



Do Children Sexually Abuse Other Children?



Talking With
Your Children About
Child Sexual Abuse



Stop It Now! Georgia

The Campaign to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse

A program of



**Prevent Child Abuse
Georgia**

“I can see now that there was a lot of secrecy in our son’s life that we thought was normal, but now we know what he was hiding. If someone had told us that it was okay to talk to our son about these things, or showed us how to do it, maybe this wouldn’t have happened.”

—The parent of a sexually abusing adolescent

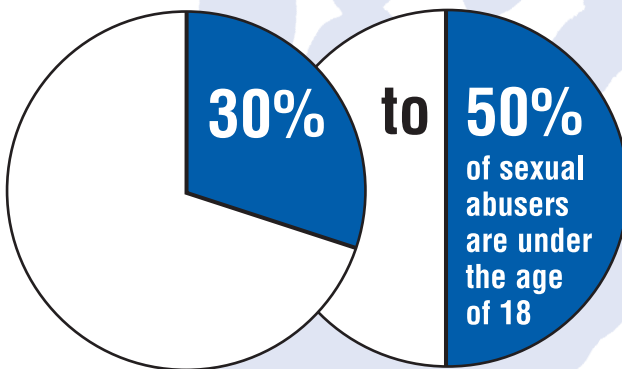
“The best way to keep your family safe is to educate yourself about child sexual abuse. The earlier we can see what is happening the earlier we can do something to stop the abuse.”

—The mother of a sexually abusing adolescent

Do children abuse other children?

The abuser is rarely the “dirty old man” we imagine lurking in the corner of our local playground or park. Sexual abusers are typically people we know. Sexual abusers are men and women, and in a growing number of cases, adolescents or children. According to studies, 30-50 percent of abusers are under the age of 18¹. Although not all victims of sexual abuse develop sexual behavior problems, a recent study showed that 40-80 percent of children with sexual behavior problems were also victims of sexual abuse.²

The sexual abuse of children by other children is very real and every adult who cares about children can do something to prevent the abuse. We believe that when children abuse, we all need to take responsibility to stop the cycle of abuse.



¹ Rogers and Tremain, 1984.

² Hunter and Becker, 1998.

What is healthy sexuality?

Infants and children need to be touched in a comforting way. They will not properly develop without this touch. Children are also born as healthy sexual beings. Sexuality is as much a part of who we are as our ability to eat and sleep.

If healthy sexuality seems difficult to talk about, remember that your children need your guidance for their development. Consider the work you did to teach your child about eating—you are happy if your child has a good appetite and proud when he or she can sit at the family table and join in your conversations. You taught them what was appropriate in society and in your family.

As we talk to our children about sexual values and rules, it is often helpful to understand a child's healthy sexual development. The chart on the following pages and further reading can help you understand some of the healthy developments of preschoolers, school-age children, and adolescents.

*In Georgia, call for
confidential information*
1-800-CHILDREN

What is age-appropriate sexual behavior?

Sexuality is a part of every human regardless of age. In the chart below are some of the healthy developments for preschoolers to adolescents. These are only some of the developments and behaviors to be aware of, and it is always important to remember that each person develops at his or her own pace. If you have any questions about your children, call a doctor, nurse, or any of the many agencies and programs that work with children and adolescents.

PRESCHOOL (0-5 yrs.)

Common:

Sexual language is used frequently, primarily related to differences in private body parts, bathroom talk, pregnancy, and birth; genital self-stimulation at home and in public is common; showing and looking at private body parts are common.

Uncommon:

Discussion of sexual acts is uncommon; contact experiences with other children are rare; adult-like sexual behaviors are rare.

SCHOOL AGE (6-12 yrs.)

Common:

Questions center around menstruation, pregnancy, and sexual behavior; experimenting with other children is very common and typically occurs during “games” with same-age peers includes kissing, fondling, exhibitionism, and role-playing; genital self-stimulation is common in the home or other private places.

