

Symptoms

There are often no obvious physical signs of child sexual abuse. However, there are some symptoms that could indicate that a child has been victimized. A child victim often develops low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness. The child may be withdrawn, mistrustful of adults or even suicidal.

Other symptoms may include:

- ▶ Unusual interest in (or fear of) all things of a sexual nature
- ▶ Drawings, pictures or stories with a strong, unusual or bizarre sexual theme
- ▶ Seductiveness – attempts to seduce adults or other children
- ▶ Detailed understanding of sexual behavior that is not age-appropriate
- ▶ Change in sleeping habits, nightmares
- ▶ Sudden changes in eating habits such as overeating or lack of appetite
- ▶ Regression or loss of previous skills such as a sudden return to bedwetting or thumb sucking
- ▶ Unusual aggressiveness or anger
- ▶ Secretiveness
- ▶ Refusal to go to school
- ▶ Runaway behavior

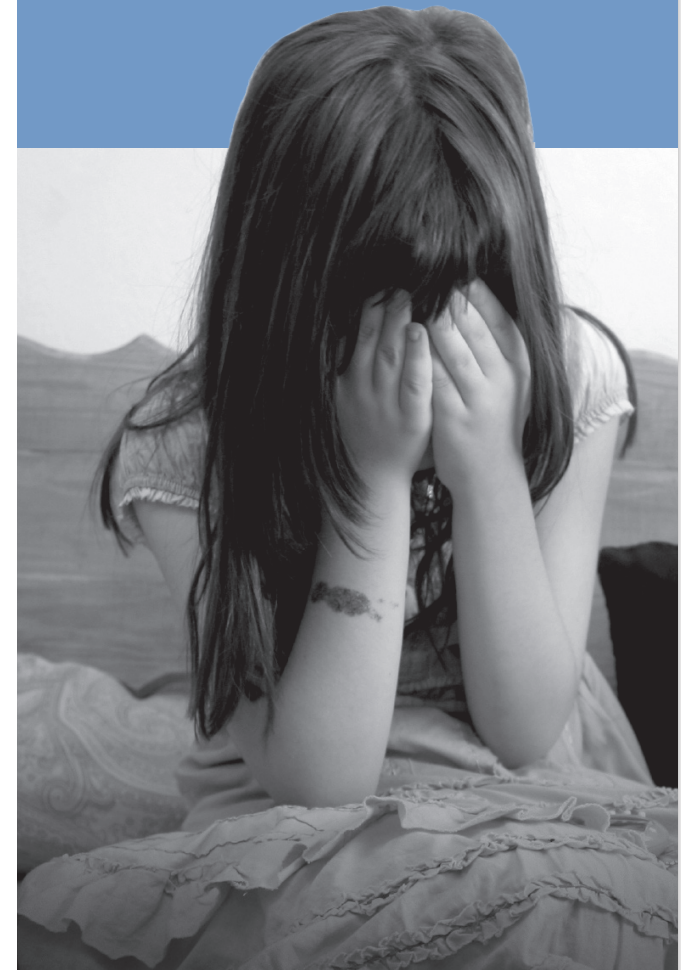
A 2003 study, *A Health Survey of Texans: A Focus on Sexual Assault*, reported that 4% of males and 16% of females under the age of 17 have been sexually assaulted.¹

If your child is sexually assaulted

If a child hints even in a vague way that sexual abuse has occurred, stay calm, don't make judgmental comments and encourage the child to talk freely. Here are some more suggestions for handling a child's disclosure of abuse:

- ▶ Assure the child that they did the right thing by telling.
- ▶ Tell the child they are not to blame for the sexual abuse.
- ▶ Find out how the child feels physically. Does their body hurt anywhere?
- ▶ Be supportive of the child.
- ▶ Don't exhibit strong angry emotions in the child's presence.
- ▶ Don't be afraid to show affection toward your child.
- ▶ Notify the police. Do not take the law into your own hands.
- ▶ Seek help in coping with the incident.
- ▶ Contact your local child abuse or rape crisis center. Seek support for both the child and yourself.
- ▶ Remember that with the love and support of adults such as parents, teachers and counselors, children can recover and thrive after these traumatic incidents.

