

25 Things Parents Should Know About Sexual Abuse



*This toolkit has been developed based on resources from the MOSAC (*Mothers of Sexually Abused Children) [website](#).*

While the website's focus is on mothers of sexually abused children, much of the general information will be helpful to non-offending parents and partners as well as mothers.

MOSAC offers additional, in-depth and extensive information. We invite those interested in prevention, education and additional knowledge about child sexual abuse to explore the site. Hyperlinks in the additional links below will lead to additional pages on the site.

1. One in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys under 18 are sexually abused in the U.S.
2. Ninety percent of children are sexually abused by people they know; family members are the largest percentage of these. Fathers and father figures are the most common offenders.
3. Child sexual abuse is not limited to sexual intercourse or penetration of any kind. It includes any sexual contact, touch or non-touch (e.g. pornography exposure, observation of sexual acts).
4. Children who report sexual abuse are not lying. Almost all children are telling the truth!
5. Fewer than 5% of children who have been sexually abused report the abuse. And fewer than 5% of perpetrators are arrested.
6. Sex offenders can pass background checks because they are rarely caught, charged, or convicted. Therefore, nothing will show on the background check, and they will not be on a sex offender registry, even if multiple complaints have occurred.
7. Some sex offenders are "preferential" offenders, meaning they like to rape children and may choose jobs and career paths that provide direct access to children.
8. Other sex offenders are "situational" or "opportunistic" offenders. This means that they may have sex with adults, but they will initiate sexual activity with a child if the opportunity presents itself. Many family figures fall into this category.
9. Sex offenders often target parents and children they view as vulnerable, such as single parents, and/or homes where significant dysfunction is present (e.g., substance abuse, domestic violence). These offenders target children who are open to attention and accessible, positioning themselves as "saving" a child from a difficult and unhappy situation.
10. Sex offenders may cultivate a highly positive and respected position in the community, so there will be no doubt of their innocence.
11. Sex offenders "groom" children. They may spend weeks or months establishing a trusting relationship with a child. Grooming may include gifts, special activities, outings, and special attention.
12. Sex offenders also often groom parents and guardians of children to lower their defenses, which allows the offender to spend time with the child alone.
13. The grooming process involves the sex offender's breaking down a child's natural inhibitions so that the child becomes increasingly accepting and comfortable with touching. This may include: "accidental" touching; sitting on the offender's lap; tickling and roughhousing; massages; involvement in the child's personal hygiene; sports training; walking in on a child who is undressing, bathing/showering, or using the toilet; photographing a child; and providing a child with alcohol or drugs. Showing pornography to a child, although a "grooming" activity, is also considered sexual abuse. Photographing a child in a sexual pose and/or providing alcohol/drugs to commit a sexual act are considered sexual abuse.
14. Sex offenders may approach parents with offers that are "too good to be true," such as offering to take care of a child after school daily, without charge; or offering to take the child on a special trip or to a special place, without cost (e.g. camping trips). Such offers should be viewed with suspicion and not accepted.
15. Sex offenders rarely stop at one victim. Sexual satisfaction gained from abusing a child becomes a pattern. Preferential sex offenders may abuse many hundreds of children over their lifespan, while an opportunistic offender may repeatedly abuse family members

and, less frequently, children outside the family. With either offender type, sexual abuse becomes a pattern, because internal barriers to abusive behavior are no longer present. Both types of offenders look at the opportunities available with a particular child.

16. Children who have been sexually abused may exhibit the following symptoms:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Fear
- Isolation
- Shyness
- Acting out
- Extreme anger/rage
- Unexplained bruises
- Difficulty walking
- Redness/bleeding of genitals, mouth, or anus
- Age-inappropriate sexual behavior
- Sexual activities with toys and/or other children
- Compulsive masturbation
- Sexual drawings
- Fear of touch
- Reluctance to be alone with a particular person
- Anxiety/fear when the subject of sexual abuse is mentioned

17. However, sexually abused children may not exhibit any of the above symptoms. Sex offenders are highly skilled at making the sexually abusive behaviors seem "normal" to the child, so acceptance and trust are maintained. Sexual abuse may not cause any physical discomfort or pain, and the child, even if feeling some internal discomfort with what is occurring, may experience pleasure in the sexual act, and be very confused.

18. Even a parent who has experienced sexual abuse may not recognize when it is happening to his or her child because each sexual abuse experience is different, and each person reacts differently to sexual abuse.

19. Include sexual abuse awareness among the safety precautions that you teach your children. Teach them about good touch and bad touch, that no one should touch their private parts, that it is okay to refuse a hug or other contact that makes them feel uncomfortable. Let them know that you encourage them to talk with you about sex and sexual abuse. Provide age-appropriate sex education and teach them the correct names for all body parts. Read books to them about body safety.

20. Trust your gut as a parent and stand your ground. If another person's words or actions regarding your child are setting off alarms in you, say, "no." If your "no" is ignored, terminate the relationship.

21. Be aware of the technology your children use. Sex offenders use sites where children and adolescents prefer to go, and they access victims through these sites. Make sure your computers and devices have good filters and monitor your child's use.

22. Be aware of the frequency of sexting and other sexual communication among adolescents. Many adolescents meet and engage in sexual activities with people they meet online, without their parents' knowledge.

23. Know your children's friends and their families. Identify a trusted adult that your child can talk to regularly if he or she doesn't feel comfortable coming directly to you.

24. If your child tells you he or she has been touched inappropriately, don't question their truthfulness. Listen, believe your child, tell them you will keep them safe. Immediately call law enforcement or a sex abuse hotline (such as Department of Human Services). Allow the professionals to do the investigation. Your job as a parent is to provide support and protection for your child.

25. Most sexual abuse victims do not report the abuse at the time it occurs. Delays of months or years are typical. No matter the child's age when the abuse happened, report the abuse. Depending on the state and statutory limitations, it may still be possible to file criminal charges; and civil charges can be filed. Also, the report will help law enforcement build a case against an offender because there are often other reports against this individual.

Additional Links

1. [What Is Sexual Abuse?](#)
2. [Talking with Your Child About Sexual Abuse](#)
3. [Warning Signs of Sexual Abuse](#)
 - [Physical warning signs](#)
 - [Behavioral warning signs](#)
 - [Emotional warning signs](#)
4. [Grooming](#)
5. [Abuse Disclosure](#)
6. [Why Children Don't Tell](#)
7. [Victims](#)
8. [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#)
9. [Maternal Support \(mother's support of children\)](#)
10. [Support for Mothers](#)
11. [Support Resources](#)