

Fred the Fox Shouts "NO!"

Tatiana Y. Kisil Matthews

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With the title as the first line, thus begins a superb story of a family of foxes who discuss the dangers of sexual abuse. Parents and caretakers will find teachable moments to use as a warning to their children—not only about “stranger danger” but also about inappropriate touching by adults they know. Images of family normalcy in *Fred the Fox Shouts “NO!”* hint that sometimes “normal” isn’t always what it seems.

Tatiana Y. Kisil Matthews communicates through her story that children will like practicing how to be safe, and may further be advised not to keep secrets about bad things anyone has said or done to them. The book’s illustrations, by Allison Fears, show a peaceful, tree-lined neighborhood where friends practice soccer and play on a swing set. Rabbits hop, birds sing, flowers bloom along the path. A school and church are depicted nearby. Inside the den where the fox family lives, the artist indicates a cheerful home life: family photos on the wall, papers held on the refrigerator door with magnets, and plants on the window sill. A lovely breakfast scene shows a secure place for the discussion to take place. The school-aged fox has a book bag beside his chair, the parent foxes drink coffee and tea, and the baby fox plays in her high chair.

A licensed practitioner with years of clinical experience advising parents about sexual abuse prevention, Matthews provides delicate, yet explicit, recommendations on how to handle the topic at hand. Fears indicates the seriousness of the subject with turned-down eyes and eyebrows. The upturned smiles on the faces of Fred the Fox and his parents as Fred leaves for school suggest that all are pleased because he is prepared with knowledge. Through the clear language and honesty of the fox family, Matthews and Fears have created a comfortable way to advise children about what the term “private parts” means and provide an exact script to ward off inappropriate touching. While the need may arise to read the book to children several times to ensure that its lessons are being absorbed, parents will welcome this useful guide.

MARY POPHAM (August 29, 2011)

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