

# Children First: Safe and Secure



## Section IV—Issues Challenging Families

### Preventing Abuse of Children with Disabilities

**C**hildren with disabilities or special needs are more likely to be abused than children without special needs. Special needs may include physical, mental, emotional, or developmental conditions.

#### What to Teach Children

- ◆ Help them build a healthy and positive self-esteem. Start when they are babies. Praise their accomplishments and let them know how much you believe in them.
- ◆ Teach them it is OK to politely say "NO."
- ◆ Help them develop healthy boundaries. Teach them their bodies belong to them and nobody should touch them without their permission. Don't force children to give or receive kisses or sit in the laps of family or friends if they are uncomfortable. Teach them they have the right to refuse touches that make them feel uncomfortable.
- ◆ Teach them to talk about their feelings.
- ◆ Help them express and deal with their fears. Respect their fears.
- ◆ Teach communication skills. Even children who have trouble speaking need to show happiness, sadness, fear, and the need for protection. If a child cannot speak, teach some simple signs that you both understand to mean things like "I need help," "I'm hurt," or "I'm afraid."
- ◆ Help them learn how to get along with others. Encourage children with special needs to play with other children.
- ◆ Teach them to seek help. Let them know they should always tell you about anything that makes them feel uncomfortable or anyone who hurts them, no matter what that person says. Help children feel comfortable talking to you about everything.



*For more information on preventing abuse of children with disabilities, contact Safe Place--Disability Services ASAP (A Safety Awareness Program) at 512-267-7233, or visit them on the Internet at [www.austin-safeplace.org](http://www.austin-safeplace.org). Preventing Abuse of Children with Disabilities*