michael McVeity

Illustrations by Monica Love

This paperback edition published in 2000

Copyright © text Freda Briggs and Michael McVeity 2000

Copyright © illustrations by Monica Love 2000

Copyright © photographs by Freda Briggs and Mary Sofka 2000

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher. *The Australian Copyright Act* 1968 (the Act) allows a maximum of one chapter or 10% of this book, whichever is the greater, to be photocopied by any educational institution for its educational purposes provided that the educational institution (or body that administers it) has given a remuneration notice to Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) under the Act.

Allen & Unwin
83 Alexander Street
Crows Nest NSW 2065
Australia
Phone: (61 2) 8425 0100
Fax: (61 2) 9906 2218
Email: frontdesk@allen-unwin.com.au
Web: <http://www.allenandunwin.com>

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication entry:

Briggs, Freda.

Teaching children to protect themselves: a resource for teachers and adults who care for young children.

Bibliography.
Includes index.

ISBN 1 86448 992 8.

1. Child sexual abuse—Prevention—Study and teaching. 2. Sexually abused children—Protection. 3. Child abuse—Prevention—Study and teaching.

I. McVeity, Michael. II. Love, Monica. III. Title.

362.767

Set in 11/13 pt Garamond by DOCUPRO, Sydney
Printed by South Wind Productions Pte Ltd, Singapore

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

<i>About the authors</i>	<i>vi</i>
Part 1 Guidelines for teachers and care-givers	1
1 Why all children need a safety program	3
2 The importance of care-givers and parents	18
3 Responding to actual or suspected sexual abuse	33
4 Integrating safety education into the wider curriculum	38
5 Strategies for teaching safety skills	44
6 On-line safety	51
7 Protect yourself	58
Part 2 Themes and activities	63
Theme 1: It's my body	67
Theme 2: Some parts of our bodies are private	83
Theme 3: Talking about touching	105
Theme 4: Staying safe with strangers	125
Theme 5: Secrets	141
Revision: Problem-solving exercises	149
<i>References</i>	<i>150</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>153</i>

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Freda Briggs is Professor of Child Development at the University of South Australia. She has a long professional history in the child protection field; first with the Metropolitan Police in London, second in residential social work, and third as an early childhood teacher in schools in disadvantaged areas. She pioneered education and research for child protection in Australia and established the first term-long, multi-professional tertiary course in 1980. In 1990, 1991 and 1995 she evaluated *Protective Behaviours* in Australia and the New Zealand school-based national safety curriculum, *Keeping Ourselves Safe*, with children of 5–8 and 10–12 years. Her research projects have involved children, parents, victims of sexual abuse and offenders.

This is Freda Briggs' tenth book on the topic of child protection. Others include: *The Early Years of School: Teaching and Learning* (1999 with Gillian Potter), *Child Protection: A Guide for Teachers and Childcare Professionals* (1997 with Russell Hawkins), *Developing Personal Safety Skills in Children with Disabilities* (1995), *Children and Families: Australian Perspectives* (ed. 1995), *From Victim to Offender: How Child Sexual Abuse Victims Become Offenders* (1995), *Why my Child?* (1993), *Keep Children Safe* (1988) and *Child Sexual Abuse: Confronting the Problem* (1986).

Since 1985, Freda has acted as consultant to the New Zealand Police and Ministry of Education on the national school-based child protection curriculum (Reception class (R) to Year 12) *Keeping Ourselves Safe*. She performed a similar function for the Department of Education and Training, New South Wales, writing *Child Protection Education* in 1997.

Freda received the inaugural Australian Humanitarian Award (Education) in 1998.

Michael McVeity is a qualified teacher with vast expertise in teaching personal safety skills to children. He became aware of the size of the child abuse problem during his fourteen years' experience as a primary school teacher in Adelaide.

Michael served as a Child Protection Adviser for two years before winning the position of State Child Protection Curriculum Officer with the Department of Education and Children's Services, South Australia. He held that post for seven years until it was phased out in 1999 and then returned to the primary school as a student counsellor.

During his employment as a curriculum specialist, Michael had responsibility for the production of a wide variety of child protection teaching materials (print and video) to use with children. His role included supporting teachers and schools in the implementation of the Wisconsin *Protective Behaviours* program.

Michael wrote and co-authored child protection articles for the Department's in-house paper, *X-press*, on topics such as touching children, secrecy, assisting abused children in the classroom and domestic violence. He was also closely involved in evaluations of child protection curriculum and related research conducted by the University of South Australia.

Monica Love is an early childhood teacher whose sensitive child protection illustrations have been tried and recommended by teachers using Freda Briggs' earlier books.

Part 1

Guidelines for teachers and care-givers

1

WHY ALL CHILDREN NEED A SAFETY PROGRAM

It used to be argued that we should not have to provide personal safety programs in schools because adults should take responsibility for children's safety. Few people would disagree. However, the sad reality is that adults, and families in particular, have an abysmal record in child protection. Evidence of the extent of their failure came to media attention in the early 1980s and led to the adoption of school-based child protection curriculum by education authorities throughout the English-speaking world.

Two extremes of parenting styles are evident in Western society. Some parents accept that the child's world is unsafe and they respond by over-protecting and over-supervising children. Then, when an emergency arises, the children lack the experience, knowledge and skills to stay safe. At the other extreme are the negligent parents. Some think that they can protect children's 'innocence' by depriving them of knowledge about their bodies and their rights. At the other extreme, some allow children to grow up in overly sexualised, unsafe—if not abusive—environments.

