

YOUNG MiNDS



Sexual Abuse

Your guide to what to do
and who to talk to



1 in 20 children in the UK are sexually abused and in 2016 over 47,000 sexual offences against children were registered*

*Source: NSPCC



Sexual abuse is never okay. And it's never your fault.

If you've experienced sexual abuse, it might have been carried out by someone you know who's taking advantage of your age, trust and their position of authority.

It can have damaging effects on your feelings and your behaviour and it can be difficult to speak out.

But you can do something about it and there are people to help.

In this booklet you'll find information on sexual abuse, what it is, how it affects you and where to go to put an end to it.

What is sexual abuse?

Sexual abuse is when you're forced or persuaded to take part in sexual activities. This can take place online or in person and includes:

- Forcing or encouraging a person to hear or witness sexual acts
- Making, viewing or distributing child abuse images or allowing someone else to do this
- Showing pornography to a child
- Sexually touching - this can be over or under clothing
- Making a person remove clothing/looking at genitals and masturbating (or making the person do this to themselves or others)
- Penetrating a person's vagina, mouth or anus with a body part or object
- Grooming, which is when someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust in order to sexually abuse them (this can happen on social media)

“When I told him not to do it he said ‘Don’t be silly, it’s just a game, what do you mean you don’t like it’. I felt really mixed up. Sometimes he would say ‘I’m doing it because I love you... it’s our special secret ok?’. I thought maybe it was just me. Maybe I just had the wrong feelings. Maybe all dads are like that and it’s just me who’s weird.”

Often a person you know or someone in a position of authority convinces you to take part in a sexual activity that makes you feel uncomfortable, and it’s still abuse even if you don’t tell them to stop.

Sexual abuse in all its forms is against the law and is never your fault.

Sexual abuse can lead to difficult feelings

If you have have been sexually abused you might feel:

- Ashamed
- Like you're at fault
- Dirty
- Worthless
- Frightened
- Angry
- Isolated or lonely
- Guilty
- Scared of having a boyfriend or girlfriend
- Being scared around other people
- Distrustful of others



It can affect your behaviour too. It's not just the emotional distress either. There are a number of other problems that could start as a result of sexual abuse:

- Bad dreams
- Bed wetting
- Sleeping problems
- Running away
- Blanking out the memory
- Issues with anger and being short tempered
- Withdrawing from friends
- Self-harming
- Poor concentration
- Using drugs or alcohol
- Eating problems

Why does sexual abuse happen?

Sexual abuse happens when someone in a position of authority or power uses a person's trust to get them to take part in a sexual act.

It's rare for them to be strangers too. They could be a relative, family friend, neighbour, carer or even someone at school. **And they can abuse more than one child** – often in secret.

Over 90% of sexually abused children were abused by someone they know*. They're most often men, but women can be sexual abusers too.

*Source: NSPCC

“I know this sounds really stupid now. But I thought someone who abused people was horrible ALL the time. I didn't think they were nice too like helping you with homework or buying you new clothes. So it took a while for the penny to drop.”

It's NEVER your fault

Sexual abuse is always the fault of the abuser.

Even if you don't say no or tell them to stop, they are still in the wrong.

Some abusers believe there's nothing wrong with what they're doing. Many even claim they were encouraged by the person they abused.

These kinds of excuses or explanations can be confusing.

It's important to remember, **it's their fault and not yours**. Many abusers rely on the age, inexperience and fear of those they abuse to carry on doing it.

Talk to someone you trust

Think of someone you can trust like a relative, youth worker, friend, doctor, school nurse or even a police officer.

It's a scary thought to tell someone you know that you're being sexually abused. You may be worried about the consequences or maybe even not being believed.

That's why it can sometimes be hard to tell someone you know. If you're worried about it, there are confidential helplines you can call.



The first step is to get help

If you think you're being sexually abused or think you know someone who is, you need to tell someone.

It's hard to do it, but it can help to:

- > stop the abuse
- > get the support you need

“No way could I tell – I didn't want to break up my family. It took about two years but I told someone in the end because I thought he had started on my cousin.”

What happens next

Whoever you tell, they'll most likely be very concerned for your welfare. Here's what you can expect:

- 1. They may want to report it to a social worker – though they'll usually talk to you about it first.**
- 2. If it is a social worker, police officer or your doctor an investigation will be launched.**
- 3. A decision will be made on the best way to protect you**

Don't worry if you've been in trouble with the police before – all that matters is your safety.

After the abuse: getting help through therapy

There's help available to deal with any upsetting feelings. A trained psychotherapist or counsellor who knows how it feels to be abused can help.

Therapy can be hard and difficult but most young people find it useful in the long term. It helps them to feel more positive, improve their self-esteem and get on with normal things like school work as well as dealing with any of the feelings we talked about on page 4.

“You know it happens to other people too but you think you're the only one who feels the way you do. You can see it's not other people's fault it happened to them and they help you see it's not your fault either.”

Where to go for help



[youngminds.org.uk/sexual-abuse](https://www.youngminds.org.uk/sexual-abuse)

childline.org.uk

The UK's free helpline for children and young people – it's a confidential service and provides telephone counselling for any child with a problem.

Helpline: 0800 1111

Textphone: 0800 400 222

Mon-Fri 9:30am-9:30pm | Sat and Sun: 11am-8pm

NSPCC.org.uk

Offers a child protection helpline for adults concerned about a child or young person. The NSPCC also provide help for families to overcome abuse.

Helpline: 0800 800 5000

Textphone: 0800 056 0566

Children's Legal Centre

Offers free legal advice and information for children and young people.

Child law advice line: 0808 802 0008

Young person freephone: 0800 783 2187



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