

# Children First

Our mission is to respond to the complex needs of abused and neglected children, and those involved in their care, by providing best practice counseling, legal, and educational services. Through research, communications and training initiatives, we work to expand these programs to prevent abuse and help more children heal.



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## Talking to Your Child About Sexual Abuse: When Do You Do It and What Do You Say?

**By Mary L. Pulido, Ph.D.**

Executive Director, The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

A reporter recently interviewed me about this topic. She wanted to know at what age parents should have this conversation with their kids, and whether parents should use the anatomically correct language for body parts.

My advice is that parents discuss this issue with their children as soon as they believe they can grasp the concepts. While this can be an uncomfortable subject, particularly if they think their child is too young, children in pre-kindergarten have shown the capability to grasp these concepts if age-appropriate language is used. Parents need to use their discretion depending on the child's age, but the important thing is to have the conversation. Children of all ages are in danger of being targeted for abuse. It's more common as children reach the ages of 8 to 12, but younger children are easy prey for perpetrators, too.

So, how do you start? I recommend that the parent frame the discussion around "safety" rather than "abuse," as it's less scary for the child. Parents might start by discussing "private parts." These conversations can be integrated into the child's daily routine, such as bath time or when changing clothes. Make it an on-going topic of conversation. I recommend that the anatomically correct names for body parts should be used such as penis, vagina, buttocks and breasts. That is the ideal. Children should learn the names of their private parts at an early age. But if the parent isn't comfortable using those terms, they could use the term "private parts." The important thing is that the parent and child are referring to the correct places on the body. I don't recommend making up a name, for example, choo-choo for penis or cookie for vagina. It's confusing for the child and if they are ever abused, adults may not understand their disclosure. Parents may want to ask their pediatricians for guidance, as they can be a great resource.

Here's a brief script for parents: "I want to have a special talk with you about safety regarding your body. You have 'private parts' on your body. They are the parts that are covered by your swimsuit or underwear. Only certain adults are allowed to touch your private parts." Then, let the child know that there are two kinds of touches, safe and not safe touches. The NYSPCC uses the terms "safe/not safe" instead of "good/bad" as it makes it clearer for the child. For example, sometimes a good touch (e.g., vaccination in the doctor's office) can feel bad to the child's body, and a bad touch (e.g., inappropriate tickling/fondling) can feel good to the child's body. The terms "safe/not safe" eliminate this confusion. The parent should give examples of safe touches, such as a doctor or nurse during an exam with Mom or Dad in the room, Mom changing the baby's diaper or giving the toddler

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## Letter from the Executive Director



Dr. Mary Pulido

Dear Friends:

The end of the year is always a time of celebration, and there is much to celebrate at The NYSPCC. Thanks to you—our dedicated supporters—our programs continue to flourish, providing hope and healing to New York City's most vulnerable children and families. I am pleased to share with you some of the good work we are doing.


The NYSPCC recently began an exciting new partnership with the Strong Starts Court Initiative, which serves families with children ages zero to three, who are involved in child abuse and neglect cases in New York City's family court system. Strong Starts will refer their most challenging cases to our Therapeutic Supervised Visitation Program, and we will help these families improve their parenting skills and strengthen their parent-child bonds. With more than 25 years of experience in the field of trauma informed supervised visitation, The NYSPCC is uniquely qualified to serve this extremely vulnerable population and positively impact children during their earliest stages of development.

Widely regarded as experts in the field of children protection, NYSPCC staff members regularly give presentations at conferences to help advance the knowledge-base of professionals working to prevent child sexual abuse throughout the United States and around the world. In June 2017, I presented "Safe Touches, Teaching Children Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Safety Concepts," at the Society for Prevention Research's Annual Meeting in Washington, DC. I also spoke on October 2, 2017, at the World Forum, the 15th ISPACN European Regional Conference, in The Hague, Netherlands. My lecture was entitled "An International Collaboration for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse: A Research and Training Initiative of the Safe Touches Program." Both presentations were enthusiastically received.

