

Myths & Facts About Child Abuse

MYTH

Child abuse is most often committed by strangers.

FACT

Most abuse (over 85%) is committed by someone that the victim knows and trusts. Simply put, the people that are most likely to abuse children are the people that have access to them.

MYTH

Incest only occurs in lower income families. Incest only occurs in large cities (OR incest only occurs in rural areas).

FACT

It's natural to want to assume that child abuse happens elsewhere than in your own community, but the reality is that child abuse and/or sexual abuse occurs at all levels of income and education. It crosses all social-economic, racial and class barriers. It happens in both rural and urban areas.

MYTH

Child molesters look sleazy, unusual or creepy.

FACT

Child abusers look like anyone else, in fact they often present an appearance of respectability, hold jobs, function well in the community and have the respect of their peers. The emotional illness affecting an abuser is rarely obvious. Most child sexual abusers are known to the child. Most have committed their first offence before the age of 30.

MYTH

Children fabricate stories about sexual abuse.

FACT

Children almost never make up stories about sexual abuse. Children do not have the cognitive capabilities to describe incest or intimate sexual behaviour unless they've been exposed to it. Statistics indicate that the overwhelming majority of reports of child sexual abuse are true. A child claiming to have been sexually abused should be believed. In fact, children are more likely to **deny** the occurrence of sexual abuse in order to protect the offender or family unit. A child who did fabricate a story about sexual abuse is likely in need of professional help or support.

MYTH

The crisis of disclosure is more devastating than the abuse itself.

FACT

Disclosure can be a painful process because it brings child abuse out into the open, however it is not the cause of the pain. Disclosure is often a vital key in bringing abuse to an end and making healing possible. Children who don't disclose their abuse, or who are not believed, carry a tremendous emotional burden alone. **The best way to help a child through a disclosure is to believe, support, and connect them to those who can help.**

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MYTH

Girls are the only victims of child sexual abuse or incest. Men are always the perpetrators.

FACT

While men are the offenders in the majority of reported cases, the perpetrator of sexual abuse can be either a man or a woman. Sexual abuse can happen to a boy or a girl. A man may sexually abuse a boy or a girl. A woman may sexually abuse a boy or a girl.

MYTH

Only homosexuals abuse children of their own gender. Children who are abused by someone of their own gender will grow up to be homosexual.

FACT

Abuse is a crime of control and violence, not of sex. Victims are chosen because of easy access, not because of gender. Statistics show that abuse of male children by males is most often perpetrated by heterosexual men or by pedophiles, rarely by homosexuals. The gender of a child's abuser does not determine the child's sexual orientation. **There is no connection between sexual orientation and sexual abuse.**

MYTH

The child is at fault for encouraging or allowing the abuse. A sexual abuser can be the victim of a seductive or sexually promiscuous child.

FACT

The child is always the victim. Children are not legally or cognitively capable of giving informed consent. Sexual abusers look for ways to rationalize their behaviour by shifting the blame for their actions onto victims. To do so is to deny their responsibility as an adult, and to deny the child's vulnerability and dependence on the adult. A seductive or promiscuous child is often the result but never the cause of sexual abuse.

MYTH

If a child doesn't complain or try to stop the adult, then it isn't abuse. If the child enjoys it, or if a male child has an erection, it is not abuse.

FACT

Sexual assault is a criminal offence regardless of the circumstances surrounding the acts. Physical reactions to sexual stimulation indicate only that one's biological functions are healthy. They do not indicate that the child is enjoying the abuse. Sexual assault is a criminal offence regardless of whether or not some of the acts make the child feel good physically. In most cases, a child does not have the emotional tools to understand what is happening. In any case, the onus of responsibility is placed upon the adult. **It is the adult's responsibility to know that his/her actions are wrong.** There is no such thing as a 'wrong reaction' or 'inappropriate response' from a child when it comes to sexual abuse.

FACT

90% of sexual assaults are never reported to police