

Dear potential partner,

My name is Marie Pflugrad and I am the author of the children's book *You Have a Voice*. I am also a survivor of childhood sexual molestation. It took years to come to grips with my childhood because like many, I thought my childhood was normal. I've come to accept that not only was it **not** normal, it was devastating! My early adult years would prove to be tragic. The years of repressed trauma finally came out and I was able to write about the healing process I went through. *From God Hole to God Whole* is a book of my memoirs. While healing, I was strongly impressed to also write a book for children. The purpose behind my children's book is all about education and prevention. It is not the typical kind of children's book that you just give to a child and say, "here you go, enjoy." No, my children's book is unique.

I am a retired public-school teacher and I taught Special Education for over 20 years. Over the years I've found that I still love to teach and it is in my nature to instruct. So, after going through so much healing from childhood trauma, it occurred to me that I really need to change my emphasis. I am now a children's advocate and public speaker who openly shares what it means to survive the loss of innocence as a child. My hope and goals are to now share with adults. To educate and provide the tools that adults can use to help prevent what happened to me. My *You Have a Voice* project is all about education and prevention.

My husband, who is a pastor, and my therapists who were also strongly grounded in faith walked me safely through the dark days so that I can now share with you, reader, how we all, with Gods leading can join forces to protect our children. Also, to help those who come forward after having been abused, to know that healing is possible no matter your age!

As I began writing *You Have a Voice*, it was as if God was telling me "Keep it simple". Taking part of what I had written as a poem, years earlier, I simplified the characters in the book to just three woodland animals. I chose a porcupine, a turtle and a skunk. All animals that children can easily relate to. Also, animals that have a built in "self-defense mechanism". In short, the characters (through the use of a counselor named Joetta) share stories with children and tell that even though you, (children) don't have quills, a shell, or spray to use for protection, YOU HAVE A VOICE and this is the resounding theme of the book.

I have provided a training module that will help walk you through the presentation of this book to use with children ages three to eight. I strongly believe that there should be some guidance and consistency when using *You Have a Voice*. The reason I mentioned not just handing the book to children to read, is because I believe it should be used in a controlled environment with a specific purpose. Many schools have a "Safety" emphasis throughout the year. The month of April is specifically targeted as "National Child Abuse Prevention Month" throughout America. My books have been a very successfully used curriculum in schools, both private and public throughout the entire month of April in North Dakota. Any

time the opportunity arises that this topic can be reinforced, it should be done. Vacation Bible School, daycares, 4-H and Boy and Girl Scout Clubs, and Pathfinder and Adventurer Clubs as well. Basically, any setting where children are, is a good place to implement the message You Have a Voice. Therefore...Please read over my training module after you've read the book *You Have a Voice* and the accompanying Activity book so it can be utilized to its best potential. Thank you in advance for taking the time to join me in an effort to educate and protect our children!

Sincerely,

Marie Pflugrad
You Have a Voice Project
youhaveavoice.org



Introduction to Training Module for book: *You Have a Voice*

The purpose of this book is to be used by educators, counselors, parents, grandparents, Day care providers, Vacation Bible School workers, Boy and Girl Scouts, Pathfinders and Adventurers clubs, Campers and Camp Staff, etc. Basically, anyone who works with children in any capacity.

When reading the book, please look at the suggestions I've provided so there can be some consistency and continuity in presenting this delicate and sensitive topic. The book is very simplistic, yet very deep and has the potential to evoke great and important conversations that are necessary to have with children. It not only educates children about prevention, but allows them to discuss other issues that may come up. It is a tool to empower them.

While I believe that all young children should be made aware of the dangers that are out there, it is still up to the discretion of the child's parents, caregivers etc. as to how this is presented. Please discuss with the leaders of each organization and make parents aware as well as getting permission, that this sensitive topic will be discussed. Discussions during parent/teacher conferences are perfect opportunities to share with parents/caregivers that you'd like to make this information available to children. It might be a good time to evaluate the interest and concerns that parents share with you and you can make decisions based on these conversations with parents/caregivers. I've had parents who were thrilled to have me come and present this book and I've enjoyed doing it. Unfortunately, I cannot possibly present to all of the children I'd like to. This is where you, as an adult/leader can help. I am effective because this was my own experience and it is very personal to me. Those who have **not** been traumatized by molestation can certainly still empathize with, and present this message with fantastic results!

