

Caring Adult



As a caring adult you have an important role in the life of the person you care for, whether that person is a child or an adult with an intellectual disability. Your role is irreplaceable because that person counts on you, trusts you and may one day choose you as the person to whom they tell something really important. Being a caring adult is a great privilege and a huge responsibility.

Taylor the Turtle is a sexual abuse prevention programme that focuses on human rights language and emotional literacy rather than frightening scenarios like good touch/bad touch and stranger danger.

By human rights language we mean that we use language that can be used to articulate their needs in health and safety in an assertive, non aggressive, clear way. And by the term 'emotional literacy' we are referring to the ability to connect our bodies to our feelings and our feelings to our expression. Studies have found that children and adults with intellectual disabilities, who are well connected to their bodies and can express their needs have a lower chance of being sexually abused, and if they have been they are more willing to share that experience with a caring adult.

The Taylor the Turtle programme contributes to a foundation of healthy relationship skills,

safety and self esteem. There are six tenets to the programme:

- **My body belongs to me!!**
- **I have the right to a healthy body!!**
- **I have the right to a safe body!!**
- **I have the right to a safe school!!**
- **I have the right to a safe community!!**
- **I have the right to talk to someone when I don't feel safe!!**

The accompanying pamphlet can be used to lead you through a discussion tonight or in the following days.

Other ways to protect someone you care for from sexual abuse:

- Build empathy
- Use the language of choice
- Give options
- Read books together that celebrate diversity, love, peace, compassion, respect
- Give unconditional love
- Communicate openly
- Focus on the person you care for to the exclusion of everything else several times a month, ideally several times each week, daily if you can. Don't use the time to teach or deal with issues. Just hang out and really pay attention to them.

- Welcome displays of emotion as warmly as if the person had been able to say “here is a difficulty I was hoping to get your help with”. It is enough to stay close and show caring, you don’t have to know what to do. The child or intellectually disabled adult will usually begin to recover spontaneously if they can sense your caring and encouragement.
- Encourage emotional literacy eg. talk about a movie or a story with an emphasis on feeling words
- Encourage self expression – see chart below
- Use proper terminology for body parts. Pet names or euphemisms make disclosures confusing.
- Emphasize the importance of listening to your instincts. Use narrative to explain your own intuition “I am crossing the street because things are getting rowdy with those kids and I didn’t feel safe”.
- Insist on respect for others. Expect respect for yourself – model being deserving of respect. It is okay to say “I don’t want to be yelled at, let’s use kind words”
- Demonstrate respect. Use respectful words and don’t use put downs. Ensure that you are never rough or physically forceful. Never hit children, for any reason, ever.
- Encourage recognising boundaries. If your child doesn’t want to kiss an unfamiliar family member goodbye, say “no kisses then, do you feel okay with a high five?” Jump in to mediate when your child wants to hug an unwilling playmate say “uh oh, looks like Mary-Sue isn’t in a hugging mood today. Let’s find another way to say goodbye.”
- Intervene when someone is infringing upon an intellectually disabled adult’s personal space by saying “Bob you look a bit fed up. Did you want to hold hands or are you happier walking alone for now?”
- Look for opportunities to promote body rights. For example, don’t coax someone to eat when they aren’t hungry or insist they dress in warmer clothes than they feel comfortable in. You may have helped clean a plate or ensured someone won’t have to return early from the park, but you have taught them that their own sense of what is right for their body is not as important as what someone else tells them to do.

Encourage emotional expression. Give the person you care for permission and space to express these emotions in healthy ways such as:

Journaling
Anger Releases
Dancing
Role play
Visual Art
Story telling/writing
Playing music
Yoga
Poetry
Crying
Playing sports
Breathing exercises
Exercise
Singing
Outdoor recreation
Meditation

Please see www.taylorsrights.ca or phone the Sexual Assault Centre, 519.751.3471, for more information on handling disclosures and for further prevention techniques and for a suggested book list.