

Sexual Abuse



A lot of people throw around the term “*abuse*”. What exactly does it mean? *Abuse* is mistreatment, using something or someone in an inappropriate manner. Similarly, sexual abuse is “any inappropriate and forceful physical, visual or verbal interaction for sexual stimulation or satisfaction”. This abuse is intentional, not accidental, and is often committed by someone the victim knows or has regular contact with, such as a family member, friend or teacher.

Common Forms of Sexual Abuse

The most common, easily identifiable forms of sexual abuse are:

- **Rape:** is forced sexual intercourse, including vaginal, anal, or oral penetration. Penetration may be by a body part or an object.
- **Molestation** or **Sexual Assault** is unwanted sexual contact that stops short of sexual penetration. This includes sexual touching and fondling.
- **Incest** is sexual intercourse between closely related persons. Incest often progresses from touching to sexual fondling to more extensive sexual activity.

Other kinds of sexual abuse can also include:

- Oral Sex
- Exhibitionism or exposing private parts to someone against their will
- Masturbation
- Being forced into prostitution
- Showing someone pornography against their will
- Using someone against their will to create pornography
- Obscene phone calls
- Any sexual conduct harmful to mental, emotional, or physical welfare
- Unwanted kissing or touching
- Threats of unwanted sexual activity
- Repeated sexual insults

Every 2 minutes an American is sexually assaulted.



Warning Signs of Sexual Abuse

The signs of sexual abuse can manifest in a variety of ways, from intense emotional issues to difficult physical problems. The warning signs of sexual abuse should be taken seriously and not overlooked. Remember, even if a victim of sexual abuse ***didn't resist the attack, it is still considered abuse.***

Physical Signs

- Memory loss
- Self-mutilation or habit disorders
- Bed wetting or change in toilet habits
- Bloody, torn or stained underclothes
- Bleeding, bruises or swelling in genital area
- Pregnancy or a Sexually Transmitted Disease, especially in ages 14 and younger

Emotional Signs of Abuse

- Anxiety or panic attacks
- Confused sexual identity
- Depression
- Emotional withdrawal, introversion
- False guilt
- Fear of going to bed, nightmares

Behavioral and Social Signs

- Alcohol and drug use
- Shrinks away or is threatened by physical contact
- Inappropriate sexual behavior or sexually abusing another person or child
- Suicide attempts or self-harming, especially in teens and young adults
- Overly protective of siblings or others, assuming a caretaker role

80% of sexual abuse victims are under the age of 30.

Did you know? Sexual assault survivors are...

- 3 times more likely to suffer from depression
- 6 times more likely to have post-traumatic stress disorder
- 13 times more likely to abuse alcohol
- 26 times more likely to abuse drugs
- 4 times more likely to contemplate suicide



Steps To Take After Being Sexually Abused

If you have been sexually abused, knowing what to do after a sexual assault can be confusing and overwhelming. Here's what you should do immediately after a sexual assault:

- Find a safe location, away from the abuser. Your safety is crucial.
- Report the attack immediately. (Call 911 in most locations in the U.S.)

- Seek medical care as soon as possible, even if you don't have any visible physical injuries.
- Preserve all evidence of the attack. This valuable evidence can be used against the abuser and should not be compromised.
 - Don't bathe, wash your hands, eat, brush your teeth, etc.
 - If you are still in the location of the abuse, don't clean the area.
 - Write down any details you can remember about the abuser and the attack

Even if the incident of sexual abuse happened in the past, you can still report it to the proper authorities and seek professional help. No matter how long ago or how recent an incident of sexual abuse has been, it is important to talk with a counselor or therapist and take steps towards recovery.

About $\frac{2}{3}$ of assaults are committed by someone the victim knows.



Getting Help for Sexual Abuse

An important part of your recovery from sexual abuse is getting help. Recovery looks different for each person, from sessions with professional counselors to finding a creative outlet to express your feelings.

I was sexually abused and I'm having a difficult time recovering emotionally.

Recovering from sexual abuse is often a difficult journey. It is extremely important to take care of yourself physically and emotionally, from getting enough sleep to talking about your experience in an effort to heal. Here are some tips to help on your journey to recovery:

- Talk with a professional counselor or therapist about your experience. If you need a referral to counseling services, contact
- If you have medical issues, seek professional help immediately.
- Take care of yourself physically by eating healthy, exercising and getting enough sleep. Your physical well-being is tied to your mental and emotional health!
- Many recovering from sexual abuse find it helpful to keep a journal to write or have a creative outlet, such as painting or drawing.
- Spend time regularly with your support system to stay encouraged. Family and friends are great sources of strength and encouragement in difficult times!



I'm a guy and I've been sexually abused.

Women and girls aren't the only victims of sexual abuse; many men and boys are also victims. **In the U.S., over 10% of sexual assault victims are male.** There are many reasons that keep male survivors from reporting their assault or getting help, like being unable to physically fight off the attacker or feelings of guilt. Understand that no matter what struggles you're dealing with, it is important to get help as part of your recovery, regardless of gender.

A friend has been sexually abused. What can I do to help?

- Listen without being judgmental. Let your friend know that you are there for him/her.
- Encourage him/her to report the sexual violence to law enforcement.
- If your friend is willing to seek medical attention or report the assault, offer to go with him/her wherever they need to go (hospital, police station, etc.)
- Check up on your friend and stay alert for the signs of self-harm or suicide. Sexual abuse is a very difficult situation to go through and can be hard to cope with.
- Let your friend know that professional help is available through the National Sexual Assault Hotline

Need someone to talk to?

A Spiritual Perspective

The burden of being sexually abused is a heavy load to carry. That's why it's important to get help and encouragement from friends, family, counselors and others who can help. Here at TheHopeLine, we truly care about you and want to help you recover mentally, physically and spiritually.

No matter what problems or issues you're dealing with, know that God loves you and has a plan for your life beyond what you can even imagine. God tells us that, ["I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance"](#) [John 10:10, HCSB]

You are loved and accepted, regardless of what has happened in your past or your current struggles. *God wants to have a real, personal relationship with you and to help you recover from sexual abuse.*

Sources:

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