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# CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

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Information for Parents



## **Sexual Assault**

The term sexual assault refers to sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim. Sexual assault can take many different forms, but one thing remains the same: it's never the victim's fault. Some forms of sexual assault include:

Attempted rape  
Fondling or unwanted sexual touching  
Forcing a victim to perform sexual acts, such as oral sex or penetrating the perpetrator's body (rape)

## **Reporting**

Several options for reporting sexual assault:

- **Call 911.** If you are in immediate danger, dial 911. Help will come to you, wherever you are.
- **Contact the local police department.** Call the direct line of your local police station or visit the station in person. If you are on a college campus you may also be able to contact campus-based law enforcement.
- **Visit a medical center.** If you are being treated for injuries resulting from sexual assault, tell a medical professional that you wish to report the crime. You can also choose to have a sexual assault forensic exam.
- To find an appropriate local health facility that is prepared to care for survivors, call the **National Sexual Assault Hotline 800.656.HOPE (4673).**

## **Statistics**

- Every 68 seconds, an American is assaulted and every 9 minutes the victim is a child.
- One in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys under the age of 18 experience sexual abuse or assault at the hands of an adult.
- Most child victims are between the ages of 12-17 (66%)
- 93% of victims are abused by someone they know and trust.
- Less than 10% of sexual abusers will EVER encounter the criminal justice system.

## **Child Sexual Abuse/Assault**

### **1)What is Child Sexual Abuse?**

Child sexual abuse is a form of child abuse that includes sexual activity with a minor. When a perpetrator engages with a child this way, they are committing a crime that can have lasting effects on the victim for years. Some forms of child sexual abuse include (but are not limited to):

- Exhibitionism, or exposing oneself to a minor

- Fondling
- Intercourse
- Masturbation in the presence of a minor or forcing the minor to masturbate
- Obscene conversations, phone calls, text messages, or digital interaction
- Producing, owning, or sharing pornographic images or movies of children
- Sex of any kind with a minor, including vaginal, oral, or anal
- Sex trafficking
- Any other contact of a sexual nature that involves a minor.

## **2) How can Child Sexual Abuse be prevented? How can children be protected?**

### **Prevention starts with Awareness!**

Ministrysafe.com offers an excellent Sexual Abuse Awareness Training class for Parents. This class can be accessed at <https://ministrysafe.com/pricing/> Single User Access: \$5/per individual.

This foundational training equips parents with the ‘eyes to see’ the **grooming process of an abuser, ways to keep your children safe, and key indicators of child sexual abuse.**

Remember that sexual abusers will seek access to children where protective barriers are low.

## **3) What do perpetrators of Child Abuse look like?**

The majority of perpetrators are someone the child or family knows (93% of victims under the age of 18 know the abuser). A perpetrator does not have to be an adult to harm a child. They can have any relationship to the child including an older sibling or playmate, family member, a teacher, a coach or instructor, a caretaker, a minister, or the parent of another child. Abusers can manipulate victims to stay quiet about the sexual abuse using a number of different tactics. Often an abuser will use their position of power over the victim to coerce or intimidate the child. They might tell the child that the activity is normal or that they enjoyed it. An abuser may make threats if the child refuses to participate or plans to tell another adult. Child sexual abuse is not only a physical violation; it is a violation of trust and/or authority.

## **4) Grooming – know the signs!!**

One tool common to those who sexually abuse kids is grooming: manipulative behaviors that the abuser uses to gain access to a potential victim, coerce them to agree to the abuse, and reduce the risk of being caught. While these tactics are used most often against younger kids, teens and vulnerable adults are also at risk. Grooming behaviors are not only used to gain a victim’s trust, but often are used to create a trustworthy image and relationship with their family and community. Child and teen sexual abusers are often charming, kind, and helpful — exactly the type of behavior we value in friends and acquaintances.

Though grooming can take many different forms, it often follows a similar pattern.

