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## **PRAIRIEWINDS CHAPTER**

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### **PRESS RELEASE FROM THE AMERICAN RED CROSS**

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### **THE UNSPOKEN HORROR: CHILD ABUSE – PART THREE**

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. During the past two weeks we provided a definition of child abuse, signs of an abused child and of an abusing adult as well as talked about the risks for abuse and the lasting effects abuse can have on a child as they grow up.

This week we will continue this series by talking about how to cope with child abuse and to support those going through this so you can help others to **\*BE SAFE\***.

As we discussed last week, child abuse can occur at any time in any socioeconomic level and in any ethnic group.

If a child tells you that he/she is being abused either mentally, physically, emotionally or sexually, **YOU NEED TO TAKE THE SITUATION VERY SERIOUSLY!** Yes – there may always be situations in which the facts are being distorted or taken out of context. Unfortunately, in the majority of cases, they are not, so you should error on the side of caution and take them seriously until proven otherwise.

If you feel abuse of any type is taking place, take the following steps:

- . **Encourage the child to tell you what has happened.** No matter what is said, remain calm and assure the child that it's okay to talk about what they went through, even if someone has threatened him or her as a way of keeping the child from talking. Ask open-ended questions such as, "What happened then?" and take notes.
- . **Remind the child that he/she is NOT responsible in any way for what has happened.** The responsibility for abuse belongs to the abuser. Children may have been told that this wouldn't have happened to them if they had behaved, had been quiet, had done their chores, etc. **IT IS NOT THE CHILD'S FAULT!** Tell them that over and over again.

- . **Offer comfort if the child wants and will accept it.** You can verbally tell the child that you are sorry that someone hurt them, that you are glad that they told you and reassure them that you will try to help them. **LISTEN.** Do **NOT** offer physical comfort if the child appears to be uncomfortable with accepting it.
  
- . **Report the abuse.** Contact a child protective agency in your area or the local police department. Give them all of the information you have including the child's name, parent's name, phone numbers and addresses and your notes. They will investigate your report and, if necessary, take steps to ensure the child's safety.
  
- . **Seek medical attention for the child.** This can be either medical (to confirm a charge of sexual or physical abuse) or psychological (for all types of abuses). Do **NOT** assume that everything is now okay because the supposed abuse has been reported and is being investigated.
  
- . **Help the child remain safe.** Don't let the child be alone with a supposed abuser. If that's not possible, do what you can to eliminate the abuser's access to the child. Make sure the child knows how to get help if needed. Remember that some abusers will make it harder on the child if they think or know that someone is onto the abuse.
  
- . **Consider additional support.** Contact a support group or refer others around the child to such a group if you feel this can be helpful.

Join us next week when **"BE SAFE"** will conclude our series on child abuse and talk about how you can help to prevent this from happening to your children or the children of others.

This information is sponsored by the Marshall Independent and brought to you by the American Red Cross and taken from information provided by the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN. If you have any questions or need further information on the topic covered in this article, please contact either your local chapter of CAPC (Child Abuse Prevention Council) or your local American Red Cross Chapter at 1-507-532-5565.