

About Child Sexual Abuse

WHAT

Child sexual abuse is when a child or young person is used by an older or bigger child, adolescent or adult for his or her own sexual stimulation or gratification. There are 2 categories:

CONTACT

- Touched and fondled in sexual areas
- Forced to touch another person's sexual areas
- Kissed or held in a sexual manner
- Forced to perform oral sex
- Vaginal or anal intercourse
- Vaginal or anal penetration with object or finger

NON-CONTACT

- Obscene calls/obscene remarks on computer or in notes
- Voyeurism
- Exposed to pornography
- Sexually intrusive questions or comments
- Forced to self-masturbate or watch others masturbate
- Indecent exposure

Child sexual abuse is one of the most under reported of all crimes. It is now commonly accepted that 1 in 3 females and 1 in 8 males have experienced childhood sexual abuse.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

Child sexual abuse damages children physically, emotionally and behaviourally. Both its initial effects and long term consequences impact on the individual, on their family and on the community.

Initial effects of child sexual abuse may include:

- Medical problems such as sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy and physical injury
- Emotional problems such as guilt, anger, hostility, anxiety, fear, shame, lowered self-esteem
- Behavioural problems such as aggression, delinquency, nightmares, phobias, eating and sleeping disorders
- School problems and truancy

Long term consequences may include:

- Sexual dysfunction (such as flashbacks, difficulty in arousal, avoidance of, or phobic reactions to, sexual intimacy)
- Promiscuity
- Prostitution
- Discomfort in intimate relationships
- Isolation
- Marital problems

- Low self esteem
- Depression
- Mental health problems

HOW CHILD SEX OFFENDERS CHOOSE AND “GROOM” CHILDREN

Child sexual abuse is different to other forms of abuse that children may experience in that it is usually premeditated. Sexual offending is not a random act; it is frequently carefully thought out and well planned. Offenders will take time to groom their victim. This appears to have 2 elements: choosing a victim that appeals to the offender, and picking someone the offender believes he/she can safely victimise. What follows is a process called grooming. This process means that the offender will manipulate people and situations in order to gain and maintain access to their victim/s.

Grooming is an insidious process: it is a dual process of:

- a) building a trusting relationship with the child and his/her carers, and
- b) isolating the child in order to abuse them.

Grooming occurs before the sex offence in order to access the child and after the offence in order to:

- a) maintain access to the child and
- b) ensure the child's silence, and the carer/adults continued trust.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: MYTHS AND FACTS

Some of the myths surrounding child sexual abuse involve blaming the victims and/or their carers for the offence, and minimising the responsibility of the offender. It is important to remember that the responsibility for sexual offences always rests squarely and absolutely with the perpetrator of the crime. While there are reasons why sex offenders perpetrate these crimes, there are never any excuses.

There are also myths that suggest a child sex offender is somehow identifiable, that they are creepy or weird looking. This is a dangerous misunderstanding that can easily be exploited by a child sex offender looking to access children.

WHY DON'T CHILDREN TELL?

Sex offenders frequently justify their behaviour long after the fact by saying that the victim didn't say no. The assumption that children will resist the abuse, preferably violently, is based both on ignorance about the power relationship between adults and children and an underestimation of the skilfulness of offenders.

A number of barriers to children speaking out and revealing abuse have been identified.

Children don't speak out because they:

- **are scared**
- **think they are to blame**
- **think they are strange in some way**
- **don't want the abuser to get into trouble**
- **feel embarrassed**
- **feel guilty**
- **feel alone**