Children find themselves in many different kinds of potentially unsafe situations. Traditionally, schools have accepted responsibility for teaching safety skills. At pre-school, children are shown how to stay safe while using electrical equipment, heat, knives, scissors and woodwork tools. They are taught how to stay safe in traffic and near water. They learn safety and hygiene in cooking. It follows that school is the best place for teaching children how to stay safe with people.

Most American and Canadian schools have long had access to comprehensive personal safety programs. In New Zealand, a national developmentally appropriate program, *Keeping*

Ourselves Safe, covers all aspects of safety for children from school entry to Year 12. Similarly, the Department of Education and Training for New South Wales has produced curriculum guidelines to be used with children from pre-school to Year 12 (*Child Protection Education: 1997–98*). The first edition included separate modules for use with children under five years, parents, communities and children with disabilities.

In South Australia, the Wisconsin program *Protective Behaviours* was adopted by State and Catholic schools as core curriculum in the mid-1980s. Catholic Education included aspects of *Protective Behaviours* and sexuality education in 'Family Life' curriculum. Unfortunately, several studies have shown that teachers use programs spasmodically and selectively, omitting the essential concepts relating to children's rights and the need to reject and report sexual misbehaviour.

Some child protection programs are vague, assuming that children will know instinctively what constitutes reportable sexual abuse. *Protective Behaviours* assumes that sexual misbehaviour will feel unsafe and, therefore, we only need to teach children to recognise unsafe feelings to keep them safe. By omission, *Protective Behaviours* gives the impression that 'if it feels OK, it is OK'. International research has subsequently shown that these assumptions are wrong and dangerous.

South Australian teachers argued that a major reason for their avoidance of essential information in *Protective Behaviours* was the shortage of 'developmentally appropriate' specific teaching materials for the sensitive parts of the program (Briggs 1991a, 1991b; Briggs and Hawkins 1994a, 1997; Johnson 1995).

This book has been written to fill that gap.

4 Guidelines for teachers and care-givers

Given that there are many publications available relating to developing children's self-esteem, understanding and expressing feelings, practising road and other forms of safety, the authors have specifically focused on the protection of children from sexual abuse.

This book provides ideas for teachers and parents as well as counsellors and therapists working both with children at risk of abuse and children who have been abused. The authors have taken account of recent research findings and evaluations of programs by children and parents.

Unfortunately there is no quick and easy fix to the problem of child sexual abuse. Safety skills cannot be taught in a single session or a single day. Teaching has to be ongoing, with opportunities for regular practice and reinforcement. The safest children are those who possess sound safety knowledge. They have teachers and parents who model safe behaviours and are open and honest in their relationships with children.

ALL CHILDREN ARE VULNERABLE TO SEXUAL ABUSE

All children are at risk of sexual abuse regardless of their age, gender, social class, race, religion or ethnicity. Most child victims are abused by people they know and trust.

Children have certain attributes and beliefs that put them at risk.

Children are relatively powerless

All children depend on adults to meet their basic needs. Ultimately, they also depend on adults to protect them. Child sexual abuse is about the abuse of power. It involves the strong and well-informed using the powerless and uninformed for sexual pleasure and degradation. Offenders gain satisfaction from planning their conquests and manipulating trusting victims. Some manipulate victims' parents and some abuse children when parents are in the same tent, room or car. The greater the risk, the greater the excitement.

Children are especially powerless when they are deprived of an open and honest protection program which provides safety knowledge, opportunities to practise safety skills, information about their rights and what constitutes unacceptable, reportable behaviour. The younger

and less well-informed the child, the greater the vulnerability to abuse.

Children trust adults to keep them safe

Five-year-olds are fearless. Without a child protection program, they implicitly trust adults to keep them safe. From five to eight years, they worry about violence, strangers and imaginary creatures, shadows, the dark and being at home alone. Nightmares are among the worst problems for children aged six and even the most negligent and abusive parents are trusted because they provide comfort and take frightened children into their beds in the middle of the night. From eight years upwards, fears tend to be more experience-related, focusing on bullying and adult violence. Adults are perceived as safe because they provide protection from bullies and violent children (Briggs and Hawkins 1993).

Young children are incapable of assessing adults' motives

Child molesters use coercion, tricks, bribes, threats, blackmail, secrecy and sophisticated seduction techniques to manipulate their victims (Briggs 1995a; Elliott, Browne and Kilcoyne 1995). Piaget's theory of moral development (1965) tells us that children under seven or eight years of age cannot assess adults' motives. *Children judge people as good or bad by their appearance, demeanour and the outcome of their actions.* As a consequence, paedophiles are often perceived by their victims as kind and loving because, in the seduction process, they are attentive and flattering, they make children feel important and provide treats. Victims often accept painful abuse as the price they have to pay for an emotionally or materially rewarding relationship. Children who lack an affectionate father figure are especially vulnerable because of their need for a male role model, male attention and male approval.

Without a child protection program that tells children *explicitly* what is unacceptable and reportable behaviour, abuse victims are likely to believe offenders when they say things like:

'It's OK. It's fun. It's what guys do.'

'This is what people do when they love each other. Would I ask you to do something wrong when I love you? You're safe with me.'

