

Body Safety Theater

Parent Information Packet



Westwood Youth
&
Family Services

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What is Body Safety Theater?

Body Safety Theater (BST) is a live theater presentation performed by high school students designed to teach 3rd graders how to identify potentially abusive situations and what to do in the event that sexual abuse occurs. The 35-minute presentation is comprised of three skits, all of which present a different abusive situation and solution. The presentation is highly interactive and intends to draw the appropriate solutions to each situation from the audience. The skits highlight the six rules of BST.

The six rules of BST encompass the elements which research tells us are part of the most effective child sexual abuse prevention programs. These elements focus on encouraging reporting by teaching children that sexual abuse is never their fault, to always tell a trusted adult, to not keep secrets about someone touching them, to identify trusted adults, and to keep telling.⁴ Research shows that programs are most effective when they actively include child participation, last for a longer period of time with multiple sessions, incorporate various techniques, and include parents in prevention.⁴ By using theater and group discussions, engaging in multiple visits to third grade classrooms, and offering parent information sessions BST uses these same elements to increase students' knowledge about body safety.

Why encourage body safety?

- At least 20% of American women and 5% to 10% of American men experienced some form of sexual abuse as children.¹
- The most vulnerable age for sexual abuse is between the age of 7 and 13.¹
- Generally, children are sexually abused by adults who are related to them or known by them or their families.²
- Sexual abuse occurs among all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups.³

Knowing these facts, it is critical that young children be given the necessary tools to recognize and avoid potentially abusive situations and relationships.

Why theater?

Body Safety Theater is offered as an effective and non-threatening method of providing young children with important safety information. Theater is seen as an effective teaching tool, particularly for younger children, and the use of actors allows children to compare their own feelings to those of the actors. It is the intention of Westwood Youth & Family Services (WY&FS) to utilize this powerful vehicle as a way to meet the needs of the community, specifically the children of Westwood. The presentation is performed by high school students who volunteer to be mentors in the Body Safety Theater program. This program has been used in Westwood schools since it was developed by WY&FS in 1987.

What are the goals of BST?

- To teach 3rd graders to identify potentially abusive situations and what to do if abuse occurs
- Community-wide education on sexual abuse
- Dissemination of information to help form a support network for parents, teachers, and all caregivers
- Support and protection for any child victim

¹ Victimsofcrime.org, 2017

² MassKids.org, 2010

³ National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect, 2010

⁴ National Sexual Violence Resource Center: Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Programs for Children 2011

The Six Rules of Body Safety Theater

1. DON'T GO WITH STRANGERS

2. ALWAYS TELL YOUR PARENTS

3. SAY NO!!

**4. THERE ARE OTHER ADULTS YOU
CAN TELL**

5. KEEP TELLING

6. IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT

Facts of Child Sexual Abuse

What is child sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse presents in three types of offenses:

1. **Touching** – Fondling, forcing a child to touch genitalia, penetration of a child’s vagina, anus, or mouth with a penis or any object that does not have a valid medical purpose.
2. **Non-touching** – Indecent exposure or exhibitionism to a child, exposure to pornographic material, deliberately exposing a child to sexual intercourse, masturbating in front of a child.
3. **Exploitation** – Engaging a child or soliciting a child for the purpose of prostitution, using a child to film, photograph, or model pornography.⁴

Who sexually abuses children?

- The sexual abuse of a child can be perpetrated by anyone: family members, parents, step-parents, siblings, peers, friends of the family, neighbors, child care providers, teachers, and strangers.
- About 90% of child sexual abuse cases are perpetrated by someone known to the child.⁵
- About 30% of perpetrators are immediate and extended family members.⁶
- 23% of perpetrators are under the age of 18.⁷
- Males are reported to be abusers in 80-95% of cases.⁸

How do perpetrators get away with sexually abusing children?

