

What Constitutes Childhood Sexual Abuse?

- **Abuse** is mistreatment: using something or someone in an inappropriate manner. It is intentional, not accidental.
- **Sexual abuse** of a child is any physical, visual, or verbal interaction with a minor by an older child or adult whose purpose is sexual stimulation or sexual satisfaction.
 - Sexual abuse victims are boys and girls under the age of 18 who have suffered one or many experiences of sexual abuse.
 - Sexual abuse of a child is almost always committed by someone the child knows or with whom the child has frequent contact. Such familiarity sets the stage for a child to be all the more vulnerable to a victimizer.

*“Like a lion in cover he lies in wait.
He lies in wait to catch the helpless;
he catches the helpless
and drags them off in his net.”*
(Psalm 10:9)

What Is Incest?

- **Incest** is sexual interaction with a child or an adolescent by a person who is a member of the child’s family: any blood relative, adoptive relative, or relative by marriage or remarriage.

*“No one is to approach any close relative
to have sexual relations.
I am the LORD.”*
(Leviticus 18:6)

What Is the Difference between Molestation and Rape?

- **Molestation** is unlawful sexual contact.
- **Rape** is both a forceful and non-forceful act resulting in sexual penetration.

Checklist for Childhood Sexual Abuse

Indirect Sexual Abuse:

As a child, did you experience ... ?

- Voyeurism:** being stared at while undressing
- Exhibitionism:** being exposed to the intentional, inappropriate nudity of someone much older
- Lewdness:** being made to listen to sexual talk or watch sex acts
- Pornography:** being shown sexual pictures, magazines, videos, or movies
- Child Pornography:** being made to pose for sexual photographs, videos, or movies
- Psychological Abuse:** being teased or ridiculed about private body parts, subjected to sexual name-calling, or made to feel like a sex object

Direct Sexual Abuse:

As a child, did you experience ... ?

- Fondling:** being touched, stroked, or caressed in sexually sensitive areas
- Oral Sex:** being made to perform oral genital contact
- Penetration/Rape:** being forced into unwanted sexual intercourse or anal sex
- Child Prostitution:** being made to perform sex acts for money
- Sadism:** being subjected to the painful use of objects on sexual parts
- Satanic Ritual Abuse:** being forced to suffer systematic acts of sadistic sexual abuse in ceremonies exalting Satan or evil

*“What the wicked dread will overtake them;
what the righteous desire will be granted.
When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone,
but the righteous stand firm forever.”*
(Proverbs 10:24–25)

Why Don't Children Tell?

For a number of reasons, most abused children never share “the secret” of their abuse. And if they do, it's usually many years later! Typically, they feel they must protect their perpetrators—or at least the secret—because:

- They feel immense shame and guilt—which is false guilt—assuming it's all their fault.
- They fear going to jail.
- They feel love and loyalty for the abuser.
- They fear that the one they tell will respond with disbelief, denial, or disgust.
- They feel no need to tell because the trauma caused dissociation, resulting in no memory of abuse.
- They fear the abuser's authority and power.
- They feel threatened by the abuser.
- They fear what will happen to the abuser.
- They feel obligated to the abuser.
- They fear no one will love them anymore.
- They fear being taken away from their family.
- They feel no one cares because no one asks!

*“Fear of man will prove to be a snare,
but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.”*
(Proverbs 29:25)

Key Verse to Memorize

*“Be strong and courageous.
Do not be afraid or terrified because of them,
for the LORD your God goes with you;
he will never leave you nor forsake you.”*
(Deuteronomy 31:6)

Key Passage to Read

Psalm 55

Dos and Don'ts of Awareness

When it comes to abuse of any kind, too many people become like an ostrich—hiding their heads in the sands of denial. Although tremendously difficult, facing the truth that child abuse has taken place is the first step to healing. Take comfort in the fact that ...

*“When justice is done,
it brings joy to the righteous
but terror to evildoers.”*
(Proverbs 21:15)

In facing the truth about child sexual abuse, know these Dos and Don'ts:

Dos

- **Do ...** Be aware that child abuse is illegal, a crime that must be reported.
- **Do ...** Be aware that children are usually abused by people they know.
- **Do ...** Be aware that children seldom lie about abuse.
- **Do ...** Be aware that most often, physical abuse is violent, but sexual abuse is usually not violent.
- **Do ...** Be aware that children may deny or change their stories because of fear.
- **Do ...** Be aware that sexual abuse is progressive and will get worse if not stopped.

Don'ts

- **Don't** be in denial, no matter how difficult it is to believe.
- **Don't** assume that if it happened only once, it is not serious.
- **Don't** minimize the abuse.
- **Don't** let the offender go without confrontation.
- **Don't** blame other family members.
- **Don't** keep abuse a “family secret.”

How to Surface the Secret

Not telling leaves victims of childhood sexual abuse in bondage to “the secret.” Revealing the truth is the only strategy for breaking the power of that secret. The key to opening the hearts of victims is to give them loving care and the tender compassion of Christ. ...

*“The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble.
He cares for those who trust in him.”*
(Nahum 1:7)

As you seek to surface the secret ...

- Pray for supernatural wisdom from God.
- Provide a safe atmosphere away from people and places that could be upsetting or intimidating.
- Ask, “Have you been experiencing something uncomfortable or confusing?”
- “Has anyone ever touched you in way that made you uncomfortable?”
- Listen carefully, repeat what is said, and ask, “Did I get it right?”
- Be cautious about asking “leading questions,” such as, “Did he do _____ to you?”

- Let authorities with an expertise in childhood sexual abuse ask most of the questions in order to determine the truth.
- Communicate that you believe the child.
- Acknowledge that the offender is wrong.
- Give assurance that the child is not to blame.
- Confirm that “telling” is the right thing to do.
- Don’t reach out with physical affection unless you ask permission: “Would you like for me to hold your hand?” ... “Can I give you a hug?” Even if the answer is *yes*, if you sense a hesitation, slowly withdraw.
- Provide a safe atmosphere by displaying genuine love and compassion.

Protection Power

The following statements can instill confidence and build assertiveness in a young heart and help the child to resist inappropriate sexual advances:

- “God loves you and made your body with a special plan and purpose.”
- “If you are asked to do something you think is wrong, say ‘NO!’ even to an older relative or friend of the family. Then come tell me whether saying ‘No’ worked or not.” (Role-play saying *no* in a firm, assertive voice.)

- “Your body belongs to you, and you decide who touches it.”
- “The parts of your body covered by a bathing suit are private.”
- “Never allow anyone to touch your private parts—unless it is for medical reasons and a parent is present.”
- “If someone tries to touch your private parts, scream and run to a safe place.”
- “If someone touches your private parts and says that it’s okay, they are wrong! You must tell me or someone you trust.”
- “If a person does not stop touching you, say, ‘I’ll tell if you don’t stop!’ Then tell me or someone else when you are safe.”
- “If someone threatens you, do not be afraid, tell anyway.”
- “If you are asked to keep the touching a secret, tell anyway.”
- “If the person you tell does not believe you, keep telling no matter how embarrassed you feel. ... Keep telling until someone believes you.”
- “Pray to have a safe adult you can trust (someone who is not a member of your family) to help you.”

“If sinful men entice you, do not give in to them.”
(Proverbs 1:10)

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The information in this resource is intended as guidelines for healthy living. Please consult qualified medical, legal, pastoral, and psychological professionals regarding individual concerns.

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