Victims are very confused when offenders are relatives, authority figures or people trusted by their parents.

In general, children under eight years judge all adults to be kind and trustworthy if they look kind, seem kind and smile. They are only afraid of adults with disabilities, those who seem to be different to the norm or fit the stereotype of evil strangers (Briggs and Hawkins 1993).

Children are taught to obey adults

Directly and indirectly, adults teach children, from an early age, that good children do as they are told. When parents leave children with baby-sitters, they often say, 'Be good and do what s/he tells you to do'. Young children relate disobedience to the loss of approval and affection. As a result, unless schools and parents provide a comprehensive child protection program, *children believe that they have to obey adults, even when they know that what the adults are doing or demanding is wrong*. Those deprived of protection information will follow the instructions of adult abusers rather than risk being reprimanded for disobedience. They will keep abuse secret whether asked to do so or not (Briggs 1991a, 1991b, 1995a).

Children are afraid of getting into trouble

Children know from primary school age that sexual activity and sex talk 'get kids into trouble'. They know *from experience* that most teachers, parents and care-givers respond emotionally, punitively or disbelievingly to children's conversations relating to genitals or sexual misbehaviour. As a consequence, without an open and honest child protection program with parental involvement, few children have the confidence to disclose abuse, even when they know that what is happening is wrong. In other words, they will tolerate sexual misbehaviour rather than risk losing the approval and affection of the important adults in their lives.

Children believe (often rightly) that if they report sexual misbehaviour, trusted adults will 'go mad', 'go bananas', 'freak out', 'blow a fuse', etc. Why?

- To report sexual misbehaviour, they would have to talk about 'rude' and 'naughty' things and, from experience, they know that it would constitute a punishable offence.
- Children believe that they will be blamed

because 'naughty' behaviour took place and 'naughty means that you are to blame . . . it's your fault . . . you'll get into trouble'.

- Children believe that adults will not only make a big fuss but also won't believe the children's version of what happened. Alternatively, if the adults believe them, they will blame the children for being there and thus enabling the abuse to happen.

When children aged from five to eight years were asked why adults get so cross about sexual misbehaviour, the children responded, 'It's because grown-ups like sex' (as witnessed on TV, in magazines and adult behaviour) 'but they want to keep it to themselves. They don't want kids to do it' (Briggs 1991a, 1991b, 1995a).

Children are taught to keep secrets

Child sexual abuse is made possible by the culture of secrecy. Most children are taught to keep secrets, especially adults' secrets and family secrets. They fear that they will be severely reprimanded if they 'tell'. Many a victim of sexual abuse has tentatively asked a trusted adult whether it's 'OK to tell a secret'. Unsuspecting parents and teachers usually assure them that secrets are nice and must be kept.

Without a child protection program, children believe that if they tell an adult's secret about sexual misbehaviour, they will be punished for several reasons:

- they told the adult's secret which they know to be a punishable offence;
- naughty behaviour occurred and there is guilt by association, even if they said 'No' and escaped; or
- they think that adults 'stick together' and 'don't believe kids'; children under eight years believe that their parents would tell the offender that they had told the secret, resulting in further punishment.

In other words, breaking an adult's secret is perceived as more serious than sexual misbehaviour.

Because they view the crime of breaking an adult's secret as having serious consequences, uninformed children will keep sexual abuse secret even when they know that it is wrong. This is because, in children's understanding, any sexual activity involving children is labelled as 'naughty' and adults get angry when children are naughty. They know that naughty means that:

6 Guidelines for teachers and care-givers

- 'you're bad', unlovable and deserve to be punished;
- approval will be withdrawn; and
- it's 'your fault'.

The sense that 'if bad things happen to you, it's your own fault and you must have done something to deserve it' ensures that many victims never report what happened.

Without the confidence and knowledge that comes from a comprehensive child protection program, children will not risk telling their secrets to the most caring of parents because they fear a negative emotional response and the withdrawal of affection. Children know that their mothers will be upset, especially if the perpetrator is a trusted partner (Briggs 1991a, 1991b; Briggs and Hawkins 1994a, 1994b).

Children's anxieties are dismissed

With the best of intentions, parents discourage the expression of fears, reassuring children that there is nothing to be afraid of when they are terrified and 'it doesn't hurt, it's nothing' when they are in pain. Boys often feel that they have to deny their hurt to appear self-reliant and strong. A University of South Australia pilot study (Hallion 1996) comparing parents' perceptions with children's actual anxieties confirmed that parents substantially underestimate their children's fearfulness. Children should be encouraged by parents and teachers to talk about their fears and how they can be reduced.

Older children fear teasing by peers

An additional trap for older children is their fear of embarrassment. Children aged seven and older fear that they will be derided by peers and siblings if they 'tell'.

New Zealand research showed that, without a school-based child protection program, children over seven years believed that they could not disclose sexual misbehaviour to adults because peers and siblings would find out and taunt them for being 'stupid' (for allowing a 'yucky' thing to happen).

Boys (realistically) fear that if they reveal homosexual abuse, they will be referred to as 'poofter', 'weird' and other derogatory terms by insensitive peers (Briggs 1991a, 1991b).