The NYSPCC also continues to provide trainings for child protective service workers, helping them manage the stress they encounter regularly in the field. As of October 31, 2017, The NYSPCC provided 15 trainings for 332 child welfare professionals so far this year in New York City, and we have more training sessions planned through the end of the year. Because our secondary traumatic stress management trainings are so effective, they are gaining national attention. I am proud to let you know that I have been invited to conduct a training at a state conference in Tulsa, Oklahoma for multi-disciplinary team members in child protective services. By helping these professionals protect their own health, The NYSPCC is ensuring that children consistently receive the best possible care from those who are committed to helping them.

As the holiday season is a time to spread joy and give back, please consider supporting The NYSPCC when making your year-end charitable donations. From all of us at The NYSPCC, we wish you and your families a happy and peaceful holiday season!

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mary Pulido".

Mary L. Pulido, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

### Help us teach 1,000 kids how to protect themselves from sexual abuse.

Safe Touches is the only program of its kind in NYC tailored for children in kindergarten through 3rd grade, the age range when children are most at risk.

**Make a year-end gift to The NYSPCC by December 31st, and together we can keep kids safe.**

Give a gift now at <https://www.nyspcc.org/get-involved/donate/> or by mail using the enclosed envelope.

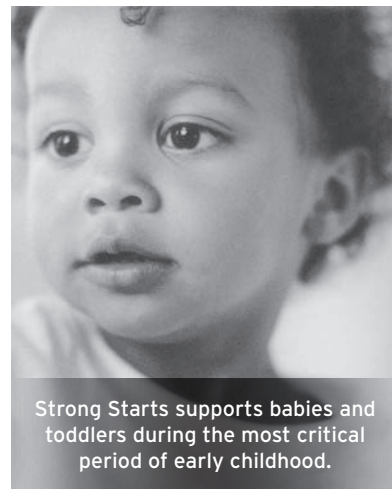


## Program Spotlight

### Giving Babies & Toddlers “Strong Starts” In Life

The NYSPCC is enhancing its Therapeutic Supervised Visitation Program through an increased focus on early childhood. The NYSPCC recently partnered with the Bronx Family Court on their Strong Starts Court Initiative. The program is designed to help babies and toddlers, ages zero to three, after they are removed from their primary caregivers due to child abuse and neglect. Strong Starts helps caregivers achieve the stability needed for family reunification. Families participating in the program receive comprehensive assessments, intensive case management, case coordination among all system responders involved with the family (e.g., mental health providers, foster care agencies, etc.), increased frequency of court hearings and a dedicated judge who presides over their case from beginning to end. The NYSPCC will assist in these efforts by providing the crucial service of Therapeutic Supervised Visitation to as many caregivers, babies and toddlers as possible.

Focus on early childhood is critical, because infancy is the most plastic and receptive period of human development. Enforced separations from parents and frequent changes in caregivers can jeopardize children's health and development, yet signs of developmental delays often go unidentified and unaddressed. In addition, the complex needs of primary caregivers are rarely assessed, resulting in inadequate or inappropriate treatment and help. Positive experiences, on the other hand, can set a secure foundation for infants' well-being, healthy relationships, and skills needed for future success. Research from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University shows that high quality early childhood services (e.g., staffed by well-trained professionals, who build positive relationships with children and families) can be highly effective, due to the adaptability of infants' and toddlers' developing brains. It is with this understanding that The NYSPCC is proud to provide therapeutic visitation services to Strong Starts families and reach these fragile—yet highly resilient—babies and toddlers, giving them a stronger start in life.



Strong Starts supports babies and toddlers during the most critical period of early childhood.

## Restoring Relationships

### How Your Support Reunited a Father and His Son

John Moore\* and his 18-month old son Mark\* were referred to The NYSPCC for therapeutic supervised visits, following an alleged incident during which John physically assaulted Mark's mother, Lisa\*. Mark was present, and Lisa was terrified that Mark could be hurt by John's violence. Lisa filed for an order of protection to keep John away from her and their son. After several months of not seeing Mark, John felt a tremendous sense of loss and filed a petition with the Family Court for visitation with Mark. The case was referred to The NYSPCC.