- Sexual abusers can make the child very fearful of telling anyone about the abuse.
- The child may feel the abuse was their fault.
- The abuser may threaten the child if they try to tell.
- The abuser may tell the child it is their “secret” they must keep.¹⁰
- In situations where the abuser is well known to the child, he or she may fear the loss or punishment of their abuser.
- Sexual abuse incidents are often not reported: research estimates that only 38% of children disclose sexual abuse. 40% of these disclosures are made to a close friend, not an adult or authority.⁹

Which children are most vulnerable?

- Youth under the age of 17 are 2 times more likely to be victimized than adults.⁹
- Children are most vulnerable to sexual abuse between the ages of 7 - 13.⁹
- Sexual abuse occurs among all racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups.³
- Females are sexually abused 5 times more often than boys.¹⁰

⁴ Childwelfare.gov, 2014

⁵ Darkness to Light (www.d2l.org), 2015

⁶ Darkness to Light (www.d2l.org), 2015

⁷ National Sex Offender Public Website (www.nsopw.gov)

⁸ Children’s Bureau (www.acf.hhs.gov), 2013

⁹ Darkness to Light (www.d2l.org), 2015

¹⁰ American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2008

What are the possible consequences of child sexual abuse?

- Unusual interest in or avoidance of all things of a sexual nature
- Low self esteem, feelings of worthlessness
- Feeling they can only relate to others in a sexual way
- Sleep problems, nightmares, night terrors
- Depression
- Withdrawal from family and friends, mistrust of adults
- Seductiveness
- Statements that their bodies are dirty or damaged, or fear that there is something wrong with them in the genital area
- Refusal to go to school
- Delinquency, conduct problems
- Secretiveness
- Aspects of sexual molestation in drawings, games, or fantasies
- Unusual aggressiveness
- Higher risk for becoming sexual offenders, abusers, or sex workers
- Suicide attempts and self-harm

What Parents Should Do: Preparing and Following up with Your Child:

- A. Read packets— What to Expect
- B. Attend Parent Meeting
- C. Follow-up
- D. Reinforcement
- E. Reports of Abuse—What to Do

A. Read Packets— What to expect:

The material in the parent packet and the children’s packets, which are given out at the performances, is distributed to parents, teachers, and students and is designed to reinforce the lessons demonstrated in the presentations and to provide important information regarding services. If you find yourself distressed or uncomfortable talking with you child or other children about this topic, or feel a need to further discuss your own thoughts and feelings of abuse, please refer to the listing of emergency numbers and resources or contact Westwood Youth & Family Services at **(781) 320-1006** for a referral.

Children’s Packet Includes:

- List of Six Body Safety Rules from the Play
- Body Safety Word Find, Word and Math Puzzles and Mazes
- “Who to Tell” Worksheet

B. Attend parent meeting:

Parent meetings will be held at WY&FS, located at the Islington Community Center, prior to the annual performances for 3rd graders. This is a time for parents to ask questions and view a video of past performances. Please see the cover letter for dates and times of parent meetings.

C. Follow-up:

The following is a list of supportive ways you can follow-up with your child in the days immediately after the BST performance:

1. Be familiar with the material about sexual abuse provided in your parent packet.
2. Go over your child’s packet with him or her immediately following the program.
 - Discuss the BST Safety Rules, incorporating your family values and beliefs.
 - Work together to complete the “Who to Tell” sheet
3. Be available and listen to your child— believe him or her.
4. Reinforce the lessons of BST and go over the material in the future.

D. Reinforcement:

It is important to reinforce these important safety issues at home.

We suggest:

- Remind your children of “The Six Rules of Body Safety Theater”
- Ask your child, “Who are some people whom you could talk to if you had a problem?”
- Play the “What if...” game. Ask your child, “What if...” and fill in any number of potentially dangerous situations.
 - Remember to keep examples general; specifics may scare children of unimportant details. Examples:

Don't Ask	Do Ask
<p>What if your baby-sitter asked you to take down your pants and let him touch your penis? <i>This introduces an image your child may never have specifically have thought of and the new anxiety that goes along with it.</i></p> <p>What if someone broke a window and came into your bedroom with a gun when you were home alone? <i>This is unnecessarily frightening.</i></p> <p>What if you were walking home from school and a big white van pulled up and a man wearing a cowboy hat tried to get you into his car? <i>This teaches children to watch out for white cars and cowboy hats.</i></p>	<p>What if someone touched you in a way you didn't like? <i>This generic question allows you to talk about the concept without giving your children more information than they need.</i></p> <p>What if you were home alone and you thought you heard someone in the house? <i>This is something children think about. The tone of the question should be unemotional.</i></p> <p>What if you were walking home from school and you saw a car or person who seemed suspicious or that you felt funny about? <i>This is not frightening or so detailed that children can visualize specific danger. It teaches an overall applicable skill.</i></p>

E. Reports of Abuse - What to do:

Any discussion of sexual abuse may lead to disclosure of abuse by a victim. If disclosure does occur, there would be a need for on-going services.

If you know or suspect that a child is being abused in any way, help them by calling the **Child-at-Risk Hotline at the Department of Children and Families anytime of the day or night at 1-800-792-5200.** For more information, visit mass.gov/dcf.

Also Remember to:

- Reinforce, praise, and support the child for telling.
- Demonstrate belief in what the child shares.
- Reassure the child that you will protect him or her and/or will assist in getting help.
- Listen. Don't pry or excessively probe.

Prevention

This material on “Prevention” is used with permission from Stop It Now![®] For further useful information or to email about the prevention of sexual abuse of children visit www.StopItNow.org.

Don’t Wait: Everyday actions to keep kids safe

The most effective prevention happens before a child is harmed. Kids are immediately safer when parents and caregivers take the time to learn about sexual abuse and its warning signs. Parents and caregivers who make a commitment to speak up as soon as they have a concern, instead of waiting for certain evidence of harm, play an even more crucial role in a child’s safety.

Here are some things that you and your family can do to protect children from sexual abuse, right now.

Set and respect clear guidelines

- **Family boundaries**— Set and respect family boundaries. All members of the family have rights to privacy in dressing, bathing, sleeping and other personal activities. If anyone does not respect these rights, an adult should clearly enforce the family rules.
- **How to say no**— Demonstrate boundaries by showing in your own life how to say “no.” Teach your children that their “no” will be respected, whether it’s in playing or tickling or hugging and kissing. For instance, if your child does not want to give Grandma a kiss, let the child shake hands instead. And make sure, too, that Grandma understands why a child’s ability to say ‘no’ is important for the safety of the child.
- **Proper names of body parts**— Use the proper names of body parts. Just as you teach your children that a nose is a nose, they need to know what to call their genitals. This knowledge gives children the correct language for understanding their bodies, for asking questions and for telling about any behavior that could lead to sexual abuse.
- **Okay touch vs. inappropriate touch**— Be clear with adults and children about the difference between “okay touch” and inappropriate touch. For younger children, teach more concrete rules such as “talk with me if anyone – family, friend or anyone else – touches your private parts.” Also teach kids that it is unacceptable to use manipulation or control to touch someone else’s body.
- **Secret vs. surprise**— Explain the difference between a secret and a surprise. Both the adults and children in your life need to know how secrets may make kids unsafe. Surprises are joyful and generate excitement in anticipation of being revealed after a short period of time. Secrets exclude

others, often because the information will create upset or anger. When keeping secrets with just one person becomes routine, children are more vulnerable to abuse.

Watch out for signs

- **Inappropriate behavior**— Watch for any inappropriate behaviors in other adults or older youth because children, especially young ones, are not as able to recognize these behaviors or to protect themselves.
 - **Technology**— Stay on top of your children’s use of technology – Internet, email, instant messaging, webcam use, peer-to-peer/social networking sites, and cell phones, including photo exchanges. The illusion of anonymity on these electronic mediums often leads to a breakdown of social rules and expectations, ones that would be assumed if the interactions were face-to-face. Whenever possible, make sure the child’s interactions are visible and public. Kids, and even adults, can easily stumble into inappropriate or even dangerous situations and exchanges.
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Speak up