Children are curious about their bodies

Children are vulnerable to sexual abuse because they are sexual beings. They don't experience

sexual desire in the same way as adults, but they are curious about their bodies and they enjoy being touched and tickled in sensitive areas. Adults are often shocked when young children masturbate; however, it is normal and healthy for young children to explore their genitals in a pleasurable way providing that it is not obsessive. Masturbation is quite common from the age of three or four years. The typical adult response is to reprimand and that merely makes the child feel guilty and ashamed. The best way of handling this uncomfortable situation is to tell the child that what he or she is doing is 'OK' but 'we only do that in private in our bedrooms or bathrooms'.

Reprimands are especially confusing if children are replicating sexual abuse inflicted on them by trusted adults.

When young children show an obsession with masturbation, it is usually a sign that they are greatly troubled and need comfort. Some victims of sexual abuse masturbate excessively. They should be observed closely to identify the cause of the problem. If sexual abuse is suspected, this should be reported to the child protection service. Look in your telephone directory for a Child Abuse Helpline.

Boys are especially interested in their genitals because, unlike girls, they have no 'private parts'; their genitals are conspicuous and they handle and exhibit them in public toilets several times a day. They have the facility to compare size and shape, and at the age of six they love to see who can 'pee' the highest and farthest. Most boys have acquired a sexual vocabulary by this age. Boys are likely to be sexually aroused when others demonstrate erections and the capacity to ejaculate. Sexual interaction may then result.

Unfortunately, children's normal sexual curiosity can lead to the formation of potentially dangerous sexualised peer groups where the informed and experienced gain kudos from demonstrating their knowledge to uninformed and fascinated friends. Because of cultural taboos, sexualised boys' groups have the exciting qualities of exclusive, secret clubs (Briggs 1995a; Cook and Howells 1981). Although parents are taught that peer experimentation is harmless, there are some dangers attached to such groups:

- The leading members are often sexual abuse victims who gain acclamation for sharing



Cartoon reproduced with kind permission of Peter Nicholson. First published in *The Australian* 16.9.98

and demonstrating their knowledge of deviant adult sex.

- When sexual interest is obsessive, there is a danger that boys' groups will attract the notice of older and more violent adolescent and adult predators. *Clearly, there is a very narrow line between children's safe and unsafe sexual exploration.*

Children are uninformed

When 200 Australian male childhood victims of sexual abuse were asked what could have protected them from being abused, the uniform response was 'information about my body', otherwise referred to as sexuality education.

It is now widely accepted that, for maximum safety, children should be taught positive, developmentally appropriate sexuality education alongside child protection programs. Catholic Education in South Australia accepted this dual responsibility in their *Education for Family Life* curriculum. Some fathers protested to church authorities (and the writers) that girls 'don't need to know anything about sex until *after* they're married'. Some argued that parents, not

the school, should be responsible for teaching sexuality education but, when questioned, they admitted that they had never discussed sexuality with their adolescent sons. When asked why this had been neglected, they replied:

'They aren't old enough.'

'They don't need to know anything about sexuality because they're Catholic.'

Children are misinformed

Adults like to think that children (and children with disabilities in particular) are asexual. They ignore the fact that children are sexually curious. They forget that children hear sexual language on a daily basis and acquire inaccurate information about rape and homosexuality from the media and peers. Rape threats, AIDS and 'poofter' taunts have become part of the primary school bullying scene. Children see explicit and simulated sex acts on TV. In 1998, bright pre-schoolers were asking parents and kindergarten teachers 'What is oral sex?' after hearing news reports relating to the impeachment of the President of the United States.

Few parents supervise or limit television viewing and many children watch adult programs in the privacy of their bedrooms. Some watch pornographic videos in their own and other people's homes. They see older brothers' porn magazines and yet, despite all of this, adults continue to behave as if children are blind, deaf and ignorant of sexual activity. Kate Legge, publishing in *The Australian* (1997), wrote, 'We have never been comfortable about mentioning children and sex in the same sentence. Sex is perceived as dirty, children as pure and the most enduring taboo in modern society keeps the two at a distance.'

Modern parents should be able to impart the basic facts of reproduction, given the number of books available to help them in schools, in public libraries and personal development bookshops. What they tend to omit is the role that sexual activity plays in human relationships. Children, both boys and girls, should be taught to take good care of their bodies. This is especially important given the risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

TEACHING PERSONAL SAFETY SKILLS

Although we have known since the early 1980s that most child sexual abuse is committed by people who are known and trusted by their victims, child protection efforts (at school and at home) tend to be restricted to the avoidance of being kidnapped by strangers.

Without involvement in child protection programs, neither parents nor teachers seem to know how to teach children to stay safe. They imagine, mistakenly, that this involves giving children frightening information about deviant sex. They do not know that protection programs can be fun and, furthermore, when children undertake them with parental support, family relationships become more open, children become more confident and less fearful given their awareness of parental support (Briggs 1991a, 1991b; Briggs and Hawkins 1995a).

Complacency and denial

Even though there has been a great deal of publicity confirming that most child sexual abuse involves trusted persons, parents and teachers remain complacent about the need for protective education for children. Parents are happy when the school takes responsibility for

protective education but they avoid involvement, believing that their families are immune from this particular problem. They view child protection education as unnecessary because:

'We don't know anyone like that. There's no-one mentally ill in our family.'

'I trust all our neighbours and relatives implicitly.'

'We drive the children everywhere. We always know where they are.'

