

PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE

By María Guisela Masarik

A video: As sexual violence against children is growing, they are instructed to report facts and taught to develop their self-esteem by means of dramatizations.

"Ninety percent of current enquires show that child rapes are domestic", claimed La Nación a few days ago, based on figures supplied by the "Educando para prevenir la violencia" [Educating to prevent violence] Foundation. And it added that 70% of the victims know the perpetrator because almost half the cases are incestuous. [In the middle of the page, there is a box showing frames of the video "Piquito aprende a cuidarse" (Learning to protect myself). Below, the caption reads:] "This is how children see it". Figures are alarming. Not all events are reported and despite the fact that this is changing, fear persists (the rapist usually threatens to kill the victim's family) or there is a prevailing lack of understanding (the child does not know what is happening or believes it was a dream.) Organizations in charge of family violence and child abuse are increasingly concerned with prevention. Monica Diner, a psychologist of "children at risk", has recently published the "Guía de autoprotección de los niños para padres y maestros" [A Guide on Child Self-Protection for Parents and Teachers] which includes a video with puppets representing the stereotypes in children's life. The piece focuses on clear-cut concepts: "the right to self-protection" - preventing situations of physical, emotional and sexual risk- and "self-esteem." Thus, before parents and friends who are not understanding and scorn them for their mistakes, children must reply: "Why don't you teach me instead of laughing?"

SECRETS AND BRIBES

"Don't listen to strangers, no matter how good they look", children are advised. At the same time, children are shown the ways of a character "trying to bribe" the child with candy and "fun" games if the child accepts to get into the car, assuring him that no one will know. "Avoid games that make you feel bad and those that create confusion because you do not know whether you like them or not", claims the video, explaining that "That happens when someone touches parts of your body that can only be seen in the bath tub." And it goes even further: "If you know the person, you must leave the place immediately and tell someone who understands and can help you". Key concepts, then, are easily memorized: say no, leave and tell, because "excessive excitement for child tolerance levels produces lasting pathological consequences", asserts Diner. In fact, many victims try to wipe out what has happened. As grown ups, they become two persons: the one who has been abused and the one who pretends that nothing has ever happened. The importance of teaching children how to report these things lies in the fact that, if kept to themselves, this psychic trauma will prevent normal life development. In many cases, the minor tells the mother, but she remains silent if the perpetrator earns the family living. However, it is necessary to disseminate the notion that this has already been provided for in the Family Violence Act, No. 24417, which contemplates the exclusion of the perpetrator from that family. Section 8 thereof says: "Any defendant having family support duties whose exclusion from the home entails prejudice to his dependants, will cause the Counsel for Minority to intervene for the corresponding actions to be sought."