As I go through the book page by page, I make suggestions based on the comments and questions the characters in the book made. This will help to lead a conversation in a healthy direction and to suggest options so there is less surprise for both the reader and the listener. Art Linkletter was quoted as having said "Kids say the darndest things" and he is correct. We never know what they might say in their innocent questioning. The Bible also says in Matthew 21:16 "Out of the mouths of babes...." Which is where the cliché Kids say the darndest things originated. So, being prepared for some of the comments children make, could be helpful. It also helps to keep the general context of the book cohesive and consistent from an educational standpoint.

Training Module

Following are the page numbers and suggestions for conversation starters as you read the book *You Have a Voice* with children.

Page 5: Joetta said that she helped people when they had problems and needed someone to talk to. Sometimes she even talked to children. Children can have problems too.

Emphasize to children that Joetta doesn't just go to schools. Ask children where they think Joetta may go? Suggest; hospitals, day cares and foster homes, churches etc.

Ask children as a conversation starter: "What are some problems that children might have?" Let children think, and give them time to "brainstorm". Discuss some of the ideas with them---if they have nothing to say, the question can be brought up: "What about children dealing with bullies?" "What about things that can cause us to be shy, quiet, afraid etc." Say: "Sometimes children see people who argue or fight and it can cause uneasy feelings. Even if we have nothing to do with the argument." (Parents may have an argument, or siblings might have a fight) *This gives a good opportunity to discuss some of the feeling's children experience.*

"What if some of us don't feel as "smart" as someone else. Are you able to talk to someone about it? Do you feel "okay" asking a teacher, parent, or someone to help you if you don't understand something?" *Perfect opportunity to reinforce that a child should NEVER be made to feel "dumb or stupid" just because we ask questions.*

Emphasize to children about some of the feelings we can sometimes have. Sometimes we get those icky feelings in our tummies. Like butterflies fluttering inside and not in a good way. Feelings of embarrassment, nervousness, anxiousness etc. Explain that these are normal feelings and that everyone feels them from time to time (even adults). Sometimes these feelings are there to help us. They can be like a warning sign for us. Explain that it is good to be aware that these feelings are there, and that it is very normal to have these feelings. Feelings are NOT always bad, but are good when they warn us from harm.

Page 8: Paragraph 2 & 3; Joetta asks the children “How many of you know what “Stranger Danger” means? Aubrey answers—then open up for discussion.

Paragraph 4: Joetta says “...sometimes someone might want to hurt us or do something bad to us, and we **DO** know them. Some people are not strangers at all. *This can give the opportunity to discuss trust—safety—more discussion about the feelings we get in our tummies. Our bodies sometimes can give us warnings. Allow the children to share. They are not too young to start understanding the concepts of “fight, flight, or freeze”. This discussion can be done in a simplistic manner, yet presented well enough to give children awareness of themselves and their surroundings. The intent is not to cause “fear” in a child, it is to educate. Give examples of being startled by a barking dog, a slamming door etc. Throughout the discussion, assure the children that these are normal behaviors...fears, nervousness, anxiousness etc. Understanding emotions is vital for children to learn early on. Children need to be “okay” with their feelings so they can learn to have “self-control” which also teaches them better coping skills, as well as confidence and resiliency. To be willing to discuss their feelings with a caring, trusting adult is essential to a child’s well-being and emotional growth. Listening to that “still small voice” is perhaps an appropriate discussion to have.*

Page 10: Joetta tells the children that there may be someone they know who tries to talk them into letting them touch you in ways that don’t feel good. They might even ask you to touch them in ways that you don’t want to do, and that doesn’t feel right to you. *Again, allow the children time to think about what you’ve read, about what Joetta is saying.*

Joetta asks the children if any of their parents have talked to them about this? *Allow the children to share~ being careful to stop the discussion if it gets too specific or is heading in an inappropriate direction. Pay close attention to the children; note expressions, body language etc. This is a difficult topic but very important for children’s awareness. Also~~ for those who may have experienced what Joetta is talking about, it may become uncomfortable for you as the reader. Please reinforce the children’s self-worth by emphasizing that you, Joetta, etc. care for their well-being and that we want the children to be, and feel safe no matter where they are and who they are with.*

*This is a good time to discuss further feelings and emotions such as shame, guilt, and blame. Ask the children to share a time when they were ashamed of something, or a time they felt guilty and then talk about blame and why some people blame others... ie. (Blaming someone places the blame, guilt, and responsibility **they** feel about something they did, onto someone else.) There are so many directions this kind of a discussion can take and you, as the reader will need to use discretion and common sense in directing the conversation appropriately. For Church schools and Christian environments, there are Bible verses that can be used. (It’s a good opportunity for a Bible study lesson) Example; Adam and Eve when they sinned...blame, blame, blame.*

