



KEEPING KIDS SAFE

MYTH OR TRUTH ?

Understanding the Facts of Child Sexual Abuse

In order to effectively prevent abuse of their own children, parents should be well educated on the risks and signs of sexual abuse. Take this “true or false” quiz to see how well you understand child sexual abuse. The answers are listed after the quiz.

1. Most child sexual abuse is committed by strangers to the child. T F
2. Half of child sexual abuse is committed by males. T F
3. Most children are so frightened by child sexual abuse that they immediately report it to a parent, teacher or trusted adult. T F
4. Most sexually abused children do not suffer physical injuries. T F
5. Most children who are sexually abused engage in the behavior because they are threatened with physical injury to themselves or a loved one. T F
6. Children may not report child sexual abuse because the behavior makes them feel good. T F
7. Children often do not report child sexual abuse because they feel responsible for the abuse occurring. T F
8. If a child is sexually abused a physical exam will generally verify that the abuse has occurred. T F
9. Most sexual abuse involves vaginal or anal intercourse. T F
10. Girls are sexually abused more often than boys. T F
11. If a young child discloses sexual abuse it usually happened. T F
12. If a child has been sexually abused they may deny it if directly asked. T F
13. Over half of child sexual abuse is committed by parents and parent substitutes. T F
14. Developmentally delayed children are rarely sexually abused. T F
15. Many of the reports to Child Protective Services about child abuse come from those who work in the school systems. T F
16. Only teachers are required to report child sexual abuse to Child Protective Services. T F
17. If a child discloses child sexual abuse, the law requires that it be reported within 24 hours to Child Protective Services or law enforcement. T F
18. An adolescent girl who has been sexually abused will often react by internalizing and “checking out.” T F
19. An adolescent boy who has been sexually abused will also react by withdrawing. T F
20. Younger children who are sexually abused may “act out” sex in play. T F

Answers:

1. False. The vast majority of child sexual abuse is committed by people that the child knows and loves. In recent years, 75% of the prosecuted cases in Idaho were committed by a family member, a family friend or an acquaintance. Experts believe that this statistic represents an accurate percentage for all cases of child sexual abuse, whether reported or not.
2. False. About 94% of reported child sexual abuse is committed by males.
3. False. Many children are confused by child sexual abuse, but are not frightened. Most children do not tell about the abuse immediately.
4. True. Most children who are sexually abused are not physically injured.
5. False. While some children are threatened, much of child sexual abuse is accomplished through positive reinforcement of the child, or engaging the child in activity to the point where they feel responsible and thus cooperate with the behavior.
6. True. Because the activities, both physical and emotional, often make the child feel loved, needed, or are physically stimulating, children may not immediately report the behavior.
7. True. The activities of the abuser, in gradually engaging the child in the activity, often make the child feel responsible. In addition, because children are immature, they naturally feel that because they engaged in the behavior it is their fault.
8. False. Most child sexual abuse does not involve physical injury, and thus 95% of the children who report child sexual abuse will have normal physical exams with no evidence of abuse.
9. False. The nature of child sexual abuse, because it occurs in secrecy and does not involve activities that would scare children, usually involves touching, oral sex, masturbation, fondling, or other activity that does not involve intercourse.
10. True. Of the reported cases of child sexual abuse, one in four girls and one in six boys are abused before the age of 18. However, experts believe that more boys are abused than the reported cases might indicate, but boys do not disclose abuse as often because the abuse is more often very confusing to them.
11. True. If a child is talking about sexual activity, they generally have experienced it, or witnessed it, because young children are generally not aware of sexual activity without personal experience.
12. True. Experts estimate that about half of children who are directly confronted about sexual abuse will deny that the activity occurred, either because they do not want to get an adult in trouble, they feel responsible, they believe they will get in trouble, or they do not want to disappoint adults.
13. True. Parents and parent substitutes are responsible for over half of child sexual abuse. Parent substitutes are those living in the home responsible for the parental care of the child. Of parental perpetrators, the majority are stepparents.
14. False. Developmentally delayed children are abused at a much higher rate of normal children.
15. True. The schools are one of the largest sources of reporting child abuse to the Child Protection system.
16. False. *Any person who has reason to believe that abuse is occurring is required by Idaho law to report it.*
17. True.

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18. True. However, not every girl will react this way, some may react aggressively by expressing anger, or engaging in risk-taking behaviors.
19. False. Boys often react by showing anger and aggression, although not every child reacts the same way.
20. True. Playing is often the only way that younger children can express what they are feeling, and thus they act out sex in play as a way of telling what has happened to them. In addition, children play in ways that they have experienced, so they may act out sexual acts with no knowledge of the social or moral implications of what they are doing.

