

## SAFETY BRIEF: DISCUSSING SENSITIVE TOPICS

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Prevention education is extremely important for children and teens today, as they face new and varied dangers more than ever before. Yet for a variety of reasons, many adults think discussing topics such as abuse, sexual abuse, online dangers, sexting, and pornography is inappropriate for children and teens. Some think that children and teens don't know what the concepts mean, and that having these conversations will expose them prematurely to material that might cause them emotional distress. However, research tells us that is not the case.

### The Problem:

Victimization, including sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, is very real starting at a very young age. Research shows:

- » 1 in 4 children will suffer some sort of trauma or victimization before they turn 18.
- » 1 in 10 children will be sexually abused before they turn 18.
- » 1 in 4 students will be bullied and 1 in 5 will be cyberbullied while in school.
- » The fourth most frequently searched term on the Internet for children under the age of 7 is "porn."
- » 90% of 8–16 year olds have viewed pornography online.
- » 42% of Internet users aged 10 to 17 surveyed said they had seen online pornography in the past 12 months.
- » Approximately 1 in 5 (19%) of teens have engaged in some kind of sexting; of those, 9% sent a sext; 17% received a sext; and 3% forwarded a sext.
- » 11 years old is the average age of first Internet exposure to pornography (meaning many students are exposed much younger).

### The Solution:

- » Children need to be educated and empowered with prevention education curricula from caring and trained adults. MBF Prevention Education Programs are comprehensive, evidence-based and evidence-informed prevention programs. *MBF Child Safety Matters®* for elementary school (grades K-5) and *MBF Teen Safety Matters®* for middle school (grades 6-8) and high school (grades 9-12) are available. The programs teach students 5 universal Safety Rules and other age and developmentally appropriate strategies, to prevent, recognize and respond appropriately to bullying, cyberbullying, the four types of child abuse (physical, emotional, sexual, neglect), digital abuse, and other digital dangers. Our goal is to reach every child and teen with these safety programs. To learn more, please visit [www.mbfpreventioneducation.org](http://www.mbfpreventioneducation.org) and/or download our "Child Safety Matters" app at no cost from the App Store or Google Play.
- » In addition to students receiving prevention education, parents or guardians need to discuss safety issues with their children. These are not always the easiest conversations to have, but they are important. So, we have provided you here with tips and activities to help make these conversations easier.

Every child deserves to be safe!

# SAFETY BRIEF: DISCUSSING SENSITIVE TOPICS

## Keys to Successful Communication:

- » Become familiar and comfortable by researching a topic, such as sexual abuse, digital abuse/safety, cyberbullying, or sexting, before talking with your child/teen. Becoming informed and comfortable about a topic prior to discussing it is the key to having a productive conversation and not distressing your child/teen. Our website and app have downloadable Safety Briefs and free online trainings for parents on these topics and more; we also provide resources for you to find additional help.
- » Ensure your conversations are developmentally appropriate for your child's age. If you need help understanding their developmental level, see the Safety Brief: Child Development on our website.
- » Allow children/teens the opportunity to talk and to ask questions before you start talking. Often they know more than parents think, or they have incorrect information that you can correct once you begin the conversation.
- » Have ongoing conversations rather than one "big talk." If your child/teen is asking about an issue, answer them honestly and provide safety knowledge to educate and satisfy their request, but avoid giving too much information, or information that is too developmentally advanced.
- » Reinforce your child's use of the 5 Safety Rules to respond to unsafe situations. Learn more by visiting [www.mbfpreventioneducation.org](http://www.mbfpreventioneducation.org) and reviewing our 5 Safety Rules.

## Activities to Facilitate Conversations:

- » **Letters/Journals** – Sometimes it is easier to write thoughts than to articulate them verbally. If you are having difficulty beginning a conversation about a topic, ask your child/teen to write you a letter explaining what they already know and any questions they may have. This gives you a starting point for the conversation and questions to address directly. Should it still be difficult for you to have a face-to-face conversation with them, you can reply in turn with a letter.
- » **Topic Cards** – Keep a "Conversation Jar" available; you or your child/teen can write down a topic or question you want to discuss on a card and place it in the jar to discuss at an appropriate time.
- » **Books** – Books often naturally lead to questions or conversations, so they are great for facilitating discussions about sensitive topics. Depending on the child's age and the topic, you may choose to read a book with your child, or ask them to read it first and then discuss it.
- » **Websites** – In addition to books, there are many great websites available to help facilitate discussions about sensitive topics. Look for websites with credible sources and authors for your child/teen to review, to help educate them, and to help you start conversations.
- » **Media** – Look for everyday opportunities to have discussions with your child/teen about tough and sensitive topics. Movies, TV shows, and even commercials can often lead to a conversation about something of concern. Begin by asking them about the movie or show, what they thought, was there anything they saw they did not understand, was there anything they noticed that might not be safe, or anything that concerned them? Use these questions as starting points for a more in-depth conversation.