Uncommon:

Masturbation is rare in public; use of sexual words and discussing sexual acts is more frequent than during preschool years although still uncommon (10-20 percent); adult-like sexual behaviors are rare.

ADOLESCENCE (13-16 yrs.)

Common:

Questions focus on concerns about decision-making, social relationships, and sexual customs; masturbation is common and restricted to private places; experimenting between adolescents of the same age is common and includes open-mouth kissing, fondling, and body rubbing; interest in other peers bodies is common; sexual intercourse occurs in approximately one-third of this age group.³

“Talking to my son was the best thing I could have done. I set a clear limit, I let him know it was wrong and I told him that I would not help him keep his secrets. I also let him know that I loved him, that he was not alone, and that together we would find him help.

— The mother of a sexually abusing youth



What is child sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse is defined as any sexual conduct with a child by any adult, adolescent, or older child. Be aware of age, size, social or power differences between two children. Sexual abuse behaviors include:

Touching offenses such as:

- Fondling “private parts”
- Touching a child’s genitals or asking a child to touch someone else’s genitals
- Playing sexual (“pants-down”) games
- Coercing a child to be sexual with animals
- Genital, oral or anal intercourse
- Forcing a child into prostitution

Nontouching offenses such as:

- Showing pornography to a child
- Exposing oneself
- Photographing a child in sexual poses
- Encouraging a child to watch or hear sexual acts
- Voyeurism (“Peeping Tom”)
- Verbal or emotional abuse of a sexual nature (e.g. making fun of a child’s body parts, calling a child “slut”, etc.)
- Obscene telephone calls

³ Adapted from: *Preventing Child Sexual Abuse: Sharing the Responsibility* by Sandy K. Wurtele and Cindy L. Miller-Perrin by permission of the University of Nebraska Press. Copyright © 1992 by the University of Nebraska Press.

Isn't this normal play? How can I label exploration as abusive?

Exploration is normal: there are certain sexual behaviors that are appropriate to each age group. However, any child who engages in sex play with a much younger child, or children who coerce or force someone to engage in sex, is beyond normal sexual exploration.

If the child is being used in any way to meet the sexual needs of another, then it is sexual abuse.

Look to see that “exploration” is appropriate to the child’s normal sexual development. The question to ask: Does it occur between children of the same age, size, social, and power relationship? (e.g. a baby sitter playing “show me yours and I’ll show you mine...” with a younger child is NOT exploration between children of the same age, size, social, and power position.)

“I didn’t have the words to tell my parents what was going on. I said I didn’t want to be left alone with kids. I wish they had listened to me...”

—A sexually abusing adolescent

What are the sexually abusing behaviors I should know about?

It is not always easy to tell if child sexual abuse is happening, especially if the possible abuser is another child. Remember, you are not on your own; you only need to decide that it would be helpful to have someone else look at what is going on.

Do you know a child or adolescent who:

- Takes younger children to secret places? (e.g. forts, hideouts, the woods, etc.)
- Plays “secret” games with younger children? (e.g. doctor, “pants-down” games, etc.)
- Plays games with a child that the adolescent would otherwise avoid or hate? (e.g. adolescent playing “house” with a child of five.)
- Experiences sudden wide changes in moods or habits? (e.g. refuses to leave his or her room or expresses anger in unexpected outbursts.)
- Insists on hugging or kissing a child when the child does not want to be hugged or kissed?
- Tells you he or she does not want to be left alone with a child?
- Becomes anxious when he or she is told about a particular person coming to visit?
- Focuses intense attention on or is overly interested in the physical maturing of children? (e.g. comments on or is overly interested in the developing bodies of others.)

- Uses frequent sexualized language in commonplace settings?
- Shows sexual material to younger children?
- Makes obscene telephone calls?
- Shares alcohol or other drugs with younger children or teens?
- Exposes his or her genitals to younger children?
- Forces sex on another adolescent or child?

