

A close-up photograph of a young girl with long, curly brown hair and blue eyes. She is wearing a pink, short-sleeved top with ruffled edges. She is holding a baby doll with a bald head and dark eyes. The background is dark, making the girl and the doll stand out.

SPEAK UP

ABOUT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Because often they can't.



SPEAK

Child abuse occurs in these 4 main forms:

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is commonly characterised by physical injury resulting from practices such as punching, beating, shaking, biting, burning or otherwise harming a child.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse tends to be a chronic behavioural pattern directed at the child/young person where by their self esteem and social competence is undermined or eroded over time.

A child/young person can also experience emotional abuse by being exposed to a dysfunctional environment which includes domestic violence.

Neglect

Neglect is the failure to provide for a child/young person's basic physical, supervisory, developmental and/or emotional needs which results in failure to meet their developmental needs.

Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse is discussed in detail throughout this booklet.

This booklet has been produced to guide Australians to recognise and respond to the behavioural signs of child sexual abuse.

UP

WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

Child sexual abuse is a crime. It occurs when an adult or young person uses their power, force or authority to involve a child/children in sexual activity. Types of abuse may include:

- Verbal/suggestive sexual comments
- Exhibitionism, eg. 'mooning'
- Touching a child's genitals
- Masturbation
- Oral sex
- Any form of penetration
- Exposure to/involvement in child pornography which may or may not include use of the internet

'Child abuse is a basic lack of respect for children...'

The Hon. Alistair Nicholson,
AO, RDF, QC, 2005

WHY SPEAK UP?

- It is estimated that **1 in 4 girls** and **1 in 7 boys** are victims of child sexual abuse (*Australian Institute of Criminology, 2000*)
- Over the 2005/2006 financial year, there were 266,745 reports of child abuse to Australian Child Protection Authorities
- Despite the prevalence of child abuse, 31% of Australian adults have said they would not believe a child who disclosed being abused (*Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2006, Australian Childhood Foundation Report, 2006*)
- The Speak Up program has been designed by Child Wise to assist Australians to Speak Up, and stop child sexual abuse in Australia
- Sexual abuse can have a lasting impact on children, but we know that harm is minimised when intervention takes place as early as possible. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that Australian's in contact with children are empowered to Speak Up about child sexual abuse, because often children can't

HOW DO YOU RECOGNISE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

Sometimes there can be medical, physical and/or behavioural signs that a child has been sexually abused. More often, awareness of sexual abuse is first raised when a child confides in an adult or peer that he/she has been sexually abused.

Prior to a child's disclosure of sexual abuse, the following signs may also be present:

- **Sophisticated or unusual sexual behaviour or knowledge**
Children who have been sexually abused may demonstrate sexual behaviours beyond their age appropriate level, because they have not understood their experience of abuse. They play out their abusive experiences in an attempt to understand them. *Children's sexual play is discussed in more detail later in this booklet*
- **Significant change in level of performance at school**
Children who have been sexually abused can either increase their performance, because they become more focused on their school work in an attempt to 'block out' their abusive experiences; or decrease their performance, because they have a reduced sense of self worth and difficulties concentrating
- **Continuous complaints of headaches and/or abdominal pain**
Children can express their emotional pain, as a result of sexual abuse, through their complaints of physical symptoms
- **Problems with sleep**
Problems getting to sleep and/or nightmares
- **Not wanting to play**
Children who have been sexually abused may be reluctant to play with their friends and may isolate themselves
- **Serious difficulties relating to friends and/or adults**
- **Demonstrating behaviours which cause harm to themselves or others**
These behaviours could include cutting, head banging and physical aggression
- **Pregnancy and/or sexually transmitted diseases**

CHILD SEX OFFENDERS ARE:

- Almost always known to the child. This could be in the context of their family and extended family, school community, sporting clubs and associations
- 90 – 95% of sex offenders are male. Just over 5% of child sexual offences are committed by females
- Approximately 1/3 of child sexual offences are committed by other young people (under the age of 18 years)

CHILD SEX OFFENDERS:

- Work hard at being liked and accepted
- Isolate children or groups of children
- Have frequent job and address moves
- Create opportunities to work or be with children and vulnerable communities
- Create 'special' relationships with children
- May spend a lot of time with children outside of their role
- May have poor impulse control, poor problem solving skills and hostility/negative emotion
- Have motivation to abuse a child sexually
- Always plan their sexual abuse of children. They plan who they will target? How they will get close to them? How they will prevent the children from speaking of the abuse?
- They may be married and have families of their own, or be single

GROOMING

To get close to children sex offenders use **'grooming'** techniques. These techniques allow them to form 'special' or 'power-based' relationships with children. Grooming can take place over days, weeks or even years. This process is designed to build the trust of the child and often their family as well as to create opportunities for the abuse to occur. Some grooming techniques include:

- Buying children lollies, sporting equipment, swap cards etc. Children appreciate and value these gifts
- Paying special attention to a particular child making the child feel special
- Asking children to keep secrets from parents, siblings and friends. These secrets may not necessarily be sexual however, sex offenders are teaching children to feel special and supported through the secrets. They are also testing to establish if children will maintain the secret
- Using threats or bribes and/or physical violence. Some common threats are to say that the child will go to jail, no one will believe them and that they will be removed from their family

LOOK OUT FOR:

- Situations where adults are involved with your child to a greater extent than you would expect in their role or relationship
- Situations where your child is given gifts or taken to outings which are unexpected
- Special relationships people form with your child that don't involve you and that you have limited knowledge about
- Where your child may be keeping secrets or have built a relationship with a secret friend
- Your child's use of the internet. Who they are speaking to on the internet and what details of their life they are describing and releasing to other people over the internet. The internet can be a mechanism through which sexual offenders access information about children and also commence their grooming techniques

Start talking to your children about sex, abuse and feeling safe as soon as possible. This is described in more detail later on in this booklet.

SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN

It is natural for all children, from all cultures and religions, to be curious and take interest in their own body, as well as the bodies of peers. A child may wish to explore their sexual development by:

- Occasional masturbation
- Playing games (eg. Mum and dad/doctor and nurse)
- Kissing, cuddling or holding hands with peers
- Engaging in sexual conversations/jokes with peers

Most of the time, a child's sexual play will fall within the parameters of normal sexual development. The following tips will help you to look out for behaviours, which may be of concern and require further investigation:

- Sexual play should be like any other experimental play. Therefore, it should always take place with the child's own peer group. Sexual play outside of a child's peer group, eg. with older or younger children, or children that the child does not normally play with, could be of concern
- Sexual play between children should be fun. Therefore any forced play is concerning. This can be play that involves verbal or physical aggression, play that causes physical/emotional harm, or play associated with shame or guilt
- Sexual activity with animals is highly concerning. This behaviour must be addressed immediately and may require professional intervention

Remember: Do not over or under react to children's sexual behaviour. You can seek assistance from Child Wise if you need help to determine the appropriateness of sexual play.

HOW DO YOU TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT SEX, ABUSE AND FEELING SAFE?

- Talking to children about sex does not make them more interested in sex, or more likely to engage in sexual behaviours. It will, however, make it easier for them to approach you with their questions
- Children need to learn that the sexual parts of their bodies need to be protected and that they need to give permission for their body parts to be touched
- It is easier to talk to children about their bodies if you start at an early age, making sure to teach them the names of all body parts, including the correct names for their penis, vagina, breasts and bottom

Children need to learn how to respect their bodies and those of others.



HOW DO YOU RESPOND IF A CHILD CONFIDES IN YOU?

When a child discloses sexual abuse, it can be deliberate or accidental. If deliberate they most likely have planned what they will say and whom they will tell.

Dependent on the types of threats & techniques used to abuse the child, they may be feeling:

- **Scared** about getting their abuser, who is usually someone they know and love or trust, into trouble
- **Guilty** that they are to blame for the abuse
- **Ashamed** that they have been abused and they may believe that they are responsible
- **Angry** that they have been abused and not protected
- **Powerless** to change their situation
- **Confused** about the consequences of telling

SHOW YOUR CARE AND CONCERN FOR THE CHILD BY:

- **Staying calm** and in control of your feelings
- **Listening** to the child
- Telling the child you **believe** them
- Telling the child it is **not their fault** and that they are not responsible for their abuse
- Telling the child they did the **right thing** by telling you
- Letting the child know **what will happen next**

Do not:
Make promises you cannot keep, such as promising the child that you won't tell anyone. To make sure they are safe you will most certainly have to involve other people.

WHAT DO YOU DO NEXT?

You need to speak to a professional about your concerns, but first ask yourself the following questions:

- 1. Is the child safe now?**
- 2. Do they need immediate medical attention?**

Child sexual abuse involving the child's parents or caregivers needs to be reported to the Child Protection service in your state, so that an investigation is undertaken and a safety plan is constructed for the child.

If the sexual abuse involves a person outside of the family home, the parents will need to be informed immediately. Seek assistance from the Child Wise help desk for the appropriate services in your area.



The following short list of contacts can assist you:

Child Wise/Speak Up help desk
1800 99 10 99
www.childwise.net
speakup@childwise.net

Australian Federal Police
02 6256 7777

Kids Help Line
www.kidshelp.com.au
1800 551 800

WHO IS CHILD WISE?

Child Wise is an Australian charity, specialising in child protection and the prevention of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Child Wise implements programs in Australia, Asia and the Pacific, which include participatory training programmes, capacity building initiatives, research and advocacy, community education, law reform and policy development.

Child Wise provides advice, support and resources to victims of child sexual abuse, individuals, parents, organisations and governments.

Child Wise values feedback and comments in order to improve our programs. Please contact us if you would like to make any suggestions regarding this guide.

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