

CHILD ABUSE: THE FACTS

Child abuse is a crime of alarming proportion, and one that takes many forms including physical battering, sexual exploitation, and abuse. It also includes neglect of food, medical care, education, and emotional nurturing.

Patterns of violent behavior are believed to be transmitted across generations. The experience of violence as a child shows up a generation later in elevated rates of child abuse and wife abuse. The more parents are violent toward their children, the more violent these children are to their siblings. Men who abuse their wives are more likely to abuse their children.

Reports show that child sexual abuse is on the rise. Sexual abuse of children ranges from intercourse, or attempts at intercourse, to touching and fondling the child's genitals, or the abuser asking the child to touch or fondle his genitals.

Child sexual abusers frequently do not use physical force but gain the child's cooperation through bribes, threats, or use of their position of authority. In 75 to 95 percent of child sexual abuse cases, the offender is known to the victim.

Incest, the sexual abuse of a family member, is estimated to occur in 14 percent of all families. Incest commonly begins when the victim is about 10 years old and continues until the intervention occurs. Fathers, stepfathers, uncles and brothers are the most common perpetrators. It is not uncommon for a father, for example, to sexually abuse all of his daughters throughout their pre-adolescent years.

Child sexual abuse results in immediate physical and emotional damage as well as long-term, sometime life long, emotional debilitation. Researchers have documented depression, guilt, learning disabilities, sexual promiscuity, runaway behavior, and prostitution, as a result of early sexual victimization. Long-term effects include substance abuse, sexual dysfunction, depression, negative self-image and interpersonal difficulties.

Victims of sexual abuse have a greater chance of becoming sexual abusers.

Information about Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse occurs when a child is exploited for the sexual gratification of an older person. Contact can take many forms. These include fondling of the genitals or breasts, oral, vaginal or anal intercourse (penetration by genitals or by an object), or exposing sexual parts of the body. When these acts occur within a family, the sexual abuse is called incest.

Children are most commonly sexually abused by someone they know. This may be a single occurrence. More likely, however, the abuse will continue over a period of time. When repeated abuse occurs, the child is often promised special favors, told that it is “education,” and given special attention. Eventually, the continued abuse may lead to full sexual intercourse. The child continues to participate out of guilt, confusion, or the fear something terrible will happen if someone finds out. The child may also be receiving special favors such as attention, gifts, privileges, money, or a feeling of being “grown up.”

The vast majority of child molesters are teenage or adult males. Most are heterosexual men, many with children of their own. Abusers come from all socio-economic levels, religions, and ethnic backgrounds.

Children who are sexually abused are:

- Usually not violently abused but are coerced and manipulated.
- Usually molested by someone they know and may even trust.
- Usually afraid to tell because of fear they will be blamed, punished, or not believed.
- Are not responsible for their abuse.

Children who have been sexually abused may:

- ❖ Show signs of redness, bleeding or other injury around the genitals;
- ❖ Return to infant or younger child behavior;
- ❖ Wet the bed;
- ❖ Have chronic stomachaches with no medical explanation;
- ❖ Have trouble sleeping;
- ❖ Experience painful urination;
- ❖ Behave sexually beyond knowledge of their age and accepted standards.