

# BE THE CHANGE

## PARENT LETTER 3: THE PROBLEM OF SEXUAL ABUSE

In this *Safer, Smarter Teens: Be The Change* lesson, your child learned about the problem of sexual abuse. The concept of “grooming” was introduced to identify techniques an abuser uses to establish and maintain a relationship. It starts with the abuser finding a target with a vulnerability. By exploiting that vulnerability, the abuser strives to fill a need for the target and establish a relationship. Next the abuser works to isolate the target. Control is maintained through secrecy and blame. Control can be gained through force, coercion, and fraud.

### PARENT CONNECTION:

Teenagers naturally seek more independence. This is an important stage of development. However, seeking independence does not mean a teen is ready to be independent. Your teenager will continue to benefit from your open communication. The more open your communication is, the more likely your teen is to come to you at the first signs of a problem. Teenagers need to be assured that they have trusted adults that they can go to when there are any signs of grooming or an inappropriate relationship. Continue to talk about how to stand up to potential abusers. Abusers typically test the waters to see how a potential victim will react. Therefore, it is essential that the target resists and tells someone at the first sign of an inappropriate relationship. Never discount when teenagers disclose that something made them feel uncomfortable. If they felt uncomfortable, it is likely that something inappropriate could occur or has occurred. Discuss with your teenager what to say or do if someone is attempting to initiate an inappropriate relationship.

### TIPS TO FURTHER TODAY'S LESSON:

Look for opportunities to discuss “What if?” questions and help your teenager develop strategies and solutions.

- What if an adult you know keeps offering to buy you things, such as an expensive jacket you have been wanting?
- What if a coach offered to work with you after practice? When is it okay to stay alone after practice, and when is it crossing the line?
- What if an adult or older teenager threatens you to keep you from telling what has been happening? Whom could you go to for help?

If your child discloses information about abuse, stay calm. Reassure your child that you are glad he or she told you and that you will help.

Reporting abuse is an essential step in helping victims and stopping the abuse. More than 90% of sexual abuse is committed by someone the target knows, loves, and trusts. Every state has an abuse hotline that accepts reports 24 hours per day. Remember, reports must be made when there is a suspicion or evidence of abuse. It is your responsibility to report suspected abuse, and it is the responsibility of the investigator to investigate abuse reports.