

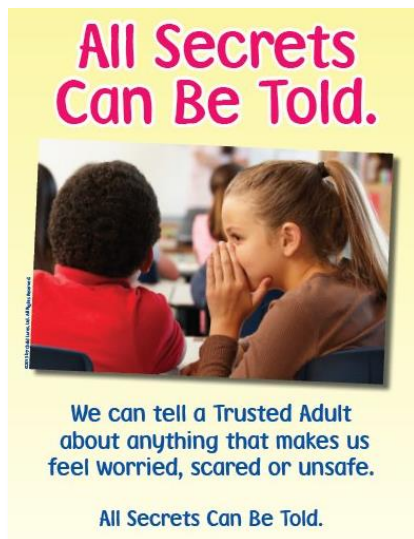
"Good Touch, Bad Touch" May Send Confusing Message to Children about Sexual Abuse

by Natalie A. Cherrix, LCSW

One of the most common phrases used for the prevention of child sexual abuse is "Good Touch, Bad Touch". This slogan refers to the teachings that good touches are those that are not abusive (such as hugs from family, a pat on the back, or shaking hands), while bad touches are those that are abusive and involve touching a child's private body parts.

For many years this concept of good touch/bad touch has been used, and is still used, in educational programs for young children to teach them about appropriate versus inappropriate touches. But, there is a serious problem with this good touch/bad touch message that is too often overlooked.

It is sometimes difficult for adults to accept that children do, in fact, experience sexual arousal and pleasure on some level. It is normal child development. As such, children can experience good physical feelings by being touched sexually. It is simply an involuntary physiological reaction - regardless of the touch being inappropriate or abusive. This in **no way** ever makes sexual abuse the child's fault.



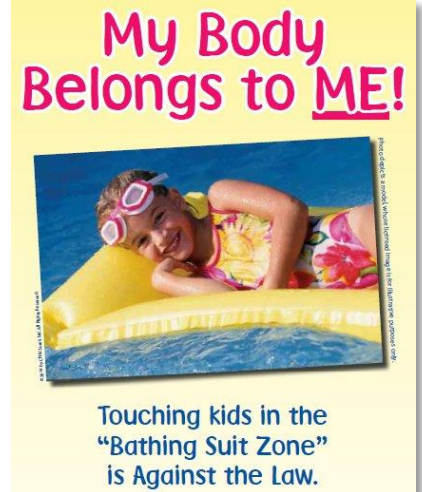
With this understanding, if "good touch/bad touch" is re-examined, it is a confusing message to give to children. If inappropriate touches are taught only as "bad" touches, then a child who is being sexually abused and experiences it as pleasurable will

likely think of it instead as a good touch. This makes it also confusing to the child as to whether or not they are supposed to tell an adult about the touching. Children are very concrete in their thinking. If something *felt* good, then it is a good touch to them. It is too abstract to expect young children to understand that even though something felt good, it is actually bad.

We must redefine how we talk to kids about this important topic. Touches are better categorized as safe and unsafe touches, instead of just good and bad. It is also important to explicitly point out the fact to children that even unsafe touches can feel good but this does not mean that they are to blame or should not tell an adult. This is especially important because those who sexually abuse children often use this to keep children silent or make them feel guilty.

Open dialogue is important to preventing sexual abuse. Start the conversation with your child at a young age, but if you have been putting it off, remember that it's better late than never!

Images by Child Lures Prevention. Learn more at www.childluresprevention.com



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