

Sexual Abuse

(Information taken from NSPCC - <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/child-sexual-abuse/>)

Finding out your child has been sexually abused can be distressing and you might not know what to do next. We're here to support you and your loved ones and give you the advice you need to help navigate through a difficult time.

What is sexual abuse?

When a child or young person is sexually abused, they're forced or tricked into sexual activities. They might not understand that what's happening is abuse or that it's wrong. And they might be afraid to tell someone. Sexual abuse can happen anywhere – and it can happen in person or online.

It's never a child's fault they were sexually abused – it's important to make sure children know this.

Types of sexual abuse

There are 2 types of sexual abuse – contact and non-contact abuse. And sexual abuse can happen in person or online.

Contact abuse is where an abuser makes physical contact with a child. This includes:

- sexual touching of any part of a child's body, whether they're clothed or not
- using a body part or object to rape or penetrate a child
- forcing a child to take part in sexual activities
- making a child undress or touch someone else.

Contact abuse can include touching, kissing and oral sex – sexual abuse isn't just penetrative.

Non-contact abuse is where a child is abused without being touched by the abuser. This can be in person or online and includes:

- exposing or flashing
- showing pornography
- exposing a child to sexual acts
- making them masturbate
- forcing a child to make, view or share child abuse images or videos
- making, viewing or distributing child abuse images or videos
- forcing a child to take part in sexual activities or conversations online or through a smartphone.

Find out more about [grooming](#) and [child sexual exploitation](#).

Signs of sexual abuse

Knowing the signs of sexual abuse can help give a voice to children. Sometimes children won't understand that what's happening to them is wrong. Or they might be scared to speak out. Some of the signs you might notice include:

emotional and behavioural signs

- Avoiding being alone with or frightened of people or a person they know.
- Language or sexual behaviour you wouldn't expect them to know.
- Having nightmares or bed-wetting.
- Alcohol or drug misuse.
- Self-harm.
- Changes in eating habits or developing an eating problem.

physical signs

- Bruises.
- Bleeding, discharge, pains or soreness in their genital or anal area.
- Sexually transmitted infections.
- Pregnancy.

If a child is being or has been sexually abused online, they might:

- spend a lot more or a lot less time than usual online, texting, gaming or using social media
- seem distant, upset or angry after using the internet or texting
- be secretive about who they're talking to and what they're doing online or on their mobile phone
- have lots of new phone numbers, texts or email addresses on their mobile phone, laptop or tablet.

Children and young people might also drop hints and clues about the abuse.

If you're worried about a child and want to talk to them, we have advice on having [difficult conversations](#).

If a child reveals abuse

If a child talks to you about sexual abuse it's important to:

- listen carefully to what they're saying
- let them know they've done the right thing by telling you
- tell them it's not their fault
- say you'll take them seriously
- don't confront the alleged abuser
- explain what you'll do next
- [report](#) what the child has told you as soon as possible.

Effects of sexual abuse

Sexual abuse can have both short and long term effects. The impact of sexual abuse can last a lifetime. Children, young people and adults may live with:

- anxiety and depression
- eating disorders
- post-traumatic stress
- difficulty coping with stress
- self-harm
- suicidal thoughts and suicide
- sexually transmitted infections
- pregnancy
- feelings of shame and guilt
- drug and alcohol problems
- relationship problems with family, friends and partners.

Our [services](#) can support children and young people who have experienced sexual abuse to help them move on and receive the care they need.

Who's at risk

Any child is at risk of being sexual abused. It's important to remember that both boys and girls can be sexually abused.

Most children who've been sexual abused were abused by someone they know. This could be a family member, a friend or someone who has targeted them – like a teacher or sports coach.

Children who are sexually abused online could be abused by someone they know. They could also be abused by someone who commits a one-off sexually abusive act or a stranger who builds a relationship with them.

Some children are more at risk of sexual abuse. Children with disabilities are more likely to be sexually abused – especially those who are unable to tell someone what's happening or don't understand what's happening to them is abuse.

Some abusers target children who are isolated or being neglected by their parents or carers. If a family is going through a tough time, they might not be able to give their child enough attention or supervision, putting them in unsafe situations.

Report sexual abuse

To report sexual abuse:

- contact the children's social care team at their local council.
- call [999](#) if the child is at immediate risk or call [101](#) if you think a crime has been committed
- call Crimestoppers anonymously on [0800 555 111](#) or [online](#).

Support

For parents

Finding out your child has been sexually abused can be frightening and distressing. But there's help for you and your family.

[MOSAC](#) supports non-abusing parents and carers whose children have been sexually abused.

We're here to support you, no matter your worry. Call us on [0808 800 5000](#), email help@nspcc.org.uk or fill in our [online form](#).

For children and young people

We run therapeutic services for children who have experienced, or are at risk of, sexual abuse and their families:

- Hear and Now
- In Ctrl
- Letting the Future In
- Protect and Respect.

[The Lighthouse](#) provides support to children and young people who have experienced sexual abuse to help them recover.

Our Women as Protectors service helps mums and carers who are in contact with a man who may cause sexual harm to their children.

Find out more about all [our services for children](#), including how to get in touch with ones in your area.

How Childline can help

We understand how difficult it is for children to talk about sexual abuse. Whether it's happening now or happened in the past, Childline can be contacted 24/7. Calls to [0800 1111](tel:08001111) are free and confidential. Children can also contact [Childline online](#).

Childline has information and advice for children and young people about [sexual abuse](#) and [rape and sexual assault](#).