

**From:** Scott Corcoran [scott@afamilyforeverychild.org]  
**Sent:** Thursday, July 18, 2013 3:52 PM  
**To:** scott@afamilyforeverychild.org  
**Subject:** How to parent a child who was sexually abused



Dear ,

Sexual abuse is one form of child abuse. Often these involve body contact, but not always. Most sexual abusers know the child they abuse. They may be family friends, neighbors or babysitters. About one-third of abusers are related to the child. Most abusers are men. If you think a child may have been abused, it's important to report it.

#### **What Are the Effects of Child Sexual Abuse?**

Sexual abuse takes away a child's childhood, and creates feelings of loss, distrust, guilt, and self-abusive behavior. It can also lead to depression, anti-social behavior, identity confusion, a lack self-esteem, and other emotional problems. The effects of sex abuse go beyond childhood; they can cause problems with intimate relationships when the child becomes an adult.

#### **Normal childhood behaviors vs. behaviors as a result of exposure to sexual abuse**

It is completely normal for a child to start exploring and be curious about their body at a young age. So how do you tell if a child's behavior is "normal" vs. inappropriate? First, your child will continue their behavior even after they have been redirected multiple times and told "no". In addition, if you hear your child threatening another child to not tell anyone, that is not normal. If there is any power differentials, in age for example. Normal is two children of the same age playing house; not normal is a much older child with a younger child.

#### **Impact of Sexual Abuse on the Family**

Fostering or adopting a child who is the victim of sexual abuse can be stressful on a marriage or relationship. Being a parent in this situation may require a couple to be more open with each other and their children about sexuality. It's important to make sure that both parents are equally addressing the issue, as an imbalance can create difficulties in parenting. In addition, your other children may be exposed to conversations about sexuality that are confusing or challenging for them. If your child wants to talk to you about their past abuse, encourage them to talk to you in private and not in front of others. If you have a child who is sexually acting out, it is important that you talk to your other children about what they see, think and feel, in addition to how they should respond in those situations. It is also important to discuss with your children what is appropriate to say about a sibling's problems with friends and relatives.

When you have one child who has been sexually abused, you may feel more protective of your other children. While this is a normal response, as the parent you need to find a balance between reasonable worry and being over-protective. To prevent any further abuse, engage strategies like teaching children how to stand up for themselves, discuss how they are in charge of their bodies, and make sure to develop open communication with all your children. By actively managing the issue, your children will worry less because they feel more secure.

Many families struggle with feelings of anger and disgust as they learn about the abuse their child endured in their earlier life. In order to help your child, you will need to resolve these feelings and learn to accept your child's background. If your family is struggling with the challenges that arise from your child dealing with their sexual abuse, it may be helpful to seek out professional guidance.

If you were (or suspect you were) sexually abused as a child, dealing with your child's past may be challenging, and bring up painful thoughts and feelings. By facing these issues, you will demonstrate to your child that sexual abuse experiences can be overcome.

Overall, one of the best ways to help your children in dealing with sexual abuse history is to create a safe, structured and nurturing environment. Seek out the help of professionals when necessary, and share your successes when you overcome obstacles. A healthy relationship between you and your child will allow them to begin the recovery process. Your relationship with your child will teach them trust and respect, which are key to your child's safety and well-being.

## How to Protect Your Family

If you have a child placed in your home who has endured sexual abuse, you may have some concerns on how they will act in your home. The following suggestions should be followed to ensure the safety of all the people in your home, including the child themselves:

-Make sure you are supervising your children when they are together. This means that when all your children are in the same room, you are in the room with them. That way you can keep an eye on them all, and stop any situation before it starts.

-Place baby monitors in different rooms of the house to keep an ear out when it's not possible to be in the same room as your kids. You can also install door alarms on your child(ren)'s doors to alert you at night when a child leaves their room.

-Don't place older children in charge of younger children if they have been sexually abused.

-Finally, seeking treatment and therapy for your child is one of the best methods to protecting everyone in your home. Therapy will give the child an idea of boundaries and help them work through their past.

## How to Protect Yourself from Allegations

It is common for a child who has undergone an abusive past to tell someone that their foster or adoptive parent is abusing them, even if it is not true. The following are some ways that you can protect yourselves from having a child make false allegations against you:

-Create strong boundaries. Make sure the child knows the rules about changing in their room with the door shut, using the bathroom with the door closed, wearing clothes around the house etc. Make sure to model the same behaviors.

-Be aware of who abused the child. For example, if you are placed with a girl who was abused by her father, make sure that the mother is the one helping her with personal activities such as getting dressed or taking a bath.

-Let the child set their own boundaries. For example, let them decide when they want to be hugged or kissed by you, or if they want help getting dressed or cleaning up.

-When you're in a room with a child, make sure that the door is open and that the child doesn't feel trapped.

## How can you help a child who is the victim of sexual abuse?

If a child approaches you and tells you that they have been sexually abused, you will need to file a sexual abuse report. Before you do, talk briefly with the child about what happened. Assure the child that they are in a safe place, and ask them a few open-ended questions. Never ask a child a digging or leading question. Keep your questions minimal and general. You should leave it to a professional and law enforcement to get all the details. Typically if a child has to tell the story over and over again, details may change, and an inaccurate report may be filed.

If you are parenting a child who has a known sexual abuse history, you can help your child by supporting them. Let the child know they can talk to you about what has happened to them, and know that they will be believed. Reassure your child that he/she is not responsible for what happened to them, and that they should not feel guilty or ashamed. In addition, make sure to establish consistency and routines in your home. Your child is most likely relearning how to trust adults, and having consistency provides them with security and trust.

## Sources

American Humane Association: [Child Sexual Abuse](#)

Child Welfare Information Gateway: [Identification of Sexual Abuse](#)

## Resources

The following are some resources you may find helpful:

Children's Response Center: [Sexual Behavior and Children: When is It a Problem and What to Do About It.](#)

National Center on Sexual Behavior of Youth: [Children with Sexual Behavior Problems: Common Misconceptions vs. Current Findings](#)

Lunch-N-Net video: Season 2, Episode 5 - ["The One About Caring for Children](#)

[Who May Have Been Sexually Abused".](#)

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