This discussion may also lead into an opportunity to discuss the “private” parts of the body. Again, these are very sensitive subjects and children of this young age need to be made aware. One example I saw years ago that I thought was so effective was when a police officer was discussing our bodies with a group of children at school. He was wearing his uniform and then he put a cut-off white t-shirt over his uniform top that covered his breast area. Then he pulled a (large) pair of white shorts up over his uniform pants which covered his bottom “private” area. This stark contrast of white over his black uniform illustrated perfectly to the children (kindergarteners) what area was “off limits” for anyone except them to touch. I will never forget the impact it had on the children and this could be shared with the children, or if you feel really brave...do your own demonstration.

Page 13: Joetta introduces Spike the porcupine. It is helpful if you (the reader) can alter your voice and go into character. It is even more effective when done as a puppet show and someone else is able to act out all 3 of the puppet characters. This would be fantastic as a puppet show for Vacation Bible School, at Junior Campouts, and for the Adventurer groups etc. The puppets are available through AdventSource, or my website youhaveavoice.org They really add to the experience when reading...but are not absolutely necessary.

Page 15: After Spike’s experience, Joetta asks the children if they understood what Spike told them. *Allow the children to ask questions. Because Spike is a boy character, and this incident occurred at a campout, it could apply to any gender of child...however, I, as the author want to specifically discuss the under-reported statistics that boys frequently bully or target younger, smaller, weaker boys to sexually abuse (even of the same age). Bigger, stronger boys who terrify smaller boys tend to try to “normalize” or “down-play” their behavior, or, if confronted, will place the blame on the smaller boy, and use threats. This worsens the pain, shame and guilt of the victim and he is actually re-victimized. While it also happens for girls, with bigger, stronger girls, I chose to use the porcupine character to bring a strong emphasis to boys. I want to empower the weaker, kinder, gentler boys (and girls) who are frequently singled out and abused. The mere fact that this kind of discussion can educate, and empower a child who may (or already has) come face to face with a similar incident is powerful. Once a child knows that this is going on, (brought out by Spike) they realize they aren’t the only child this has happened to, they can learn to feel empowered and brave. This book gives children the permission to speak up. To stand up to a bully, they can even learn to defend a friend who might need them to help them if something like this were to happen. Awareness is the first tool of education. We can’t teach if we don’t know it’s even happening...and believe me it’s happening! A boy who has gone through a trauma similar to*

what Spike discusses, still needs to get the help that is available. Unfortunately, the world is full of adult men who were told to “buck up” be a “man”. “Be tough, don’t be a cry-baby”. And they bottled up the pain, the shame, the guilt and NEVER told anyone. They are still carrying it around in their adult lives. I don’t have time to mention what years of repressed and suppressed pain can lead to. My goal is to get children to use their voices to tell someone they trust. Children can heal much quicker, the sooner the issue is addressed.

Page 16: Joetta introduces Shelley, who is a very shy turtle. Joetta shares with students about a relative who wanted to see Shelley without her shell on, which made Shelley very uncomfortable. *This is an opportunity to discuss the topic of “nudity” and being “naked”. Keep in mind that some families are very open with their own children about nudity. This, however, is not the norm and children can be taught about “modesty” without causing offense. The opportunity to discuss keeping our bodies covered is appropriate. Again, this is another opportunity to talk about our “private body parts” that are for us only and not to be seen, or shared with others. Even if they are our relatives and they visit our home. Discuss with children the importance of **NOT** being alone with anyone. Re-visit the topic of those “icky” feelings we can get in our tummies when we “sense” that something isn’t feeling right. Use the warning signs our bodies give to help us get out of a situation. Tell a trusted friend or another family member you know will listen if someone tries to see you without your clothes on, or if they take their clothes off in front of you and “tease” you. Emphasize to the children that they have the right to leave, or get away as quick as possible if someone gets “naked” in front of them.*

The topic of “curiosity” can be discussed as well. Being curious can be a good thing, but it can also lead to problems. The book You Have a Voice has many places where “curiosity” can be discussed. Use caution and wisdom in balancing curiosity and temptation and stress, that as children, they can’t always know good from bad and again, talk about the inner feelings and warnings that go off inside of them. Again, the topic of the “still small voice” within might be appropriate.