If you answered yes to any of the last three questions, you need to get some professional help for the adolescent or child.

If you recognize some of the other behaviors, talk to the child or find someone who can comfortably talk to the child about what is going on.

If I am still unsure it is happening, can I see the impact of sexual

abuse?

It is always good to talk with our children; often we are not aware of what is going on. And if you want to prevent abuse, it is best to talk about child sexual abuse before any abuse has occurred. However, if you are afraid a child has been abused, this is what you can look for in a possible victim. Keep in mind that some of the behavioral signs listed will show up at other stressful times such as divorce, death of someone close, or problems in school.

Do you notice (behavioral signs):

- Nightmares, difficulty sleeping, fear of the dark, or other sleeping problems?
- Intense fear of “monsters”?
- “Spacing out” at odd times?
- Appetite loss, problems with eating or swallowing?
- Sudden and extreme mood swings; anger and crankiness?
- Fear or sudden dislike of certain people or places?
- Ongoing unexplained stomach illnesses?
- In an older child, exhibits behavior typical of younger children? (e.g. bed wetting)
- Sexual behavior with toys or other children?
- New words for private body parts?
- Answering “I can’t tell you” when asked about secrets?
- Drawings that are scary or use a lot of black and red?
- Talk of a new older friend?
- Suddenly having money?
- Self-mutilation (cutting or burning themselves) as adolescents?

Can you see (physical signs):

- Unexplained bruises, redness, or bleeding of the child’s genitals?
- Pain or injury to the genitals or mouth?
- Sexually transmitted diseases?

What if my child discloses sexual abuse?

Whether your child is abused or admits to sexually abusing another child, it is very important that you get help for your child. Experts and parents agree that it is helpful to both the child and to the parents to get outside help, even if your instincts are to “keep it within the family.” Call your doctor, your local child protection services, or your local law enforcement agency to get help for your child. You can also call the Stop It Now! Georgia helpline (1-800-CHILDREN) for confidential information about what your next steps should be.

If your child is a victim of child abuse, be sure to get your child to a safe place and seek specialized treatment for your child. Although there may not be any signs of physical harm, research studies show that a child needs specialized help and attention to heal from this abuse, otherwise he or she might be at risk for further abuse or for showing abusing behaviors.

*In Georgia, call our
Toll-free Helpline
1-800-CHILDREN
8:00 AM - 8:00 PM
Monday - Friday
Eastern Standard Time*

What do I teach my child?

Every child should have the chance to learn basic safety rules. Even if your child learns these skills at school, it is important to review them at home. Take some time to teach your child basic personal safety skills and offer help when it is needed. Repeated reviews will not only help the child learn, but it will reassure your child that you care and that you will listen. If you want to learn more, you can call the toll-free helpline at 1-800-CHILDREN.

Children need to:

- Learn about appropriate touch — the difference between OK touch and not OK touch.
- Understand that they are in control of their own bodies. It is NOT OK for them to try to control someone else’s body or for anyone to touch them in ways that are not OK.
- Know the proper names for all body parts from the earliest years. This gives your child the proper language for understanding their bodies, asking questions that need to be asked, or telling about sexual abuse.
- Know that touching secrets are never OK.
- Discuss family boundaries. All members of the family must respect rights to privacy in dressing, bathing, and sleeping.
- Understand how to say “NO” to touching and how to respond if someone tells them “no”.

- Have a plan if he or she is threatened and have a safety team of good listeners to tell about the experience.
- Model how to say “NO” and that “NO” will be respected. (e.g. if a child does not want to give Uncle Bob a kiss, that child’s parent should encourage them to shake hands or simply say good-bye or goodnight.)
- Talk about what is appropriate touch rather than good touch or bad touch.
- Let your child know that an abuser could be someone they know, someone older or close to their age, someone who makes them feel special or grown-up.
- Say clearly that you love them, whatever they have done.

