



silentlambs

www.silentlambs.org

877-WTABUSE

The Silent Problem

Children become silent lambs when they do not tell anyone about sexual abuse because they:

- are too young to put what has happened into words
- were threatened or bribed by the abuser to keep the abuse a secret
- feel confused by the attention and feelings accompanying the abuse
- are afraid no one will believe them
- blame themselves or believe the abuse is punishment for being "bad"
- feel too ashamed or embarrassed to tell
- worry about getting into trouble or getting a loved one into trouble

Silence enables sexual abuse to continue. Silence protects sexual offenders and hurts children who are being abused. Sexual abuse is an extremely difficult and damaging experience. Today, there are many resources to help victims and their families. Children no longer need to suffer as silentlambs.

Signs of Sexual Abuse

Because most children cannot or do not tell about being sexually abused, it is up to concerned adults to recognize signs of abuse. Physical evidence of abuse is rare. Therefore, we must look for behavior signs. Unfortunately, there is no one behavior alone that definitely determines a child has been sexually abused. The following are general behavior changes that may occur in children who have been sexually abused:

- Physical complaints
- Fear or dislike of certain people or places
- Sleep disturbances
- Headaches
- School problems
- Withdrawal from family, friends, or usual activities
- Excessive bathing or poor hygiene
- Return to younger, more babyish behavior
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Discipline problems
- Running away
- Eating disorders
- Passive or overly pleasing behavior
- Delinquent acts
- Low self-esteem
- Self-destructive behavior
- Hostility or aggression
- Drug or alcohol problems

- Suicide attempts

Specific Symptoms

Children who have been sexually abused frequently have specific symptoms:

- Copying adult sexual behavior
- Persistent sexual play with other children, themselves, toys or pets
- Displaying sexual knowledge, through language or behavior, that is beyond what is normal for their age
- Unexplained pain, swelling, bleeding or irritation of the mouth, genital or anal area; urinary infections; sexually transmitted diseases
- Hints, indirect comments or statements about the abuse

If Your Child Becomes a Victim of Crime

Believe him or her. Many children who tell adults about crimes are afraid they will not be believed. Many aren't. Be sure to take your child seriously, even if a violent crime was not committed.

Reassure the child that what happened is not his or her fault. A child who was hurt or accosted while breaking a rule (such as being somewhere you said they were not allowed to go) may be especially afraid that you will be upset with him or her.

Immediately get him or her any needed medical attention. In the case of a sexual assault, an injury might not be obvious, and a medical exam is needed to detect internal injuries and screen for possible exposure to disease or infection.

Try to temper your own reaction. Your child is likely to become very upset if she or he sees that you are upset. They may also think that they did something wrong and take responsibility for your pain. They may decide it is better not to keep talking to you if you exhibit extreme emotions.

Trying to pretend something didn't happen or telling your child to "just forget about it" will not help. Both you and your child will experience stress related to the crime, whether or not you acknowledge it. The best way to cope with the problem is to talk, listen and get support.

Do not try to take the law into your hands. Your child needs you, and needs to try to get back some normalcy in his or her life. If you try to harm someone who has hurt your child, you could be arrested and even go to jail. Your child must then cope with this added trauma.

Report the crime -- even a suspected crime -- to the police.

Get support. Contact a local crime victim agency or child advocacy center. They can offer you and your child support and important information about your rights. Don't try to handle this alone. There are many organizations that can help you.

Your local phone book, law enforcement agency, or hospital can help you find local services. Or you can call the National Center for Victims of Crime's FYI program, a toll-free crime victim referral service at 1-800-FYI-CALL OR RAINN (Rape, Abuse, Incest, National Network) 1-800-656-HOPE.

Teach Your Child

1. **Talk to your child on a daily basis and listen to what they are saying.**
2. **Teach your child about good and bad touches.**
3. **Teach your child names for the different parts of their body.**
4. **Teach them that no one is to touch their private areas or do anything that makes them feel uncomfortable.**
5. **Without scaring your child, tell them that some adults might try to touch them in an inappropriate manner, even adults they might know.**
6. **Tell them that they should not keep secrets from their parents, even if someone has threatened to harm them or their parents.**

Beware of over-zealous identification. If several signs are present do not question your child or ask leading questions .Contact a professional (ie: therapists or **MASA @ 704-895-0489**).

