

Facts on Childhood Sexual Abuse



What is childhood sexual abuse?

Childhood sexual abuse and exploitation is described as any use of a child (0 – 17 years old) for sexual purposes. This includes fondling, inviting a child to touch or be touched sexually, intercourse, rape, incest, sodomy, exhibitionism, or involving a child in pornography or prostitution (Department of Justice Canada, 2008).

Canadian statistics highlighted that in 2008, children and youth under the age of 18 represented over half (59%) of all police reported sexual assault victims (Statistics Canada, 2010).

The vast majority of sexual abuse victims do not report the abuse. Many survivors delay the disclosure of sexual abuse for many reasons, including; feeling threatened by the abuser, fear that they will not be believed or will be punished, and many survivors want to protect their families and sometimes the perpetrator. (Government of Canada, 2006).



Risk Factors

There is no single, defining risk factor predisposing a child to experience sexual abuse. Children of all ages, races, ethnicities, economic backgrounds, neighbourhoods, countries, spirituality, sexual orientation, physical or mental abilities and gender are vulnerable to sexual abuse (NCTSN, 2009).

Trends

- During the first year of life, rates of sexual assault are relatively close between boys and girls; however, female children and youth are more likely to be sexually assaulted than are male children and youth.
- While boys and girls are both vulnerable to sexual violence, the vast majority of child victims of reported sexual offences are female (82%) (Statistics Canada, 2010)
- Girls under the age of 18 reported a rate of sexual violence that was nearly 5 times higher than their male counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2010)



Who Abuses Children?

The vast majority of perpetrators of sexual violence against children and youth are male (Statistics Canada, 2010) and can be found among all age groups, ethno-cultural communities and social and economic backgrounds. Sexual violence against children and youth is more commonly perpetrated by someone known to the victim (75%), usually an acquaintance or a family member (Statistics Canada, 2010). In order to gain access to victims, abusers may use such tactics as play, deception, threats, or other forms of coercion to engage children and maintain their silence rather than physical force. They also employ a tactic called “grooming” in order to keep the child engaged such as buying gifts or arranging special activities, which can further confuse the victim (NCTSN, 2009).

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Possible symptoms

Possible symptoms of abuse include an increase in nightmares and/or other sleeping difficulty, withdrawn behaviour, angry outbursts, anxiety, depression, not wanting to be left alone with a particular individual, sexual knowledge including language and/or behaviours that are inappropriate for the child’s age (NCTSN, 2009). This list is not inclusive and it is possible that no observable symptoms may exist and thus should not be used to judge truthfulness of disclosure.

Prevention

- Support public education and child abuse prevention programs in the community
- Promote parent education, support, relief and treatment services
- Teach children how to recognize abusive behaviour
- Empower children to say no to abusive behaviour
- Report suspicions of abuse to local authorities
- Have discussions to establish healthy boundaries at an early age
- Create an environment where children can talk openly about their bodies; be an “askable” parent
- Teach children the difference between appropriate touching and sexually abusive touching
- Teach children how to tell and keep telling until they are heard
- Avoid making threats against possible perpetrators (ie. “I would kill anyone that touched my child”) that may cause a child to fear disclosing
- Learn how to identify risk situations, pay attention to warning signs and know how to respond to a disclosure
- Foster an attitude of self-respect and appropriate assertiveness in children (Government of Canada, 2006)

For local support or to report:

519-741-8633
24-Hour Crisis & Support Line
Sexual Assault Support Centre
of Waterloo Region
www.sascwr.org

519-576-0540
Family & Children’s Services
of Waterloo Region
www.facswaterloo.org