Child Sexual Abuse



National Sexual Assault Hotline
Free. Confidential. 24/7.

1-800-656-HOPE

TAASA
Texas Association Against Sexual Assault

6200 La Calma, Suite 110
Austin, Texas 78752
www.taasa.org

¹ Busch, N. B., Bell, H., DiNitto, D. M., and Neff, J. A. (2003). *A Health Survey of Texans: A Focus on Sexual Assault*. Institute on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.

What is Child Sexual Abuse?

According to the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect in Washington, D.C., sexual abuse is any “contact between a child and an adult when the child is being used for sexual stimulation of that adult or another person.” Sexual abuse has many forms and may be so subtle that the child doesn’t even know it is happening.

Sexual abuse includes:

- ▶ Sexual touching or fondling
- ▶ Exposing a child to pornographic materials, adult sexual activity or genitalia (in a sexual context)
- ▶ Having a child pose, undress or perform in a sexual fashion
- ▶ “Peeping” into bedrooms or bathrooms
- ▶ Oral sex, intercourse or the attempt to engage in these activities

A vast majority of child sexual abuse incidents are never reported to the authorities. Child abuse remains one of the most underreported crimes because children are often afraid to tell anyone what happened. The offender may have told them no one will believe them, it has to be a secret, or they may have threatened that something bad will happen if they tell. Some children feel responsible and guilty because they cooperated or were bribed into participating.

The reality is that your child is most at risk for sexual abuse from someone they know – a relative, family friend or neighbor. Ninety-three percent of juvenile sexual assault victims know their attacker.¹ The offender rarely has to use force because they are usually known and trusted by the child. The offender uses that trust to trick or manipulate the child into compliance.

¹U.S. Department of Justice, 2001.

Risk Reduction Tips

Education is the best way to reduce your child’s risk of becoming a victim. Teaching your child not to talk to strangers is simply not adequate. In addition to the fact that most children are molested by someone known to them, children are also susceptible to clever lures developed by intelligent offenders with an understanding of child psychology. Discuss the following possible lures with your child:

- ▶ The offering of gifts, candy, money or bribes.
- ▶ Appealing to the child’s sense of helpfulness such as asking for assistance in finding a lost dog.
- ▶ Offers of rides on motorcycles, trail bikes or in sports cars.
- ▶ Telling children that their parents were hurt and offering a ride to the hospital.
- ▶ Telling the children that they were sent by their parents to pick them up.
- ▶ Offering to fix bicycles, etc.
- ▶ Parents should also teach their children about their bodies and about inappropriate and appropriate touching.



- 1) Teach your child that their body belongs to them, and that they have the right to say “no” to anyone who touches them.
- 2) Explain to your child that people they know and trust may touch them in a way that feels funny, and they still can say “no.”
- 3) Tell your child that you want them to come to you if anything happens that makes them feel uncomfortable and that you won’t be angry no matter what happened (for example, if they broke a rule).
- 4) Do not teach your child blind obedience to adults. Do not teach a child to do whatever a teacher or babysitter tells them. Teach your child that it is ok to say “no” to an adult if they want them to do something they know or think is wrong.
- 5) Teach your children which areas are sexual and private. Tell them that the areas covered by their bathing suit are private, sexual areas.
- 6) Teach your children the correct names for their body parts. Teach them that they do not have to be embarrassed to talk to you about their private parts.
- 7) Teach your children not to keep secrets from you and don’t encourage secret keeping in your family.
- 8) Advise your child not to give information over the phone such as “my parents aren’t home.”
- 9) Tell your child in advance if someone other than yourself is supposed to pick them up.
- 10) Do not allow your children to go to public areas such as parks, playgrounds or pools alone.
- 11) Know your babysitter. Be cautious of babysitters who are loners and have no apparent friends.
- 12) Encourage risk reduction and prevention programs in your local school system.