

Sexual Abuse of Children

Information Sheet

What is Child Sexual Abuse?

Child sexual abuse is ANY sexual contact, verbal abuse of a sexual nature, or sexual exploitation of a child by an adult, including, but not limited to: fondling, flashing, masturbation, intercourse or oral-genital contact. Consent is not an issue in cases of child sexual abuse because the power imbalance inherent in adult/child relationships precludes “consent.” Force is not necessary for sexual abuse to occur.

Prevalence

It is estimated that 1 in 3 females and 1 in 6 males will be sexually abused before they reach their eighteenth birthdays.¹ Seventy-five to eighty percent of the perpetrators are known (family friend, neighbors, babysitter) or related to (parent, grandparent, sibling) the children.² Over ninety percent of people who sexually abuse children are heterosexual males.³

Possible Indicators

Children who have been sexually abused MAY show signs of injury such as bleeding, redness or swelling around the genitals. However, many people who sexually abuse children are careful to not physically harm the child. It is more common for perpetrators to use trickery or bribes instead of force to entrap the child and ensure his/her silence.

Other signs that abuse may have occurred include knowledge of sexual acts which are inappropriate for the child’s age; regressive or drastic changes in behaviors; sleep disturbances; eating problems; unexplainable or recurrent “gifts” of toys or money by an individual; cutting or burning of the self; running away; or other delinquent behavior.

Reporting

Children rarely lie about sexual abuse. Many children are reluctant to disclose the abuse because of confusion, guilt, fear of not being believed, and fear of retaliation by the abuser. If a child does disclose sexual abuse, she or he may recant it at a later date because of these same feelings. Some of their fears do come true soon after they disclose, and may prompt the recant.

If you suspect a child is being abused in any way, take your suspicion seriously. All Nebraskans are legally obligated under Nebraska law to report suspected child abuse. Reports can be made to your local police or sheriff’s department, child protective services or through a statewide, 24-hour, toll-free hotline at (800) 652-1999.

The best way to respond to a child who discloses sexual abuse is to stay calm, tell them you are glad that they told you, and that you want to help keep them safe. Be honest with them. Let them know that you are required by law to tell the authorities about the abuse.

Help is available

To learn more about child sexual abuse contact the sexual assault/domestic violence crisis center nearest you by calling (866) 95-DOVES (36837).

¹ Russel, Diana E.H. “The Incidence and Prevalence of Intrafamilial and Extrafamilial Sexual Abuse of Female Children,” in *Handbook on Sexual Abuse of Children*, edited by Lenore E.A. Walker. Springer Publishing Co., 1988.

² Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers. (1996). *Reducing Sexual Abuse Through the Treatment and Intervention With Abusers*. Beaverton, OR: Author.

³ Holms, W.C., M.D., MSCE, Slap, G.B., M.S., M.S., “Sexual Abuse of Boys,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 280, No. 1; pp. 1855-1862, 1998 citing numerous studies.