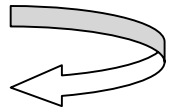


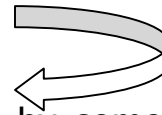
Myths and Facts about Child Sexual Abuse...

Myth: *Incest and sexual abuse rarely occur and only happen to girls.*



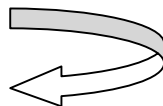
Fact: Child sexual abuse is not rare, and experts believe that sexual abuse is underreported. Retrospective research indicates that as many as 1 out of 4 girls and 1 out of 6 boys will experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 18. However, because child sexual abuse is by its very nature secretive, many of these cases are never reported.

Myth: *Persons who sexually abuse children are obviously "sick and depraved," and are usually strangers to the child.*



Fact: Children are most often sexually abused by someone they know, love and trust. Approximately three quarters of reported cases of child sexual abuse are committed by family members or other men or women who are considered part of the victim's "circle of trust." The person who abused the child is often the father, stepfather, mother's boyfriend or member of the extended family, and sometimes the person is the mother, stepmother or grandmother. A small percentage of people who sexually molest have gross psychiatric illnesses. A larger percentage has chemical dependence such as alcoholism.

MYTH: *Most of the time, the child's report of sexual abuse is fantasy rather than actual fact.*

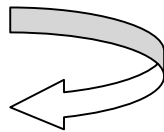


FACT: A child or adolescent's report of sexual abuse is the most important indicator that the abuse occurred. Children very rarely lie about something as important as sexual abuse. Further, children are unable to fantasize about things that they have not learned. When children retract their story, it is usually a result of role reversal in the family; in other words, these

children assume responsibility for taking care of the parents. When they see that their disclosure is hurting the family or the person who abuses, they may retract. Pressure from family members may encourage these children to retract their statements.

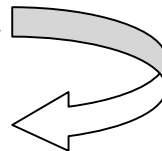
Also how the community intervenes affects whether these children will retract their stories. When the child is further traumatized by the system's efforts to protect the child (e.g., the child is removed from the home without explanation or warning, subjected to a series of embarrassing interviews by legal, medical and child welfare professionals and then placed with strangers in foster care), the subsequent pain, embarrassment and confusion may result in a child's retracting his or her disclosure.

MYTH: *It is better for a child if he or she does not talk about the sexual abuse, because child welfare professionals and other adults contribute further to the child's victimization.*



FACT: Accepting this myth may lead to the further victimization of the child. As with any serious pain or trauma, healing can occur when the problem can be discussed and *worked through with a supportive, knowledgeable and compassionate person*. It is this healing process which helps the person avoid possible re-abuse and the possible long-term effects of the abuse. Avoiding this healing process limits the child's opportunities to overcome the short and long-term effects of the trauma of child sexual abuse, and enables the person to be re-abused or to sexually abuse another person.

Myth: *Preschoolers do not need to know about child sexual abuse and would be frightened if educated about it.*

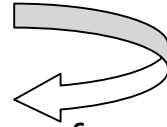


Fact: Numerous educational programs are available to teach young children about body safety skills and the difference between "okay" and "not okay" touches. These programs can help children develop basic safety skills in a way that is helpful rather than frightening. For more information

on educating young children, see **“Let’s talk about taking care of you: An educational book about body safety for young children”**, available at:

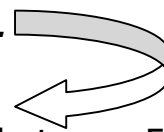
www.hope4families.com/Lets_Talk_Book_Information.html.

Myth: *Children who are sexually abused will never recover.*



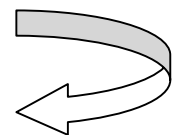
Fact: Many children are quite resilient, and with a combination of effective counseling and support from their parents or caregivers, children can and do recover and thrive after such experiences.

Myth: *Child sexual abuse is always perpetrated by adults.*



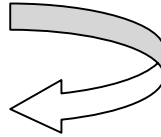
Fact: Experts in the field of child sexual abuse estimate that over 50% of children who have been sexually abused are sexually abused by an older adolescent. In 23% of actual **reported cases** of child sexual abuse, the person who sexually abused the child was an individual under the age of 18. While some degree of sexual curiosity and exploration is to be expected between children of about the same age, when one child coerces another to engage in adult-like sexual activities, the behavior is unhealthy and abusive. Both the abuser and the victim can benefit from counseling.

MYTH: *The sexualized behavior of the child sets up the abuse.*



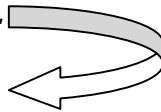
FACT: The sexualized behavior often observed in children who have been sexually abused is a learned behavior caused by the abuse. Behavior in a child that is perceived as “seductive” by some persons should be seen as an indicator of sexual abuse, not the cause of it.

MYTH: *When the child does not resist sexual advances, he or she is as much to blame as the person who abuses.*



FACT: Actually, we teach our children to obey adults and to do what they are told. In sexual abuse, the child usually knows and trusts the person who abuses. Young children may be easily convinced that the sexual behavior is a normal part of growing up or some kind of learning experience that is for their own good. If sexual abuse begins at an early age, children may believe that it is normal and appropriate. The closeness and the special attention that the sexual relationship brings may feel very positive to the child.

Myth: *Talking about sexual abuse with a child who has suffered such an experience will only make it worse.*



Fact: Although children often choose not to talk about their abuse, there is no evidence that encouraging children to talk about sexual abuse will make them feel worse. On the contrary, treatment from a mental health professional can minimize the physical, emotional, and social problems of these children by allowing them to process their feelings and fears related to the abuse.

*Adapted from National Child Traumatic Stress Network Child Sexual Abuse Committee. (2009). *Caring for Kids: What Parents Need to Know about Sexual Abuse*. Los Angeles, CA & Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

*Adapted from Ralston, L. "Myths and Facts About Child Sexual Abuse." *Protecting Children*, Spring 1986, p.13, and "Attitudes and Myths Concerning Sexual Abuse." *The School Counselor*, November 1981, pp.104-109.

