

What Should I do if I Suspect Child Sexual Abuse?

Sexual abuse is one of the most underreported crimes, occurring more often than we realize. Sexual abuse can happen to children of all ages, races, and socio-economic backgrounds.

WARNING SIGNS

What are the Warning Signs of Sexual Abuse of a Child?

The way a child responds to sexual abuse varies from child to child. Some children do not act or behave differently. However, some children who have been victims of sexual abuse may exhibit a number of different behavioral, emotional or physical signs of abuse. These signs include¹²:

- Reverting back to behaviors they had previously outgrown, such as bedwetting, soiling of the bed, thumbsucking
- separation anxiety
- fear of certain people or reluctance to attend certain activities or programs
- fear or avoidance of undressing
- Sudden isolation from family and friends
- repeated nightmares
- excessive worry
- sexually provocative behavior that is out of context with the child's age or maturity
- STD's
- Signs of trauma to the genital area, i.e. bruising, blood in the sheets

What are Warning Signs that an Adult May be Abusing a Child? ³⁴

- engages in touching the child in a manner that the child indicates they are uncomfortable with or in a manner that is inappropriate given the adult's relationship with the child

¹ Prevent Child Abuse America (2003). *Recognizing child abuse: What parents should know*. Chicago, IL. Retrieved 5-31-2013 from www.preventchildabuse.org.

² Stop It Now! (2013) *Warning signs in children and adolescents of possible child sexual abuse*. Northampton, MA. Retrieved 5-31-2013 from www.stopitnow.org

³ <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/child-abuse.html>

⁴ <https://childluresprevention.com/resources/molester-profile/>

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- gives the child gifts without reason, such as money or toys
- spends time alone with the child outside of their role in the child's life
- talks with children about their personal relationships in a manner that is inappropriate given the adults relationship with the child
- doesn't have age appropriate relationships and seeks out a friendship with the child that is inconsistent with the adult's role with the child

WHAT STEPS CAN I TAKE IF I SUSPECT A CHILD IS A VICTIM OF SEXUAL ABUSE?

Attempt to Speak With The Child⁵

If you suspect that a child may be a victim of sexual abuse, it is always a good idea to approach the child directly, if possible. If you do speak with the child, be mindful of the time and place that have the conversation. Find a location where the child is comfortable and avoid raising the subject in front of the person who you suspect is causing the abuse.

It is important that when you speak to the child that you broach the subject directly. Research indicates that children who disclose abuse are more forthcoming when asked direct questions such as "has someone ever touched you?" If the child does disclose that they are being abuse, it is important to listen to what they have to say and ask follow up questions. Be patient with the child and avoid pushing the child to disclose more than they are willing to share at the moment. Disclosures tend to be most productive when they occur over time.

When speaking with the child remember to provide lots of support to the child and reassure them that they have done nothing wrong. Do not blame or judge the child for any disclosure they make. Children who are victims of abuse often times are threatened or pressured by the abuser to remain silent. Perpetrators of abuse use shame and fear as tools to prevent the child from speaking, so it is very important that adults who speak to the child avoid playing into those fears.

Report the Abuse to Authorities

Sexual abuse is a crime, so If a child reports that they are a victim of abuse it is important that you contact the authorities. Different states have different procedures for reporting sexual abuse crimes

⁵ Reporting Child Sexual Abuse (2019). Darkness to Light. <https://www.d2l.org/resources/>



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, so research the state's laws for reporting. The Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN) provides a national database of state laws that address sexual abuse and violence.

If you reside in New York State and are a New York Mandatory Reporter, please visit www.nysmandatedreporter.org to learn more about your obligations and responsibilities. It is important that mandatory reporters complete training about the procedures and processes involved in reporting suspected abuse. The rules vary depending on the relationship between the suspected perpetrator and the child.

Ask for Help

If you need further assistance in how to speak with a child about suspected abuse, you can also reach out to one of the following organizations that provide tools and support services:

[ChildHelp](#) - [Childhelp National Abuse Hotline](#) at 800.422.4453 to be connected with a trained volunteer.

[1in6](#) – national nonprofit for men who have experienced sexual abuse or assault, and the people that care about them.

[Rainn.org](#) – RAINN is the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, the largest national anti-sexual violence organization.

If you or a loved one has been a victim of childhood sexual abuse and you would like to learn more about your rights, the law firm of Greenberg, Maria, Greenberg & Associates are here to help. Visit our website at www.nyvictim.com or contact our offices toll free at (833) Victim 9 / (833) 842-8469. All emails and conversations are confidential and will be help in the strictest of confidence.

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