When they believe that strangers present the only danger to their families, parents think that all they have to do is act as taxi drivers to keep children safe. This is a comfortable escape from responsibility, given that none of us knows or socialises with strangers.

Parents gain comfort from the belief that all the people they trust are trustworthy and, even when faced with contrary evidence, they prefer to think that child victims are mistaken rather than admit that their trust could have been misplaced. Denial is a widespread problem. Alan Gill, researching for his book *Orphans of the Empire* (1997), found that countless disclosures of sexual abuse by children in religious boarding schools and state children's homes were dismissed and ignored by nuns, relatives, social workers and even a police commissioner.

The reality is that the justice system does not protect children from sexual abuse. Only about 10 per cent of offenders are prosecuted and only about 2 per cent are convicted. Juries may be warned that the word of a child is considered to be much less reliable than the word of an adult offender in a criminal court. Furthermore, cases are unlikely to be taken to court unless child victims/witnesses are sufficiently intelligent and sufficiently articulate to withstand hours or even days of questioning by a barrister whose sole aim is to confuse and discredit.

SEXUAL ABUSE DAMAGES CHILDREN AND SOCIETY

Unfortunately, the early sexualisation of children can cause enormous damage to their development, irrespective of whether they like or dislike what happens. At school, most abused children exhibit learning problems (Oates 1985, 1990). Their overtly sexualised behaviour is recognised by potential abusers. Paedophiles and opportunists abuse children without conscience when they believe that they are sexually experienced.

They are then victimised repeatedly and victimisation becomes a way of life. When their emotions are sexualised, children look for sex in lieu of affection. Victims who have learned that sex pleases adults may behave sexually with their teachers or older children of the same gender as their abusers. Uninformed staff may label them as ‘promiscuous’ without considering how they learned the behaviour.

Sexual abuse victims also come to the notice of teachers and parents when they re-enact their abuse with other children, replicating the behaviour and seduction methods learned from experience. If there is no therapeutic intervention, they are likely to perpetuate the abuse cycle, creating another generation of victims and future offenders.

Victims who like their abusers or enjoy some aspect of an abusive relationship are likely to suffer from enormous guilt when they realise that what was happening was wrong. This can cause great psychological harm. Victims of both sexes tend to lose their capacity to trust and many have difficulties in creating and maintaining long-term relationships. Because of associated feelings of guilt, shame, anger and self-recrimination, victims are also likely to suffer from low self-esteem, unemployment, mental and physical ill health and suicidal and self-destructive tendencies including drug abuse and alcoholism.

The financial and social costs of child abuse to society are enormous.

Children in home- or school-based child protection programs, however, are the ones least likely to be targeted for victimisation.

DISCLOSING ABUSE

Fear of breaking rules

Unreasonably, most parents believe that their children will know *instinctively* that sexual abuse is wrong if they encounter it. Without giving children any information, parents expect them to risk anger, blame, reprimand and punishment by:

- breaking the rules of obedience and disobeying the offender;
- breaking the rules which forbid discussion of sexual matters and reporting to them immediately;
- breaking the rules and telling them an adult’s secret.

Parents need to know that they cannot delay child protection education until children ask

questions; children will never introduce the subject of sexual misbehaviour. They will never ask questions if parents do not introduce what is widely recognised as a taboo subject. *It is unreasonable to expect children to ‘tell’ if, by their very avoidance of the subject, the adults have given the impression that they cannot cope with disclosures of this kind.* Sexual misbehaviour is difficult to report and children will only disclose their concerns when they know for certain, *from past experience*, that the adults will be supportive. The first approach *must* come from parents when children are young.

Lack of reporting skills

Without child protection programs, child victims do not know how to report abuse.

Children need clear reporting skills to disclose abuse. Many victims are told by offenders that their mothers know what is happening. This is a deliberate ruse to increase the victims’ sense of helplessness.

A complication is that, when uninformed victims try to make reports, they use the offenders’ language and a child’s perspective of what happened. For example:

‘I don’t like it when he wants me to play horsey.’

‘He has a magic stick.’

Children subjected to oral sex may refer to an offender’s genitals using his language, such as: ‘I don’t like the taste of his ice-cream (or milk).’

An additional complication is that children who are unsure of support will then test adults by giving them vague hints. If help is not immediately forthcoming, they are likely to accept a state of helplessness and hopelessness, especially if the offender warned that ‘no-one will believe you if you tell’. This increases the psychological damage to the child.

Hints include low-impact statements such as:

‘I don’t like my grandpa/uncle/cousin coming to our house.’

‘I don’t like going to scouts/church/sport/music lessons.’

‘I don’t want to go to his or her house any more.’

‘Is it alright if — does funny things?’

‘I’ve got a secret.’

‘Is it alright to tell a secret?’

‘Is — coming today? I don’t like the games he plays.’

‘He wears funny underpants.’

'He made the dog lick me.'
'I don't like the way he tickles me.'
'I don't like ——. S/he's mean/gross.'

Unfortunately, uninformed adults tend to confirm victims' helplessness by responding with statements such as:

'Yes, we have to keep secrets.'
'Yes, we have to learn to put up with teasing/tickling.'
'He plays with you because he loves you.'
'Of course it's OK if he's funny and it makes you laugh.'
'S/he will be upset if you don't go today. You know how s/he looks forward to seeing you.'

