

HelpLine strives to stop child abuse and end sexual assault
By Nancy Radcliffe, SARN Director

April is a very busy month for HelpLine staff, especially those involved in sexual violence prevention and intervention services. While we work to raise awareness about child abuse prevention and sexual assault year-round, we have devoted ourselves to doing even more during this eventful month. We believe that not only can child abuse and sexual assault stop, each of us can do something to make that happen.

[We invite you to join us by attending one or more of the activities held throughout the entire month of April – spread awareness, spread prevention.](#)

Here are a few things that each of us can do:

1. **Learn as much as we can about these issues.** By seeking out information and sharing it with those in our lives, we're already creating change.
2. **Speak up whenever it is safe to do so. Make it your business. If you're witness to something that is hurtful or unsafe, you are involved.**
For example, if you see a situation where you're concerned a child may get hurt, try this technique I learned at Prevent Child Abuse Ohio. Say something positive or encouraging to an adult who's having difficulty with a child who's acting out in public. With a supportive smile, I like to say, "My son did that, too." Okay, so sometimes I wasn't telling the truth. My kid did a lot of things that tested my patience but was actually a really well-behaved child most of the time. What I learned was that this kind of intervention can help the stressed out adult look at their situation a little differently. Sometimes it allows them to vent some of their frustration. There is no perfect parent who has perfect children. ***We're all figuring it out as we go along.*** Over the years, while I've gotten back a variety of reactions from stressed out adults, I've seen how it has helped the situation.
3. Along these lines, to [prevent child sexual abuse](#), **restrict situations where a child will be alone with an adult.** Most children experience this kind of abuse by someone that they know in places where no one else is around. Whatever we can do to limit these kinds of settings, limits a perpetrator's ability to act without being caught.
4. While it's our responsibility to protect them, we further increase children's safety when we **teach them about their bodies and encourage them to set limits.** For example, they don't have to give grandma a kiss. Don't get me wrong – grandma may really want a kiss – and you might like them to give grandma a kiss. But if you give them the right to not give someone as wonderful as grandma a hug or a kiss, then that reinforces their right to speak up to about what happens to their bodies – and that they have conversations like this with you.
5. **We need to put more in place to promote the safety of youth and teens.** We know that children can experience [bullying](#), abuse and sexual violence by their peers. We need to teach them how to intervene if they see their peers behaving badly and how to have healthy relationships. **We need to promote the rights of all teens to be treated well and stand up for and with them when they are not.**

6. Before someone becomes sexually active, help us spread the word **that consent has to be asked for and freely given when both parties are sober**, before sex occurs. If someone's judgment is impaired, wait until it isn't before initiating sex or even asking about it.
7. Help us promote the idea that **we need to focus on the behaviors of the perpetrators and stop judging victims/survivors**. People always want to give potential victims tips about how not to be victims. However, we're only going to stop sexual assault if we stop sexual assault perpetrators. The next time you hear someone judging a victim/survivor, see if you can change the focus by asking "I wonder why that perpetrator thought it was okay to do that?"
8. **Support people who've experienced child abuse and sexual assault**. If you don't know what to say, try telling them you're sorry that they've experienced it. You can also encourage them to call [HelpLine's hotline](#) or access our [SARN services](#) for more support or information.

Q: Should I wear a blue or a teal ribbon in April?

A: Either is fine since April is both Child Abuse Prevention (blue ribbon) and Sexual Assault Awareness (teal ribbon) months!

To learn more about these issues and what is being done in April to raise awareness feel free to visit:

- Learn about Sexual Assault Awareness Month - <http://www.nsvrc.org/saam>
- Learn more about Child Abuse Prevention Month - <http://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/preventionmonth/>