How do I talk about this?

Everyone, including your child, wants to be asked questions about what is going on in his or her life. When child sexual abuse has occurred, whether your child has abused or been abused, he or she needs your reassurance that you care and that a responsible adult will help them.

Some simple rules when talking to your child:

- Make sure you are comfortable before you bring up the topic; it’s OK to practice with a trusted adult who is not in the situation.
- Set aside time when you can focus on your child without interruption.
- Talk to your child at eye level so that it is easier for them to ask you questions.
- Ask one question at a time and listen carefully to the answers.
- Use your child’s own words whenever possible and ask your child to explain words that are unclear.

- Most important, acknowledge that the situation must have been difficult for them and support them if they have the courage to bring up abuse of any kind.
- Keep trying: you may need to bring this up more than once.

Try NOT to:

- Suggest answers to your child.
- Criticize your child or his or her choice of words.
- Show shock or horror at what your child may have to say.

“My older son sexually abused my younger son. I reported the abuse so we could all get help. We are healthier and closer than we’ve ever been. I encourage parents to do whatever is necessary to identify and stop the cycle of abuse now.”

—The mother of a sexually abusing youth

As a friend or family member, what can I do?

As adults, it is our responsibility to stop the abuse and help the child who is abused and the child who abuses. Always look at what may be going on in your home or in the house of family or friends. Keeping abuse a secret is what abusers and survivors say allows it to continue from generation to generation. You can play an important role in preventing or stopping the sexual abuse of a child you know.

If you have a feeling that sexual abuse may be occurring, what can you do?

Step One:

**STAY CALM AND
ASK GENTLE QUESTIONS**

In a gentle voice find out what happened, where it happened, when it happened and by whom. Remember to stay calm and ask simple and direct questions — know that confusion, guilt, and shame of the abuse can create fear for your child.

*For a free copy of
PARENTALK,
a newsletter for parents
of children with sexual
behavior problems,
in Georgia call
I-800-CHILDREN.*

Step Two:

LISTEN TO YOUR CHILD

Listen to what your child is saying to you and listen to what is not said as well. Simple statements such as “I don’t like that babysitter to come over” or “don’t leave me alone with those little kids” should be discussed further. If your child does not give you names, places or dates, do not suggest any.

Step Three:

REASSURE YOUR CHILD

Tell your child you believe him or her and you will do whatever you can to keep them safe. However, do not make promises that you cannot keep. Your child may not tell you anything the first time — children who abuse may deny their actions in the beginning. When they do talk to you, tell them they were brave to let you know what was going on and that you will be getting them help.



Step Four:

SEEK HELP

If your child was abused or may be abusing, there is help and support available to you. For immediate action, you can report the case to your local child protective services or your local law enforcement agency. If you are unsure about where to go, you can call the Stop It Now! Georgia helpline (I-800-CHILDREN) to talk about your situation confidentially.

If you have general questions about child sexual abuse:

American Humane Association, Children's Division (AHA)
63 Inverness Drive East, Englewood, CO 80112-5117
Office: (303) 792-9900 Fax: (303) 792-5333
Toll free: 1-800-227-4645 Website: www.amerhumane.org
A resource for professionals and concerned citizens providing the facts, resources, and referrals they need to help children and families in crisis and to prevent child abuse in their own neighborhoods.

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN)
300 C Street S.W., Washington, DC 20447
Office: (703) 385-7565 Fax: (703) 385-3206
Toll free: 1-800-FYI-3366 (1-800-394-3366)
Email: nccanch@calib.com Website: nccanch.acf.hhs.gov
A resource and clearinghouse that collects, stores, organizes and disseminates information on all aspects of child maltreatment.

Prevent Child Abuse America (PCAA)
200 South Michigan Ave., 17th Floor, Chicago, IL 60604-2404
Office: (312) 663-3520 Fax: (312) 939-8962
Website: www.preventchildabuse.org
A volunteer-based organization committed to preventing child abuse in all its forms through research, public education, programs, and advocacy. Write for a catalogue of publications.

