



Healing children one story at a time.

Myths about Child Sexual Abuse

*Adopted from **One with Courage**, a national initiative centered around the courage it takes to talk about child sexual abuse and the role children's advocacy centers play in providing comprehensive, coordinated and compassionate services to child victims of abuse.*

Myth 1: He looks normal and acts normal, so he can't be a child molester. (Only boogeymen are child molesters.)

A common and dangerous public assumption is that a person who looks normal and acts normal simply cannot be a child molester. Sex offenders are knowledgeable about the importance of their public image, and can hide their private behaviors from their friends, neighbors, colleagues, and even their own family members.

Myth 2: Only Men Sexually Abuse Children.

While male perpetrators tend to be the majority of reported cases of abuse, women are also capable of child sexual assault. Reports of female perpetrators are on the rise, and female offenders have been reported in cases of abuse involving both male and female children.

Myth 3: Child molesters target any and all children nearby.

Just because a child is in the proximity of a sex offender, this does not mean that the child will automatically become a target or a victim. Sex offenders carefully select and groom their targeted victims, employing an outline or plan to get a child alone. Not every child fits the mold of what a pedophile is looking for. There is a process of obtaining a child's friendship or trust, and in some cases, the parent's friendship or trust, as well. Once trust has been obtained, the child is more vulnerable, both emotionally and physically.

Myth 4: Abused children always tell! (My kids know they're supposed to tell!)

Children often fail to disclose their abuse. This is frequently used as purported evidence that a victim's story isn't plausible. Children who have been victims of sexual assault often have difficulty disclosing their victimization. On average, one in four girls and one in six boys will be a victim of sexual abuse before his or her 18th birthday, but it is estimated that only one in ten will make an outcry of abuse.

Myth 5: The Victim is Always a Girl.

Just as women can be sex offenders, boys may be victims of abuse. Unfortunately, child sexual abuse with male victims is underreported due to social and cultural attitudes: boys are taught to fight back and not let others see vulnerability. Boys are aware at an early age of the social stigma attached to sexual assault by another male, and fear appearing weak to others. All these attitudes make male child victims less likely to tell of their abuse.



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Myth 6: Child victims of sexual abuse will have physical signs of the abuse.

Frequently, an absence of physical evidence is often used as support that a perpetrator must be innocent of an alleged sexual assault. The truth is that abnormal genital findings are rare, even in cases where abuse has been factually proven by other forms of evidence. Many acts leave no physical trace. Injuries resulting from sexual abuse tend to heal very quickly, and many times, exams of child victims do not take place on the same day as the alleged act of abuse.

Myth 7: Stranger Danger

85% of all reported cases of child molestation involve a child and a known perpetrator. The people most likely to abuse a child are the ones with the most opportunity, most access, and most trust. Abusers can be parents, step-parents, uncles, aunts, step-siblings, babysitters, tutors, and family friends.

Myth 8: Sexual victimization as a child will inevitably result in the child growing up to become a sex offender.

Early childhood sexual victimization does not automatically lead to sexually aggressive behaviors. This is a particularly important fact to understand because a misunderstanding can create a terrible stigma for a child who has been sexually abused. While past sexual victimization can *increase the likelihood* of sexually aggressive behavior, most children who were sexually victimized never perpetrate against others. Multiple factors contribute to the development of sexually offensive behaviors. These include not only a history of sexual victimization, but also exposure to domestic violence or other violent behaviors. Research has indicated that if a child discloses an incident of abuse early and is believed and supported by other close people in their lives, they have a much higher likelihood to not become perpetrators as adults.

Myth 9: Child Sexual Abuse is a cultural or socioeconomic problem.

It is frequently believed that abuse is a problem plaguing only certain families or people with a certain level of family income and education. Sometimes people believe that incest only happens in lower class and/or rural families. Sexual abuse crosses all socio-economic, neighborhood, race and class barriers. It happens in large and small families; in cities and in rural areas; in wealthy and lower income neighborhoods; and in homes, schools, churches, and businesses.