- **Victim selection:** Abusers often observe possible victims and select them based on ease of access to them or their perceived vulnerability.
- **Gaining access and isolating the victim:** Abusers will attempt to physically or emotionally separate a victim from those protecting them and often seek out positions in which they have contact with minors.
- **Trust development and keeping secrets:** Abusers attempt to gain trust of a potential victim through gifts, attention, sharing “secrets” and other means to make them feel that they have a caring relationship and to train them to keep the relationship secret.
- **Desensitization to touch and discussion of sexual topics:** Abusers will often start to touch a victim in ways that appear harmless, such as hugging, wrestling and tickling, and later escalate to increasingly more sexual contact, such as massages or showering together. Abusers may also show the victim pornography or discuss sexual topics with them, to introduce the idea of sexual contact.
- **Attempt by abusers to make their behavior seem natural,** to avoid raising suspicions. For teens, who may be closer in age to the abuser, it can be particularly hard to recognize tactics used in grooming. Be alert for signs that your teen has a relationship with an adult that includes secrecy, undue influence or control, or pushes personal boundaries.

## 5) How can parents promote safety?

Teach young children the language they need to talk about their bodies and information about boundaries to help them understand what is allowed and what is inappropriate. These lessons help them know when something isn't right and give them the power to speak up.

- **Teach children the names of their body parts.** When children have the words to describe their body parts, they may find it easier to ask questions and express concerns about those body parts.
- **Some parts of the body are private.** Let children know that other people shouldn't touch or look at them. If a healthcare professional has to examine these parts of the body, be present.
- **It's OK to say “no.”** It's important to let children know they are allowed to say “no” to touches that make them uncomfortable.
- **Talk about secrets.** Perpetrators will often use secret-keeping to manipulate children. Let children know they can always talk to you, especially if they've been told to keep a secret. If they see someone touching another child, they shouldn't keep this secret, either.
- **Reassure them that they won't get in trouble.** Young children often fear getting in trouble or upsetting their parents by asking questions or talking about their experiences. Be a safe place for your child to share information about things that they have questions about or that make them uncomfortable. Remind them they won't be punished for sharing this information with you.

- **Show them what it looks like to do the right thing.** It could be as simple as helping an elderly person get off a bus or picking up change that someone has dropped on the ground. When you model helping behavior it signals to your child that this is a normal, positive way to behave.
- **When they come to you, make time for them.** If your kid comes to you with something they feel is important, take the time to listen. Give them your undivided attention and let them know you take their concerns seriously. They may be more likely to come to you in the future if they know their voice will be heard.
- **Choose caregivers carefully.** Whether it's a babysitter, a new school, or an afterschool activity, be diligent about **screening caregivers** for your child.
- **Know the warning signs.** Become familiar with the **warning signs of child sexual abuse**, and notice any changes with your child, no matter how small. Whether it's happening to your child or a child you know, you have the potential to make a big difference in that person's life by **stepping in**.
- **Create a dialogue** about topics like safety and sexual assault with your teens.

For an age-appropriate resource on talking to children about sexual abuse, see [\*A Kids Book About Sexual Abuse\*](#).

## 6) Warning signs of Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse isn't always easy to spot, and some survivors may not exhibit obvious warning signs. The perpetrator could be someone you've known a long time or trust, which may make it even harder to notice. Consider some of the following common warning signs:

### Physical signs:

- Bleeding, bruises, or swelling in genital area
- Bloody, torn, or stained underclothes
- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Frequent urinary or yeast infections
- Pain, itching, or burning in genital area

### Behavioral signs:

- Changes in hygiene, such as refusing to bathe or bathing excessively
- Develops phobias
- Exhibits signs of depression or post-traumatic stress disorder
- Expresses suicidal thoughts, especially in adolescents
- Has trouble in school, such as absences or drops in grades
- Inappropriate sexual knowledge or behaviors
- Nightmares or bed-wetting
- Overly protective and concerned for siblings, or assumes a caretaker role
- Returns to regressive behaviors, such as thumb sucking
- Runs away from home or school
- Self-harms

- Shrinks away or seems threatened by physical contact

## 7) What should be done if we suspect a child is being harmed?

### a) Recognize the signs

You might notice behavioral or physical changes that could signal a child is being abused.