By comparison, a well-informed, safety-conscious adult would ask:

'Where do you see him in funny under-pants?'
'Show me where he tickles you.'
'How do you play that game?'
'What will happen if you tell the secret?'
'Who said so?'
'Who else knows about it?'
'Why don't you want to see — any more?'
'What is a magic stick?'
'Where does the milk (or ice-cream) come from?'

These simple questions enable caring adults to assess the seriousness of the problem and discuss strategies for stopping inappropriate behaviour.

Unfortunately, children who have not been taught how to make accurate reports believe that they are disclosing abuse when they make these vague statements. Classes of 5–8-year-olds were asked what children should do if a new childminder asked them to play a new secret game in which they were told to remove their clothes. All of the children knew that the game was 'rude', wrong, or 'not allowed'. However, some children said that 'kids would have to obey a baby-sitter because baby-sitters are older and they get mad if you disobey'. A few said that the 'kids should say they're tired and go to bed'. One boy said that he would 'go round to the neighbour's' and another suggested crossing off that baby-sitter's name from mum's address book in the sideboard. Others made statements such as:

'I would say to Mum that the baby-sitter was mean.'
'I would tell Mum that the baby-sitter told me to get undressed.'

'I would say, "Mum, I don't want that baby-sitter to come any more".'

While the children believed that they were making reports of sexually inappropriate behaviour, it is very unlikely that any parent would realise that something was seriously wrong.

One boy said that he could telephone his mum from a telephone extension in his bedroom 'because mum always tells me where she's going to be'. However, only one boy gave a clear and comprehensible report and, coincidentally, he was the only child in his class whose mother had read child protection books and talked about personal safety and children's rights with him. He believed that his mother would pat him on the head and say, 'Good boy. We won't have that baby-sitter again.'

Few children will persist if there is no response to their first attempt at reporting. Few children will tell anyone else if their mother does not respond supportively.

There is more information about dealing with the disclosure of child sexual abuse in Chapter 3.

Reading the signs

Without education for child protection, parents and teachers often confuse the signs of child sexual abuse with normal sexual curiosity. The offender then gets the benefit of the doubt and continues to offend.

Children's normal curiosity involves an equal partnership on the lines of 'you show me yours and I'll show you mine'. It is exploratory play designed to confirm whether other children's bodies are the same as their own. Because children are interested in the construction of their bodies, curiosity increases when they become aware of gender differences.

It is a sign that a child may have been sexually abused when he or she engages in sexual activity and there is a difference in the power, size, age and knowledge of the instigator(s) and other participants; for example when:

- an intellectually disabled or younger child is targeted;
- a child tells others to do sexual things to another;
- force is used;
- the instigator uses tricks, bribes, coercion, threats or blackmail;
- the instigator instructs others to abuse a child;
- there is no equality or mutual sharing.

Table 1.1 Normal curiosity compared with the behaviour of children who have been molested**Behaviour typical of normal curiosity**

Scope: A limited number of sexual behaviours such as looking, peeking, touching.

Frequency: spasmodic, not focused. The participants are easily distracted into other activities.

Duration: Intermittent interest. Spate of interest at 4–6 years and again at 8 years.

Involvement of other children: Experimentation; usually with friends.

Age difference of participants: Often none. Similar age, size and development.

Coercion: Not involved.

Affect: Silly, giggling, fairly spontaneous.

Motivation: Exploratory and sensual: they want to know how others are constructed.

After discovery: Embarrassed. Fearful of punishment.

Family environment: Any family.

Behaviour typical of children who have been abused

A range of sexual behaviours, including penetration (by penis, fingers or objects), sex talk, often very disturbed toilet functions. May use adult offender's behaviour and language if the child offender is also a victim of sexual abuse.

High frequency. Obsessive. Activities often focus on sex and aggression.

Aggressive *and* sexual behaviour evident over several days or weeks.

Siblings, cousins or other relatives as well as children at school.

No age difference or molests younger children.

Coercion involved, sometimes using physical force, threats, secrecy, bribes, blackmail. They often choose vulnerable victims.

Angry, vindictive, threatening, punishing; or lonely, sad, anxious. Sadness and loneliness often pair with aggressive sex.

Sex for anxiety reduction or sharing knowledge with others for kudos.

Denial. Abusive, angry or withdrawn.

Often chaotic families with histories of sexual abuse, drug abuse, absent and non-functional or violent father-figures, resulting in a lack of understanding by child about boundaries.

Adapted from Child Protection Council, Canberra, *Child Protection Newsletter*, no. 10, 1993.

In addition, it is likely to be a sign that the instigator has been abused when:

- there is a demand for secrecy;
- there is a demand for oral sex;
- there is sexual activity of a kind referred to in adult pornography, e.g. references to 'golden showers' (urinating over a child) or inserting objects into vaginal or anal openings;
- victims are asked whether they 'like it' or they are assured that it feels great.

When children simulate sexual intercourse or oral sex in doll play or show an obsession with sex with dolls, their drawings and conversations, there is a strong possibility that they have been sexualised prematurely. Such children should be carefully observed and observations should be recorded and reported. Even if the

child protection authorities do not investigate the suspicions, it is helpful to have a record in case other people report suspicions.