Information used to compile these questions and answers was obtained from (1) the child maltreatment and mental health experts used in the Diocese of Boise’s Safe Environment Workshops, Dr. Leah Lamb and Patricia Woodbury; (2) research on facts and statistics located on the websites listed later in this material, including the federal Health and Human Services statistics published at <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>, <http://www.calib.com/nccanch/pubs>, and the compilation prepared on behalf of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops in “Child Sexual Abuse: A Review of the Literature;” and (3) a review of this information provided by the Review Board for Sexual Misconduct, and members’ consultation with child maltreatment experts at St. Luke’s Children’s Hospital in Boise.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

As a parent, if you are concerned about possible child sexual abuse, what signs and symptoms should you watch for in your children? A child may exhibit a variety of signs and symptoms, and some of the signs and symptoms may signal problems other than child sexual abuse.

Signs of child sexual abuse can be physical and/or emotional. The following signs and symptoms may indicate your child has been sexually abused. A particular child may have one or several of these signs or symptoms, and in a particular child all of the symptoms may be physical, with no behavioral signs, or vice versa.

Physical Indicators	Behavioral Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Torn, stained or bloody underclothes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawn, depressed; running away; truancy; uncomfortable with physical contact; mood swings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pain or itching in genital area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive seductiveness; inappropriate sex play; premature understanding of sexual issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bruises or bleeding genitalia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor self esteem, self devaluation, lack of confidence; suicide attempts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Venereal disease 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Massive weight change; eating disorder; sleep habit changes; changes in toilet habits
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sudden school difficulties for no explained reason; changes in behavior; sudden aggression; regression to infantile behavior

Often, there are no physical signs or symptoms!

If you suspect that your child may have been abused, talk to your child, and take your child to a physician or professional therapist who can determine whether the signs and symptoms stem from child sexual abuse.

WEB SITES WITH INFORMATION ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

The best prevention tool is education. The following websites provide excellent information on the scope of the problem of child sexual abuse, and how to prevent it.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE ISSUE OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

The US Council of Catholic Bishops has released a comprehensive report on all aspects of Child Sexual Abuse, the statistics, and the origins of the problem, which provides extensive background information. It is called: "[Child Sexual Abuse: A Review of the Literature](#)" and can be found at a link on the home page at: <http://www.nccbuscc.org>

Other overviews on Child Sexual Abuse:

General Information and Statistics <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>
Child Sexual Abuse <http://childlures.org/research/coreproblem.asp>
A Profile of the Child Molester <http://www.childlures.org/research/molester.asp>
Reports and Statistics <http://www.childlures.org/research/statistics.asp>
A 21st Century Model for Prevention <http://www.childlures.org/research/model21.asp>
Child Abuse Research and Statistics <http://www.prevent-abuse-now.com/stats.htm>
Child Abuse: Statistics, Research, and Resources (2003) <http://www.jimhopper.com/abstats/>

The US Department of Justice (www.doj.gov) also has published online a number of reports which contain background statistics on all kinds of crimes against children. One relevant report is:

Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement: Victim, Incident and Offender Characteristics

Other government reports include:

Juvenile Justice Bulletin—May 2001—Child Abuse reported to the police, published at http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojdp/jbul2001_5_1/contents.html

Child Maltreatment 2001

Published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information

<http://www.calib.com/nccanch/pubs>

(includes prevention resources, prevention programs, the costs of not preventing abuse, federal funding resources, etc.)

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INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Warning Signs of Possible Abuse: <http://www.saferchild.org/signs-ph.htm>

Molestation Signs <http://missingkids.com/missingkids>

Talking to Kids About Sexuality and Abuse:

Teach, Listen, Believe, Respond: <http://www.saferchild.org/listen.htm>

About the Human Body: <http://saferchild.org/body.htm>

Teaching Your Child: <http://www.saferchild.org/teach.htm>

Molestation Prevention <http://missingkids.com/missingkids>

Tips for Safeguarding Your Child <http://www.childlures.org/parents/tips.asp>

Child Lures Parent Guide <http://www.childlures.org/parents/guide.asp>

Responding to Disclosure of Abuse

Molestation Disclosure <http://missingkids.com/missingkids>

ADVOCACY AGAINST CHILD ABUSE

Campaign Against Child Sexual Exploitation; Sex Offender profiles; Molestation

Resources <http://missingkids.com/missingkids>

Child Lures Community Plan <http://www.childlures.org/community/index.asp>