



**PARENT HANDBOOK**

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**Parent Handbook**

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**Big Brothers Big Sisters of Windsor Essex**

**Who are we?**

* a non-profit volunteer organization which aims to establish meaningful relationships between caring adult volunteers and children in need of service
* committed to providing role-models and mentors for young people who share similar interests and meet the requirements of the agency
* dedicated to providing responsible and caring role-models and mentors who are 18 years of age and older and are committed to volunteering at least a few hours a couple times a month
* committed to providing training and ongoing professional support to foster the success of the mentoring relationships

**What do we believe?**

* all children who need a mentor in their life should have one
* all children have individual needs to be met and therefore our programs reflect this
* healthy, nurturing and empowering relationships contribute to the positive development of children (socially, physically, mentally, emotionally, academically, etc.)
* in the power and importance of mentorship

***Did you know these facts about the children in our programs:***

**91% feel better about themselves**

**65% have improved confidence**

**76% show improved grades**

**80% have a better attendance record**

**82% develop a better relationship with teacher(s)**

**90% get along better with other children**

Facts: Retrieved from <http://www.bigbrothersbigsistershalifax.ca>

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## PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Your child will be assessed to participate in one or more of the following programs:

* Big Brother Big Sister Mentoring
* Couples Mentoring
* Group Mentoring

-Site-Based Group Program

*All children assessed and accepted into one of the above programs will receive Pre-Match Training.*

**Other Programs/Services**

* Summer Day Camp (conditional on funding)
* Community Involvement Opportunities
* Camp Programs/Sponsorships
* Special Activities

**School Based Programs**

These are school based programs and referrals are made by the school only

* In-School Mentoring
* Go-Girls!
* Game On

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**GETTING STARTED**

**Who is a Little?**

Little Brothers and Little Sisters are children between the ages of six and eighteen years of age who would greatly benefit from having the support, guidance and friendship of an adult mentor whether it be on a one to one basis or in a group setting. Littles are regular children who have specific needs which can be met through their involvement in our program and by spending time with a positive adult role model. Littles are referred by a variety of sources such as parent/guardians, school personnel or other social service agencies in the community. The reasons for the referral will be discussed with the parent/guardian during the enrollment process.

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**Family Enrollment Process**

Once an application is received by the office, it is distributed to a Mentoring Coordinator to process. The Mentoring Coordinator will have contact with the parent/guardian and will set up a convenient time to meet for a Parent Interview. During this interview, the Mentoring Coordinator will ask the parent/guardian questions about their family situation and their child in particular in an attempt to understand the child’s needs and assess whether our program is in the child’s best interest. If the Mentoring Coordinator feels that it is appropriate to proceed with the intake process, a child interview will be scheduled.

The child is interviewed separately. During this interview, personality, needs and interests are further explored and with parental/guardian consent, the Mentoring Coordinator will contact the child’s school and other social service agencies the child is involved in to assist them in making an appropriate assessment. Pre-Match Training is also delivered to the parent/guardian and the child at this time. The training is directed at preparing the parent/guardian and child for a match. This training also incorporates a Child Safety component which is designed at protecting and educating both children and parents/guardians in acknowledging, understanding and responding to abusive and unsafe situations.

Once all this information is gathered and the Mentoring Coordinator makes an assessment of your child’s needs, the parent/guardian will be notified of the child’s acceptance and the Mentoring Coordinator will proceed in placing the child in the appropriate program(s). If it is determined that the agency cannot meet the child’s needs a referral to another agency may be made at this point with the consent of the parent/guardian.

The following are guidelines to help you and your child understand what is expected once your child is accepted into the program.

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**EXPECTATIONS OF A PARENT/GUARDIAN**

Parents/Guardians must agree for their child to be involved in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program and adhere to agency policies and procedures. The parent/guardian ultimately has the authority regarding their child’s participation in the program.

What you need to do as a parent/guardian:

* Ensure positive communication between yourself, the agency and volunteers
* Inform the agency of any changes which may affect your child’s involvement in the program particularly changes in address, phone numbers, school, emergency contacts
* Inform the agency of medication your child is taking for ongoing health issues
* Inform the agency of your child’s behavior which may affect program participation
* Encourage your child to be ready and on time for group, outings, etc.
* Inform the agency of transportation arrangements/requirements for outings.

