

WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

Child sexual abuse is a crime and an abuse of trust, power and authority that could contribute to serious short- and long-term problems for a child. One in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before they turn 18 years old (Finkelhor, Hotelling, Lewis, & Smith, 1990). Children who have been sexually abused might also experience verbal, emotional or physical abuse (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, Hamby, & Kracke, 2009).

FORMS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

A person sexually abuses a child when he or she exposes the child to sexual acts or behavior. Forms include (Finkelhor, Hammer, & Sedlak, 2008):

- Sex acts that involve penetration
- Touching a child's breasts or genitals
- Making a child touch the perpetrator's breasts or genitals
- Voyeurism (when a perpetrator looks at a child's naked body)
- Exhibitionism (when a perpetrator shows a child his or her naked body)
- Showing a child pornography or using a child in the production of pornography (Putnam, 2003).
- Child sexual exploitation, such as trafficking
- Internet-based child sexual abuse, such as creating, depicting, and/or distributing sexual images of children online; or stalking, grooming, and/or engaging in sexually explicit behaviors with children online.

WARNING SIGNS THAT A CHILD MAY HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED

- Bodily signs (bed-wetting, stomach aches, headaches, sore genitals)
- Emotional signs (fear, sadness, mood changes, acting out, refusing to be left alone with certain people)
- Sexual signs (inappropriate sexual behavior with objects or other children)
- Verbal signs (knowledge about sexuality that is not age- or developmentally appropriate)

Evidence shows that child sexual abuse is not always obvious and the majority of cases are never reported (Finkelhor et al., 2008). Children often love and/or trust the people who sexually abuse them, creating further barriers in coming forward. Some fear the consequences of a disclosure and the ramifications it will have on their family. People who sexually abuse children might use force or, more commonly, manipulation to abuse a child and keep him or her from telling others.

VICTIMS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Gender: Boys and girls are vulnerable to sexual abuse. Girls are abused three times more often than boys, whereas boys are more likely to die or be seriously injured by their abuse (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996).

Age: Children of all ages, from birth to age 17, can be sexually abused. Adolescents ages 14 to 17 are the most likely to be abused; more than one in four (27.3%) had been sexually victimized during their lifetimes (Finkelhor et al., 2009).

WARNING SIGNS THAT A PERSON MAY BE SEXUALLY ABUSING A CHILD

- Person exhibits an unusual interest in a particular child or particular age or gender of children
- Person socializes more with children than with adults, and attempts to be alone with children
- Person insists on hugging, touching, kissing, tickling, wrestling with or holding a child even when the child does not want this affection
- Person encourages a lack of privacy around the home and on the part of children and expresses voyeuristic behaviors such as watching them bathe
- Person discusses inappropriate topics with a child
- Person exhibits lack of interest in normal adult sexual relations but is overly interested in the sexuality of a particular child or teen

PEOPLE WHO SEXUALLY ABUSE

Gender: Based on law enforcement reports, 96% of people who sexually abuse children are male (Snyder, 2000).

Age: Most perpetrators are adults. Law enforcement reports show that 76.8% of those who perpetrate sexual assaults are adults; 23.2% are juveniles who sexually abuse children, and 19.5% of perpetrators are between the ages of 12-17 (Snyder, 2000).

Relationship to the child: Children are most often sexually abused by people they know and trust. People who sexually abuse children can be in positions of authority and esteemed by the community. Family members are the perpetrators in 34% of reported cases against juveniles (Snyder, 2000).

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