



## Building a Network Of Trust

By Michelle Derrig

*One* of the key elements to empowering and protecting our young children against abuse is to ensure that they have a network of adults that they can trust (also known as a network of safety). Although parents may want to be the main contact point for their children, child protection experts recommend that we also identify at least four other adults that our children can go to, if they need ever worried or concerned about something.

To establish a network of trust:

- Ask your children to choose some adults in their life that they think they can trust and whom they would feel comfortable talking to if they were ever worried or upset about something.
- You might suggest other family members (such as a parent, grandparent, aunty or uncle) or other adults they relate to (such as teachers, coaches, family friends etc.).
- Keep in mind that these people need to be someone that your child sees regularly or can contact easily.
- Trust your child's intuition, as well as your own, so if either of you don't feel comfortable or 'quite right' about someone then don't include them, no matter who they are (remember 89% of victims will be abused by someone they know).
- Trace your child's hand onto a page and help them to write down the names of each of these people in each of the fingers. For smaller children, you can print small photos of each person and glue them on to the tip of each finger.
- Talk to the child about the types of things that they could potentially discuss with the adults in their network of trust (discuss inappropriate touch and protective behaviours, but also encourage them to reach out if they are feeling confused, worried, hurt, bullied, sad or depressed).
- Remember that this list will change over time and should be revisited at least once a year, particularly as children return to school with new teachers, instructors, coaches etc.