

# Child Abuse Information

## Parents/Custodian Etc.

### The Grooming Process: Steps The Abuser Takes To Set Up Children

Some parents wonder how it is possible for their children to be abused. Offenders use many tactics to gain access to children. These include:

**Seeking out an approachable child:** Abusers usually pick children who are easy to get to (relatives, friends, and neighbors). They may also seek children who have emotional needs for friendship and attention.

**Establishing relationship with the child:** Abusers often seek ways to build trust and friendship with children. They may spend time playing with them, volunteer for child care duty, become their "buddy" or buy them candy or presents.

**Breaking down the child's resistance to touch:** Abusers may find ways to touch children a lot. As a result, the children are often confused when the touch becomes sexual. The abusers may play games with a lot of physical contact, like wrestling, and they may tickle children and sneak sexual touches.

**Finding ways to isolate a child:** Abusers find excuses to be alone with children so they can molest them. For example, they may baby-sit, invite them to sleep over, or take them camping.

**Blaming the child and keeping the secrets:** Abusers try to make the children feel responsible so they won't tell. They use statements like these: You know you like the way I touch you.. If you tell, people will think you are bad.. If you tell our special secret, I will go to jail.. If you tell your mother, she won't love you anymore.

### How Parents Sometimes Feel When Abuse Has Been Reported

When abuse is reported, parents sometimes feel as if they are on a roller coaster of emotions. This is normal. The report can affect your life in many ways, and it takes time to adjust. Following are some of the common thoughts and feelings parents have. You may feel one or more of these, or you may move from one to another.

**Denial:** Your first reaction may be to not believe or accept the possibility that it really happened. Or you may believe it happened, but no real harm was done. Parents often experience denial because it is too overwhelming to accept that the abuse occurred and that there will be after-effects. For some people, it takes time to overcome denial and face the realities of abuse.

**Anger:** At times. You may feel angry with yourself for not protecting your child. You may feel angry with the perpetrator for what he did. You may even feel angry with the child. Be honest about your feelings and share them with a trusted person or group.

**Helplessness:** You probably do not know what to expect and feel that things are out of your control. Some parents may fear that their children will be taken away. Try to stay aware of how cases proceed through the system in which you are involved.

**Lack of assertiveness:** You may feel invisible and think there is nothing you can do to help the situation get better. We will help you learn what you can do to change the situation and take appropriate action.

**Shock, numbness, repulsion:** You may have memories of being abused as a child, which may lead to shock, numbness and repulsion for the new situation you find yourself in. If so, you may need to seek therapy for yourself to recover from the abuse.

**Guilt, self-blame:** You may feel it is all your fault. But the offender is responsible for the abuse, not you. The best thing you can do now is support your child and learn all you can about how to make things better. Reading this is a good first step.

**Hurt and betrayal:** It is normal to feel hurt from the loss of your children's innocence. You also may have lost a spouse or partner if that person was the offender. You may even have lost friends. It is very important to take time to grieve for these losses.

**Sexual inadequacy:** Some women believe the offender turned to the child because their relations with him were not adequate. It is important to learn the dynamics of abuse in order to realize that sexual relations with an adult partner do not affect a person's likelihood to abuse or not to abuse children.

**Concern about money:** You may be worried about finances because of lost income. Do not hesitate to seek assistance from community resources, DHR Social Worker or Advocate Program to help you get on your feet.

**Fear of violence:** In homes where violence is common, you may fear the offender will try to harm you or your children. If so, please contact the domestic violence shelter in your area.

**Fear of drug or alcohol abuse:** You may be afraid that you or the offender will abuse drugs or alcohol because of the stress, or that one of you may have a relapse to an old addiction. If you need help please call the local crisis center or mental health facility.

### **How to Act Toward Your Child**

Provide safety, love and support. Let them know it is okay to cry or be mad. Make sure your child understands it is not his or her fault. Don't coach or pressure your child to talk about things.

**Some things you can say that will really help your child:** I believe you, I know it's not your fault.. I'm glad I know about it.. I'm sorry this happened to you.. I will take care of you.. I'm not sure what will happen next.. Nothing about you made this happen.. It has happened to other children too.. You don't need to take care of me.. I am upset, but not with you.. I'm angry at the person who did this.. I'm sad, you may see me cry.. That's all right, I will be able to take care of you.. I'm not mad at you.. I don't know why he did it.. He has a problem.. You can still love someone but hate what he or she did to you.

**Some things you can do:** Return to a normal routine as soon as possible. See that your child receives therapy as soon as possible.. Trying to sweep the problem under the rug usually causes more problems because it will not go away.. Find help for yourself.. You don't have to do it all yourself.. Teach your child the rules of personal safety.. Tell them what to do if someone tries to

touch them in an uncomfortable way.. Be careful not to question your child about the abuse. If you do, you can jeopardize the case in court against your child's abuser.. Specially trained professionals will interview your child to obtain the necessary information without harming the case or further traumatizing him/her.. If your child wants to talk about it, listen supportively, but do not probe.. Keep your child away from the person suspected of the abuse. This is to protect you, that person, and the child.. Avoid discussing the case with other victims or their families.. Never coach or advise your child on how to act or what to say to professionals or investigators. This could seriously damage the case.. Avoid the suspect.. Your child may need an extra sense of physical security. Stay close, and assure your child you will keep him/her safe.. Remember to give attention to your other children.

### **What to Say to Others**

One challenge your family will face will be what to say to others about the abuse. Your child may feel embarrassed and/or responsible. If there is no publicity or public awareness, you can decide whom you will tell. Let your child know with which relatives or friends you will be discussing it and let your child have some choice about who is told.

Sometimes an extended family member is the first person to learn of the abuse. You may feel hurt that someone knew before you. However, understand that your child may have been trying to protect your feelings by telling someone else. Your child may have felt that person could tell you in a less upsetting way than he or she could.

If you are especially close to your family, you will probably want to talk with them about your child's abuse and how it has affected the family. It is important to keep in mind how these relatives usually react to stressful situations. Their reactions may include hysteria, horror, obvious distress, sincere concern, embarrassment, disgust, disinterest or unnecessary questioning for intimate details. If you know they will react in a negative way, you may not want to share the information with them unless it becomes necessary. It is important to maintain your child's sense of privacy. On the other hand, be careful not to make it a dirty secret, as this could cause more shame in your child.

Reference: When Your Child Has Been Molested. by Kathryn B. Hagans & Joyce Case