
FACT SHEET

Child Sexual Abuse

WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE? Sexual abuse includes sexual intercourse and/or its deviations. This behavior may only be the last step in a worsening pattern of sexual abuse. For that reason & because of their devastating effects, exhibitionism, fondling & other sexual contact with children is also considered sexually abusive.

Generally non-touching sexual offenses include:

*~indecent exposure/exhibition ~exposing children to pornographic material
~masturbation in front of a child ~deliberately exposing a child to act of sexual intercourse*

Touching sexual offenses include:

*~fondling ~making a child touch an adult's sexual organs
~penetration of vagina or anus-no matter how slight-by a penis or object that doesn't have medical purpose*

Sexual exploitation of a child is also an offense and can include:

~using child to film, photograph or model pornography ~engaging child or soliciting child for purposes of prostitution

WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR IF I SUSPECT A CHILD IS BEING SEXUALLY ABUSED? Child sexual abuse cases can be very difficult to prove largely because cases where definite, objective evidence exists are the exception. The first indicators of sexual abuse may not be physical signs, but behavior changes or abnormalities. Unfortunately, because it is unusually so difficult to accept that sexual abuse may be occurring, the adult may misinterpret the signals & feel that the child is merely being disobedient or insolent. The reaction to the disclosure of abuse then becomes disbelief & rejection to the child's statements.

The child victim may be the only witness. In that case, the child's statements may also be the only evidence that sexual abuse has occurred. In such cases, the central issue sometimes becomes-can the child's statements be trusted as true? Some child welfare experts believe that children never lie about sexual abuse & that their statements must always be believed. According to Douglas Besharov it is the job of the child protective agency to make the determination as to whether or not sexual abuse has occurred; as a general rule, all doubts should be resolved in favor of making a report. A child who describes being sexually abused should be reported unless there is clear reason to disbelieve the statement. According to the American Humane statistics, only 2-8% of all reports of child sexual maltreatment are deliberately false.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE? Sometimes the child may be so traumatized by sexual abuse that years may go by before he/she is able to understand or talk about what happened. In these cases, adult survivors of sexual abuse may come forward for the first time at the age of 40-50 & divulge the horror of their experiences.

Its effects extend far beyond childhood occurrence. It robs children of their childhood, creates a loss of trust, feelings of guilt and/or self abusive behavior. It can lead to antisocial behavior, depression, identity confusion, loss of self-esteem and other serious emotional problems.

HOW DO I REPORT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE? If you suspect sexual abuse & believe a child to be in imminent danger, call the police immediately.

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO TO PROTECT THEIR CHILDREN? They can teach children about what appropriate sexual behavior is & when to say "no" if someone tries to touch sexual parts of their bodies or in any way that makes them feel uncomfortable. Parents can observe children when they interact with others to see if they are hesitant or uncomfortable around a certain adult. Most importantly, children need to know they can speak openly to a trusted adult & they will be believed. Children who are victims of sexual abuse should always be reassured that they are not guilty for what has happened to them and should not feel ashamed.



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Fact Sheet developed the American Humane Association