



**rape and abuse
crisis center**

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Myths and Facts about Child Sexual Abuse

Myth #1: Child sexual abuse occurs only among strangers. If children stay away from strangers, they will not be sexually abused.

Fact: Statistics show 93% of juvenile sexual assault victims know their attacker. Family members account for 34.2% of all perpetrators, and acquaintances account for 58.7%. Only 7% of perpetrators are strangers to their victim.¹

Myth #2: Children provoke sexual abuse through displaying seductive behavior.

Fact: Seductive behavior is not the cause. Responsibility for the act lies with the offender. Children are not psychologically prepared to cope with repeated sexual stimulation.² Sexual abuse, therefore, exploits children who are not developmentally capable of understanding or resisting the abuse.

Myth #3: The majority of child sexual abuse victims tell someone about the abuse.

Fact: It is estimated that 73% of child victims do not tell anyone about the abuse for at least a year and 45% of victims do not tell anyone for at least 5 years. Some never disclose.³ Child sexual abuse has been reported up to 80,000 times a year, but the number of unreported instances is far greater because children are afraid to tell anyone what has happened.²

Myth #4: Men and women sexually abuse children equally.

Fact: Studies have shown the majority of child sexual abusers are men.⁵ Men sexually abuse both female and male children, and despite a common myth, homosexual men are not more likely to sexually abuse children than heterosexual men.⁵

Myth #5: If the children did not want the abuse, they could tell their perpetrator to stop.

Fact: Because children are often taught the importance of obeying adults, they generally do not question the behavior of an adult. Children are often coerced with bribes, threats, or use of a position of authority.

Myth #6: All sexual abuse victims are female.

Fact: Studies indicate that female children are abused more often than male children.⁵ It is estimated between 25-33% of women have been sexually abused during childhood. Estimates for men are 10-16%.⁴ Therefore, male children are also victims of sexual abuse.

Myth #7: Family sexual abuse is an isolated, one-time incident.

Fact: Child sexual abuse is usually a situation that develops gradually over a period of time and occurs repeatedly.⁶

Myth #8: In family sexual abuse, the "non-offending" parent always knows what has happened.

Fact: While some "non-offending" parents know and even support an offender's actions, because of a lack of awareness, many suspect something is wrong, but are unsure what to do.

Myth #9: Family sexual abuse only happens in low-income families.

Fact: Family sexual abuse crosses all classes of society. There is no race, social, or economic class that is immune to family sexual abuse.

Myth #10: Non-violent sexual behavior between a child and an adult is not damaging to the child.

Fact: Nearly all victims will experience confusion, shame, guilt, anger, and suffer from possessing a poor self image. Child sexual abuse can result in long-term relationship problems as well. The long-term emotional and psychological damage of sexual abuse can be devastating.²

References:

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5. American Psychological Association:
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6. World Health Organization:
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