

Preventing child sexual abuse



How we can protect our children from getting hurt.

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When a child confides in someone that they are being sexually abused many people are not sure what to do.

The initial reaction is usually strong and along the lines of anger or disgust, but many people don't realize that this is the wrong thing to do.

That is why a course put on by Little Warriors last week is an important part of training when it comes to working with children.

"The intent of the program is to empower you," said facilitator Joanne Borle to the assembled participants May 17.

By using a program designed by Darkness to Light, Little Warriors was able to give those in attendance tools in the prevention of child sexual abuse, along with the proper steps to follow should a child come forth.

Borle also gave some shocking statistics during the course. She said statistically it runs the Canadian government \$15 billion annually to deal with the repercussions of child molestation.

"It's amazing the money that it costs our society," she said.

The reason for this, as Borle and the program pointed out, is that child sexual abuse has far-reaching impacts. Children who have been abused can act out in different ways and can affect many people.

Some will need therapy, some turn to substance abuse to cope. There are some who act out in violent ways, or will have their self-esteem and confidence affected so much they will not be able to finish school or keep a steady job.

Many will have teenage pregnancies and others will continue the abuse with future generations.

This means health services and the justice system are heavily involved in the ramifications of sexual abuse, along with many others, such as family members, who may have to deal with the situation.

Because it is a problem that needs proactive steps from society it is important that parents and caregivers be "conscious" of the possibility of child sexual abuse. Because 95 per cent of the children in Canada who are a victim of sexual abuse know the person who committed the act it is also important that parents and caregivers be vigilant in watch-

ing for signs of sexual abuse.

However, there are some simple things that parents and caregivers can do to help their children. One thing that seems insignificant to many is using the proper names of their anatomy, such as penis or vagina.

One example that Borle used was of a girl at a birthday party. Borle said a girl approached her and some other parents, who were enjoying some cookies, at the party and said "Sometimes my daddy eats my cookie."

The initial reaction from the parents was common, telling the girl that her daddy was silly. Then the girl repeated, "No. Sometimes my daddy eats my cookie," and Borle realized the girl was trying to be heard about sexual abuse.

Borle responded as she had been trained to, telling the girl she believed her and was proud of her for being so brave. She told the group the important thing is to stay calm because any other reaction might cause the child to shut down or change their story, which can affect court proceedings later on.

Borle said when the mother was told about the abuse she was devastated because her daughter had said the same thing to several people in the past, but no one understood.

Had the girl known the proper term there would have been no confusion and the situation could have been dealt with the first time she told someone.

The program touched on many other things that children should be raised aware of, such as their ability to give or deny affection to someone. This can be hard for families because children may be pressured to give hugs and kisses to people they may not want to, which can be hard to hear.

"If the child doesn't want to give them a hug they shouldn't have to," said Borle.

This teaches the child that nobody is allowed to touch them or asked to be touched if the child doesn't want to do it. They will feel the situation is wrong.

One other thing that Borle stressed during the program was the law about suspected child abuse.

"It's our job to report," said Borle. "If we don't report we can certainly know nothing is going to happen."

She said it is the law to report suspected child abuse, and those who don't report it when they are aware of it may also be charged.

For more information on taking the Little Warriors course visit www.littlewarriors.ca.

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WHO CUTS YOUR HAIR

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