Page 19: Shelley gets brave and shares with the children that they need to be brave too. *This is a good opportunity to discuss bravery and courage.*

Joetta asked the children what they would have done if they were Shelley? *Allow the children to share their thoughts. Again, pay close attention to each child and their body language and behaviors. Also, be prepared to re-direct if the discussion gets too personal. Let a child know that you will talk to them privately if they'd like. Also, keep in mind: If a child has already been molested and has encountered something like what Shelley described. You will not know unless they tell you. Therefore, the children likely have NEVER told anyone. This can make the victim feel guilt and shame for not having spoken up. You as the reader, can give affirmation by making a statement like this: "If you know what Shelley is talking about, and if it ever does happen again, I hope you can remember what Shelley told you. You can be brave. You can tell someone. You can tell me." Then, be prepared to listen to what the child tells you. You may want to have someone available with you as you do any documentation of events a child may share with you.*

I know, I know, this is a very difficult topic....please don't give up!!! Please don't ignore the possibility of a child sharing something with you. You may be the first and/or only person this child feel safe enough to trust. Be prepared to take notes and documentation of statements in the event that something needs to be addressed. We as adults must get over the fear of having to confront this sensitive topic head on. Our children need our bravery, they need us to be their advocates. Please don't be afraid, be accurate, take notes, dates, times places of discussions etc. Documentation is essential!!!

Page 21: Joetta introduces April, or “Squirt” the feisty little skunk puppet. When April shares with the children that her parents said she is only to use her spray when she is in real danger...then Aril looks sad. *This is an important opportunity to discuss with the children the importance of telling the truth. Talk about the difference between “important” versus “un-important”, or the word “serious” versus “not as serious”. If possible, share the story of the little boy who cried wolf to get more effect.*

Page 22: April goes on to tell the children, that she tried to tell her parents after she had sprayed when she was so afraid. But they didn’t listen to her. *Discuss the word “embarrassed”. Re-emphasize our feelings, and that it’s okay to have these feelings. Feelings are not bad. Share again how important it is to find someone you can trust to tell something like this to. Also, if anyone tells you to “keep a secret”. Help a child to understand that some secrets cannot and will not be kept. Discuss “secrets” and why they can be hurtful to ourselves and others. If a child is afraid, that is the most important time to find someone they trust to share it with. Reinforce that the children must tell, tell, and keep telling until someone finally listens to them.*

Also, discuss the word “threat”. Often times secrets are used as manipulation and threats are also used to get a child to do what an abusive person wants them to do. Anything that causes a child to feel fearful, shameful, or guilty, is not acceptable!!!

As Squirt said, “No one should touch you in ways that make you feel yucky.”

Page 25: Joetta follows up with several thought provoking questions for the children.

You, reader can discuss as much, or as little as you want to. The emphasis is to encourage children that You Have a Voice! Encourage the children to use their voice, to speak up if ever faced with a situation where you could be hurt in any way.

Teaching children to stand up for right and wrong and to stand up for weaker people is always a good thing. To defend people is a great quality, no matter how young or old you are.

Joetta goes on to discuss areas that children need to be aware of at school for example; playgrounds at recess, locker rooms, and particularly in bathrooms.

As an educator, I had a high sense of alertness when I let my younger students go to the restroom in a common area. In small, rural schools, children don't always have the separation of restrooms for older and younger children. Little children using a restroom where older children can also be, is a very risky thing. Many people don't give any consideration to the abuses that take place in our public-school restrooms. There are rarely monitors or people who accompany a child to the restroom and this causes me to shutter after having involvement with a child who experienced this abuse first hand and reported it. There are countless unreported incidents. We simply cannot be too careful!

Conclusion

Once the book *You Have a Voice* has been read and much discussion has taken place, the *You Have a Voice* Activity book (with the same name) can be used. This activity book is full of coloring sheets, puzzles, games etc. that children will enjoy working in. The curriculum is designed so that children can take their time and work in it over the course of many days in conjunction with the reading of the book. I'm especially proud of the last page (13) **My Pledge**, where children will put their name in it and agree to use their voices to tell someone if they need to. Also, at the bottom of each page, **Miss Joetta Says:** gives advice, reminders, and prevention strategies for children to watch for. Inside the back of the book there is a list of Warning Signs for adults that is helpful too.

I hope this has been helpful and I appreciate with all my heart your willingness to get the word out to every child you have within your reach. Teach them, You Have a Voice, and strongly encourage them to learn the prevention strategies. I also encourage you to look into the statistics that are available regarding this heartbreaking topic of child molestation.

We cannot teach if we ourselves do not know the truth about what is going on. Please become educated, so we can all be better educators!

Blessings to you all,

Marie Pflugrad