As a parent, your main concern is to protect your child/teen. The best way to do that is to stay active and involved in their life to assess any risks they may be facing, and to educate and empower them to protect themselves. Ongoing conversations about tough and sensitive topics are a great way to do that and more.

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Every child needs adults in their life they can talk to if they have been hurt or are concerned about their safety. They need adults they can trust to help keep them safe.

## Consider these facts:

- » 1 out of 4 children will be bullied, 1 out of 5 will be cyberbullied.
- » 1 out of 7 children ages 10-17 have been sexually solicited online.
- » 1 out of 10 children will be sexually abused before they reach the age of 18.
- » 90% of abuse is by someone a child knows and trusts, not a stranger, (30% by a family member).

The concept of Safe Adults is taught to students as part of *MBF Prevention Education Programs*. This same concept can be taught to all children using the information below.

## Who is a Safe Adult?

A Safe Adult is someone a child can go to if they ever feel unsafe, have ever been hurt, or if they're not sure if a situation is unsafe. A Safe Adult is someone who:

- » is an adult that can get them help if they're ever hurt or unsafe.
- » doesn't break the Safety Rules, or try to get the child to break them.
- » the child feels comfortable with and can easily talk to about things that may be difficult or tough to talk about.
- » the child can trust to keep them safe.

Children should also be taught that if they have a Safe Adult now, and sometime in the future that Safe Adult doesn't make them feel safe, they can always choose another Safe Adult.

## Why do we ask children to identify "Safe Adults" instead of "trusted adults?"

Many children have adults in their lives they trust, and many children have also had trusted adults who have hurt them. Simply identifying trusted adults does not ensure those adults are safe. So, in addition to an adult a child trusts, we identify other factors that makes them a Safe Adult, such as someone that can and will help them, someone who doesn't break the Safety Rules or try to get the child to break them, etc.

## How many Safe Adults should a child identify?

We encourage children to identify at least two Safe Adults; one who lives in their home, and one who lives outside their home, although they can identify more. It is important to identify one in the home and one out of the home in case abuse occurs in the home, or the Safe Adult in the home is not available when the child needs to talk.

## What should children talk about with their Safe Adults?

Children should be encouraged to talk with their Safe Adults any time they feel unsafe, or any time they aren't sure if a situation is safe. They would want to talk to them:

- » any time they are hurt, or have been hurt in the past.
- » about anything unsafe that is happening, or has happened, to them or a friend.
- » about Red Flags they have spotted that tell them someone, or something, might not be safe.
- » any time they aren't sure whether a situation or person is unsafe.

## What is the role of a Safe Adult?

A Safe Adult needs to understand that if a child tells them they have been hurt, or if they suspect a child is being hurt or is unsafe, they need to act in the best interest of the child. It is an adult's responsibility to protect children. They can help by:

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- » listening carefully to what the child tells them.
- » telling the child they believe them.
- » being aware of uncomfortable feelings and controlling their own emotions if a child discloses abuse.
- » acting right away to help the child:
  - report bullying to the school or organization where it occurred.
  - report unsafe online behaviors to law enforcement or the CyberTipline at 800-843-5678.
  - report child abuse to your state child welfare agency. (Visit <https://www.childwelfare.gov/organizations> for a list of state child welfare agency contact information.)

To learn more about responding to a disclosure of child abuse or bullying, parents and Safe Adults can visit [www.mbfpreventioneducation.org](http://www.mbfpreventioneducation.org) for helpful resources.

### What if a Safe Adult is not helpful?

Children need to keep telling Safe Adults if they do not feel safe or have been hurt until someone LISTENS and DOES something to help them. This is another reason we encourage children to have multiple Safe Adults.

Keep in mind that children might find it hard to talk to a Safe Adult. Embarrassment, shame, fear that they will get in trouble or get someone else in trouble, fear that they won't be believed, or fear of breaking a promise can all make reporting difficult for a child. Because of this, we also teach children to identify a Safety Buddy or a Safe Friend, because sometimes it's easier to talk to a Safe Adult if the child has someone else with them. A Safety Buddy or Safe Friend is a good friend who is trusted and is easy to talk to. They are someone who will go with the child to talk to a Safe Adult, but they are not someone to tell instead of a Safe Adult.

