



Basic Facts About Child Sexual Abuse

What is child sexual abuse?

A person sexually abuses a child when he or she exposes the child to sexual acts or behavior. Child sexual abuse can involve:

- Sex acts that involve penetration
- Touching the child's breasts or genitals
- Making a child touch the perpetrator's breasts or genitals
- Showing a child pornography or using a child in the production of pornography
- Voyeurism (that is, when a perpetrator looks at a child's naked body)
- Exhibitionism (that is, when a perpetrator shows a child his or her naked body)

In addition, other forms of child sexual abuse may include the following:

- Child sexual exploitation, such as trafficking or child prostitution
- Internet-based child sexual abuse, such as creating, depicting, and/or distributing sexual images of children online; or stalking, grooming, and/or engaging in sexually explicit behaviors with children online (Finkelhor, Hammer & Sedlak, 2008)

Who are victims of child sexual abuse?

Boys and girls are victims, although girls are three times more likely to be abused than boys (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996).

Who are the perpetrators?

Children are most often sexually abused by adults with whom they are acquainted. Most perpetrators are adult males (Snyder, 2000).

How common is child sexual abuse?

About one in 12 children are sexually abused (Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005).

About one in three girls and one in seven boys will be sexually abused before the age of 17 (Briere & Elliott, 2003).

How can I reduce the risk of my child being abused?

- Develop positive, open communication with you child. Talk to him/her about his/her day, friends, feelings, concerns, etc. When they talk to you, listen and be supportive.
- Model and teach about healthy relationships. Help children to create and express boundaries about being touched.
- Teach children about healthy sexual development.
- Teach children that secrets about touching and being touched are not safe secrets to keep.
- Help children to identify adults they trust with whom they can confide.
- Monitor children's internet use. Talk to them about the dangers of internet predators.
- If a child or adolescent exhibits inappropriate sexual behavior, talk with a professional to assess the need for help.
- Support the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Safe Environment child sexual abuse prevention programs in schools and other community settings.
- Educate yourself about child sexual abuse. Share what you learn with other adults.

Why would a child keep sexual abuse a secret?

Evidence shows that child sexual abuse is not always obvious and many children do not report that they have been abused (Finkelhor, et al., 2008). Many children are embarrassed or feel guilty. Some fear the consequences of a disclosure and the impact it will have on the family and the perpetrator. Children often love and trust the people who sexually abuse them, making it more complicated to tell. They may feel confused because of the ways in which their bodies may have reacted to the abuse. Victims may also have a fear that there is something wrong with them or that they caused the abuse.



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