



Be Empowered: Help Protect Our Children

A Guide Book for Parents, Caregivers and Educators





Know the Facts about Child Sexual Abuse

As many as 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 7 boys will be sexually abused at some point in their childhood.

Briere, J. & Eliot, D.M. (2003). Prevalence and Psychological Sequence of Self-Reported Childhood Physical and Sexual Abuse in General Population. *Child Abuse and Neglect: The International Journal*, 27,1205-1222.

Tennessee is one of only 3 states that has not seen a decline in childhood sexual abuse since 1990. While in other states, child sexual abuse had declined as much as 50%, the incidence of child sexual abuse in Tennessee has risen 18%.

Jones, L. & Finkelhor, D. (2009). *Updated Trends in Child Maltreatment, 2007*. Retrieved from: <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/Trends/index.html>

Someone in the United States is sexually assaulted every 2 minutes.

U.S. Department of Justice. (2007). *National Crime Victimization Survey*. (Publication No. NCJ 227669). Retrieved from <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=1743>

As much as 15% of all males and 30% of all females report some type of exposure to child sexual abuse.

Brown, K. (2000). Male Victims of Child Sexual Assault: What the Research Tells Us. *Sexual Assault Report*, 4(1), 8.

Children under age 17 make up 71% of all sex crime victims.

Finkelhor, D. & Ormrod, R. (2000). Characteristics of Crimes Against Juveniles. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. (Publication No. NCJ 179034). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

88 percent of child sexual abuse is never reported to the authorities.

Hanson, R.F., Resnick, H.S., Saunders, B.E., Kilpatrick, D. G., & Best, C. (1999). Factors related to the reporting of childhood sexual assault. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 23, 559-569.



What is child sexual abuse?

Understanding what sexual abuse is can be very confusing and hard to hear. Our goal in providing this information is not to frighten you, but to empower you to prevent sexual abuse from happening and to know how to help if a child experiences sexual abuse.



Child sexual abuse is when a child is used for the sexual pleasure of an adult. Any type of sexual touching between an adult and a child is wrong, but physical touch is not always involved. When an adult engages in sexual behavior around a child, whether the adult is showing, looking, touching, or taking inappropriate photographs, it is considered child sexual abuse.



Child sexual abuse is typically something that happens gradually over time rather than a one time, sudden event. Sex offenders usually spend a lot of time building trust with the victim and the victim's parents or caregivers before the abuse actually happens. Often, sexual abuse happens more than one time and may increase in severity and duration as the sex offender continues to build the victim's trust.

Sexual assault describes any type of unwanted sexual activity by anyone at any age. This term includes rape and child sexual abuse.

Child sexual abuse is a term used to describe any type of sexual activity when the victim is less than 13 years old. This includes rape, molestation and fondling, or any other type of activity for the sexual enjoyment of another person.

Rape is unwanted sexual penetration of a victim by an offender.

Incest is sexual activity with penetration between family members. The abuser can be a parent, a child, a grandparent, uncle, aunt, nephew, niece, stepparent, stepchild, stepsibling or half-sibling. The relationship can be natural or adoptive.

Statutory rape is sexual activity with penetration when the victim is between ages 13-18, and the offender is at least 48 months older.

For specific terms, please review the Tennessee Codes 39-2-610 --- 39-2-642 at www.michie.com.

How will I know if a child has been sexually abused?

Most of the time, adults find out that a child has been abused when that child “accidentally” discloses to them that abuse is occurring. In this situation, the word “disclosure” means that a child reveals that they have been sexually assaulted.

Unfortunately, sexual abuse can be hard to recognize. Some of the same signs and symptoms can happen when other changes are happening in a child’s life like divorce, the death of a family member, problems at school or during any other difficult event in a child’s life. The most important thing that parents, teachers and other caregivers can do for children is to pay attention to any behavior change.

Physical signs of sexual abuse are rare, and often, nonexistent. Some signs can only be discovered by a doctor during a medical examination. If you notice any of the following, the child needs to see a doctor to rule out any illness or injury, whether related to sexual abuse or not.

Will I recognize an offender?

Unfortunately, there is no such thing as a typical sex offender. They can be any age, live anywhere, be rich or poor and have any kind of job. Sex offenders are male and female, and are often very connected to their families and friends. Many sex offenders are very active in their churches and communities, but there are also offenders who are not. Some sex offenders are extremely well educated while others have little education. Sometimes, they have already been convicted of sexual or non-sexual offenses, but some sex offenders may have no criminal record at all.

Most importantly, in more than 90% of cases, the victim knows the sex offender. Many people think that only strangers are the ones who are hurt children, but actually, the most frequent offenders are acquaintances like friends or neighbors. Family members are the next, followed by only about 10% of cases involving strangers (Douglas, E. and Finkelhor, D., 2005). It is also important to remember that while most sex offenders are male, women can also be sex offenders.

