



### No Good Secrets



#### Reflection

One of the most common strategies predators use when seeking a child for sexual relationship is to ask them to keep the relationship secret. The predator may establish secret jokes, secret gifts, secret conversations, or code words.

In this context it is important to teach our children that there are no good secrets. Encourage kids to tell their parents if someone tells them a secret.

There *are* times when telling parents secrets can be difficult, such as when family members are the abusers or when parents truly are not able to deal with important topics maturely and lovingly. In these cases, it is helpful to have parent-approved trusted adults.

*Proverbs 12:22 says,  
"Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord,  
but those who are truthful, his delight."*

***"The face is the mirror of the mind,  
and eyes without speaking  
confess the secrets of the heart."***

- St. Jerome

### Top Five Secrets a Child Won't Tell

There are a few secrets children keep within themselves. These secrets can be life-threatening and compromise a child's physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. The list below encompasses the most prevalent secrets, but there may be others.

- Rape/Sexual Abuse
- Alcohol, drug use, and smoking
- Eating disorders
- Bullying/Cyberbullying
- Sexting

### Why Children Keep Secrets

**Today's children face more challenges and obstacles than ever before.**

- Technology and the ease of secrecy gives rise to secret-keeping behavior among children who may also take advantage of their parents' lack of "expertise" in navigating areas of tech.
- Shame and guilt provide motives for keeping secrets.
- Fear brought on by doubt is common and leads to low self-esteem, insecurity, and secret keeping.

As a parent you need to develop and maintain a constant connection with your child so that they feel confident to tell you anything, no matter how bad.

*"The child keeps the secret for a number of reasons. The child may feel that no one will believe him. The offender may have verbally threatened him or subtly let him know that harm might come to him or his family if he tells. In many cases, the child feels guilty and doesn't want to get the offender in trouble."*

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## **WATCH**

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### **1. Watch for physical boundary violations.**

- ▶ Roughhousing, wrestling, or tickling
- ▶ Touching too much
- ▶ "Accidentally" touching inappropriately
- ▶ Encouraging children to pile on top of an adult
- ▶ Having children sit on an adult's lap
- ▶ Holding or hugging when the child resists
- ▶ Hugs with too much body contact

### **2. Watch for emotional boundary violations.**

- ▶ Spending a great deal of time with a child
- ▶ Calling or emailing a child frequently
- ▶ Getting involved in many of the child's activities
- ▶ Acting possessive of the child

### **3. Watch for behavioral boundary violations.**

- ▶ Ridiculing the beliefs of a child's parents
- ▶ Allowing children to do things against their parent's wishes
- ▶ Offering children cigarettes, alcohol, or drugs
- ▶ Allowing children to look at pornography or to visit inappropriate Internet sites

### **4. Watch for warning signs that a child may have been abused.**

These behavioral warning signs may indicate that a child has been abused:

- ▶ The child changes his or her routines
- ▶ The child begins acting differently
- ▶ The child starts complaining about activities or people he or she previously enjoyed
- ▶ The child withdraws from his or her parents
- ▶ The child stops spending time with friends

Watch for these sudden changes in a child's behavior:

- ▶ Bathroom difficulty such as bed-wetting or daytime accidents
- ▶ Increased moodiness or depression
- ▶ Increased aggressive behavior
- ▶ Decline in academic performance
- ▶ Difficulties getting along with peers
- ▶ Increased inappropriate sexual behavior



## ACT

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### 1. Act when you notice warning signs in adults.

- ▶ Talk to the person you suspect.
- ▶ Explain to the person you suspect that you do not allow the actions or behaviors.
- ▶ Express your concerns to the person supervising the program where you believe boundary violations may be occurring.
- ▶ Remove your child from the situation.
- ▶ If you suspect abuse, call protective services or the police.

### 2. Act when you notice warning signs in your child.

- ▶ Ask your child questions like, "What is going on in your life?" or "Why are you suddenly behaving differently?"
- ▶ Let your child know he or she can tell you anything.
- ▶ Assure your child of your love and desire to keep him or her safe.

## TEACH

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### 1. Teach our children to help protect themselves.

Teach children about their bodies.

- ▶ Teach them the names of their body parts, including their private parts.
- ▶ Once they know the names of their private parts, teach them how those private parts are different from the other parts of the body, such as eyes, ears, feet, and arms.
- ▶ Teach children that most people are not allowed to touch their private parts.

Teach children what to do if someone tries to violate their boundaries.

1. They can tell the person to stop!
2. They can get away from the person.
3. They can tell their parents.
4. They can tell another adult who can protect them.

### 2. Teach our children they can talk to us about anything.

- ▶ Maintain open lines of communication.
- ▶ Don't act embarrassed when talking to your children.
- ▶ Build a sense of trust.
- ▶ Talk with children about sexual abuse the way that you talk to them about any other danger.
- ▶ Let children know they won't be in trouble for telling you if something happens.
- ▶ Tell your children you want to take care of them and keep them safe.
- ▶ Let them know you love them.