### What can Parents and other concerned adults do?

- » Ask your child who their Safe Adults are and assist them with identifying at least two Safe Adults.
- » Let your child know that telling a Safe Adult about bullying, abuse, or other unsafe situations is helping, not tattling or snitching. Tell them they can always come to you, or another Safe Adult, and you will listen and support them.
- » Let your child know you trust their instincts and it is okay for them to trust their instincts as well.
- » If your child discloses that they don't want to be around a particular person, such as a babysitter, relative, or family friend, don't force them.

### Learn more:

- » Visit [www.mbfpreventioneducation.org](http://www.mbfpreventioneducation.org) to take the following one-hour online courses provided at no cost (click on Learn More/Online Trainings):
  - Recognizing & Reporting Child Abuse & Neglect
  - Real World Safety: Protecting Youth Online and Off
  - Protecting Children from Child Sexual Abuse
  - Preventing, Recognizing, and Responding to Human Trafficking
- » Download our mobile "Child Safety Matters" app at no cost from the App Store or Google Play.
- » Visit [www.mbfpreventioneducation.org](http://www.mbfpreventioneducation.org) to learn more about the risks faced by children in today's society and how an evidence-based, comprehensive prevention program can help keep them safe. You can also join our Safe Adult Club to better protect all children.
- » Like and follow our social media pages to stay up to date on the latest issues and concerns regarding children's safety and to learn more about how to help protect all the children in your life.

## Digital Abuse Statistics

- » 3 out of 4 (74%) young people have a home Internet connection.
- » Nearly one-third (31%) have a computer in their bedroom, and 1 out of 5 (20%) have an Internet connection there.
- » 21% of children in grades K - 2 have access to a cell phone.<sup>1</sup>
- » In a typical day, 48% of youth go online from home, 20% from school, and 16% from someplace else.<sup>2</sup>
- » 42% of Internet users aged 10 to 17 surveyed said they had seen online pornography in a recent 12-month span. Of those, 66% said they did not want to view the images and had not sought them out.<sup>3</sup>
- » 9 out of 10 children between ages 8 and 16 have viewed pornography on the Internet. In most cases, the sex sites were accessed unintentionally when a child, often in the process of doing homework, used a seemingly innocent sounding word to search for information or pictures.
- » More than three-quarters of the unwanted exposures (79%) happened at home, 9% happened at school, 5% happened at friends' homes, and 5% happened in other places including libraries.<sup>4</sup>
- » 13% of students in grades 2 - 3 report they used the Internet to talk to people they do not know, 11% report having been asked to describe private things about their body, and 10% have been exposed to private things about someone else's body.<sup>5</sup>
- » About 1 in 5 (19%) teens have engaged in some kind of sexting; of those, 9% sent a sext, 17% received a sext, and 3% forwarded a sext.
- » 53% of teens who sext are girls and 47% are boys.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.guardchild.com/statistics>

<sup>2</sup>Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year-Olds. Victoria Rideout, Donald F. Roberts, Ulla G. Foehr. March 2005. The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. 17 November 2006, <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/up...f-8-18-Year-olds-Report.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup>Wolak, Janis, et al. "Unwanted and Wanted Exposure to Online Pornography in a National Sample of Youth Internet Users." *Pediatrics* 119 (2007); 247-257. In the survey, most kids who reported unwanted exposure were aged 13 to 17. Still, sizable numbers of 10- and 11-year-olds also had unwanted exposure – 17% of boys and 16% of girls that age. The survey had a margin of error of + or - 2.5% points. The results were from a telephone survey of 1,500 Internet users aged 10 to 17 conducted in 2005, with their parents' consent.

<sup>4</sup>Online Victimization of Youth: Five Years Later. 2006. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, Crimes Against Children Research Center, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. December 4, 2006. <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV138.pdf>.

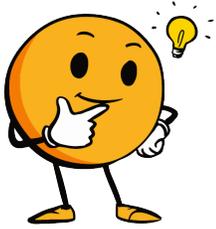
<sup>5</sup>Enough is Enough: <http://www.enough.org/inside.php?id=3K03RC4L00>