- **Practice talking**— Practice talking before there’s a problem. Say the “difficult” or “embarrassing” words out loud so that you become more comfortable using those words, asking those questions, and confronting those behaviors. Having stress-free conversations about difficult issues with both the adults and children in your life gets everyone in the habit of talking openly and honestly. Show those people in your life that you will listen to anything they have to say, even if it’s about something embarrassing or something they’ve done wrong.
 - **Don’t ignore inappropriate behaviors**— Speak up when you see, or are subject to, any inappropriate behaviors. Interrupt and talk with the person who is making you uncomfortable. If you feel you can’t do this, find someone who is in a position to intervene. The person behaving inappropriately might need help to stop these behaviors.
 - **Report suspected abuse**— Report anything you know or suspect might be sexual abuse. If nobody speaks up, the abuse will not stop.
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Support your kids

- **Be reassuring**— Make it clear that you will support your children when they request privacy or say “no” to an activity or a kind of touch that makes them uncomfortable.

- **Who to trust**— Talk to your kids about who you/they trust. Give your kids permission to talk to these trustworthy adults whenever they feel scared, uncomfortable or confused about someone's behavior toward them.
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Be prepared

- **Family safety plan**— Create a clear and easy-to-follow Family Safety Plan. Make sure that as adults, you know how to challenge each other when you see any inappropriate behaviors. Create a list noting both who to talk to when you see behavior you are unsure about and who to call if you believe you need to report sexual abuse. Teach the children about what to do and who to talk with if they are sexually threatened or touched by someone.
- **Helpful organizations**— Make a list of people and organizations you can call for advice, information, and help. You can be a resource to your family and friends about how to report abuse and how to get help for everyone involved. If you know that a child has been sexually abused, be sure to get help for the child quickly, so the harm can be stopped and healed.
- **Be a confident parent**— Understanding the tools of sexual abuse prevention builds your confidence that you have the power and knowledge to keep your kids safe. Remember, the most effective prevention involves taking action before any abuse occurs. Prevention can start in your home today. You can start it now.

Understanding Children's Sexuality

Ages 2 – 6

Common Behaviors	Uncommon Behaviors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masturbating or touching genitals in either private or public areas • Viewing, touching peer or new sibling's genital area • Showing genitals to peers • Standing, sitting closely to others • Attempting to view nude peers or adults • Behaviors are transient, fleeting and few 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any sexual behavior that involves children with an age difference greater than 4 years • Different sexual behaviors displayed on a daily basis • Sexual behavior that causes emotional or physical pain • Sexual behavior associated with physical aggression • Sexual behavior that involves coercion

Ages 7-12

Common Behaviors	Uncommon Behaviors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play with children they know, including playing "doctor" with some sexual discussion involved • Interested in sexual content in the media (TV, movies, radio) • Touch own genitals at home, in private • Look at nude pictures • Interested in the opposite sex • Shy about undressing • Shy around strangers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puts mouth on sex parts • Puts objects in rectum or vagina • Masturbates with objects • Touches others' sex parts after being told not to • Touches adults' sex parts • Acts to engage in sex acts • Imitates intercourse • Undresses other people • Asks to watch sexually explicit television • Makes sexual sounds

Emergency Numbers and Resources

Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF)

Child-At-Risk Hotline, 24/7

To report suspected abuse in Massachusetts

1(800) 792-5200

Childhelp's National Child Abuse Hotline

Nationwide hotline staffed with professional counselors

1(800)-4-A-CHILD

Parents Helping Parents, Parental Stress Line

Support and guidance for parents in Massachusetts

1(800) 632-8188

Massachusetts Citizens for Children

14 Beacon Street, Suite 706

Boston, MA 02108

Masskids.org

(617) 742-8555

Children's Hospital Boston, Department of Psychology

300 Longwood Ave.

Boston, MA 02115

(617) 355-6680

Riverside Emergency Services

190 Lenox Street

Norwood, MA 02062-3416

Emergency Services

(781) 769-8674 or Toll Free 1(800) 529-5077

Westwood Police Department

590 High Street

Westwood, MA 02090

Emergency Dial 911

Business (781) 320-1000

Westwood Youth & Family Services

Islington Community Center

288 Washington St.

Westwood, MA 02090

(781) 320-1006

Suggested Readings

These books are recommended, but not endorsed by Westwood Youth & Family Services. Please remember to read the books alone before reading them to your children.

