



Christian Counseling

Equipping People for Life...

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

BEHAVIORAL SYMPTOMS IN TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOL CHILDREN:

1. Anxiety in the presence of persons with whom they used to be comfortable. Being ill-at-ease around particular people or types of people. Tense and/or tearful withdrawal from the presence of members of the opposite sex.
2. Sudden uncharacteristic fear of bathrooms or shower rooms, or nervous resistance to being undressed.
3. Masturbation which exceeds curious exploration and discovery: preoccupation with excessive sexual manipulation, or rubbing themselves against chair arms, pillows, dolls, etc. Sex play with other children, beyond the normal "playing doctor" games: inserting objects into the vagina or anus, imitating aspects of adult love play. (In some homes, pornographic TV video scenes will have made disturbing impressions).
4. Sleeplessness, disturbed sleep, nightmares.
5. Excessive crying, clinging to a parent, not wanting to leave the house, unusually fearful responses to being left with a baby-sitter.
6. Sudden personality changes: i.e. a normally quiet child becomes hyperactive, or negatively aggressive toward other children.

BEHAVIORAL SYMPTOMS IN CHILDREN FROM PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE TO PRE-TEENS:

1. Decline in consistency and quality of schoolwork: inability to concentrate, assignments not completed, truancy, tardiness, falling grades.
2. Disturbed sleep, nightmarish dreams, inability to sleep; wearing multiple layers of clothing to bed.
3. Decline in energy level due to anxiety, exhaustion and/or lack of sleep.
4. Fear of being alone with members of the opposite sex, avoidance of particular people with whom the child used to be comfortable, withdrawal from friends and activities previously enjoyed.
5. Change of eating habits: nervous or distracted picking at food, compulsive over-eating for comfort.
6. In girls: poor personal hygiene in a girl who normally cares about her appearance (attempting to make herself unattractive).
7. Exaggeration of normal personality traits: i.e. a day dreamer becomes even more out of touch with the world, an energetic child becomes hyperactive, etc. or, sudden dramatic swings to opposite personality poles.
8. Invention of irrational excuses not to participate in school or extracurricular activities which formerly inspired enthusiasm.
9. Sudden inordinate modesty, self-consciousness about the body. Fear of restrooms and showers.
10. Sudden cessation of conversational sharing.

IF YOU THINK YOUR CHILD HAS BEEN ABUSED:

Believe your child. Children rarely lie about sexual abuse.

Temper your reaction. The greatest challenge for a parent may be to not convey your own horror about the molestation. Your perspective and acceptance are critical signals to your child.

Make sure your child understands that the abuse was not their fault. A child's greatest fear is that he/she is at fault and responsible for the abuse. Let your child know that you are glad you were told about the abuse.

Make sure that your child is immediately protected from the abuser and understands that abuse will not continue.

Report the suspected abuse at once to a social service agency, state abuse registry or the police. You cannot get in trouble for reporting suspected abuse even if the abuse turns out to be unfounded.

Make sure your child is interviewed by a professional trained in child sexual abuse. Help your child answer questions during the interview process and make sure your child is protected from an interviewer who may not be sensitive to your child's problem.

Find a physician with the experience and training to detect and recognize sexual abuse. A medical exam is necessary to protect your child's health, and possible evidence. Trained physicians can be found through the Rape Crisis Hotline, and Child Protective Services numbers listed in the right column.

Talk with other parents whose children come in contact with the suspected molester. Ask them whether their children are exhibiting any unusual behavioral or physical symptoms that might be indicative of sexual abuse.

Finally- don't blame yourself for your child's sexual molestation. Sexual abuse occurs in every community. Unfortunately, many people who molest children deliberately seek and find work in areas of employment that give them access to children. It can be very difficult for parents and employers to detect potential child sexual abusers.

IF YOU DECIDE NOT TO REPORT THE ABUSE:

Sexual abuse is often a habitual behavior for offenders; it doesn't go away by avoiding it or not reporting. As much as everyone would like to believe that the assault will not be repeated, the assailant is likely to repeat this behavior as long as nothing is done. If a child abuse report is not filed against the offender, then other children will continue to be at risk for sexual abuse.

You may not want to report the crime because you worry that your child will be further traumatized by being asked to testify in court. This is a valid concern and one that an experienced counselor can help the child prepare for.

IF YOU DECIDE TO REPORT THE ABUSE:

There are two different ways to report a sexual assault:

1. Anonymously, by means of a third party report through Rape Crisis. The report does not become part of official police statistics, but the police can use the information. Be aware that if your child tells a counselor, doctor, or Sunday school teacher about the abuse that person has a legal responsibility to report the crime if it has not been reported.

2. Directly to the police. The police can then provide immediate assistance and protection, take a crime report and collect evidence (if you choose to prosecute).

A uniformed patrol officer will come to your home and take an initial report. This usually means that your child will be asked to talk about what happened.

Your child will be required to see a doctor and a counselor to confirm the report.

RAPE CRISIS HOTLINE - 1-800-886-7273

CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES - 1-800-252-5400

CRIME VICTIMS COMPENSATION PROGRAM - 1-800-983-9933

Under the Crime Victims Compensation Program of Texas any time a crime is committed and a police report is filed, the victim is eligible for Crime Victims Compensation. This money is set aside by the state of Texas for crime victims to use for medical bills, counseling, crime scene cleanup, lost wages etc.

Taken from HEALING VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE, by Paula Sandford.