



**rape and abuse
crisis center**

advocacy. counseling. education.

For Parents Dealing with Child Sexual Abuse

Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse occurs when a child is tricked, forced, coerced, or manipulated into sexual contact for the purpose of gratifying the abuser. The sexual abuse can range from fondling of the child's sexual parts, exposure of the abuser's private parts, having a child touch the abuser's private parts, to intercourse.

Some Facts

Studies on child sexual abuse indicate *one in four* females and *one in six* males will be sexually abused before the age of 18.¹ The abuser is known to the victim in 93% of all cases.²

Effects of Child Sexual Abuse

Nearly all victims will experience feelings of confusion, shame, guilt, anger, self-blame, embarrassment, and fear. Child sexual abuse can result in long-term relationship problems and be perpetuated from generation to generation. A male who is sexually abused as a child is more likely to sexually abuse others if there has been no intervention. A female victim who receives no intervention is more likely to be re-victimized.³

Reaction of Parents

When their child is violated, parents may feel violated too. They experience feelings similar to those of their child; self-blame, anger (at themselves and the abuser), guilt, embarrassment, and fear. They tend to want to overprotect their child to ensure the child's safety; however, the child may view this as punishment or lack of trust.

When parents have also been victims of sexual abuse, it may be difficult for them to separate feelings regarding their experience of abuse and that of the child. These parents may need to receive help to deal with their own abuse experience.

Pointers to Help Parents Talk to a Child Who Has Been Sexually Abused

Remember, a child may not have the vocabulary to talk about the sexual abuse and often does not tell anyone about the abuse, due to fear of not being believed. In some case, the victim has been threatened with harm, told not to tell, or has been told s/he will get in trouble if the "secret" is told.

It is important for parents to stay calm and have their feelings under control when they talk to their child. The effect sexual abuse has on a child depends, in part, upon the parents' reaction. If parents become overly upset and angry, a child may think s/he is bad, or has done something wrong. When parents react in a concerned, caring, supportive, and loving manner, the child feels better able to share their feelings about what happened.

24-hour Crisis Line (701)293-7273

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F: Education/Revised Handouts/For Parents Dealing with Child Sexual Abuse

Indicators

While the presence of the following behaviors does not mean a child has been sexually abused, a pattern of these behaviors usually indicates that a problem exists. It is important to talk with a child who exhibits a pattern of behavioral problems and seek necessary help.

1. Physical Indicators

- Change in appetite
- Eating disorder
- Unexplained gagging
- Pregnancy
- Vaginal or uteral discharge
- Infection or sexually transmitted disease (evidence by difficulty urinating, scratching, and tugging at clothing around genital area)

2. Behavioral Indicators

- Abrupt change in behavior
- Clinging or whining
- Refusal to go to a certain place/be with a certain person
- Regression to more infantile behavior such as bed wetting, thumb sucking, fecal soiling, etc. (evident primarily in younger children)
- Acting out and attention-getting behavior (e.g. shoplifting, fire setting)
- Prostitution or promiscuous sexual behavior
- School problems, truancy, drop in academic performances
- Alcohol/drug abuse
- Excessive bathing

3. Psychological Indicators

- Excessive fear of being touched
- Fear of being alone
- Nightmares and other sleep disturbances
- Withdrawal and isolation from peers
- Depression
- Physical self-abuse
- Suicide attempts/threats
- Reluctant to undress for physical education classes
- Chronic running away issues

References:

1. Darkness to Light:
http://www.darkness2light.org/KnowAbout/statistics_2.asp
2. Rape, Abuse, and Incest Network: <http://www.rainn.org>
3. South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault:
<http://www.sccadvasa.org/articles/73.pdf>