

## **WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

A person sexually abuses a child when he or she exposes the child to sexual acts or behavior. That child may experience a variety of short and long-term reactions as a consequence of that abuse. Many children who experience sexual abuse show physical, emotional, sexual, or verbal signs of abuse. These effects can lead to long-term stress and hardship for the child well into adulthood, and often cause concern for parents, teachers, and other caretakers. It's only in the last few decades that we, as a society, have started to acknowledge how widespread child sexual abuse has been and how much it hurts children.

**WHO SEXUALLY ABUSES CHILDREN:** It is estimated that more than 300,000 children are sexually abused every year. Chances are, you already know a boy or girl who has been sexually abused, and in all likelihood know someone who has abused a child. 85% of incidents are committed by relatives, close family friends, or an adult that the child knows and trusts.

We can't tell who the perpetrators are by the way they look. What they have in common is that they think about sexual interactions with children and then they act on those thoughts. We know that sexual child abuse happens every day across the country, with little regard for social classes, racial, or ethnic groups, religious affiliations, or sexual orientation.

Child sexual abuse includes touching and non-touching behaviors. Touching behaviors:

- fondling
- touching a child's genitals for sexual pleasure or other unnecessary purpose
- making a child touch someone else's genitals or playing sexual games
- incest
- prostitution

Non-touching behaviors:

- showing pornography to a child
- exposing a person's genitals to a child
- encouraging a child to watch or hear sexual acts
- asking children to interact sexually with one another
- online enticement of a child for sexual purposes and/or obscene phone calls
- photographing a child in sexual poses
- exposing a child to adult sexual activity in person or through the use of technology
- watching a child undress or use the bathroom, often without the child's knowledge

**WHY DON'T CHILDREN TELL ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE:** There are many reasons children do not disclose being sexually abused, including:

- threats of bodily harm (to the child and/or the child's family)
- fear of being removed from the house
- fear of not being believed
- shame or guilt

If the abuser is someone the child or the family cares about, the child may worry about getting that person in trouble. In addition, children often believe that the sexual abuse was their own fault and may not disclose for fear of getting in trouble themselves. Very young children may not have the language skills to communicate about the abuse or may not understand that the actions of the perpetrator are abusive, particularly if the sexual abuse is made into a game.

**A CALL TO ACTION:** Does a child close to you have:

- unexplained bruises, redness, or bleeding of the child's genitals, anus, or mouth?
- pain at the genitals, anus, or mouth?
- genital sores or milky fluids or repeated infections in the genital area?

Our silence allows people who sexually abuse children to get and maintain access to vulnerable children. We can all help prevent and stop the sexual abuse of children by speaking up and by learning more. If you know that a child has been sexually abused, you need to report it. You can:

- call your local police department
- call the national sexual assault hot line 800-656-4673
- call the Colorado child abuse hot line 844-264-5437
- call the local protective services office
- take the child directly to an emergency room, doctor, or therapist

## **REFERENCES, RESOURCES TO CONTACT, & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

- American Academy of Pediatrics ([https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/healthy-foster-care-america/Documents/Ch4\\_%20PP\\_Child\\_Abuse.pdf#search=child%20sexual%20assault](https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/healthy-foster-care-america/Documents/Ch4_%20PP_Child_Abuse.pdf#search=child%20sexual%20assault))
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network: Child Sexual Abuse Fact Sheet
- Stop It Now! Prevent Child Sexual Abuse: Facts About Sexual Abuse and How to Prevent It
- Parents Protect! ([http://www.parentsprotect.co.uk/warning\\_signs.htm](http://www.parentsprotect.co.uk/warning_signs.htm))
- National Sexual Violence Resource Center – Under Projects: Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Resources (<http://www.nsvrc.org>)
- Missouri Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Children ([http://www.msbanet.org/files/governmental\\_relations/MoKidsFirst\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.msbanet.org/files/governmental_relations/MoKidsFirst_Report_FINAL.pdf))