

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:

Facts and Statistics

- Sexual touching or fondling
- Exposing a child to pornographic materials, adult sexual activity, or genitalia
- 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 afraid to tell anyone what has happened. The offender may have told them no one will believe them, it has to be a secret, or he/she 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 he or she knows- 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 he is usually known and trusted by the child. The offender uses that trust to trick or manipulate the child into compliance.

1. U.S. Department of Justice, 2001.

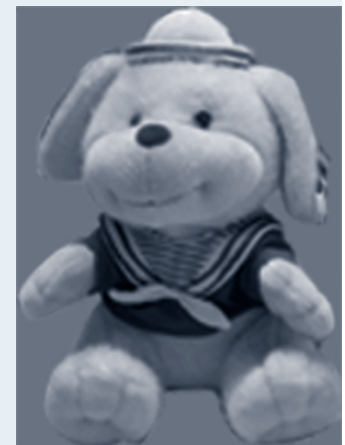
Prevention Tips

Education is the best way to prevent your child from 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. Children should be educated to recognize these lures:

- 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 in the hospital and offering a ride to the hospital
- Telling the children that their parents sent him 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 her body belongs to her, and that she has the right to say NO to anyone who touches her.
2. Explain to your child that people he knows and trusts may touch him in a way that feels funny, and he still can say NO.
3. Tell your child that you want her to come to you if anything happens that makes her feel uncomfortable and that you won't be angry no matter what happened (even if they got into trouble because 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 him to do something he knows or thinks 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, and pools alone.
11. Know your babysitter. Be cautious of babysitters who are loners and have no apparent friends.
12. Encourage professional prevention programs in the local school system.



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 a victim of sexual abuse. 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 thumbsucking
- Unusual aggressiveness or anger
- Poor self-concept
- Secretiveness
- Refusal to go to school
- Suicidal behavior
- Runaway behavior



Seven percent of girls and three percent of boys in grades 5-8; and twelve percent of girls and five percent of boys in grades 9-12 said they had been sexually abused. ¹

1. Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescent Girls and Boys, 1998.

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 he/she did the right thing in telling.
- ❁ Tell the child he/she is not to blame for the sexual abuse.
- ❁ Find out how the child feels physically. Does his/her 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.

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



 *The voice of sexual violence survivors in Texas.*



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www.taasa.org

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

1-800-656-HOPE