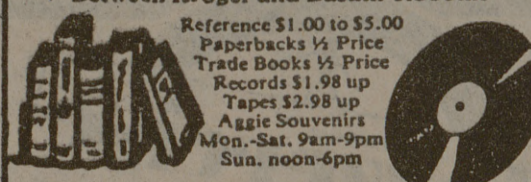


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Streetproof children, Canadian groups advise

New guidelines released to prevent sexual abuse

United Press International

The rules to streetproof your children as drawn up by two Canadian organizations are also a good idea for U.S. children, says an American child psychiatrist.

The guidelines were formulated by Health and Welfare Canada and Citizens Concerned Against Crime, Ontario.

Dr. Sandra Kaplan, chief of child and adolescent psychiatry, North Shore Hospital, Manhasset, N.Y., is an expert in child neglect and abuse, including the sexual tampering of tots and toddlers by strangers or relatives.

"I can agree with those rules," Dr. Kaplan said when she was read the guidelines that are being circulated and posted in Canada to counter sexual abuse of children.

Canadian authorities estimate 10 percent of families will be confronted by sexual abuse and that one out of every three females will be sexually molested before age 18. One of every 10 boys will be molested before he reaches 18.

"More than 85 percent of abusers are known to the victim," the Canadian National Clearinghouse on Family Violence says.

Dr. Kaplan said she has no trouble accepting those statistics.

Most parents want to educate their children about sexual abuse but don't know how, she said.

The "streetproofing" advice begins by telling parents that there is no such thing as telling a child too much; "knowledge doesn't stimulate inappropriate behavior — ignorance does." It continues:

"Parents who talk openly with their children will be askable parents, and children will feel free to bring their worries and concerns to them in the future."

The streetproofing rules:

- An unattended child is a child at risk. Arrange with your child where to wait if you are delayed, especially in the darker winter evenings. Suggest a well-lighted store or inside an arena or school.
- Whenever possible, have children walk in pairs or groups.
- Children should always travel the same route home.
- Use a secret family code. Children should never go with anyone, not even a close family friend, unless warmer by indicating that the first steps also have crossed the street. Suggest that the child cross the street again, and explain that if the first steps cross the street for a second time, then the situation is "hot."
- Ask for ways to "cool" down the situation. You might help with such as going into a lighted store, looking quickly for a Block Party or, because it is a "hot" situation, they might yell "fire" which is "help."
- Discuss with your child the difference between fact and fancy, and fiction, so that they understand the nature of taking an oath. This may be necessary for a court appearance).
- If you suspect that an abuse has taken place:
 - Encourage the child to talk about it.
 - Establish in the child's mind that he or she is not to blame.
 - Do not correct the child's story. Listen to the original words, even those that are babyish or fanciful words.
 - Do not suggest or modify what the child is trying to say. Your story might confuse the truth.
 - Do not show horror or anger, however, if caught by surprise, be unable to control your emotions, be clear that your anger is meant for the offender, not the child.
 - When you are aware of an incident of sexual abuse, call the police or child welfare authorities immediately. Be sure a social worker, a police officer and someone supportive to the child is present when the evidence is given.
- Introduce your child to the "hot and cold" game. Describe a situation which is "cool" — "imagine you are walking home from a friend's house ... then make it tepid — you hear footsteps and think someone is following you."
 - Ask the child to make the situation "cool" again and suggest that it would be appropriate to cross the street. Now make the situation

they are able to give the child the code. Once the code has been used, it should be changed.

•Don't allow your young child to go to a public restroom alone.

•Check your babysitters' credentials thoroughly.

•Tell your child it is not rude to ignore an adult who is asking directions in the street. Another adult could be asked for more accurate directions.

•Tackle the subject of sexual abuse prevention with the same honest, matter-of-fact manner you would attach to road safety. Remember, the only time a child will ask you about sexual abuse is after it has happened. Open the subject and your child will remember that you are open to questions.

To which Dr. Kaplan adds another guideline:

- Take the child to the pediatrician for an examination, for treatment and to establish the extent of abuse. The abused child also should be seen by a child psychiatrist. Parents will benefit from similar counseling as they struggle to recover from the emotional trauma.



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