

Protecting Children

Child Sexual Abuse

Raising Awareness and Protecting Children

We can all help protect children from sexual abuse. The key to **child sexual abuse prevention** is by educating yourself and your community. By raising awareness we can reduce the risk of children becoming victims of child sexual abuse. All children are at risk, but be aware that children with special needs are especially vulnerable. It is an adult's responsibility to keep children safe.

- Educate your children in an age-appropriate way about safety and sexual abuse. Teach them the proper names of body parts.
- Teach children that no one has the right to touch them if they don't want to be touched.
- Encourage children to talk to you openly about situations that make them feel uncomfortable.
- Be involved in children's lives and their activities.
- Know where your children are and who they are spending time with.
- Think carefully about the safety of any situation where a child is alone with an adult.
- Raise awareness in schools, churches, sports groups and other clubs that you and your children belong to and insist on policies that protect children.
- Internet safety – be aware of and monitor your children's computer use. Educate them on the dangers of sharing names, addresses and other personal information with anyone they do not know. Also, tell them to never ever agree to meet someone they met on the internet in person.

Too often after the abuse has occurred, adults say they felt something was not quite right and they didn't act on their suspicions.

If you sense something is wrong, trust your instincts.

Do all you can to protect children.

- For a list of local Child Advocacy Centers which help in the investigation of child sexual abuse go to Children's Advocacy Centers of Illinois www.cacionline.org
- For a list of registered sex offenders in Illinois go to the Illinois State Police website www.isp.state.il.us/sor

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE VISIT:

- Darkness to Light
www.darkness2light.org
Helpline 1-866-367-5444
- Stop It Now
www.stopitnow.org
- Child Molestation Research and Prevention Institute
www.childmolestationprevention.org
- Prevent Child Abuse Illinois
www.preventchildabuseillinois.org

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Prevent Child Abuse
Illinois

528 S. 5th Street, Suite 211
Springfield, IL 62701
217-522-1129 (office)
217-522-0655 (fax)

www.preventchildabuseillinois.org



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Raising Awareness

The topic of child sexual abuse can be overwhelming and may be difficult to talk about or understand. To help protect children, know the signs and symptoms of child sexual abuse, how to respond, and how to help prevent it in your family and community.

Child sexual abuse is any sexual activity with a child. Child sexual abuse can be perpetrated by an adult or by a child who exerts power over another child. Sexual activity can be touching or non-touching actions and may include: fondling, rape, incest, sexual talk, voyeurism (watching), exhibitionism (showing), pornography or internet crimes.

One out of four girls and one out of six boys are sexually abused before they are 18 years old. One-third of all victims reported are under the age of 12. Research shows that 90% of children who are sexually abused are abused by someone they or their family know, love or trust.

- **Only 10% of child victims are abused by a stranger.**
- **Child sexual abuse can happen to any child.**

Child sexual abuse is the most under-reported type of abuse affecting our children. Many children who are sexually abused never tell anyone about the abuse. Actually, 67% of sexually abused children never tell anyone! Children need adults to be aware of the signs and symptoms of abuse and they need adults who are willing to do something about it.



Know the Signs and Symptoms

Many children who have been sexually abused show no physical signs at all. When physical signs are present they may include:

- **Difficulty walking or sitting**
- **Redness, rashes, bleeding or pain in the genital or anal areas**
- **Frequent bladder or urinary tract infections**
- **Painful bowel movements**
- **Frequent headaches or stomachaches**
- **Sexually transmitted diseases**
- **Pregnancy**



A child victim of sexual abuse can experience behavioral and emotional problems which can be devastating and can last into adulthood. Behavioral signs may include:

- **A sudden change in behavior or personality**
- **Depression or anxiety**
- **Withdrawing from family, friends or activities**
- **Acting aggressively**
- **Showing a sudden fear of certain people, places, or activities**
- **Problems at school**
- **Acting younger than their age (regressing) such as wetting their bed or sucking their thumb**
- **Nightmares or other sleep problems**
- **Acting out sexually, showing sexual knowledge beyond what is normal for their age, sexual play with toys, self or others**
- **Self-destructive behaviors such as alcohol or drug use, eating disorders, or cutting themselves**

Children who have been sexually abused may also experience feelings of guilt, shame, fear, betrayal, confusion, embarrassment, anger and depression.

Responding

Telling someone about sexual abuse can be very hard and overwhelming for the child as well as for the person receiving the information. An appropriate response to a child who reports sexual abuse is important to ensure safety, build trust, and begin healing. Here's what you can do:

- **Put the child's needs first.**
- **Try to remain calm and keep your emotions in check. Don't overreact.**
- **Listen. Let the child talk.**
- **Do not attempt to do your own investigation. Leave that to the professionals.**
- **Believe them! Children rarely lie about sexual abuse.**
- **Reassure them that it is not their fault.**
- **Let them know they did the right thing by telling.**
- **Reassure the child that this does not change the way you feel about them.**
- **Do all you can to keep the child safe.**
- **Seek professional help through a Child Advocacy Center or counselor.**
- **Report it! Child sexual abuse is a crime.**

The child may become alarmed that you need to report the abuse because the abuser may be someone they love and trust. The abuser may have threatened to hurt them or someone in their family and told them to keep the abuse a secret. Sexual abusers can be very manipulative.

How to Report Child Sexual Abuse

Call the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) hotline at 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873). You may make a report to the DCFS hotline without giving your name.

Provide the following information if possible:

- **Child's name**
- **Information about siblings**
- **Parent or guardian names**
- **Address**
- **Date of birth**
- **Phone number**

Or inform your local law enforcement agency.