

# HANDOUT #3: HOUSE RULES FOR SEXUAL SAFETY

Sexual abuse is sometimes the reason for a child's removal from a home and, therefore, is known prior to placement. However, often sexual abuse (even when it did occur) is not known when children first enter care. It may not become apparent until children feel comfortable and safe enough to disclose this abuse or when they engage in behaviors that point to a potential history of sexual abuse. It is important to remember that sexual abuse is not isolated to children in care. For that reason it is important to provide as many safeguards as possible for all children in your home through commonsense "house rules."

## Privacy

- Emphasize privacy. Let children know the privacy boundaries as soon as they enter your home. Close bathroom and bedroom doors whenever anyone is toileting, bathing, dressing or changing clothes. Allow only one person in the bathroom at a time. Teach everyone in the home to knock before entering.
- If young children bathe together, provide adult supervision. Refrain from having children age 5 and older bathe together.
- Limit access to bedrooms by establishing house rules concerning who may visit whose bedroom and under which circumstances (for example, the door remains open during visits).
- Establish a family dress code that defines which types of clothing are acceptable. Help children to learn why it is important to avoid wearing clothing that is skimpy or provocative.

## Sleeping Arrangements

- Multiple children should not sleep in the same bed.
- A child should not sleep in the same bedroom with an adult unless the child is an infant and the sleeping arrangement has been approved by the child welfare agency.
- A child who has a history of acting out sexually with other children should have one's own bedroom and some type of alarm on the bedroom door so that you can monitor every time the child leaves the bedroom at night.

## Supervision

- Parents who will be fostering or adopting a child with a known history of sexual abuse should have discussions with the agency staff before the child moves into their home about safety for the child moving in as well as for other children in the home. Work with

the agency staff to create a safety plan, and discuss the plan with all members of your household.

- When children first move into your home, monitor their behavior closely to observe how they interact with other children in the home. Avoid leaving the children together without an adult present.
- Don't leave supervision to older children. Supervision of children should be done by adults.
- Children should not be allowed to stay up at night together after the adults in the household have gone to bed.
- Do not punish children for exhibiting sexualized behavior. Instead, address the behavior calmly and in a manner that makes it clear that the behavior is not acceptable but that the child is not bad. Talk with the agency staff, and seek professional help for the children who exhibit such behavior.

## Communication

- Monitor Internet usage. Set parental controls to ensure that children do not have access to inappropriate materials.
- Ensure that your home is free from sexually explicit materials (i.e., magazines, drawings, art, etc.).
- Model appropriate language and communication. Do not allow sexually crude language or gestures to be used in your home.
- Ensure that all children in the home know that there are no secrets in your home.
- Talk with the agency staff if a child exhibits behavior that causes you concern. Try to be as detailed as possible when you describe the behavior.