

13 Sivan, 5768
June 16, 2008

Dear Friends:

I hope this brief letter finds you well.

After much thought, I am addressing this letter to all of you, with the hope that if it is not immediately relevant for you, you may choose to share it with someone for whom it is. This letter is being written for parents of children and teens. I am writing specifically at the onset of the summer season, when this message is especially timely.

Over the past few years there has been much discussion about the issue of child sexual abuse. **As parents, we have the ability to help our children protect themselves significantly from this scourge.** I encourage each of you to take the following two steps.

1. **Make sure that your children understand what an acceptable behavior is and what is not.** This does not require complex discussions. Simply find an opportunity to remind your child that their private parts are just that, and that nobody – friend, relative or any authority figure other than their doctor – should be allowed to touch them there. Opportunities for sharing this can be bath times for young children, dressing or clothes shopping for older children, or at the time of a doctor's appointment.
2. **Make absolutely sure that your child feels safe to confide in you.** It is essential in this and in every other area that each child feel that they can safely share their concerns with a trusted parent who will take them seriously and act in their best interests. Check in with them consistently – as casually and as naturally as you can – to make sure that they are “okay”, that they are not experiencing any kind of harassment or bullying, and that that they feel generally secure. Make sure they understand that if they are experiencing some difficulty, you would want to know about it and help them through it. And if they do share concerns with you, react responsibly.

It should go without saying that in the area of child sexual abuse all relevant mandated reporting laws must be followed. In addition, please make sure to share any specific safety concerns with those individuals who are in a position to address them responsibly and effectively. A rabbi familiar with these issues or a competent mental health professional may be able to help guide you in this area.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter. May *Hashem* grant us the privilege to see all of our children thrive in every way.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Moshe Hauer