

Being Alert

Unfortunately, all parents must face the possibility that someone may hurt or take advantage of their child.

- ✓ Very young children as well as older teenagers are vulnerable to sexual abuse.
- ✓ Usually the abuse is by someone they know and trust: a relative, family friend or caretaker.



Sexual abuse involves forcing, tricking, threatening, bribing or pressuring a child into sexual awareness or activity. Sexual abuse occurs when an older or more knowledgeable child or an adult uses a child for sexual pleasure. The abuse often begins gradually and increases over time.

The use of physical force is rarely necessary to engage a child in sexual activity because children are trusting and dependent. They want to please others and gain love and approval. Children are taught not to question authority and they believe that adults are always right. Perpetrators of child sexual abuse know this and take advantage of these vulnerabilities in children.

Because most children cannot or will not talk about being sexually abused, it is up to concerned adults to recognize signs of abuse. Since physical evidence of abuse is not always obvious, we must look for certain behavioral signs.

Signs of Sexual Abuse

General behavioral changes that may occur in children who have been sexually abused include:

- ✓ Physical complaints.
- ✓ Fear or dislike of certain people or places.
- ✓ Sleep disturbances.
- ✓ Withdrawal from family, friends or activities.
- ✓ Return to younger, more childlike behavior.
- ✓ Depression.
- ✓ Anxiety.
- ✓ Discipline problems.
- ✓ School problems.
- ✓ Running away.
- ✓ Eating disorders.
- ✓ Passive or overly pleasing behavior.
- ✓ Low self-esteem.
- ✓ Self-destructive behavior; suicidal.
- ✓ Hostility or aggression.
- ✓ Drug or alcohol problems.
- ✓ Sexual activity or pregnancy at an early age.
- ✓ Displaying sexual knowledge, through language or behavior, that is inconsistent with a child's 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.



Taking Action

If you believe that your child has been sexually abused, do not blame yourself. Do not dwell on what you could have done differently to prevent the abuse. Do not doubt your abilities as a parent. Your child needs to see strength and support.

In a private setting ask your child easy, general questions about the circumstances. Be cautious of leading questions; simple, direct, open-ended questions asked one at a time are best.

Listen carefully to what your child has to say. Provide reassurance, support and encouragement to tell the truth. Calm your own reaction; your greatest challenge may be to avoid conveying your true feelings and emotions.

✓ **Report the abuse.** Do not confront the person who is suspected of abusing your child. Instead, promptly contact the police. Ensure that investigating officers are provided with all details as they were described by your child.

✓ **Get help.** Have your child examined by a physician as soon as possible. This is not only important for the welfare of the child, but will likely document evidence of abuse. Also, obtain the services of a family counselor who is experienced in handling child sexual abuse.

✓ **Support your child.** Commend your child for having the courage to tell about the experience. Make it clear that he or she is in no way responsible. Continually convey understanding, support and optimism.

Remember, taking prompt action is the only way to ensure that your child and other children are protected from an abuser.

**A Message From
Governor George Pataki**



Sexual abuse can include a wide range of behavior, from inappropriate touching to child pornography. It can be carried out by people with a wide range of relationships to a child ... from a family member to a stranger.

The information in this brochure provides basic guidance for adults who have reason to believe that a child has been the victim of sexual abuse. It is imperative that a child who has disclosed sexual abuse be treated with patience, sensitivity and support. Every effort must be made to ensure that the child is not subjected to additional trauma.

The need to take prompt action cannot be over-emphasized. Taking action as described in this brochure is the only way to ensure that your child and other children are protected from an abuser.



**NEW YORK STATE
MISSING &
EXPLOITED
CHILDREN
CLEARINGHOUSE**



**IF YOU WOULD LIKE MORE
INFORMATION, CONTACT US AT:**

**NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services
4 Tower Place
Albany, NY 12203**

1-800-FIND-KID or (518) 457-6326

**Missing child photographs and biographical
information and additional child safety information
can be viewed on our website.**

<http://criminaljustice.state.ny.us>

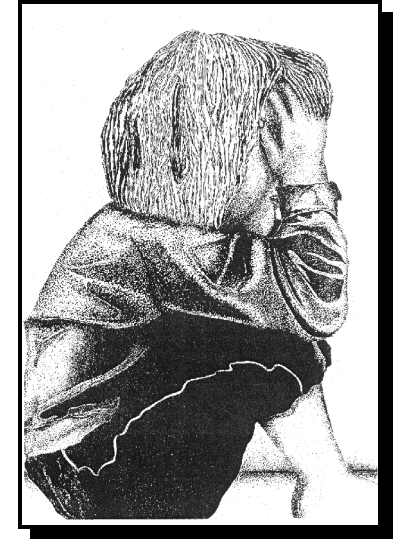
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**CHILD SEXUAL
ABUSE...**



**ARE YOU
CONCERNED?**



**State of New York
George E. Pataki, Governor**