



PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL ABUSE

A resource for parents, caregivers and child and youth service providers on sexual abuse intervention and prevention.

**If you believe that a child is in IMMEDIATE DANGER or
if a criminal offense has occurred, CALL THE POLICE.**

IDENTIFYING the Possible Signs of Sexual Abuse

- Changes in personality traits that are not age appropriate
- Changes in patterns of sleeping and/or eating
- Sexualized language, behaviors or knowledge that is not appropriate to child's age
- Social withdrawal
- Receiving gifts with no explanation
- Changes in levels of concentration, motivation and/or school performance
- Increased agitation and/or aggressive behavior
- Regressing to behaviors that are developmentally appropriate for an earlier age (going back to thumb sucking, bed wetting, etc.)
- Pain, burning, itching, bleeding, or bruising in the genital and/or anal areas
- Unusual discharge or signs of sexually transmitted diseases

UNDERSTANDING the Possible Long-term Impacts of Childhood Sexual Abuse

- Mental health problems
- Physical health problems
- Shame and self-blame
- Relationship difficulties
- Isolation
- Self-harm
- Suicidal behaviors and/or thoughts
- Social and emotional withdrawal
- Lack of emotional control
- Developmental delays

Did You Know...

Before their 18th birthdays, 1 in 6 boys and 1 in 3 girls will be impacted by sexual abuse.

(Canadian Mental Health Association, 2019)



Potential Effects on a Child's Brain

Abusive experiences in childhood may increase child's sense of vigilance, which can reduce their brains' capacity to think, plan and reason. As children's senses of safety have been impacted, they may often feel unsafe in and react to even safe environments/situations. (Levine & Kline, 2007 and Cozolino, 2009).

SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION

- Educate your child about their bodies and their private body parts using age appropriate and non-judgemental language
- Educate your child about privacy and boundaries by talking about those concepts with your child, by modelling behaviors that promote privacy and boundaries and by respecting their privacy and boundaries (i.e. teach them to close the door when they are changing and/or using the washroom.)
- Discuss the differences between healthy and unhealthy touch with your child. Let your child know of what to do and who and how to tell if someone touches them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable.
- Let your child know that you would always believe them.
- Teach your child how to say no in different circumstances.
- Trust your child's instincts. If your child does not want to hug or kiss a certain relative, do not force them. If your child does not want to be left alone with a certain individual, listen to your child.
- Discuss with your child the differences between good and bad secrets with clear and concrete examples.

RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURES

Children who tell an adult sooner and are listened to and supported may be less impacted by their abusive experiences.

Children who do not tell anyone about the abuse, children who tell someone but are blamed for the abuse or are not believed are more likely to experience longer term negative effects (*Levine & Kline, 2007*). It is our responsibility as adults to remind children that abuse is not their fault.

Children may decide not to talk about their experiences of abuse as they may be afraid that they will be blamed, shamed and/or punished for their experiences of sexual abuse. (*Levine & Kline, 2007*).

HOW TO RESPOND TO DISCLOSURES

- Remain calm and present
- Listen in a non-judgemental manner
- Let them know that it is not their fault
- Let them know that they have not done anything wrong
- Remind them that they are safe with you
- Thank them for telling you
- Explain to them what you will do next
- Do not ask leading questions
- Thank them for being open with you

How you respond to a child's disclosure can make a big difference in their lives and have long-term effects on that child's future.

(*BC Handbook on Child Abuse and Neglect*)

CONTACTS AND RESOURCES

Free counselling is available to children between 3 and 18 who have experienced sexual abuse. Please contact the Sexual Abuse Intervention Program (SAIP) at Archway Community Services.

(604)859-7681 ext. 251

abusecounselling@archway.ca

archway.ca/saip

SAIP services are funded by the Ministry of Child and Family Development.

Those impacted by abuse or violence may also qualify for funding for counselling through the Crime Victim Assistance Program.

1-866-660-3888

If you believe that a child is in immediate danger or if a criminal offense occurred, call your local police department or 911.

If you suspect a child may be in need of protection, please report to MCFD:

Abbotsford: 604-870-5880

After hours line (BC): 1-800-663-9122

Other Resources:

Helpline for Children 310 -1234

Parents Help Line 1 - 888 - 603 - 9100

BC Suicide Crisis Hotline 1 - 800 - 784 - 2433

List of References and Resources

- Canadian Mental Health Association. (2013). Childhood sexual abuse: A mental health issue. Retrieved from <https://cmha.bc.ca/documents/childhood-sexual-abuse-a-mental-health-issue-2/#who>
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- Hickling, M. (1996). Speaking of Sex: Are You Ready to Answer the Questions Your Kids Will Ask. Kelowna, BC : Northstone Publishing Inc.
- J.E.B. Myers, L. Berliner, J. Briere, C.T. Hendrix, T. Reid, & C. Jenny (Eds.) (2002). *The APSAC handbook on child maltreatment, 2nd Edition*. (pp. 175-202). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications
- Levine, P. A., & Kline, M. (2007). *Trauma Through a Child's Eyes: Awakening the Ordinary Miracle of Healing*. Berkley, CA: North Atlantic Books.
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