

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

# Child Sexual Abuse

## What Is It?

Child sexual abuse refers to any sexual contact with a child or teen. It includes many different acts. Some of these are touching the vagina, penis, or anus of a child; having a child touch the abuser's vagina, penis, or anus; putting an object, penis, or finger into the vagina or anus of a child; and showing a child pictures or movies of other people undressed or having sex. There are also other forms of child sexual abuse.

- Sexual abuse can happen to boys or girls of any race, ethnicity, or economic background.
- Sexual abuse is not a child's fault. The only person responsible for this kind of behavior is the abuser.

People who sexually abuse children usually know the victims before making sexual contact. Abusers can be anyone, even someone the victim used to look up to, like, or trust, such as a neighbor, babysitter, friend, or member of the family or household.

Most of the time, because abusers are often older, bigger, or more powerful than the victims, children are afraid of what will happen if they don't cooperate with the abuse or if they tell someone. Sometimes abusers will threaten or hurt victims in other ways to make them do what they want.

The age of children protected by child sexual abuse laws is different from state to state. In most states, sexual contact between an adult (18 years or older) and someone under 16 years old is child sexual abuse and is against the law, even if the abuser believes the young person agreed to the sexual activity. Children and young teens are protected from any sexual contact by adults and older teens because, when there is such a difference in power, sexual contact is harmful.

## 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 about whether 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.
- Child sexual abuse has been reported up to 80,000 times a year.<sup>1</sup>
- Approximately 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 7 boys are sexually abused during childhood.<sup>2</sup>

## Get Help

Being sexually abused is not your fault. Nothing about what you say, the way you look, or your behavior gives anyone the right to use or hurt you. You have a right to ask for help.

- If you are sexually abused, you may need medical care. Try to get to a safer place and call 911. Tell a trusted parent or adult as soon as possible.
- Abuse is not a secret you have to keep. Keep telling until you get the help you need to feel safe.
- Tell a teacher, counselor, or principal at school if there is no one you can trust at home.
- Contact the police, a sexual assault or rape crisis counseling center, or child protective services for help.
- Some adults, such as teachers, counselors, and social workers, are required to talk to another authority about abuse of children and teens. You always have the right to ask whom your information will be shared with before you tell someone what happened.

## Help Yourself

You have the right to emotional support and counseling to heal from child sexual abuse.

## Help Someone Else

Child sexual abuse is a serious crime. If you know a child or teen who is being sexually abused, you can help put a stop to it.

- If a friend tells you that he or she was sexually abused, listen patiently and respectfully. Avoid being judgmental and believe what your friend tells you.
- Ask a teacher, parent, or another adult to help. You won't be snitching; you'll be taking a stand against abuse.

- Tell your friend that you want to help, and encourage him or her to talk to a supportive adult. Offer to go with your friend.
- Report the abuser to an adult you trust.
- Learn more about child sexual abuse and the healing process for victims.

### If You Want to Read More ...

- about adult survivors of child sexual abuse,
- about sexual assault,
- about male rape, or
- about incest,

...see our GET HELP series at [www.ncvc.org/gethelp](http://www.ncvc.org/gethelp).

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- 1 American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, "Facts for Families: Child Sexual Abuse," no. 9 (2004), <http://www.aacap.org/page.ww?name=Child+Sexual+Abuse&section=Facts+for+Families> (accessed July 14, 2008).
  - 2 John Briere and Diana M. Eliot, "Prevalence and Psychological Sequelae of Self-Reported Childhood Physical and Sexual Abuse in a General Population Sample of Men and Women," *Child Abuse and Neglect* 27, no. 10 (2003): 1205-1222.