**EXPECTATIONS OF A LITTLE**

Your child must be a willing participant in order to benefit from the program. Encouraging your child to participate in the programs offered by the agency is beneficial although forcing them to is counter- productive and not recommended. If there is a concern with your child’s willingness to participate, discuss this with your Mentoring Coordinator.

What your child needs to do as a Little:

• follow agency structure

• communicate regarding their feelings about program involvement

•  **HAVE FUN!!!!!!!!**

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**THE VOLUNTEER**

Whether a Big Brother, Big Sister, In-School Mentor or Group Leader, our volunteers are valued members of this agency who have a responsibility to uphold its mission. As an organization we symbolize friendship, responsibility, trust, and a concern for the protection and well-being of children. As a part of our team, we expect that a volunteer will:

* be a friend to the child(ren) and maintain contact on a regular and consistent basis
* be a consistent and positive role model by modeling responsible behaviours such as reliability, respect, honesty, appropriate manners, etc., along with a concern for the protection and well-being of children
* be supervised by service delivery staff and remain accountable to him/her
* be 18 years of age or older

To become a volunteer, an individual has to complete the agency’s Enrollment Process. This is the agency’s way of ensuring that each applicant will be a suitable role model for a child. We follow a set of Service Delivery Standards, which requires each applicant to complete or provide:

* an On-Line Orientation Session which is designed to raise the individual’s awareness of the needs of children and the important role a volunteer has within the agency. It is at this time that a volunteer learns about our various programs and the role the volunteer plays within each program.
* a written application
* a minimum of three references from individuals who have known the applicant for at least two years
* a Vulnerable Sector/ Criminal Records Check
* a Pre-Match Training specific to the program in which they would like to volunteer. Training sessions address the role the volunteer has in mentoring a child or group of children and prepare them to be matched to a child. As part of the session a variety of situations that may occur while volunteering are discussed. Also child safety information is presented to all volunteers to emphasize the importance of child safety and child sexual abuse prevention.
* a minimum of one in-depth interview with the appropriate Mentoring Coordinator to assess the applicant’s suitability for acceptance as a volunteer. This interview includes questions about their motivation to be a volunteer in this organization, their family and employment history, volunteer experience, health, experiences with children, a home assessment and their personal interests.

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**THE MATCH PROCESS**

The waiting process can be long and unpredictable therefore your child is encouraged to participate and take advantage of all programs and opportunities available to them within the agency. This will help your child to feel connected to the agency and will enable us to provide service as they wait to potentially be matched in the future. This will also help us in getting to know your child better as the more acquainted we are with your child the more equipped we are to make a successful match.

The matching process is the method through which a Big and Little, who have been accepted into the program, are eligible to be matched by a Mentoring Coordinator. A match shall be determined in such a way that the Little’s well-being is given priority and the potential of the Big for helping the Little is fully considered. Factors such as the needs of the Little, age, geographical location, interests, personality characteristics and the needs of the Big and their availability are taken into consideration in matching a Big and Little.

Once a Mentoring Coordinator has selected a Little to consider matching to a volunteer, they will contact the volunteer to share some relevant information about the Little and assess their interest in meeting this child. Once the volunteer has agreed to meet the child, the Mentoring Coordinator then contacts the parent/guardian of the Little and shares some relevant information about the volunteer.

An Introduction Meeting will be arranged by the Mentoring Coordinator for the Big to meet the Little and his/her parent/guardian usually in their home with the Mentoring Coordinator present. At this time, if all are in agreement, the Big is encouraged to take the child out for a brief visit to provide an opportunity for them to get to know each other and to help them make a decision about being matched. We want the child to feel that he/she is important in this process and that their input is valuable.

If all are in agreement, a Match Meeting will be scheduled with everyone to formalize the match and to discuss goals, expectations and responsibilities in an effort to start off the match in a positive way. The match commitment is generally one year in duration and reassessed on a yearly basis. Contacts between a Big and a Little vary depending on a child’s needs.

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**MATCH SUPPORT**

A Mentoring Coordinator is assigned to you to offer support to a Little, Parent/Guardian and Big throughout their involvement with the agency. The Mentoring Coordinator maintains regular contact with all parties to ensure the match is going well. The agency relies on Parents/Guardians and Bigs to maintain open communication regarding the match and to alert the Mentoring Coordinator as soon as possible if issues arise.