Offenders are usually very good at what they do, and even people who know what to look for to spot an offender can be tricked. Sex offenders will often look for more vulnerable children who will trust them, and when they find a child like this, they are very good at creating opportunities to spend time with the child. Most of the time, they do not use physical force to get a child to do what they want, instead, they use lies, bribery, threats and rewards. Because sexual abuse is so confusing to children, and because it may not cause physical pain, it is hard for a child to understand that what is going on is wrong.

If you suspect or know that a child has been abused, you must make a report to the Department of Children’s Services at 1-877-237-0004.

Common signs and symptoms:

- Distracted or distant at strange times
- Nightmares or problems sleeping without explanation
- Withdrawing from friends, family or activities they previously enjoyed
- Avoidance or fear of certain people or places
- Talks about a new, older friend or suddenly has gifts, money or toys without reason
- Depression
- Unusual aggressive behavior or shows sudden mood swings including rage, fear or insecurity
- Acting out at school and home
- Concern that their body is dirty or damaged, or worry that something is wrong with their private body parts
- Sudden or unusual interest in or avoidance of all things of a sexual nature
- Abrupt changes in eating habits; refusing to eat, has trouble swallowing, drastic decrease or increase in appetite
- Keeping secrets, particularly if it is one between the child and another friend or adult
- Displaying knowledge, behaviors or language of adult-like sexual nature
- Playing, drawing, writing or dreaming of sexual or other frightening images

Physical signs to watch for:

- Pain, discoloration, bleeding or discharges in the child’s private body parts
- Pain when the child uses the toilet
- Wetting or soiling his or her pants, unrelated to potty training
- If a child under the age of 13 is pregnant or has a sexually transmitted disease

Guidelines and Tips for Teaching Children about Safety



Include touching safety rules when you talk about other types of safety.

Teach children that no one should touch their private body parts except to keep them clean and healthy. No one should ask them to touch his/her private parts, or ask the child to take off their clothes. No one should take pictures of them with their clothes off, or take his/her clothes off in front of a child.

Help children develop assertiveness skills.

Being assertive means that a child stands up for himself or herself in a way that doesn't hurt someone else. Help children understand that no means no, all the time. Teach children that adults aren't always right, and that if someone is touching them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable, they can say, "Stop, I don't like that," or "Stop, or I'll tell." Let children know their bodies belong to them and that touching safety rules apply all the time.

Set up family rules regarding secrets.

A safe secret is one that won't cause someone to get hurt or to get in trouble, and a safe secret isn't a secret that must be kept forever. Teach children not to keep secrets about touching, and if anyone asks them to keep a touching secret, they should always tell a safe person.

Help children understand who several safe people are.

A safe person is an adult who can help a child when he/she needs help. Children should be able to identify several safe people, both at home and at school, at church or other places the child frequents. Safe people should be people the child feels comfortable with and can contact easily. Keep a list of safe adults somewhere at home where the child can find it easily, and help the child make a list to carry with him or her when not at home.

Know who your child is with when they are not with you.

Don't be afraid to ask for references on the people who keep your children when you are away. Interview potential sitters, and ask tough questions during the interview. Let people who take care of your children for you know what your family rules are, including rules about touching. Meet and be familiar with your child's coaches, youth pastors, etc.

When a Child Tells You that He or She has been Sexually Abused

90% percent of sexual abuse victims never tell.

Freyd, J.J., Putnam, F.W., Lyon, T.D., Becker-Blease, K. A., Cheit, R.E., Siegel, N.B., & Pezdek, K. (2005). The science of child sexual abuse. *Science*, 308, 501.

74% of disclosures from sexually abused children are accidental.

Sorenson, T. & Snow, B. (1991). How children tell: The process of disclosure in child sexual abuse. *Child Welfare*, 70(1), 3-15.

False reports of rape are rare, occurring less than 6% of the time.

Lisak, D., Gardinier, L., Nicksa, S. & Cote, A. (2010). False Allegations of Sexual Assault: An Analysis of Ten Years of Reported Cases. *Violence Against Women*, 16(12), 1318-1334.



Why Children Don't Tell

There are lots of reasons that children don't tell an adult that they have experienced sexual abuse. They may be afraid they won't be believed, or they may think that the adults in their lives already know.

Many times, young children don't understand what is going on, and they don't have the right words to describe what is happening to them. They might be afraid of getting in trouble, or that it is their fault the abuse is happening to them. The sex offender may be threatening or bribing them to keep the secret.

Sometimes, they don't know who they can tell or who will protect them. They could be afraid about how their friends or family will react when they find out, or they may be trying to protect the sex offender. Older children are usually very embarrassed to talk about sexual issues with adults, particularly when the adult is an authority figure.

