

**1 IN 10 CHILDREN
WILL BE SEXUALLY
ABUSED BEFORE THEIR
18TH BIRTHDAY.**

**90% KNOW THE
PERPETRATOR.**

**ONLY 10% OF
CHILDREN ARE ABUSED
BY A STRANGER.**

**While these statistics are
alarming, the prevalence
of child sexual abuse
may be even greater as
this crime is extremely
under-reported:**

**86% OF CHILD SEXUAL
ABUSE CASES ARE
NEVER REPORTED.**

REPORTING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

In Maryland, almost without exception, everyone has to report suspected child abuse or neglect.

Everyone—NOT just “mandated reporters.”

Any person in Maryland with reason to believe that a child is being sexually abused is required to report this abuse to the local department of social services, to local law enforcement, or both.

For more information about reporting to Child Protective Services in your area, contact the Maryland Department of Human Services at 1-800-917-7383.

There are additional reporting considerations for some professionals. Free, online training related to these obligations is available for professionals, including clinicians and educators. Visit <https://mcasa.org/providers/online-training-library> to complete our Recognizing and Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Online Training.

For legal inquiries, please contact
the Sexual Assault Legal Institute (SALI):
301-565-2277 or toll-free 877-496-7254



mcasa.org | 301-328-7023 | info@mcasa.org
P.O. Box 8782
Silver Spring, Maryland 20907

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3/2025

preventing

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE



Information for parents, guardians,
and other concerned adults



**BOTH TOUCHING AND NON-
TOUCHING SEXUAL BEHAVIORS
WITH CHILDREN ARE CRIMINAL
ACTIVITIES.**

Examples of abusive touching
behaviors include:

- Fondling of a child’s genitals, buttocks, or breasts
- Penetration of a child’s mouth, anus, or vagina by an abuser’s body or with an object
- Coercing a child to fondle him or herself, an abuser, or another child

Examples of abusive non-touching
behaviors include:

- Exposing oneself to a child
- Viewing and violating private behaviors of a child or teen, such as undressing or bathing
- Taking sexually explicit or provocative photographs of a child
- Showing pornography or sexually suggestive images to a child
- Talking in sexually explicit or suggestive ways to a child, in person or by phone
- Sending sexually explicit or suggestive messages to a child by internet or text message.

Sexual assault is a form of oppression, as well as a crime. It is an abuse of power that uses violence and coercion to control, silence, and deny people their autonomy and dignity. Sexual violence thrives when people who have power in society use that power to commit violence against vulnerable individuals. We must all work together to end these forms of violence.

PREVENTING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

It is the responsibility of adults to protect children from sexual abuse. Even though a parent can teach children how to say “no,” it is very difficult for children to disobey an adult. Children should be taught that it is against the rules for adults to act in a sexual way with them. Adults should also pay attention to other adults who spend time with children and should look for warning signs that sexual abuse might be occurring.



Special Considerations for Youth-Serving Organizations and Agencies

Each school and agency working with children should have child sexual abuse prevention and reporting policies in place. Parents or guardians should ask youth-serving organizations, such as day care or after-school programs, what their prevention and reporting policies are.

SOME STRATEGIES TO KEEP IN MIND:

- Organizations should screen all staff and volunteers, check the sex offender registry, and conduct reference checks. Some may also want to conduct criminal background checks.
- All employees and volunteers should receive prevention training about child sexual abuse and how to protect children from perpetrators. Contact MCASA for training support.
- One-on-one time between children and adults should be eliminated or avoided, and should always occur in an open and observable area.
- There should be a clear policy about reporting suspected child sexual abuse, such as to whom someone should make internal reports. The policy should include a statement that staff should also always file a report themselves with Child Protective Services, law enforcement, or both. The policy should also state that employees and volunteers should leave investigations to trained professionals.

TOPICS TO DISCUSS WITH CHILDREN:

- The anatomically correct names for body parts
- Grown-ups and older children should not “play” with a child’s genitals or private parts
- Secrets between children and adults are not okay, especially secrets about bodies
- All the parts of our bodies are good and special, and we deserve to be treated with love and respect

BE PROACTIVE. IF A CHILD SEEMS UNCOMFORTABLE OR FEARFUL OF BEING WITH A CERTAIN ADULT, ASK THEM WHY.

PARENTS AND GUARDIANS SHOULD SPEAK WITH CHILDREN OPENLY AND AGE APPROPRIATELY ABOUT BODIES, HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS, AND ABUSE.

RECOGNIZING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Not every child experiences sexual abuse in the same way. Some children will have a few effects, while others may experience many. Recognizing the signs of abuse is critical for protecting children from future abuse and ensuring they get the help they need.

Behavioral and emotional signs may include:

- Changes in mood
- Disturbances in eating or sleeping habits
- Changes in attitude or loss of interest toward school, hobbies, or pastimes
- Unusual fear of certain people or places
- Fear of or refusal to use the bathroom
- Thinking of themselves or their bodies as being dirty or bad
- Reverting to behaviors such as bedwetting or thumb-sucking
- Unusual or age-inappropriate sexual behavior, language, or knowledge
- Wearing multiple layers of clothing in all kinds of weather

Physical signs may include:

- Vaginal or rectal cuts, tears, or pain; itching, swelling, bleeding, or discharge
- Trauma to breasts, buttocks, or lower abdomen
- Blood in the child’s underwear
- Unexplained or frequent health problems such as headaches or stomach aches
- Difficulty with bowel movements, urinating, or swallowing
- Self-mutilation, such as biting oneself, pulling out hair, or wrist-cutting
- Difficulty walking or sitting

THESE LISTS DO NOT INCLUDE ALL SIGNS. THESE SIGNS CAN ALSO BE SYMPTOMS OF OTHER ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES AND TRAUMA.

PERPETRATORS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Perpetrators of child sexual abuse rarely assault children in a sudden attack. Most spend time with the child—and the child’s family—to earn their trust. This is called “grooming” and can include giving a child gifts, sharing private secrets, tempting a child to break rules, or taking actions a child may find threatening. Grooming is designed to stop a child from disclosing the abuse and keep it a secret.

ABOUT 90% OF CHILDREN WHO ARE VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE KNOW THEIR ABUSER.

APPROXIMATELY 30% OF CHILDREN WHO ARE SEXUALLY ABUSED ARE ABUSED BY FAMILY MEMBERS.

An adult who is a perpetrator:

- May be grooming the child by buying presents or complimenting the child inappropriately
- May be grooming the child’s parents or caregivers to win their trust
- Might have close friends who are children
- May take opportunities to be alone with children
- Is drawn to settings where they can gain easy access to children, such as sports leagues, faith centers, clubs, and schools