

Information About Childhood Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse occurs when a child is exploited for the sexual gratification of an older person. Contact can take many forms: fondling of the genitals or breasts; oral, vaginal or anal intercourse (penetration by genitals or by an object); or exposing sexual parts of the body. When these acts occur within a family, the sexual abuse is called incest.

Children are most commonly sexually abused by someone they know. This may be a single occurrence. More likely, however, the abuse will continue over a period of time. When repeated abuse occurs, the child is often promised special favors, told that it is education, and given special attention. Eventually, the continued abuse may lead to full sexual intercourse. The child continues to participate out of guilt, confusion, or fear that something terrible will happen if someone finds out. The child may also be receiving special favors such as attention, gifts, privileges, money, or a feeling of being "grown up".

The vast majority of child molesters are teenage or adult males. Most are heterosexual men, many with children of their own. Abusers come from all social-economic levels, religions, and ethnic backgrounds.

Children who are sexually abused:

- Usually are not violently abused, but are coerced and manipulated
- Usually are molested by someone that they know and may even trust
- Usually are afraid to tell because of fear that they will be blamed, punished, or not believed
- Are not responsible for their abuse

Children who have been sexually abused may show signs of redness, bleeding, or other injury around the genitals; return to infant or younger child behavior; wet the bed; have chronic stomach aches with no medical explanation; have trouble sleeping; experience painful urination; have contracted a sexually transmitted disease; or behave sexually beyond their knowledge for their age. Long term problems may also result: depression, drug or alcohol dependency, rebellion, sexual promiscuity, low self-esteem, excessive guilt, inability to form friendships, trust or interact with people, inability to develop normally (sexually). Youth may also run away from home to escape the abuse.