The drawings of young sexual abuse victims often include:

- outsize genitals;
- an erect penis on drawings of the offender, akin to a third arm;
- exaggerated mouths and sharp teeth on portraits of offenders (oral sex);
- phallic symbols, often incorporating the shape of an erect penis;
- armless self-portraits, although they draw arms on other figures (depicting helplessness);
- faceless self-portraits, although they draw faces on other people (showing loss of identity and/or fear of revealing a terrible secret);

12 Guidelines for teachers and care-givers

- immature body shapes in self-portraits, although drawings of other people's bodies are well developed;
- frequent use of black, purple and red (angry colours) when there is a free choice (Briggs and Hawkins 1997c).

Older victims may draw attention to their plight in bizarre writing, sexually explicit drawings or behaviour.

Don't dismiss evidence

Teachers often try to excuse or explain children's sexually obsessive behaviour by suggesting that they may have seen sex videos or parents' sexual activity at home. Such assumptions are unacceptable; there is no evidence that videos strongly influence young children's behaviour. Because they are impersonal, they are less emotionally disturbing than real-life experience. Videos *do* affect children's behaviour when they are made to act out what they see. Children are more likely to be influenced by what happens *to them*. If there is evidence that children are watching pornography, this should be reported given the widespread use of pornographic materials to desensitise children in preparation for sexual abuse.

OFFENDERS' TECHNIQUES

Studies of sexual offenders confirm that they choose uninformed, powerless children and avoid confident, knowledgeable ones whenever possible (Briggs, Hawkins and Williams 1994; Briggs and Hawkins 1995a; Elliott *et al.* 1995). In selecting victims, 'pretty' children were targeted by 42 per cent of offenders in Elliott's study of 99 male subjects. However, although physical characteristics were important, they were less important than the way that children behaved. In general, offenders tend to target the lonely, trusting, curious, young and small. One in eight male offenders focused on 'innocent' and 'trusting' children and 49 per cent said that they were attracted to those who lacked confidence and self-esteem. As one man commented, 'You can spot the child who is unsure of himself and target him with a compliment and positive attention' (p. 584).

Almost half (46 per cent) developed a 'special relationship' with the victim as part of the seduction strategy.

When looking for victims outside the family, 35 per cent of offenders frequented places

where children congregate, such as schools, campsites, Sunday Schools, amusement arcades, playgrounds and sports facilities. They targeted the unaccompanied losers in sports events.

One-third of offenders deliberately gained access to victims' parents and were made welcome in their homes. Besides increasing their access to the child, this is a safety measure: parents are less likely to believe a child who reports sexual misbehaviour by someone the adults know and trust.

Almost half (48 per cent) of offenders isolated their victims by acting as baby-sitters. They introduced sex while offering to bath or undress the child, misrepresenting the abuse as educational or a sign of affection.

It is important to note that 53 per cent of abusers gained access to children by offering to teach them to play a musical instrument or a sport. Forty-six per cent gave them a lift home. Sixty-one per cent of sexual abuse offences occurred in the offenders' homes and 39 per cent in the victims' homes. In addition, 44 per cent of offenders abused children in public toilets and on campsites.

In an Australian study, some convicted incest offenders told the author that, when child protection was introduced at school, their victims told them that their behaviour was wrong. The fathers instructed the children to 'do the right thing and report it to the teacher', which they did (Briggs, Hawkins and Williams 1994).

Offenders molest children in groups

Unfortunately, there is no truth in the saying that 'there's safety in numbers'. Boys are particularly vulnerable to seduction in groups, especially at camps, sports clubs, church groups and boarding schools. It is comparatively easy for a trusted group leader and authority figure to overcome the resistance of an uninformed child by demonstrating that 'everyone else does it' and 'it's fun . . . it's what guys do'. Paedophiles take advantage of children's fear of being perceived as different to their peer group. The boy who resists suffers a barrage of jibes designed to make him feel abnormal: 'Don't you like having fun? What's wrong with you? You're weird.'

Although no-one can be trusted merely by virtue of their position, religious affiliation or relationship, at the same time we cannot teach children to fear *all* adults. That is why children need personal safety education that will both help them to understand their rights to protec-

tion and assist them to identify, avoid and report inappropriate behaviour.

Offenders exploit children's confusion

Because parents reprimand children for playing with or showing their genitals and for 'rude' or 'dirty' talk, girls in particular are shocked and confused when they first encounter sexual misbehaviour involving an adult. Offenders take advantage of their confusion to gain compliance, giving assurances that what is happening is normal:

'I'm teaching you about what girls are for.'
'This is what people do when they love each other.'

Unfortunately, if victims do not report the first incident, offenders perceive them as willing, equally informed partners.

Use of pornography to desensitise children

It is easy for sex offenders to gain access to sexually curious children. They stimulate curiosity by introducing sex talk, dirty jokes, sex-focused magazines, pornographic videos and pictures and Internet sites, often in the guise of 'sex education', harmless 'fun' and 'what guys do'. Targeted victims are exposed to a diverse range of deviant sexual practices. This is part of a carefully planned desensitising process to persuade children that sex between adults and juveniles is normal, acceptable and enjoyable. They say, 'Look, it's obviously OK. They make movies about it.' If a child does not object and walk away when sex talk and pornography are introduced, the offender accepts silence as evidence of interest and willingness to participate.

