

# Child Sexual Abuse

**Definition:** Child sexual abuse occurs when a child is exploited for the sexual gratification of an older person. The sexual contact can take many forms: fondling of the child's private parts (breasts, penis, vagina, mouth, buttocks); oral, vaginal or anal penetration by the offender: or the offender exposing sexual parts of their body. Sexual contact can also include the child touching the offender's private parts. When these acts occur within a family the sexual abuse is called incest.

## Myths and Facts About the Sexual Abuse of Children

**MYTH: The stranger represents the greatest threat to the child.**

- **FACT:** The most common victim is a girl who is assaulted nonviolently by an adult male she knows. Studies show that 75 percent to 95 percent of offenders are known to the child.

**MYTH: Child molesters are all dirty old men.**

- **FACT:** In a recent survey of convicted child molesters, 80 percent were found to have committed their first offense before the age of 30.

**MYTH: Children lie or fantasize about sexual activities with adults.**

- **FACT :** Children cannot make up sexual information unless they have been exposed to it. They speak from their own experience. Sometimes a parent will try to get a child to falsely report sexual abuse. Primary indicators of such a report are the child's inability to explicitly describe or illustrate the act, or a grossly inconsistent account.

**MYTH: It is not important for children to have information about sexual assault.**

- **FACT :** It is as important for children to have information about sexual assault for their own safety as it is for them to receive information about fires, crossing the street and learning how to swim.

**MYTH: Child sexual abuse is an isolated one-time incident.**

- **FACT :** Incestuous situations develop gradually, over a period of time, and the sexual abuse can occur repeatedly.

**MYTH: In cases of incest the child victim provokes or initiates the sexual contact.**

- **FACT :** Family sexual abuse often begins before a child understands its significance. The perpetrator uses his/her position of authority and trust to convince the child that their relationship is normal. The victim may be trapped in a relationship for years. Seductive behavior may be the result, but never the cause, of sexual abuse. The responsibility lies with the adult offender.

**MYTH: If children did not want it, they could say stop.**

- **FACT :** Children generally do not question the behavior of adults. They are often coerced by bribes, threats and use of a position of authority.

**MYTH: Any parent who would sexually abuse their child has to be mentally ill.**

- **FACT :** The vast majority of abusers are not mentally ill, and most hold jobs, function well in the community and are well respected by their peers. Most abusers deny the event and some claim seduction by the child.

**MYTH: Telling offenders to stop is all that is necessary.**

- **FACT :** An offender will continue to offend unless stopped. The offender needs to be reported to the police or child protection. Extensive counseling is important if the offender is serious about changing how he/she reacts to children and handles relationships with them.

**MYTH: The lower the family income and social status, the higher the likelihood of the sexual abuse of the children.**

- **FACT :** There is no data to support this conclusion.