For Children:

A Terrible Thing Happened: A story for children who have witnessed violence or trauma, by Margaret M. Holmes (2000)

I said, "No!" A Kid-to-Kid Guide to Keeping Your Private Parts Private, by Kimberly and Zack King (2008)

It's NOT the Stork!: A Book about Girls, Boys, Babies, Bodies, Families and Friends by Robie Harris and Michael Emberley (2006)

It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing up, Sex and Sexual Health by Robie Harris and Michael Emberley (2014)

It's So Amazing! A book about Eggs, Sperm, Birth, babies and Families by Robie Harris and Michael Emberley (2014)

No Means No! by Jayneen Sanders (2015)

Some Parts are Not For Touching, by Julie Federico (2008)

The Right Touch: A read aloud story to help prevent child sexual abuse, by Sandy Kleven (1998)

Your Body Belongs to You, by Cornelia Spelman (1997)

For Parents:

Ten Talks Parents Must Have with Their Children About Sex and Character, by Pepper Schwartz (2000)

When Your Child has Been Molested: A parents' guide to healing and recovery, by Kathryn Brohl (2004)

Body Safety Education: A Parents' Guide to Protecting Kids from Sexual Abuse by Jayneen Sanders (2015)

Internet Safety

Acts of sexual abuse can be instigated or perpetrated on the internet. Here are some suggestions to decrease internet vulnerability in your household. Remember that each family is different and it is best to make rules that fit your family's needs.

Tips for families:

- Keep your computer in a common, monitored room with minimal privacy
- Set up computer rules. Consider restricting time of day, duration of time online, and sites they are allowed to visit
- Install passwords and block access to inappropriate sites and graphic content
- Make rules that work for your family

Suggested ways to teach your child(ren) about internet safety:

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do use the internet to help with schoolwork• Do use the internet to "visit" places far away like museums and historic sites• Do use the internet to keep in touch with friends and family who you already know and trust• Do let parents know if you come across information that makes you feel uncomfortable• Do play games that your parents said are okay• Do tell your parents if you ever feel uncomfortable• Do follow your family rules• Do have fun!	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't give out any personal information like your last name, address, telephone number, or school name to someone you meet online• Don't agree to meet someone who you met online. (People online may not be who they seem)• Don't post any pictures of yourself online without asking your parents• Don't respond to people who you do not know (online chatting or emails)• Don't let others make you feel uncomfortable• Don't download or install anything that could harm family privacy

Acknowledgements

Westwood Youth & Family Services would like to thank the many individuals and groups that contribute and collaborate to ensure the continued success of the Body Safety Theater program in Westwood.

After thirty-two years of annual performances, BST has become an institution. It is a wonderful demonstration of how individuals and groups in a community can come together to educate and inspire dialogue on a difficult topic such as sexual abuse prevention in a way that promotes safety and awareness without fostering fear.

We would first like to acknowledge and thank our high school volunteers, the Mentors, for their hundreds of hours of community service each year and for their commitment to the health and safety of the younger children in Westwood. We simply could not do this program without you!

Each year the Westwood Public Schools, both the elementary and high schools, graciously collaborate to find two days in May when our high school volunteers are able to leave school and visit each of the five elementary schools. This requires an amazing juggling act of space and scheduling for third grade and high school teachers, school staff, and administration, and it is much appreciated.

Since the 2006 fiscal year, when budget cuts necessitated the elimination of BST from the WY&FS budget, the program has been able to continue only through the generosity of various local groups, including donations and grants received from the elementary school PTOs and the Dedham Savings Institution. Thank you to all our donors, past and present.

Finally, a special word of thanks to all the members of the Westwood Youth & Family Services staff and advisory board whose time, guidance and commitment provides the solid base necessary to maintain this important effort.

We sincerely hope that this program acts as a spring board for parents and children to start conversations and reinforce lessons about how to stay healthy and safe at all ages.

-Westwood Youth & Family Services