

FACTS ABOUT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child sexual abuse is the exploitation of a child for the sexual gratification of an adult or any significantly older person. It is called incest if it occurs between family members. Child sexual abuse can include a variety of behaviors including fondling, verbal stimulation and pornography, but also more violent behaviors such as rape.

SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

- One in four girls is sexually exploited by age 18
- One in six boys is sexually exploited by age 18
- Over 1/3 of child sexual abuse cases involved children five years old or younger
- 85-90% of child sex offenders are known to victims and their family

CHARACTERISTICS

- Sexual abuse may begin when a child is in early childhood and may last several years
- Most children do not tell anyone about sexual abuse
- The typical offender is a male using his position of power to take advantage of a child's trust, need for affections, and innocence
- Child sexual abuse occurs in all socio-economic and racial groups
- Children very rarely lie about sexual abuse incidents

PREVENTION

Education can help prevent sexual exploitation of children. Children and adolescents can learn to recognize potentially exploitative situations and can learn to say "no" to inappropriate touching. Parents can teach these skills to their children. Schools can implement a child sexual abuse prevention curriculum into their health program. Your role is NOT to investigate the situation. It is your responsibility to report the abuse, set in motion the process of getting help for the child, and be supportive of the child. Professionals working with children and youth can learn to recognize the symptoms of sexual abuse and how to help a child who has been victimized. Educators are mandatory reporters. *It is your responsibility to report the abuse not investigate it!*

DISCLOSURE

Children may disclose sexual abuse in a variety of ways. They may come to you in private, and tell you directly and specifically what is going on. Unfortunately, this is one of the less common ways for children to disclose. More common ways include:

INDIRECT HINTS

For example, "My brother wouldn't let me sleep last night." "Mr. Jones wears funny underwear." "Daddy's trying to poison me." "My babysitter keeps bothering me." A child may talk in these terms because he/she hasn't learned more specific vocabulary, feels too ashamed or embarrassed to talk more directly, has promised not to tell, or for a limited vocabulary. Keep in mind that in order to make a report you do not need to know exactly what form the abuse has taken.

DISGUISED DISCLOSURE

"I know someone who is being touched in a bad way. What would happen if a girl told her mother she was being molested but her mother didn't believe her?" Here the child might be talking about a friend or sibling, but it just as likely to be talking about him/herself. Encourage the child to tell what he/she knows about the "other child." It is probable the child will eventually tell you whom they are talking about.

DISCLOSURE WITH STRINGS ATTACHED

"I have a problem, but if I tell you about it you have to promise not to tell anyone else." Most children are all too aware that some negative consequences will result if they break the secret of abuse. Often the offender uses the threat of these consequences to force the child to remain silent. Let the child know you want to help him/her and that the law requires you to make a report if the child discloses abuse; just as the molestation itself is against the law, so too it would be against the law for you not to report. Assure the child you will respect his/her need for confidentiality by not discussing the abuse with anyone other than those directly involved with the legal process, who might include the school nurse or counselor, school principal, and/or the CPS investigator.

HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURE

- Find a private place to talk with the child
- Do not panic or express shock
- Express your belief that the child is telling you the truth
- Use the child's vocabulary
- Reassure the child that it is good to tell
- Reassure the child that it is not his/her fault, that he/she is not bad
- Determine the child's immediate need for safety
- Let the child know that you will do your best to protect and support him/her
- Let the child know what you will do
- Report to the proper authorities
- If a child discloses during a lesson, acknowledge the child's disclosure and continue the lesson. Afterwards, find a place where you can talk with the child

alone. It is best to present the curriculum before a playtime or recess so that you have a natural opportunity to talk with children privately, if they come forward.