### b) Talk to the child

If you are concerned about abuse, talk to the child. Keep in mind a few guidelines to create a non-threatening environment where the child may be more likely to open up to you.

- **Pick your time and place carefully.** Choose a space where the child is comfortable or ask them where they'd like to talk. Avoid talking in front of someone who may be causing the harm.
- **Be aware of your tone.** If you start the conversation in a serious tone, you may scare the child, and they may be more likely to give you the answers they think you want to hear—rather than the truth. Try to make the conversation more casual. A non-threatening tone will help put the child at ease and ultimately provide you with more accurate information.
- **Talk to the child directly.** Ask questions that use the child's own vocabulary, but that are a little vague. For example, "Has someone been touching you?" In this context "touching" can mean different things, but it is likely a word the child is familiar with. The child can respond with questions or comments to help you better gauge the situation like, "No one touches me except my mom at bath time," or "You mean like the way my cousin touches me sometimes?" *Understand that sexual abuse can feel good to the child, so asking if someone is "hurting" them may not bring out the information that you are looking for.*
- **Listen and follow up.** Allow the child to talk freely. Wait for them to pause, and then follow up on points that made you feel concerned.
- **Avoid judgment and blame.** Avoid placing blame by using "I" questions and statements. Rather than beginning your conversation by saying, "You said something that made me worry..." consider starting your conversation with the word "I." For example: "I am concerned because I heard you say that you are not allowed to sleep in your bed by yourself."
- **Reassure the child.** Make sure that the child knows that they are not in trouble. Let them know you are simply asking questions because you are concerned about them.
- **Be patient.** Remember that this conversation may be very frightening for the child. Many perpetrators make threats about what will happen if someone finds out about the abuse. They may tell a child that they will be put into foster care or threaten them or their loved ones with physical violence.

### c) Report it

#### When is a report required in Washington State?

- Reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered abuse or neglect.

- Call DSHS at 866-363-4276.
- Call 911 if a child is in an emergency situation.
- Call or text the [Childhelp National Abuse Hotline](https://www.childhelp.org/childhelp/hotline) at 800.422.4453 to be connected with a trained volunteer. Childhelp Hotline crisis counselors can't make the report for you, but they can walk you through the process and let you know what to expect.

### Where does it go?

- The Department of Children, Youth, and Families
- The local office of the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (information available at: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/report-abuse-and-neglect>;) )
- The proper law enforcement agency.

Reporting agencies vary from state to state. To see where to report to in your state, visit RAINN's(Rape, Abuse& Incest National Network) State Law Database. RAINN operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline: 800.656.HOPE.

### Before you report

- Tell the child that you're going to talk to someone who can help. Be clear that you are not asking their permission. The child may not want you to report and may be frightened, especially if the perpetrator has threatened them or their loved ones. Remember that by reporting, you are involving authorities who will be able to keep the child safe.
- Ensure that the child is in a safe place. If you have concerns over the child's safety, be sure to discuss them explicitly with authorities when you make the report. If you fear that the perpetrator will cause further harm to the child upon learning about the investigation, clearly communicate this to the authorities.
- If you are not concerned that the parents are causing harm, you can consult with them prior to making a report to authorities.
- If you are a parent and are concerned that your partner or someone in your family may be hurting your child, this may be a very difficult time. It's important to be there for your child, and it's also important to take care of yourself.
- Prepare your thoughts. You will likely be asked identifying information about the child, the nature of the abuse, and your relationship with the child. **While anonymous tips are always an option, identified reporting increases the likelihood of prosecuting the perpetrator.**

Sources utilized to create this document:

- 1) RAINN's website (Rape, Abuse& Incest National Network) <https://www.rainn.org/>
- 2) MinistrySafe's website <https://ministrysafe.com/>
- 3) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childsexualabuse/fastfact.html>

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