## Digital Safety Tips

- » Start early teaching your child about digital safety. Prevention is the key to safety in this digital culture kids are growing up in.
- » Keep all computers, games, and other digital devices in a common area in the house.
- » Establish rules/guidelines for your child regarding the length of time they are allowed on the computer and other digital devices, and regarding the use of age-appropriate, approved websites and apps.
- » Learn more about the sites/apps your child is using, and read the terms and conditions before agreeing to their use.
- » Complete a digital safety agreement with your child and post it near the computer. Visit [www.mbfpreventioneducation.org](http://www.mbfpreventioneducation.org) or download our "Child Safety Matters" app at no cost from the App Store or Google Play, for a sample.
- » Monitor your child's online accounts and review your child's computer/cell phone/game use and history. Use the opportunities to teach them about potential digital dangers and digital safety.
- » Teach your child about good digital citizenship and the importance of establishing a good digital reputation that will follow them into their future.
- » Report malicious messages or inappropriate pictures or material your child encounters online to your child's school, your Internet Service Provider, or the Cybertipline at 800-843-5678, as appropriate.
- » Resist the urge to take your child's computer, phone, or other digital device if they are the victim of cyberbullying or digital abuse. Instead take appropriate actions to report the behavior and teach your child how to block the perpetrator or bully. Take necessary steps to keep them safe.
- » Do not use digital shaming as a form of punishment.
- » Be a good role model for your child and model good digital behavior and citizenship.
- » Learn more about digital dangers and digital safety to become educated and empowered to keep your child safer online and when using digital devices. Visit the following websites or download our app for resources to help you, including:
  - » [www.mbfpreventioneducation.org](http://www.mbfpreventioneducation.org)
  - » [www.PublicandPermanent.com](http://www.PublicandPermanent.com)
  - » [www.internetsafety101.org/agebasedguidelines.htm](http://www.internetsafety101.org/agebasedguidelines.htm)
  - » Mobile app "Child Safety Matters" available from the App Store or Google Play

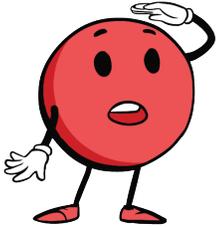
The **5 Safety Rules** are taught to children in the MBF Prevention Education Programs. Parents or other adults can reinforce the rules with children by asking them to explain each Safety Rule and practicing the motions with elementary-aged children. Additionally, parents and adults can use the 5 Safety Rules themselves to better protect children. For additional information, visit [www.mbfpreventioneducation.org](http://www.mbfpreventioneducation.org), and/or download our “Child Safety Matters” app at no cost from the App Store or Google Play.

## How to Use the Safety Rules to Better Protect Children



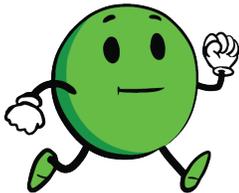
### Know What's Up

Talk to your child. Listen to them. Ask them questions about times when they are away from you. Know whom they are with and what they are doing. Help them understand unsafe situations and how to use the Safety Rules to keep them safe. Make sure they know your personal contact information and how to reach you. Have a private family password and make sure they know to never go with anyone who doesn't know it. Learn about the technology and devices they are using or have access to, and talk to them about potential online dangers.



### Spot Red Flags

Teach your child safety concepts such as personal space and boundaries, respecting themselves and others, safe vs. unsafe situations, secrets and tricks, and digital safety. Teach them the correct names for their private body parts, and how to report if anyone looks at, touches, or photographs their private parts. Educate them about Red Flags, both online and off, and how to seek help. If you are talking to your child and educating them about possible dangers and how to spot the Red Flag behaviors that lead to those dangers, it minimizes their risk of being victimized.



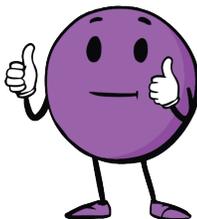
### Make a Move

If you suspect a child is being harmed, trust yourself and Make a Move to keep them safe. If a child tells you about abuse or bullying that has happened to him/her or another child, praise them for telling you and take action right away. Report bullying to the school or organization where it occurred. Report abuse to your state child welfare agency, and unsafe online behaviors to law enforcement, and the Cybertipline at 800-843-5678. **(Visit [www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/](http://www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/) for state child welfare agencies and contact information.)**



### Talk It Up

Talk about child safety because Child Safety Matters. Talk to other adults about what you have learned, so they too become better educated and empowered. Talk to your child using everyday opportunities to discuss safety and safe vs. unsafe situations. Ask your child to spot Red Flags and use the Safety Rules to protect themselves using role-play opportunities. Let your child know they can talk to you about anything, so if the need arises, they will feel comfortable talking to you about difficult topics.



### No Blame | No Shame

Let your child know that no matter what happens to them, they are never to blame because adults are responsible for keeping kids safe ALWAYS. Let them know that no matter what they are told, they should never be ashamed to tell you or another Safe Adult about Red Flags, abuse, or anything else they need to tell you to help keep them safe. Let them know you support them. If your child is a victim, remember you are not to blame and you should not be ashamed to seek help. Support is available.