

Child Sexual Abuse



What is Child Sexual Abuse?

When an adult or an older person abuses a child's trust and misuses his or her authority to engage the child in any sexual activity, it is termed child sexual abuse. Most often, sexual abusers know the child and can sometimes include family members. Both boys and girls can be victims of child sexual abuse and both men and women can be abusers.

Child sexual abuse includes voyeurism (getting sexual pleasure from watching children naked), exhibitionism (exposing one's sexual parts), exposing a child to pornography, kissing or touching a child with sexual undertones, fondling of child's private parts, getting a child to fondle the abuser's private parts, masturbation, penetration, and using a child for prostitution or pornography. Any sexual activity with a child is a crime.

Article 34 of the UN CRC requires State Parties to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse including prostitution and involvement in pornography. The Convention's Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography supplements the Convention by providing States with detailed requirements to end the sexual exploitation and abuse of children. The Protocol provides definitions for the offences of 'sale of children', 'child prostitution' and 'child pornography'. It requires punishment not only for those offering or delivering children for the purposes of sexual exploitation, transfer of organs or children for profit or forced labour, but also for anyone accepting the child for these activities.

The Government of Pakistan ratified this protocol in June 2011, thus committing to criminalize and punish the activities related to these offences.

How can I tell if a child has been or is being sexually abused?

Because of the prevailing silence around child abuse, sometimes the only way we can be alerted to the possibility of a child being or having been sexually abused is by looking at some behavioral and physical indicators. These indicators can also suggest other kinds of abuse, such as physical and emotional. Therefore it is important for the adult to investigate further.

Some possible behavioral indicators

- Fear of separation, loneliness, darkness or of some person
- Difficulty sleeping or nightmares
- Withdrawal or isolation, displaying low self-esteem
- Infant like behavior, for example, bed wetting
- Sudden changes in mood or behavior
- Aggression
- Self-destructive tendencies; drug or alcohol abuse, eating disorders, suicidal tendency
- Sexual promiscuity
- Unexplained drop in school performance

Some possible physical indicators

- Difficulty in walking or sitting
- Unexplained pain in the genital area
- Itching, soreness, discharge or unexplained bleeding in the genital or anal area
- Recurrent urinary tract infections
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Bruises, bite marks or other injuries on the body

What are the effects of child sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse has both immediate and long term effects not only on the individual but also on the family and community. Immediate effects on the child include physical, emotional (anger, guilt, and shame) and behavioral problems.

Long term effects on the adult:

- Inability to sustain or enter intimate relationships
- Marital problems
- Isolation
- Depression
- Vulnerability to further abuse and exploitation
- Prostitution
- Drug, alcohol and food abuse
- The risk of also becoming an abuser

Myths and Facts

Myth: Child sexual abuse only takes place in poor families

Fact: Child sexual abuse takes place at every income level regardless of social standing and family background.

Myth: Usually there is terrible physical violence accompanying child sexual abuse.

Fact: In most reported cases the abuser is not physically violent but rather uses emotional manipulation and blackmail.

Myth: Child abusers are usually psychotic and/or of low intelligence.

Fact: Only a small number of abusers exhibit psychotic tendencies or display low intelligence. Abusers are usually people one mingles with and who seem to be socially well adjusted.

Myth: A victim of child sexual abuse is usually very attractive and provocative.

Fact: Children are never to blame for the abuse. A child's

appearance is not an excuse for an adult's abusive act.

Myth: Sexual abuse generally occurs outside the home and the abusers are strangers.

Fact: Most children are sexually abused in the homes. In a predominant number of cases, the abuser has the trust of children and their families and access to their homes.

Myth: Reporting of child sexual abuse can cause more harm than good.

Fact: If child sexual abuse is not reported then the same abuser may harm other children or may target the same child again.

Speaking to children about the possibility of child sexual abuse

Adult members of a family cannot protect their children all the time. Children need to be taught how to protect themselves. For this we need to make children aware of the fact that child abuse does exist and can happen to them.

1. Teach children that their bodies belong to them and if anyone touches their body in a way that confuses or frightens them they should say NO and immediately tell a grownup they trust.
2. Tell children that no one has the right to tell them to keep a touch, kiss or hug a secret. This is bad secret and they should immediately inform a grownup they trust.
3. Let children know if anyone gives them money or sweets they don't have to keep it a secret. Nor do they owe any favors in return.
4. Tell children that if they are abused it is never their fault.

What to do when a child tells you they have been abused

The first reactions will probably be of anger, disbelief, shock and disgust. It is important to stay calm and not convey these feelings to the child as this may prevent the child from further talking about the abuse. It could also result in the child feeling more ashamed and guilty.

- Tell the child that you believe in him or her.
- Explain to the child that what has happened is not his or her fault.
- Tell the child that he or she did the right thing by telling you
- Do everything you can to reassure and comfort the child. Be careful not to make promises you can't keep.

If a child has revealed his or her abuse to you, they are asking you to help them. If you are unsure of what to do at any stage then seek advice.

What can we do?

It is every individual's responsibility to be aware of child sexual abuse. The following are some ways in which you can contribute:

1. Get informed.
2. Talk to friends and family about child sexual abuse.
3. Talk about child sexual abuse with children. Talk to your children about safe and unsafe touching.
4. Raise your voice against sexual exploitation of children.
5. Write about child sexual abuse in newspapers and magazines.



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