Therapeutic Supervised Visitation allows families to maintain their relationships in a child-friendly and safe space.

During a thorough intake, John and his visitation clinician collaborated on identifying goals that included child development education and the need to provide structure and predictability for Mark during visits. The lessons John learned proved to be highly valuable, particularly because Mark was diagnosed with Autism. A challenging diagnosis for any parent to hear, John used his pre- and post-visit coaching sessions to better understand Mark's special needs and learn how to respond to them in a constructive way. As a result, John was better able to communicate with Mark, using two word instructions and non-verbal communication (i.e. pointing). With help from the visitation clinician, John became more aware of Mark's need for physical closeness or distance and learned how to assess when the toddler needed help or could complete a task independently. With this critical communication and focus on child development education, Mark's bond to his father grew tremendously. He became more responsive to his father's instructions and engaged in more play. Mark's instances of tantrums decreased, as John was better able to respond to potential triggers. With support from the NYSPCC visitation clinician, John developed a more comprehensive understanding of his son's special needs and deepened his bond with Mark.

The visitation clinician also met with Lisa regularly to ease her concerns about Mark's safety. Through monthly coaching sessions, Lisa was able to further process her domestic violence history with John and understand the benefits and ways for Mark to have a safe and healthy relationship with his father. As Lisa observed Mark's increased positive responses to visits with his father, Lisa's worries about Mark's safety started to decrease.

John's extraordinary growth, commitment and attunement to Mark during his six months in the program helped contribute to the Court's decision to allow unsupervised visits between this father and son. Because of you, John and his son have a new beginning. Thank you for your continued support in making help and hope possible for the children and families we serve. If you'd like to learn about ways you can get involved, please visit to [www.nyspcc.org](http://www.nyspcc.org).

*\*Names are changed to protect the identities of children and families.*



## Signature Events

### Spring Luncheon

On April 19, 2017 over 200 of The NYSPCC's most loyal supporters gathered together at The Pierre for the Sixth Annual Spring Luncheon, featuring Guest Speaker and renowned lawyer Eric MacLeish. The afternoon raised over \$325,000 for the agency's child abuse prevention and treatment programs.



Diana Cunningham, Brooke Shields, and Connie Newberry



David Stack, Eric MacLeish, Holly Kelly, and NYC ACS Commissioner David Hansell



Valesca Guerrand-Hermès, Elizabeth Mayhew, and Maarit Gloer



Jean Shafiroff, Victor de Souza, Dr. Penny Grant, and Tanja Dreiding Wallace



Madeleine Porcelli and Mary Alice Sherrill



Russ Coniglio and Dr. Mary L. Pulido



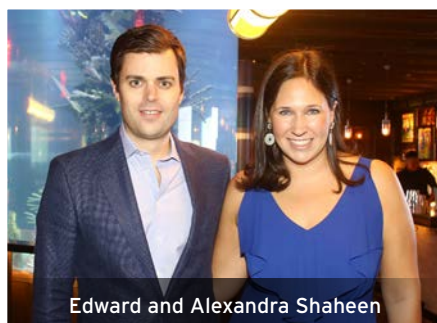
Eric MacLeish and Tania Higgins



Karl Wellner and Diandra Douglas

### Junior Committee Spring Benefit

On Thursday, May 11th, The NYSPCC's dedicated Junior Committee hosted its annual Spring Benefit at Fishbowl at Dream Midtown. The evening brought together young professionals and philanthropists and raised over \$30,000 in essential funding for The NYSPCC's programs.



Edward and Alexandra Shaheen

### Family Benefit

At the 2017 Family Benefit, parents and children enjoyed a brunch and Broadway performance in support of The NYSPCC's child sexual abuse prevention workshop, Safe Touches. The afternoon began with a pre-show brunch at Sanctuary Hotel's HA-VEN rooftop and followed with a matinee performance of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.



