

*"Someone touched me in a way
that made me feel bad..."*

Child Sexual Abuse

What is it?

Child sexual abuse includes many different acts. Some of these might include touching the vagina, penis, or anus of the victim; forcing someone to touch the abuser's vagina, penis, or anus; putting an object, penis, or finger into the vagina or anus of the victim; and showing the victim pictures or movies of other people undressed or having sex. Sexual abuse can happen to boys or girls of any race, ethnicity, or economic background.

According to the law, kids under a certain age cannot legally agree to sexual acts with anyone. In most states, you have to be at least 15-18 years old to be able to consent to sexual acts with someone, but the age differs from state to state. These laws are created to protect kids and teens.

The abuser can be an adult or an older child. Most of the time the abuser knows or is related to the victim, such as a neighbor, babysitter, friend of the family, or family member. The abuser can be someone the victim looks up to, likes, or trusts. When the victim and the abuser are in the same family, it is called incest. The only person responsible for this kind of behavior is the abuser.

Sometimes an abuser will threaten or hurt a victim in order to make them do what they want. Most of the time, because the abuser is bigger, older, or more powerful than the victim, the abuser doesn't even have to threaten them or hurt them to make victims do this. Victims are often afraid of what will happen if they don't cooperate, or if they tell.

If you are a victim of child sexual abuse, you might ...

- Feel angry, sad, lonely or depressed.
- Feel like you have no friends.
- Feel guilty, even though the abuse is not your fault.
- Want to hurt someone else or yourself.
- Feel like taking steps to defend yourself.
- Feel helpless to stop the abuser.
- Feel hopeless that anything can be done.
- Feel anxious all the time.
- Feel bad about yourself or your body.

You're Not Alone

- Research suggests that child sexual abuse is common and highly underreported.
- In 2001, there were 90,300 reported cases of child sexual abuse.¹
- Approximately 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 6 boys are sexually abused during childhood.²

Get Help

Being sexually abused is not your fault. Nothing about what you say, the way you look, or how you behave gives anyone else the right to use or hurt you.

¹ Children's Bureau. (2003). *Child Maltreatment*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

² Faller, Kathleen C. (1993). *Child Sexual Abuse: Intervention and Treatment Issues*. McLean, VA: The Circle, Inc. and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

- Tell a trusted adult, they can help you. If you are being abused or are uncomfortable about how someone is treating you, it is not a secret you should keep.
- Tell a teacher, counselor, or principal at school if there is no one you can trust at home.
- Contact a local victim assistance agency, child protective services, or the police for help. If you need help finding someone to call, contact our Helpline at **1-800-FYI-CALL**.
- If you choose to tell someone, you should know that some adults are mandated reporters. This means they are legally required to report neglect or abuse to someone else, such as the police or child protective services. You can ask people if they are mandated reporters and then decide what you want to do. Some examples of mandated reporters are teachers, counselors, doctors, social workers, and in some cases, even coaches or activity leaders.

Help Yourself

- Tell someone you trust about what is happening to you.
- Try to avoid being alone with the abuser.

Help Someone Else

If you know a child who is being sexually abused, you can help put a stop to it.

- If a friend tells you that they are being sexually abused, listen patiently, respectfully, and sympathetically. Avoid being judgmental and believe what your friend is telling you.
- Get a teacher, parent, or another adult to help. You won't be snitching; you'll be taking a stand against abuse.
- Talk to the child being abused and try to get them to talk to an adult. Offer to go with them.
- Report the abuser to an adult you trust.

If you want to read more ...

- ...about adult survivors of child sexual abuse, read our **GET HELP** series bulletin on child sexual abuse; *or*
- ...about sexual assault, read our **GET HELP** series bulletin on sexual assault; *or*
- ...about male rape, read our **GET HELP** series bulletin on male rape; *or*
- ...about incest, read our **GET HELP** series bulletin on incest at **www.ncvc.org/gethelp**.

*The **Teen Victim Project**, a program of the National Center for Victims of Crime, is dedicated to improving the national response to teen victims of crime by raising awareness of the incidence and impact of teen victimization and encouraging youth leadership and community collaboration to identify, support, and refer teen victims of crime.*