

Sex education can protect children from the abuse

NEW SUNDAY TIMES 2/12/07 M/S 7

CHILDREN with disabilities can be trained to avoid sexual abuse by educating them about their anatomy and teaching them about personal safety, said experts.

"It's important to teach them what is safe and unsafe touching and educate them about their body, including their private parts, especially when they are approaching puberty," said T. Kamaraj, manager of the Selangor and Federal Territory Association for Retarded Children.

He said children have to be taught to say "no" when they are uncomfortable with the way they have been touched.

"Some of our kids never say 'no', they just keep quiet. That's dangerous. They must respond or react in some way," he added.

Madeleine Yong of Protect and Save The Children said because of their trusting nature, children with disabilities are easily enticed.

Some would even exchange a kiss for sweets and the abusers would usually pick vulnerable children, gain their trust and, in some instances, even gain the trust of the parents.

"They usually desensitise the child with a touch while saying 'well done' and each time the touches become more violating," she added.

Last year, P.S. The Children and a parent support group, Dignity and Services, with funding from World Vision, produced a personal safety curriculum for children with learning disabilities.

They plan to push this pilot pro-



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gramme to schools next year.

"Schools and parents need to be open to the personal safety programme. Parents' participation is crucial in the teaching of the programme. But before they learn this, they need to be given basic education on sex," she added.

"It's important to vet new staff. Once recruited, they must be given continuous training about appropriate attitude and behaviour when interacting with

the disabled and the dynamics of sexual abuse," said Metillda John of ED Dignity & Services.

Experts agree that there is a need for more advocacy on the rights of those with disabilities.

"Public awareness in Malaysia is very low. We are a developing nation.

"We should be doing more to educate the public to respect the disabled like everybody else," said Kamaraj.