Raffle winners on a backstage tour with one of the actors from the show

APRIL  
**17**

SAVE  
THE  
DATE

**2018  
Spring Luncheon**

**Tuesday, April 17, 2018  
The Pierre**

FOR RESERVATIONS AND FOR  
MORE INFORMATION

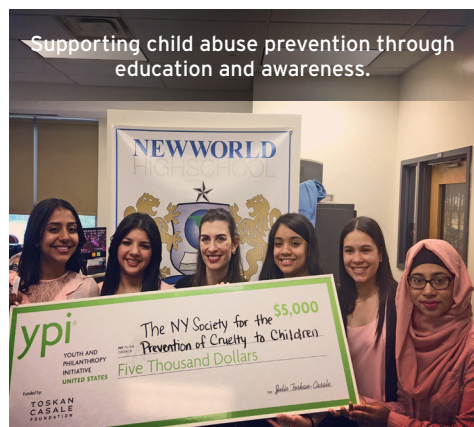
 **212.233.5500 ext. 216**

 **info@nyspcc.org**



## In the Community

Thank you to all our dedicated friends throughout New York City and the surrounding areas who care about children and take action to help support our work. The projects they coordinate not only raise essential funding for our programs, but also help raise awareness about child abuse prevention—especially in our own neighborhoods.



In May, students from New World High School learned about The NYSPCC, and created a presentation as part of the school-wide Youth in Philanthropy competition. Their dedication and compassion to child abuse prevention helped them win \$5,000 for the agency.



In June, a group of fifth grade students from P.S. 41 Greenwich held a sidewalk sale, featuring home-made crafts, baked goods, and lemonade, in support of The NYSPCC. They raised over \$700 for the agency!

## Corporate Spotlight

The NYSPCC is proud of our corporate friends and partners, who help us improve the lives of New York City's most vulnerable children.

If your company is driven to help, please contact The NYSPCC to explore ways your company can support the families and children we serve.



Sherwin-Williams donated paint and supplies, and arranged for members of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades to paint The NYSPCC office and therapy rooms, creating a comfortable space for our clients.



Barclays invited The NYSPCC to their corporate headquarters to give a child sexual abuse prevention training for employees, who are parents.

## Talking to Your Child About Sexual Abuse

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sister a bath. "These are safe touches and are OK." You may ask the child to give you an example of a safe touch so that you are sure they understand the concept.

Then you explain about not safe touches. "Sometimes there are people, and they could be people that you know and like, that may try to touch your private parts in ways that make you feel sad, mad, confused or uncomfortable. These are not safe touches." Give an example of someone putting their hand under a girl's shirt or down a boy's pants to touch their private parts. "The person may tell you that it's a game, or that you will like these touches." Again, ask the child to give you an example of a not safe touch

Then, focus the conversation on the fact that they must tell you right away if this ever happens to them. "What's important is that you tell me or Dad (or whomever the child trusts) right away, so we can keep you safe." Work with the child to identify several key adults that they trust and could go to if something happens. Ask them, "So, who would you tell if this happened to you?" The NYSPCC recommends a list of three to four adults in case the parents are not available or in case the parents are preoccupied and not clearly interpreting the child's cues on the matter. What's important is that the child keeps telling until someone believes them and takes action.

The parent should also address the issue of secrecy or threat that some perpetrators use with children to keep them quiet about the abuse. "Even if the person who is touching you makes you promise not to tell, or tells you that they will be mad at you or they may hurt you, or someone you love, if you tell, that does not matter. What they are doing is bad and not your fault. You must not keep it a secret, you must tell me right away. Then, I promise that I will take the steps needed to keep you safe."

It is very important to reinforce with the child that it's never their fault if they were touched in an not safe way. It's always the adult's fault. And the parent's job is to protect them.

For more child safety tips visit [www.nyspcc.org](http://www.nyspcc.org).

## Special Thanks

We are grateful to the following supporters who have made Annual Fund gifts of \$500 or more since April 1, 2017 to help support our work with NYC's children:

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Follow us on Twitter at [twitter.com/nyspcc](https://twitter.com/nyspcc)



Make a one-time or reoccurring gift at [www.nyspcc.org/donate](https://www.nyspcc.org/donate)



Ask your employer about matching gifts and corporate sponsorships

## Partners in Protection

We're grateful for our corporate partners who share our passion for preventing abuse and helping children heal.