During supervision contacts, the Mentoring Coordinator will ask questions about outings, Child Safety, experiences and growth in the relationship. All parties are expected to cooperate with these guidelines as non-compliance may jeopardize the continuation of the match. See table below for a schedule of minimum match supervision contacts.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Timeframe** | **Volunteer** | **Parent/Guardian** | **Child** |
| One month | Telephone | Telephone |  |
| Two month | Telephone | Telephone | Telephone |
| Three month | Telephone | Telephone |  |
| Four month | In-person | In-person | In-person |
| Six month | Telephone | Telephone | Telephone |
| Eight month | Telephone | Telephone | Telephone |
| Ten month | Telephone | Telephone | Telephone |
| Twelve month | In-person | In-person | In-person |
| **12 months or more** |
| Quarterly contact | Telephone and/or email | Telephone and/or email | Telephone and/or email |
| Annually | In-person | In-person | In-person |

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**GROUP MENTORING**

Age appropriate groups are offered on a weekly basis at the Big Brother Big Sister office. All children are eligible to participate once they have been accepted into the program unless this is not in their best interest which will be discussed with you during the intake process. The Group Work Coordinator will contact you once your child has been accepted into the program to let you know how they can get started. The goal of the group program is to enhance the self-esteem and social development of group members and to provide the opportunity for mentoring relationships with Group Leaders. Groups consist of theme oriented topics with a social, educational and recreational component such as bullying, body image, cooperation and problem solving. Priority for participation in group is always given to unmatched Littles.

The use of appropriate consequences for negative behaviour in group will involve:

* logical and natural consequences
* removal from the situation
* parental involvement
* temporary suspension
* dismissal from one or all programs the agency provides

It is the policy of Big Brothers Big Sisters Windsor Essex not to use physical discipline with the children in our programs.

**GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS**

* Parents/Littles must sign up for group each week. The Group Work Coordinator will confirm with the parent the day of group.

• Communicate with the Group Work Coordinator regarding your child’s involvement in group and discuss changes as they arise. (ie. address, phone number, allergies, medications, behaviour, etc.)

* Parents are expected to take the responsibility of transporting their child to and from groups. Transportation may be provided in special circumstances when available by staff and/or volunteers.

• Encourage your child to be ready and on time especially when transportation is being provided.

• Do not force your child to attend groups against their will as this may prevent them from benefitting from the program and may affect their behaviour in group.

* The parent/guardian is responsible to ensure the child’s safety to and from the vehicle. A parent or designated adult must be at home when the child is returned. In the event a suitable guardian is not there to receive the child and other arrangements have not been prearranged with the Group Work Coordinator, the Children’s Aid Society will be contacted for direction. This is for the safety of the child.

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**PRE-MATCH TRAINING**

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of Windsor Essex is here for you and your child, from the beginning to the end of your match. Our goal is to ensure a safe, strong, healthy, and enjoyable match.**

1. ***You and Big Brothers Big Sisters***
* **Key Messages**
	+ **You’re making a commitment**
	+ **Parents/Guardians are essential partners in supporting a strong, healthy match**
* What do you (parent) expect from the program?
	+ Reinforce facts, address misconceptions
* **Your child as a Little Brother or Little Sister**
	+ They should want to have a mentor
	+ It will take time for them to get to know their mentor
	+ Having a mentor means they will have lots of fun and try new things safely
* **Match Participants and Stages**
	+ You are free to talk to us at any time about your child’s mentor / match
	+ The match relationship may take some time to warm up and develop trust
	+ The goal of the match is to have a strong and mutually rewarding friendship
	+ The mentor will make a commitment to spend time with your child
	+ They are good listeners, fun friends, guides, motivators, confidants.
	+ This is a one-on-one relationship, so please don’t ask that siblings or friends go along in the match outings
	+ Be sure to communicate with the mentor what you think are safe and appropriate activities. We will also be careful to monitor match activities.
	+ Your child's mentor is an "older friend" to them. They are not substitute parents, babysitters, disciplinarians, financial supporters, a taxi service, or counselors.
		- They will be 18 years of age or older
		- They have expressed an interest in being your child’s friend and making a difference in their life
		- They have gone through a thorough assessment process
		- They have a satisfactory criminal record check and vulnerable sector check
		- They have given us at least three satisfactory references
		- They have shown us in a comprehensive interview that they are aware and interested in what it means to be a mentor
		- They have been trained to be aware of signs of abuse in your child, and are mindful that their own behaviour is risk-free
		- They have been trained on the mentorship process and are aware of the requirements and demands
		- They will be meeting with us monthly to talk about the match
		- They are always able to contact us to discuss their concerns or any uncertainties about the match