The sharing of pornographic material with children often becomes a special secret between the abuser and the child. Boys may feel privileged to have been given entry to this secret adult world. Those who are members of highly sexualised peer groups believe that they are in control when paedophiles provide rewards for genital fondling. They suspect that the offender is crazy for paying them for what they already do with their school-mates. This early cooperation makes it difficult for victims to escape when activities become violent and excruciatingly painful. The secret is then used to maintain the abusive relationship, often accompanied by

threats that victims will 'get into big trouble' if parents find out that they have been watching sex videos and other banned material. This threat usually occurs when the relationship has moved into the sexually aggressive phase.

Unfortunately, the writers have found that some fathers introduce their young sons to porn on the Internet in the mistaken belief that this is an amusing, macho thing to do. They excuse this behaviour on the basis that 'they're too young to understand'. Parents should be made aware that children are constantly learning and those exposed to pornography at home are learning inappropriate sex roles. There is a risk that boys will re-enact the sexual behaviours they see with children much younger than themselves (i.e. they could become mini-offenders), or that girls will behave sexually with older males. The question of where children learned this inappropriate behaviour is obviously an important one and parents could suffer the embarrassment of an investigation by child protection officers.

Thus, it is essential that adults who own legal pornography keep it locked away so that the risk of accidental access is minimised.

Paedophiles use victims to recruit others

Some paedophiles use their victims to recruit others to provide sex, not only for themselves but for paedophile acquaintances. Offenders told the author that boys are less likely to report them if the boys' mates are also involved. Boys are even less likely to disclose victimisation if they have complied with adult instructions to abuse younger boys in the group, making them mini-offenders. Boys trapped in brothels and paedophile groups used by community leaders (such as police officers, lawyers, members of parliament, judges, magistrates and businessmen) may experience death threats relating to silence. Victims are often given alcohol and other drugs.

Offenders exploit children's guilt

Child offenders deliberately make children feel responsible for the criminal behaviour. Boys are unlikely to report sexual offences if they've been led to believe that they were chosen because they were identified as 'homosexual', weak or girlish. When victims want the behaviour to stop, offenders tell them that they should

have said 'No' at the outset and, despite differences in maturity, power and knowledge, the fact that they failed to stop the abuse is presented as evidence of equal responsibility (Briggs 1995a). Girls are sometimes trapped by the threat that, if they report abuse within the family, their mothers will disbelieve or disown them, the offender will be jailed and they, the victims, will be responsible for the family break-up and resultant poverty and trauma. 'If you tell, I'll go to jail and it will be all your fault. You will have nowhere to live.'

When victims want the abuse to stop, they are told: 'It's your fault. You could have said "No" and you didn't. You're a bad kid. You'll get into big trouble if you tell. The police will take you away from home.'

When children are sexually abused and protest that it is painful, they are told by their abusers that the discomfort is their own fault; they are too tense and need more practice. Given that their abusers make no secret of the pleasure that they get, child victims may accept the blame and assume that they are physically abnormal.

Offenders exploit children's powerlessness

Paedophiles gain control of children by telling them that they are the only people in the world who care for them. Boys are given the impression that their parents were negligent because they didn't provide sex education or engage in physical affection that included sex. Offenders demean single mothers to their sons. Offending father-figures commonly control every aspect of female victims' lives, teaching them that they are powerless, inadequate and dependent on them. Girls are sometimes told that their mothers 'know what is happening and it's alright'. Victims may then hate their mothers as much as the offenders and feel psychologically orphaned with nowhere to turn.

STRANGER DANGER

Although most parents teach children to avoid being kidnapped by strangers in cars, comparatively few children are abducted by strangers. In an Australian survey of 200 abused males, only 13 per cent said that they were molested by a stranger (Briggs and Hawkins 1995a). Australian Police statistics have shown that as few as 6 per cent of annual reports of abuse

involve strangers. The vast majority of offenders develop a trusting relationship with targeted victims (and, sometimes, their parents) before they introduce sex. Abuse by strangers is usually a 'one-off' non-violent incident in a public place. Although such incidents are traumatic and affect children's lives, they are usually less damaging than repetitive abuse that takes place over a prolonged period of time at the hands of a trusted person. An additional problem for victims is that they are often engaged in a banned activity (such as talking to a stranger or taking a short cut through a park) when the abuse takes place. The fact that they broke the rules and spoke to or accompanied the stranger prevents them from reporting offences. They live with guilt and fear thereafter.

Although child kidnap and murder are rare, such cases attract media headlines. This has caused parents to concentrate on the dangers of strangers using negative and often vague instructions.

While most young children fear dangerous strangers, the testing of 378 Australian and New Zealand children aged between five and eight years confirmed that those who are deprived of access to a comprehensive child protection program are vulnerable to abduction by strangers because they believe that:

- they can trust all adults except strangers;
- they have never seen a stranger in their lives but would recognise one instantly if they saw one;
- strangers are always males;
- women are always trustworthy;
- if you have talked to adults, they cease to be strangers;
- strangers are readily identifiable by their evil appearance, black masks and balaclavas, black clothing, old black cars and the way in which they leer at children;
- strangers are part human, part monster who burgle houses in the night and steal property and kidnap children from their beds;
- women can always be trusted to help children;
- people who know your name or say that they know your parents can be trusted because they are your friends;
- people can be trusted if they have been introduced;
- people can be trusted when they look kind, seem kind and offer to do kind things;
- teachers would never allow strangers onto