

## What is Child Sexual Abuse?



- Child sexual abuse is an especially complicated form of abuse because of the layers of damage, guilt and shame the child feels. It's important to recognize that sexual abuse doesn't always involve bodily contact. Making sexual comments to a child or exposing a child to sexual situations or materials is sexually abusive, whether or not touching is involved.
- Sexual Grooming is the process by which an offender often gradually draws the child into a sexual relationship and maintains that relationship in secrecy. The sex offender works to separate the child from family and peers, typically by giving special attention to the child and making the child feel that they have a special relationship. The sex offender sizes up the child's vulnerability—emotional neediness, isolation and lower self-confidence. Children with less parental oversight are more desirable sexual prey.
- While news stories of sexual predators are scary, what is even more frightening is that sexual abuse usually occurs at the hands of someone the child knows and should be able to trust—most often close relatives, friends of parents, neighbors and trusted activity leaders. And contrary to what many believe, it's not just girls who are at risk. Boys and girls both suffer from sexual abuse. In fact, sexual abuse of boys may be underreported due to shame and stigma.
- Aside from the physical damage that sexual abuse can cause, the emotional component is powerful and far-reaching. Sexually abused children are tormented by shame and guilt and a belief that they are “damaged goods” for life. They may feel that they are responsible for the abuse or somehow brought it upon themselves. This can lead to self-loathing and sexual problems as they grow older—often either excessive promiscuity or an

inability to have intimate relations and even frightening flashbacks when that remind them of their abuse.

- The shame of sexual abuse makes it very difficult for children to come forward. They may worry that others won't believe them, will be angry with them, will believe it was the child's fault or that it will split their family apart. Because of these difficulties, false accusations of sexual abuse are not common, so if a child confides in you, take him or her seriously. Don't turn a blind eye!
- If you are a concerned parent/caretaker/teacher/adult and suspect that child sexual abuse is occurring but not sure you can call the Family Helpline at 716-892-2172 anytime 24/7 to speak to a qualified staff who will listen to your concerns and help you decide the next steps to take. The Helpline is brought to you by the Family Help Center a family support program staffed by caring professionals and volunteers. The Family Help Center located at 60 Dingens Street, Buffalo NY provides services to families with children of all ages and provides parents with the support that isn't always available from family, friends or neighbors. Call 716-892-2172 or visit us at [familyhelpcenter.net](http://familyhelpcenter.net).
- You can also contact the New York State Child Advocacy Resource and Consultation Center [www.nyscarcc.org](http://www.nyscarcc.org) or call Toll-Free: 866 313 3013 | Tel: 718 330 5455 | Fax: 718 330 5462. Email: [nyscarcc@safehorizon.org](mailto:nyscarcc@safehorizon.org)
- To make a Child Abuse report **Call the Statewide Toll Free Telephone Number: 1-800-342-3720**. If you believe that a child is in **immediate danger**, call **911** or your local police department.

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