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* + - They have been trained to set boundaries with your child and to be cautious in respecting the boundaries which they or the child set, or boundaries you may set for them
* **As the parent, you will be actively involved throughout the match**
	1. We will contact you and your child monthly to see how the match is going and your thoughts on the match, as well as any suggestions you might have for improvement. **If you do not maintain contact with us, the match cannot continue.**
	2. We encourage you to actively talk with the mentor about the match and discuss any concerns or issues you might have (e.g., movie ratings). They might not know this is an issue for you!
	3. We encourage you to work with the mentor to plan outings, and we will ask them to be as open as possible with you about the outing details. Be sure to ask your child about the outings and their feelings about the mentor and the activities.
	4. We are always happy to hear if things are going well, but don’t be afraid to call us if you have any worries or concerns. We’ll do our best to work through things with you!
	5. Being actively involved with your child’s match and the mentor means that the match relationship will be stronger and more meaningful, and the child will be more comfortable knowing you’re 100% with them
	6. We ask that you set boundaries with the mentor about what you feel comfortable having them do with your child. Be vigilant that the boundaries are being respected, and let us know immediately if you feel the boundaries are being stretched or broken
* **There are four parts to a match:**
1. Getting to know each other
* The mentor and child will get to know each other over time
* Setting goals will help. The point is not to push to meet all the goals, but the processing working towards them
1. Spending time together
* The mentor will encourage your child to try new things or learn new skills
* The mentor and the child both make a commitment to spend a few hours with each other several times each month, but weekly contact for a few hours is encouraged
* The mentor will encourage your child to take greater responsibility for choosing what they will do or where they go
* **Activities should be low cost or no cost**
* Boundaries should be established and made clear by the child, the mentor, and you, as the parent
1. Honouring the commitment
* A match requires a minimum of a one year commitment by everyone involved
* Encourage your child to talk about what they liked or didn’t like about the outings

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* Be supportive of the match relationship, but be aware and talk to us if you notice anything uncomfortable or strange about the match
1. Ending or closing the match
* Sometimes the match might end earlier than planned (e.g., someone moves)
* We aim to plan for closing ahead of time, being honest with the child while assuring them that it’s not their fault.
* We aim for open communications during the closing process

1. ***Healthy Relationships***
* **Safe, healthy relationships pave the way for strong, supportive matches**
* **Communicate comprehensively with your child, their mentor, and your program staff**
* **Healthy Relationships**
	+ This means honesty and open communications between you and the mentor, your child and the mentor, and you and your child
	+ You know your child best. Be aware of any negative changes in your child or the match relationship, and feel free to talk to us!
* **Voice and Choices**
	+ Trust your instincts. If something feels off or wrong, don’t dismiss it
	+ We will remind your child that their body belongs to them, and no one has the right to do things to them or make them do things that are hurtful and uncomfortable
	+ We reassure your child that they have a voice in the relationship and the choice to say no to anything they feel uncomfortable about
* **Communication and Listening Skills**
	+ We encourage you to be open and communicative with your child’s mentor. This includes both the bad and uncomfortable things, as well as the good and positive things they do
	+ We also encourage you to be open and communicative with your child about their match. Be aware of how your child acts before and after an outing, and how that might reflect on the match relationship
	+ Let your child’s mentor know if you think change is necessary
1. ***Secure and Resilient***
* **All match participants will set boundaries, which must be respected**
* **Talk with your son or daughter about their Circle of Support, and be alert to secrets and risky behaviour**
* **As adults, we do have a duty to report abuse if it is disclosed to us or if we have reason to suspect abuse**
* **What’s a boundary?**
	+ Clear boundaries must be set by the child, the parent, and the mentor, and any stretching or breaking of boundaries must be reported to us immediately.
	+ We let your child know that our staff is always here to listen to them

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* **Circle of Support**
	+ We tell them about the circle of support they have in the people around them, and the importance of being open about secrets and risky behaviour. We encourage you to talk with your child about the supportive people they have in their life!
	+ We tell your child it is important to set boundaries with their mentor, and let them know what they are comfortable doing and what they are not comfortable doing
	+ The agency will be supportive and involved with all of you throughout the match
	+ You or your child can talk to us at any point about the match
	+ We will help the mentor and your child to set goals for their time together
* **Duty of Care, Types of Abuse, Disclosure and Discovery**
	+ Duty of care is when an adult is obligated to protect children/youth from harm.
	+ Types of abuse include: physical, emotional, sexual, neglect, bullying
	+ We have the duty to report any suspected abuse of the child to the authorities
	+ If the child discloses to us or the mentor about abuse, or we discover suspicions of abuse (through behaviour or physical signs of abuse), we are obligated to report it to the authorities
1. ***Ready to Start!***
* Please remember – most child-adult relationships are healthy, fun and empowering.
* You’re welcome to call, email or visit us any time.
* Any questions or comments?