Stop It Now!
PO Box 495, Haydenville, MA 01039
Office: (413) 268-3096 Fax: (413) 268-3098
Helpline: 1-888-PREVENT (1-888-773-8368)
Email: info@stopitnow.org
Website: www.stopitnow.org
A national nonprofit with a ground-breaking public health approach to prevent the perpetration of child sexual abuse. Programs protect children by emphasizing adult and community responsibility. Stop It Now!'s confidential helpline is available for individuals and families who are concerned about inappropriate sexualized thoughts or behavior in themselves or in another adult, teenager, or child.

If you have questions about a child who may have been sexually abused.

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)
Charles B. Wang International Children Building,
699 Prince Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-3175
Office: (703) 274-3900 Fax: (703) 274-2220
Website: www.ncmec.org
A clearinghouse for information on missing children and the prevention of child victimization. NCMEC's website brings images and information about missing children and a wealth of child protection information to a global audience. The CyberTipline, 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678) is a toll free line to report any information pertaining to the sexual exploitation of children on the web or any industry that makes use of child pornography. (Report online at www.cybertipline.com.)

National Center for Victims of Crime (NCVC)
2000 M Street N.W., Suite 480, Washington, DC 20036
Office: (202) 467-8700 Fax: (202) 467-8701
Toll free: 1-800-FYI-CALL (1-800-394-2255)
TDD: 1-800-211-7996
Email: webmaster@ncvc.org or gethelp@ncvc.org
Website: www.ncvc.org
An information and referral center for victims. Through its database of over 30,000 organizations, NCVC refers callers to critical services including crisis intervention, research information, assistance with the criminal justice process, counseling, support groups, and referrals to local attorneys in victim-related cases.

The National Children's Advocacy Center (NCAC)
200 Westside Square, Suite 700, Huntsville, AL 35801
Office: (256) 533-0531, Fax: (256) 534-6883,
Website: www.nationalcac.org
A nonprofit providing prevention, intervention, and treatment services to physically and sexually abused children and their families through a child-focused team approach. Call for a local listing or affiliate.

If you have questions about sex offenders or sexually abusive behaviors:

The Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA)
4900 S.W. Griffith Drive, Suite 274, Beaverton, OR 97005
Office: (503) 643-1023 Fax: (503) 643-5084
Email: atsa@atsa.com Website: www.atsa.com
A national organization developing and disseminating professional standards and practices in the field of sex offender research, evaluation, and treatment. Call for a referral to a local treatment provider.

Center for Sex Offender Management (CSOM)
Center for Effective Public Policy, 8403 Colesville Road,
Suite 720, Silver Spring, MD 20910
Office: (301) 589-9363 Fax: (301) 589-3505
Website: www.csom.org
Provides ready access to most of the current knowledge and effective practices in the field of sex offender supervision.

The Safer Society Foundation, Inc. (SSFI)
PO Box 340, Brandon, VT 05733-0340
Office: (802) 247-3132 Fax: (802) 247-4233
Website: www.saferociety.org
Provides services and publications for treatment providers, youth with sexual behavior problems, adult offenders, their families, survivors and mandated reporters. Call for a free catalogue. Call for a referral to a local treatment provider (M-F, 9-4:30PM EST).

Sex Abuse Treatment Alliance (SATA)
PO Box 1191, Okemos, MI 48805-1191
Office: (517) 482-2085 or (517) 372-8207
Email: help@satasort.org, Website: www.satasort.org
Provides a network of support for abusers who are currently in treatment, a newsletter on current issues for sexual abusers, and answers general questions about sex offender treatment.

For more information call toll-free in Georgia

1-800-CHILDREN

8:00 AM - 8:00 PM, Monday - Friday



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www.stopitnowga.org

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