

Taming the Boogieman: Taking the Fear Out of Protecting Our Kids from Sexual Abuse

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We check under the bed, in the closet. We say, “See Honey, no one’s there. You’re safe.” And we smile. Because we know the Boogieman doesn’t exist.

But we hear the statistics, **1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be sexually violated by their eighteenth birthday**, and we’re tempted to hide under the bed, race for the closet, dragging our children with us. Maybe if we hide from childhood sexual abuse, it won’t see us.

We stick our fingers in our ears. “I can’t hear you.” And we soothe ourselves by believing what we don’t acknowledge can’t hurt us. But the statistics remain.

Fear paralyzes. It keeps mommas from doing what we need to do. But there are some things a momma’s got to do. So let’s look the Boogieman, disguised as sexual abuse, in the eye, and wrestle him to the ground. Together.

Here are four things you can do to stand up to the Boogieman and protect your preschoolers.

- Teach your children the proper names for their body parts. Use bath time as teachable moments. Don’t make up silly names for their penis or vagina. *Perpetrators target clueless children.*
- Instruct your children that no one is allowed to touch them where their swimsuit covers and that they are not allowed to touch others where their swimsuit covers. Those areas are

special and private. Calmly explain to them that they should tell you if someone touches them (no matter whom) or wants them to do the touching. *Perpetrators avoid knowledgeable children.*

- Empower your children to take ownership over their own bodies. Don't force your little ones to hug and kiss people if they don't want to. Help them understand that their bodies, hugs, and kisses belong to them. Children need to be taught to be respectful, but that they can say NO! We spend so much time teaching our kids to be obedient; we forget to teach them that there is a time to be disobedient. Most often perpetrators are authority figures in our children's lives. Our children need to know how to say NO! *Perpetrators avoid empowered children.*
- Discourage secrets in your family. "We don't keep secrets in our family. You can tell me anything." Encourage surprises. "We're going to have a surprise party for grandma. We're not going to tell her about it until we have the party. Then you can tell grandma *everything*." Childhood sexual abuse relies on secrets. A perpetrator must convince your child to keep a secret in order to accomplish their goal. *Perpetrators avoid children who won't keep a secret.*

We can't be with our children, every second of every day. We can't check under every bed and peek into every closet. And we can't hide them in a closet away from the world's dangers. But we can be wise, fearless mothers who teach our children well, empowering our children to understand—*they can talk to us about anything.*

And together, we can look the Boogieman in the eye and not allow him to paralyze us with fear anymore.