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**CHILD SAFETY**

The mission of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Windsor Essex is to support youth, families and adult volunteers in mentoring relationships, empowering youth to gain positive life experience and achieve personal growth. To ensure that we are following through on this commitment, we provide Pre-Match Training to all children/youth, parents and volunteers who are involved with us. This training includes information about you and Big Brothers/Big Sisters, healthy relationships, secure and resilient and ready to start which incorporates child safety information. In addition volunteers agree to abide by the Health and Safety Guidelines of the agency.

Unfortunately, child abuse is a problem in our society. We want our families to be aware of the issue and to ensure the safety of their children in any situation whether it be with a volunteer, an educator, a family member or a neighbour. We will teach children what they need to know to avoid becoming victims of abuse and as a parent/guardian you are provided with relevant information to help you protect your children.

Please read through the information contained in this handbook. It is important to talk with your child/children and determine their feelings and knowledge level around the issue of abuse. If you require assistance from the agency, your agency contact person is there to provide that and to discuss any questions or concerns you may have.

We hope you find this information helpful. We will work together to keep our children safe.

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**How to Protect My Child**

Children who…..

 are well informed about inappropriate touching

 are taught to trust their feelings about situations and people

 know where to get help if they require it

…. are less likely to be victimized by any type of assault. **Prevention** is the key.

* Teach your child that touching is wonderful and makes us feel good, but privacy is important and some adults do not follow the rules of privacy
* Teach your child the proper names of body parts. Children must feel comfortable to use these words and must know that abuse is not a forbidden topic
* Teach your children that their bodies are their own and that they have the right to decide who may touch them and the right to say “NO”
* Teach your child basic safety rules for strangers: don’t talk to them; don’t accept gifts or rides; don’t go with them for any reason. Use a “password” for family safety; this is a word that only you and your child know and that anyone must provide for the child to accompany him/her
* Teach your child to trust his/her instincts
* Teach your child to run if he/she is the slightest bit suspicious about the actions of an adult
* Teach your children to always tell if they are concerned about the behaviour of an adult and assure them that they will be believed
* Teach your child that secrets are not allowed: surprises, like birthdays are fun but it is not fair for an adult to ask a child to keep a secret forever
* Play “what if” games with your child to cover a wide variety of potentially dangerous situations, both with strangers and with people they know. Do this regularly as children will have different questions and responses as they mature

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**Facts about Child Sexual Abuse**

**What is Child Sexual Abuse?**

When someone older, stronger or more experienced has forced sexual activity on a child or youth, child sexual abuse has occurred. This sexual activity may include sexual touching, intercourse, forcing the child to watch sexual activity or to view pornographic material.

There may be other acts/behaviours that make your child feel uncomfortable. These too could be interpreted as sexual abuse. Listen to your child!

Child sexual abuse is an abuse of power.

**Facts about Child Sexual Abuse:**

* In most cases the offender is someone the child knows well (e.g. a parent, a relative, an older friend or a neighbour).
* Most offenders are male, heterosexual and often regarded as “upstanding” members of their communities.
* The abuse is not usually violent. Most offenders use persuasion, threats and bribes instead of physical force.
* Children rarely tell about their sexual abuse because they are afraid and have been told by the offender not to tell.
* Children want to tell but they do not think they will be believed or protected from the threats of the offender**.**
* Children rarely lie about sexual abuse.
* The abuse usually takes place in the child’s own home, or the home of a relative or friend.
* The offender is always responsible for his/her own actions. Abuse is not the victim’s fault. Often the victim feels “tricked” into participating.
* The abuse typically begins with touching but may eventually escalate to more intrusive sexual acts.
* Sexual abuse is not limited to any social, economic or ethnic group.

