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PRESS RELEASE FROM THE AMERICAN RED CROSS

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THE UNSPOKEN HORROR: CHILD ABUSE – PART FIVE

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. During the past three weeks we've 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. Last week we discussed what to do if you suspect child abuse.

This week we will continue this series by talking about how steps you can take to protect your child and to prevent child abuse in your neighborhood and community to **'BE SAFE'**.

- **Offer the children around you lots of love and attention.** We all feel overwhelmed with the demands everyday life places on us; especially those who are single parents have multiple children and/or work outside of the home. It is important that the children around you feel loved and have one-on-one time with the adults in their lives. Take regular breaks to hug your children, talk with them and spend five minutes here and there.
- **If you're angry, upset or feel like your life is out of control: talk to another adult but DON'T take it out on the children around you.** It's difficult when you're dealing with a crying baby, had a fight with your spouse or have other children that aren't behaving. Stressed out adults often become abusing adults.
- **Make the supervision of the children around you a priority.** NEVER leave children home alone, in a shopping cart, a car or other public place without supervision. Don't allow your child to go out anywhere or accept anything without your permission. When your child is old enough to leave home without parental supervision (age varies based on the responsibility and maturity level of each child), require that your child hang out with friends – preferably at your home or another known adult's home – rather than alone. Know where your older child is at ALL times. They may hate you for keeping tabs on them, but it's worth your sanity in gold.

- **Know your child’s caregivers AND the other adults that will be around your child.** Check references. Make unannounced visits during the time your child is there. Question any bruises or injuries immediately. Meet the husbands, boyfriends and friends of the caregiver and use your gut feelings as your guide and trust factor.
- **Teach your child how to say “no”.** Teach your child that they don’t have to do everything an adult tells them to do if they think it is wrong. Train them to leave situations they find scary or threatening immediately and to tell you immediately thereafter. Encourage them to talk with you about all events that happen when they are away from you – no matter who they are with.
- **Teach your child about on-line safety.** Make certain your child knows they should not share any personal information on-line. Monitor computer usage and check it regularly. Block all sites you feel aren’t safe. Put a time limit on computer usage. Consider it a warning sign if your child becomes secretive or angry when you question them about their computer usage.
- **Reach out to others and be a good neighbor.** Know the parents of your children’s friends, the adults on your block, the teachers in your child’s school, their scout master or 4-H leaver or any other adult (anyone over 16) that your child may come in contact with. If a friend, neighbor or family member is struggling with raising children on their own, or is having financial problems, offer to help by baby-sitting several hours a week or in some other way to give them some “recovery time” away from their children.
- **If you feel out of control, ask for help immediately.** Start with your family doctor who can refer you to parent education classes, help if you are depressed or facing other medical challenges, abusing alcohol or drugs. If you are embarrassed about going to others for help with your personal situation DON’T BE! The other option is to maybe lose it and then to lose your children – and that’s never a good option to risk.

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.