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NEW JERSEY CARES INSTITUTE

The Art & Science of Healing Children

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE INFORMATION SHEET (CHILD)

WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

Child sexual abuse is when an adult or older child touches, or rubs a child's private parts (i.e. penis, testicles, vagina, bottom, breasts), or when an adult or older child asks the child to touch or rub their private parts. This kind of touching is **not okay**. The person who does this is called a sex offender. The offender might make you do these things and be rough with you, or they might pretend it's a game, or even give you a reward to do it. The offender could be someone you know, a relative, a stranger, or another child. Still it's not OK even if they try to make it fun and you think it is fun.

WHO IS SEXUALLY ABUSED?

Sexual abuse happens to a lot of children. It can happen to boys and girls of all ages, religions, and races. Some children who have been sexually abused are rich, some are poor, and they are from all different neighborhoods. By the age of 18, one of every four girls, and one of seven boys may experience sexual abuse.

WHO SEXUALLY ABUSES CHILDREN?

There are some people who sexually abuse children, but there are many more people who only touch children with okay touches. Most sex offenders are men, though some are women. You cannot tell by the way they look, dress, or act that they are offenders. Most of the time, the offender is not a stranger, but someone who the child knows very well. The offender could be a family member (like a cousin, uncle, parent or grandparent) or someone that is well known to the child (like a coach, babysitter or neighbor).

WHY DON'T CHILDREN TELL?

Sometimes the offender tells the child to keep the not okay touching a secret. The offender may use tricks to keep the child from telling. The person may say: it's the child's fault, or that the child or their family will get hurt if they tell. These are all tricks. Sometimes children just keep it a secret because they feel ashamed, embarrassed or scared. For those reasons, many children don't tell about sexual abuse or they take a little while to gain the courage to tell. It helps for children to keep telling adults, until they find an adult that will help them to stop the sexual abuse.

WHY DOES SEXUAL ABUSE HAPPEN?

There are lots of different reasons just like there are lots of different offenders. But it is very hard to know the reason why it happens to any child. We do know this much; no child is responsible for what an adult does.

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HOW CAN YOU TELL THAT A CHILD HAS BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED?

You cannot tell by looking at a child that he or she has been sexually abused. Sometimes you can tell by the way they are acting that something is bothering them, but you do not know what it is. That is why it is so important for children to tell somebody when they experience a not okay or confusing touch.

HOW DO CHILDREN FEEL WHEN THEY HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED?

For some children, the sexual touching may feel good and they may still like the person who did it. But some children have other feelings. Some children are very angry at the person who did the abuse, or are scared of him or her. Other children may still like the person. Any of these feelings are OK. Other children might feel guilty about what happened. Sometimes when people have these feelings, the feelings affect the way they behave. Like a child who is afraid may not want to sleep alone or be alone. Sometimes children get into more arguments and sometimes they may just feel sad and want to be alone. Some children feel upset for a long time after the abuse has ended, but they often feel better with the help of counseling. If children are having a hard time with these feelings, talking with a counselor or a parent can help them feel better.

HOW CAN CHILDREN RESPOND TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

You need to know that your body belongs to you. If you feel uncomfortable in the way you are being touched, you can tell the person "NO!" Saying "NO!" can sometimes be hard to do especially if you're scared, shy or embarrassed. But the next thing you can do is "GO" get away from that person. And the next and most important thing to do is "TELL". Although this can also be hard to do, it is important to tell another adult (like a parent, other family member or a teacher) about what happened. It is important to keep telling until someone listens and helps. Remember the steps – NO – GO – TELL!

It is great to talk to a counselor or a parent. It helps to talk about sexual abuse, even though it can be hard. Talking, writing and even singing and drawing can help children who have been sexually abused feel better after a while.

It is important to tell an adult about child sexual abuse. There is a special telephone number that adults and children can call for help if they know that a child is being abused. The phone number can be called any time of the day or night.

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