Why Children Do Tell

There are also a variety of reasons why children decide to tell. Sometimes, when they cannot keep the secret any longer, the abuse is discovered during a medical exam or an adult finds out accidentally.

Other times, the abuse begins to get worse or happens more often, and the child is frightened so they tell a safe adult. If the child thinks that the sex offender is going to start abusing other children, like a younger brother or sister, the victim may tell to stop the abuse from happening to someone else. Or, maybe the child has learned sexual abuse prevention training and they know what to do to make the abuse stop.

Sometimes, it's as simple as a child understanding how to recognize a safe adult, and they feel safe disclosing to the adult.

How to Assist a Sexually Abused Child

The thought of helping a child who has just told you that he or she has been sexually abused can be overwhelming. Hearing a child tell you that they have been sexually abused is not an easy thing to respond to, and as a person close to the child, you will undoubtedly have an array of your own feelings (fear, anger, concern or confusion). If a child discloses to you that he or she has been abused, it is helpful to have planned your response beforehand. Practice how you might respond before a real situation ever occurs, and you will find that you will be better prepared if this situation actually happens. Numerous studies have shown that the very best way for a child to heal is to be believed and supported when they disclose. Here are some tips to help you know what to do if a child tells you that he or she has been a victim of sexual abuse.

- Remain calm
- Always reassure the child that you believe him/her and are there to protect him/her
- Always reassure the child that they have done the right thing by telling you about the abuse
- Use care when correcting behavior
- Listen to the child's stories and be supportive
- Contact a therapist or case worker with specific questions about the child's behavior
- Teach personal safety
- Offer alternative choices or redirect inappropriate behavior
- Talk to the child's caregiver/teacher about concerns you have or things you have seen happen with the child
- Don't force the child to talk about the abuse if they appear uncomfortable; respect the child's boundaries
- Pay attention to your own reaction and body language and how it might affect the child
- Don't coach the child or put words in his/her mouth
- Don't try to figure out yourself if the allegations are valid
- Remember that children rarely lie about being sexually abused
- Make a report to the Department of Children's Services at 1.877.237.0004.
- Remember, help is available! SAC is here to help you and your child deal with the effects of sexual abuse. SAC is here to provide support, therapy and guidance to help you and the child heal from this victimization.

If left untreated, sexual abuse can have some very serious long term effects. Children or teens may experience many of the following emotions and responses:

- Feel different or alone
- Depression
- Sadness
- Running Away
- Confusion
- Eating disorders
- Acting out at school or home
- Develop anxieties
- Turning to violence
- Fear
- Feelings of guilt or shame
- Hate
- Using drugs and/or alcohol
- Anger
- Difficulty forming close relationships
- Thoughts of or attempted suicide
- Successful suicide

Where You Can Get Help

Sexual Assault Center

SAC provides counseling for victims of sexual assault and non-offending caregivers or family members, as well as educational resources and curricula about personal safety and healthy relationships.

615.259.9055

Crisis Support Line: 1.800.879.1999

www.sacenter.org

www.besafeatlast.com

Department of Children's Services

The Department of Children's Services responds to over 37,000 reports of child abuse and neglect a year.

To report child abuse: 1.877.237.0004

www.state.tn.us/youth/childsafety.htm

Our Kids

Our Kids provides expert medical evaluations, crisis counseling and other services to children and families affected by child sexual abuse.

615.341.4911

www.ourkidscenter.com

Nashville Children's Alliance

The Nashville Children's Alliance is a nonprofit organization providing services to children when there are allegations of sexual or severe physical abuse.

615.327.9958

www.nashvillechildrensalliance.org

Metro Nashville Police Department

615.862.8600

www.police.nashville.org

Tennessee Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence

TCADSV is a statewide coalition of agencies working to end domestic and sexual violence.

615.386.9406

www.tcadsv.org

RAINN.org

The Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network is the nation's largest anti-sexual assault organization.

1.800.656.HOPE

www.rainn.org

Stop It Now

Stop It Now! prevents the sexual abuse of children by mobilizing adults, families and communities to take actions that protect children before they are harmed.

www.stopitnow.org

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network works to raise the standard of care and improve access to services for traumatized children, their families and communities throughout the United States.

www.nctsn.org

National Sexual Violence Resource Center

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center serves as the nation's principle information and resource center regarding all aspects of sexual violence.

www.nsvrc.org

National Center for Victims of Crime

The mission of the National Center for Victims of Crime is to forge a national commitment to help victims of crime rebuild their lives.

www.ncvc.org

The National Children's Advocacy Center

The NCAC models, promotes, and delivers excellence in child abuse response and prevention through service, education, and leadership.

www.nationalcac.org

Prevent Child Abuse Tennessee

Prevent Child Abuse TN provides education to the public about the prevalence of child abuse and the community's role in child abuse prevention.

615.383.0994

www.pcat.org