



himaya , in collaboration with **Moms & To Be** , aims to break the silence on children abuse which is still considered a taboo. This section is to help you recognize different forms of abuse and stop them from happening to ensure the safety and welfare of a child.

THE PERPETRATOR UN-MASKED

Whenever I introduce myself as a child protection professional, people ask me the same question as an attempt to reassure themselves: "Isn't it true that all cases of child abuse come from an uneducated or poor family?" And my answer is always the same: "Not necessarily so." This answer usually creates immediate discomfort, but the truth is, child abuse occurs within all family structures, regardless of socio-economic background.

Children are usually and mostly abused by their own parents. The underlying explanations for that may be that parents were once victims of abuse, or that they experience high levels of stress with no psychological immunity, poor parenting skills, or finally, substance abuse and addiction.

But what about other perpetrators, specifically the ones we worry about the most: child molesters. Where and how can we identify them?

"The younger the child, the more likely their abuser is a family member," whether that family member is a part of direct or extended family. Most child molesters establish trust first by getting parents' approval and offering them services, becoming their friends, babysitting while parents are absent, engaging in community children activities. They sometimes adopt a friendly and affectionate attitude, which makes adolescents who feel lonely and unwanted most vulnerable. Perpetrators then lure children into inappropriate settings by offering them something they want, like candy, or toys. They often pressure them into

keeping their encounters secret by drilling in the notion that their parents won't believe them or that they'll get in trouble. If the abuser is a family member, the chances of a child reporting them is very low if trust and communication isn't originally established with the parents.

What about abusers who aren't family members? They sometimes wander in playgrounds and malls where kids spend time unsupervised, and other times they are simply behind a screen, meeting children through social media and gaming platforms.

Youngsters who share their pictures or personal information online are at a higher risk of abuse. Those who agree to meet with the strangers they speak to online are almost certainly subject to abuse.

Sexual predators usually assess if a child has a stable or challenging life through their conversations with them, as a child with a more complicated lifestyle is more vulnerable. However, they are less likely to abuse children who are informed and sensitized.

How do we protect our children?

- Teach children their own rights. Tell them that they are the masters of their own bodies, and that they can allow or forbid people to touch them. Respect their privacy and teach them to respect others' too.



- Encourage your children to pick two adults they truly trust (e.g. a parent or teacher) that they can open-up to whenever they have secrets they cannot tell or problems they cannot solve.

-Make sure your children set strong passwords and revise their privacy settings on social media platforms. Ensure strangers cannot view their photos or contact them on sites such as Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter.

- If your child comes to you about being abused by a family member, do not disregard their statement. Children do not lie about these things. If they are telling you it happened, it probably did, and you should seek help and support. You can do so by calling our hotline at 03/414964.

- Highlight the importance of having a child protection policy within the institutions your children attend, such as schools, clubs, gyms, etc. himaya and other organizations work on implementing such policies by training the staff and faculty of these institutions.

- Finally, consider enrolling in our Parental Effectiveness Training (PET) program with your friends. It teaches parents a variety of skills that don't always come naturally to us, such as how to effectively communicate and resolve conflicts in ways that build trust and strengthen our relationship with our children.

If you suspect your child is involved in risky behavior, contact our hotline at 03/414964. If you have any questions about child abuse or our services, you can find out more by visiting our website www.himaya.org or following our FB and IG pages @himayaleb.

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