

A Parent’s Guide to the Understanding of Child Sexual Abuse

The State of California requires that parents of children enrolled in preschools receive information about child sexual abuse. At this time the official pamphlet is being revised and is unavailable. Schools have been instructed to provide the following information in this format until the new brochures are completed. Please return the tear-off to the school office after you have read the information.

What is Sexual Abuse?

The sexual abuse of a child occurs whenever any person forces, tricks, or threatens a child in order to have sexual contact with him or her. This contact can include such “non-touching” behaviors as in adult exposing himself or asking a child to look at pornographic material. It includes behaviors ranging from the sexual handling of a child (fondling), to actual genital contact, to intercourse, to violent rape. In all instances of child sexual abuse, the child is being used as an object to satisfy the adult’s sexual needs or desires.

“Candy is my best friend. I play at her house a lot. Today her daddy asked us to look at some pictures. They were nasty pictures of people with no clothes on.” He said, “Doesn’t that look like fun?” I didn’t think so, but I said, “Yes.”

Who Gets Sexually Abused?

Any child of any age is a potential victim of sexual abuse. Some important facts to keep in mind:

- Although the majority of adults do not sexually assault children, most sexual abuse occurs with an adult the child knows and trusts.
- Most sexual abuse goes unreported and undetected.
- Although we do not have exact numbers, some studies have found that one out of every four girls and one of every ten boys become victims of child sexual abuse by the age of eighteen.
- Children often keep sexual abuse a secret.

“When Mommy goes to work, I stay at Mrs. Jenkin’s house. I wish I didn’t have to. Mommy says Mrs. Jenkins is a real nice lady, but Mrs. Jenkin’s son, Ralph, sometimes makes me do bad things. Yesterday he made me take off my underwear, and he put his finger in my privates.” He said, „You better not tell.”

Children may keep a sexual assault a secret for many reasons. They may fear rejection, blame, punishment, or abandonment; they may think people won’t believe them. Boys are less likely to report an abuse than girls. The closer the relationship of the offender to the child, the less likely it is that the child will report the incident.

How Can You Determined If Sexual Abuse Has Taken Place?

First and foremost, if your children confide that they have been sexually assaulted, believe them! Children very seldom lie about such a serious matter. Also be aware that most sexual abuse does not result in the child being violently attacked or hurt physically.

Often there is not physical evidence a child has been molested. Fondling, involvement in child pornography and oral sex usually present no physical signs of abuse. But, if a child has been physically harmed as a result of sexual abuse, the following may be signs of this occurrence.

- A discharge from the vaginal area or penis
- Injury to the genitals or anus
- Pain, itching, or bleeding in the genital or anal area
- Discomfort in walking or sitting
- The discovery of a sexually transmitted disease

Children, especially very young children, are many times unable to verbalize that they have been molested. The following are some indicators that sexual assault may have taken place:

- Nightmares and sleep disturbances
- Bedwetting
- Fear of certain places or certain people (such as a day care center or friend)
- Loss of appetite
- Clinging to a parent more than usual
- Behaving as a younger child (such as an older child sucking his or her thumb)
- Unexplained changes in behavior at school, day care, or in relations with peers.
- Withdrawal
- Acting out the abuse with dolls, friends, or through drawings.
- Excessive masturbation.

While everyone should report child abuse and neglect, the California Penal Code provides that certain professionals and laypersons must report suspected abuse to the proper authorities. The mandated reporters include:

- Any Child Care Custodian (teachers, licensed day care workers, foster parents, social workers)
- Medical Practitioners (physicians, dentists, psychologists, nurses)
- Nonmedical Practitioners (public health employees, counselors, county welfare department employees)

Failures to report suspected abuse by a mandated reporter (listed above) within 36 hours is a misdemeanor punishable by 6 months in jail and/or a \$1,000 fine or both.

Child Abuse Prevention Pamphlet Receipt

Please sign the form in the space below to indicate that you have received a Child Abuse Prevention Pamphlet Receipt. This portion will be kept in your child’s file.

I/we, the parents of _____, have received a copy of “Child Abuse Prevention Pamphlet: A Parent’s Guide to the Understanding of Child Sexual Abuse” from.

Signature of Parent(s)/ Guardian(s) _____ Date _____