



Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse: A Fact Sheet

What are the facts about child sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse is a pervasive public safety and public health issue. The exact prevalence of child sexual abuse is difficult to determine due to low reporting rates. When considering both abuse that involves contact (such as fondling and rape) and no contact (such as being made to view pornographic images), it is estimated that about 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys are sexually abused before their 18th birthday. It is also estimated that only 38% of child victims disclose that they've been sexually abused.

Only 10% of child sexual abuse is committed by a stranger; therefore, focusing prevention efforts on "stranger danger" and sex offender registries is ineffective at preventing or stopping the majority of child sexual abuse.

What is the impact of child sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse has significant immediate and long-term effects, including:

- **Individual and Public Health:** Children who are sexually abused are more likely than children who are not to experience anxiety, depression, behavioral problems, delinquency, academic problems, drug and alcohol abuse, suicide attempts, and hyper-sexualized behavior. Adults who were sexually abused as children are more likely than those who were not to experience mental health issues, substance abuse, chronic health conditions, eating disorders, reduced productivity, and diminished quality of life.
- **Economic:** The estimated lifetime burden of child sexual abuse is \$210,000 per victim, which is comparable to the per-patient cost of stroke or Type 2 Diabetes. This includes costs related to medical and mental health care, criminal justice response, and lost productivity that occurs as a result of experiencing sexual abuse.
- **Criminal Justice and Public Safety:** Most perpetrators of child sexual assault who are arrested are convicted, however only 29% of child sexual abuse cases result in an arrest. The vast majority of those who sexually abuse children remain free to continue to victimize others.

How can we prevent child sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse is preventable, but only by adults and only if we commit ourselves to understanding it, stopping the abuse when we see or suspect that it's happening, and holding adults accountable for the safety of all children. In general, efforts to prevent and stop child sexual abuse should include:

Children cannot prevent child sexual abuse, and should never be held responsible for preventing or stopping it. This is the responsibility of all adults.

- Evidence-based prevention curriculum provided by trained professionals, including rape crisis center staff
- Education for ALL adults about the dynamics of child sexual abuse, how to identify abusive behavior, how to intervene to stop abuse, and how to support a child who has been abused
- Age-appropriate guidance to help children be able to identify abusive behavior and tell someone
- Funding for and access to supportive services for children and for adults who were abused as children
- Policies that support survivors of child sexual abuse and hold offenders accountable

For additional information and resources, visit www.oaev.org/child-sexual-abuse