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**INDICATORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE**

**How do I know if my child has been abused?**

**Physical Symptoms** may include:

* Unexplained bruises or swelling of the genitals
* Problems with urination
* Vaginal or rectal bleeding or discharge
* Difficulty in walking or sitting
* Experiences pain or itching in the genital area
* Torn, stained or bloody clothing
* Has venereal disease
* Has swollen or red cervix, vulva or perineum
* Has semen around mouth or genitalia or on clothing

**Behavioural Symptoms** may include:

* Sudden or persistent objection to being left in the company of a specific individual or in a certain place
* Unusual interest in own genitals or those of others
* Repeated talking or joking about sexual matters
* Appears withdrawn or engages in fantasy or infantile behaviour
* Precocious sexuality
* Stories about other children who have been touched in unwanted ways
* Fear of adults
* Significant change in appetite
* Irritability, shifts in moods, fear of the dark
* School difficulties
* Unwillingness to change clothing for physical education or to participate in sports or games
* Is engaging in delinquent acts or runs away
* Has poor peer relationships
* States being sexually assaulted by alleged perpetrator
* Sad, unhappy, poor self-esteem

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**RESPONDING TO A DISCLOSURE**

Children are unique therefore the way they react to abusive situations will vary. These are suggestions to help you and your child respond once an abusive situation has occurred.

* Children seldom lie about abuse. Reassure your child that you believe him/her and that you are glad that he/she came to you for help and allow them to report the incident in his or her own words
* Help your child understand that the abuse was not his/her fault and accept what they are telling you
* Remain calm (even though you may be angry)
* Support and comfort your child and show your concern
* Do not confront the offender in front of your child. It may be someone he/she loves and your child may be frightened about what will happen to him/her now. Help your child to understand that the offender needs help
* It is advisable to have your child examined by a physician even if no physical injury is evident. A doctor can determine if internal damage or infection is present
* Assure your child that it is okay to talk to you or ask questions about what happened. Don’t pressure your child to talk before he/she is ready
* Don’t tell other family members until your child wants them to know. Your child may need time to deal with his/her feelings before they are comfortable with anyone else knowing
* Report the matter to the Children’s Aid Society (519-252-1171) or the Police (911). Abuse is against the law and someone will be able to help
* Continue your normal family routine. Refrain from treating your child as special. If you suddenly start treating your child differently, he/she may begin to feel abnormal

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**Internet Safety**

The internet is becoming increasingly popular with children of all ages. It is a great resource for children when researching educational materials, learning about their favourite musical band or for playing games. However, the internet can be very dangerous as many children are becoming victims of abuse by the people they have met through the ever popular “chat rooms”. As a result, parent(s)/guardian(s), need to take responsibility and closely monitor their children’s internet use. The following are some things you should consider before allowing your child to use the internet:

* Talk to your child about the dangers of giving out their personal information such as their home/e-mail address, phone number or school location
* Never allow your child to send pictures of themselves to people over the internet
* Encourage your child to speak to you about any information or pictures they receive that makes them feel uncomfortable
* Remind your child that it is not their fault if they receive mean messages and to never respond to those messages
* Do not allow your child to get together with anyone they meet through the internet unless an adult can supervise them. Ensure that this meeting is held in a public place
* Most importantly, set up clear rules for going on line. Be sure to address such matters as when they can use the internet, the length of time which is acceptable and the appropriate places they can visit

**Always remember: You cannot see the people you are talking to.**

**People are not always who they appear to be.**

**Adults can pretend to be children!**

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**COMMUNICATION AND LISTENING SKILLS**

*Tips to get the conversation going:*

* Even when you're busy, make the time to talk with your child. Sometimes young people feel less "in the spotlight" and are more relaxed about communicating while you're doing something else, like walking home from school or preparing dinner.
* Listen carefully. If your child knows you're really listening, they're more likely to provide more details about the things going on in their lives.
* Listen between the lines. Sometimes young people have difficulty expressing their emotions. Try to hear and respond to the feelings behind the words they're using.
* Be sure to ask about simple things, as well as important issues (e.g., What was your favourite part of the movie?). Starting conversations about ordinary subjects can be a good way to segue into bigger topics and/or can lead to more sharing.
* Make sure you give them adequate time to express their opinions, desires, or feelings. They may take a while to say something, but what they come up with may surprise you!
* Don't give up if your child isn't interested in talking when you are. Wait for another opportunity, and perhaps try a different approach.
* A key finding from new research study that asked young people what they want from adults: Laugh with them!

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