

Do you know
someone who
has been
sexually
abused?

Child sexual abuse is, sadly, an all too common experience. We know that 15–30% of adult women have had an unwanted sexual experience at some time in their childhood. Girls are two to three times more likely to be abused than boys, but boys do get abused too. Sexual abuse happens to children and young people of all ages and cultures. It can have both short term and longer term effects which can last into adulthood. No-one can take away the memory of what happened, but with skilled help its impact can be reduced.

What are the effects of child sexual abuse?

Following sexual abuse children can develop a range of emotional and behavioural problems which may include:

- Upsetting thoughts and memories
- Sleeping difficulties
- Sexualised behaviour which is inappropriate for their age
- Irritability
- Bed wetting
- Repeated urinary tract infections
- Eating problems
- Social withdrawal
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Self-harming
- Poor concentration

It can cause children to have problems with how they relate to other people around them – both of their own age and adults. It can also affect their psychological and educational development. For some it can lead to longer-term sexual and relationship problems. For those who have been particularly disturbed by their experiences it can lead to post-traumatic

stress disorder, serious depression or anxiety disorders.

Getting help

It is sometimes easy to think that once a child or young person is no longer in contact with the person who has abused them then their problems are at an end. Unfortunately, as you can see from the information above, this is very rarely the case.

Some children and young people want or need to talk to someone as soon as possible. Others will want to get on with living but may find they need to talk about what happened at a later stage – perhaps when they start serious relationships.

Most children will benefit from meeting with a specialist skilled in helping with this kind of abuse. It is important that they have an opportunity to talk about their feelings and to understand that they are not to blame either for the abuse or for the events that may follow from its discovery. Some children will find it easier to talk to an individual; some may find it easier to be in a group with people who have been through similar experiences.

A GP, social worker, health visitor or school nurse is generally the best route for accessing this kind of help. They can refer your child to a child and adolescent mental health service. This is usually staffed by a range of professionals, some of whom will be specialists in this area (eg. psychologists, psychotherapists, psychiatrists). They can be particularly useful in providing either individual or group therapy. There may also be other organisations in your area that provide counselling and support that your GP or social worker can tell you about.

Finding out that a child for whom you are responsible, either as a parent or a carer, has been sexually abused can be very distressing. If you were abused yourself as a child it may be particularly difficult for you to cope with. In

these circumstances you, as well as the child, are probably in need of help. Your GP, social worker or health visitor should be able to provide access to specialist services for you as well.

Talking to the GP or other professional

If you are talking to the GP or other professional for the first time about a child who has been sexually abused, you need to be aware that he or she may inform your local social services department. Social services child protection teams have to investigate any case of child sexual abuse reported to them. This is when people such as a social worker, doctor or police officer try to find out what has happened, so it can be decided what should be done to help the family and protect the child. Other professionals who know your family may also be contacted.

While this might be a very difficult decision, you need to think very carefully about the effect on the child if you don't. This can be an upsetting time, but remember there are people who can help you through it.

You may feel that there are other difficulties in the family which make it hard for you or the child to access help or to make the best use of it – for example:

- Domestic violence
- Wanting to protect the abuser
- The child not wanting to tell anyone else
- Uncertainty about whether the child has been abused

Helplines can be very useful for getting advice anonymously on what to do next, and finding out what other support might be available. You could also raise these problems with your GP or health visitor, or you could contact one of the help agencies below.

Useful contacts

Children's Legal Centre

www.childrenslegalcentre.com

This website contains frequently asked questions on legal issues affecting children.

Irwin Mitchell Solicitors

Tel: 0870 1500 300; Fax: 020 7404 0208

Contact: Tracey Storey, Associate,
Irwin Mitchell Solicitors, 150 Holborn,
London EC1N 2NS

Email: tracey.storey@irwinmitchell.com

www.irwinmitchell.com/personalinjury

Irwin Mitchell (IM) is one of the country's leading law firms with a national reputation in the field of personal injury and has a specialist national team handling cases brought by child and adult victims of abuse.

Mosac

Helpline: 0800 980 1958

Website: www.mosac.org.uk

Provides support, information and counselling to non-abusing parents or carers of children who have been sexually abused.

NSPCC Child Protection Helpline

Helpline: 0808 800 5000 (24 hours)

Textphone: 0800 056 0566 (24 hours)

Asian Freephone: 0808 096 7719 (Mon–Fri
11am–7pm)

CYMRU/Wales Freephone: 0808 100 2524
(Mon-Fri 10am-6pm)

Email: help@nspcc.org.uk

Website: www.nspcc.org.uk

A child protection helpline for any child or adult concerned about a child at risk of neglect, sexual, emotional, or physical abuse. The advisers are qualified child protection officers and can suggest ways to get help for

your child, and advise about stopping and reporting the abuse. Runs community-based teams and projects which provide a number of services, including counselling for children and parents.

What to do if you're worried a child is being abused: children's services guidance

This publication is designed for practitioners to help them work together to safeguard children. However, it also contains a useful appendix about confidentiality, data protection and the Human Rights Act. To obtain the publication, call the Department for Education and Skills publications helpline on 0845 60 222 60 and quote product code 31553.

Alternatively, download the report at:
<http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/eordering/Download/31553.pdf>

YoungMinds

PO BOX 52735, LONDON EC1P 1YY

Office telephone: 020 7336 8445

YoungMinds Order Line: 0870 870 1721

Parents Information Service: 0800 018 2138

(Monday and Friday 10am-1pm, Tuesday and Thursday 1-4pm, Wednesday 1-4pm and 6-8pm)

Fax: 020 7336 8446

Email: enquiries@youngminds.org.uk

Website: www.youngminds.org.uk

YoungMinds is the national charity committed to improving the mental health of all babies, children and young people. YoungMinds Parents Information Service is a free confidential telephone service providing information, advice and details of other national/local services to any adult with concerns about the mental health of a child or young person.

To obtain further copies of this leaflet (ref L12), call the YoungMinds Order Line on 0870 870 1721. ©YoungMinds 2003-5.

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