

PARENT LETTER 4: A.C.T. - ABUSE, DISCLOSURE, & GETTING HELP

During our fourth lesson of *Safer, Smarter Teens: Personal Power*, your child saw a video scenario featuring Chris, whose backstory includes that he is “being abused by his mom’s boyfriend.” Lauren reviewed the red flags of abuse. She noted that abusers create opportunities to be alone with children and teens and may offer enticing experiences, such as access to alcohol or inappropriate movies, with the caveat not to tell. She shared her conflicts about disclosing her abuse and reminded students that abuse is never the child’s fault. Students practiced A.C.T. (Ask, Care, Tell) as a way to respond to red flags and to reach out to peers.

PARENT CONNECTION

Middle school age children are old enough to be aware of changes in their friends’ behaviors and help them recognize questionable or unsafe situations. This lesson reinforces ways in which children can access help because it’s always okay to tell. Encourage your child to share his or her observations and concerns. Discuss what to do if his or her friend discloses abuse. It is important to stay calm in this situation. Remind your child to reassure that friend that your child is glad he or she confided in him or her. Your child can help a friend by telling a trusted adult. When children disclose abuse to adults, it is important for adults also to remain calm and reassuring. It is very difficult for a victim to disclose abuse, so a calm, non-judgmental response is best.

TIPS TO FURTHER TODAY’S LESSON

Look for opportunities to discuss “what if” situations with your child and review strategies for using A.C.T. (Ask, Care, Tell).

For example:

- What if a friend tells you that she is uncomfortable when her cousin comes over? He is 30 and always comments about how good she looks. He tries to be alone with her and has bought her make up that her mom doesn’t know about.
- What if a friend tells you that his music teacher has given him beer to relax and begs you not to tell anyone?
- What if your cousin seems sad and quiet? You miss texting and chatting together. She says that her dad won’t let her use the phone.

Ask your child how he or she would A.C.T. – What would he or she Ask to begin the conversation with his or her friend who may be in an unsafe situation? How would your child communicate that he or she Cares about the safety and well-being of the friend? Reinforce the next step: Telling a trusted adult and getting help. (Consider asking your child what he or she would do if the friend begged your child not to tell and to keep this unsafe secret.)