

What are the facts about child abuse?



- Children in the United States are more likely to be victimized violently in their own homes than on the streets. (*Current Trends in Child Abuse Prevention, Reporting, and Fatalities: The 1997 Fifty State Survey*. Chicago, IL: Prevent Child Abuse America, 1999)
- In 1997, 47 out of 1,000 children were reported abused or neglected and 15 children out of 1,000 were confirmed as abused or neglected. (*Current Trends in Child Abuse Prevention, Reporting, and Fatalities: The 1997 Fifty State Survey*. Chicago, IL: Prevent Child Abuse America, 1999)
- A survey of adolescent boys' health revealed that one in eight high school boys had been physically and/or sexually abused. Sixty-six percent of boys who reported physical abuse said it occurred at home. Of sexually abused boys, 35 percent said the abuse happened at home. Forty-eight percent of physically or sexually abused boys said they had not talked to anyone about their abuse, and only 7 percent had discussed their abuse with a doctor. (*The Health of Adolescent Boys: Commonwealth Fund Survey Findings*. New York, NY: The Commonwealth Fund, 1998)
- One in five high school girls surveyed reported that she had been physically or sexually abused. Fifty-three percent of the abuse occurred at home, and 65 percent of the girls said it happened more than once. Twenty-nine percent of girls who had been physically or sexually abused had not told anyone about the abuse. Forty-six percent of abused girls had symptoms of depression, which is more than twice the rate of girls who said they

had not been abused (18 percent). Abused girls are also at double the risk for signs of eating disorders. (*The Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescent Girls*. New York, NY: The Commonwealth Fund, 1997)

Resources for Information and Assistance

Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline

1-800-4-A-CHILD or 1-800-422-4453

www.childhelpusa.org

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

1-800-843-5678

www.missingkids.org

National Center for Victims of Crime

1-800-FYI-CALL or 1-800-394-2255

www.ncvc.org

National Children's Alliance

Regional Children's Advocacy Centers

1-800-239-9950

www.nca-online.org

National Organization for Victim Assistance

1-800-TRY-NOVA or 1-800-879-6682

www.try-nova.org

National Runaway Switchboard

1-800-621-4000

Office for Victims of Crime Resource Center

1-800-627-6872

TTY 1-877-712-9279

www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ovcres/welcome.html

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What You Should Know About Child Abuse

(For Teenagers Ages 12-16)

Office for Victims of Crime

OVC

Advocating for the Fair
Treatment of Crime Victims

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR
Victims of Crime

Child abuse isn't something that only happens to little kids. Some kids who are abused by their parents have been abused for as long as they can remember. For others, the abuse started when they got older. Almost half of the reported cases of child abuse and neglect involve teenagers.

What is child abuse?

Child abuse occurs when a parent, family member, or caretaker physically hurts a child or adolescent, makes that youth feel worthless, has sexual contact with him or her, or does not provide adequate food, care, or shelter. Child abuse can happen in all types of families, and in most cases, the abuser is related to the victim. Every state has laws against child abuse.

Most people agree that acts that threaten a young person's life or cause serious injury are **physical abuse**. Some people disagree over the difference between a spanking, which some see as an acceptable form of discipline, and a beating. When punishment is very severe or leaves bruises or other injuries, then it's no longer discipline—it's child abuse, and it should stop.

All forms of child abuse, including emotional abuse, cause the victim pain and suffering.

Sexual abuse occurs when an adult forces, threatens, or induces a young person into any kind of sexual contact. It includes direct physical contact and nontouching sexual "contact," such as when a young person is persuaded to view obscene materials. Teenagers can be sexually abused by someone they know or by a stranger. They also can be abusers.



Always trust your feelings. If you become uncomfortable in a situation, assertively ask the person to stop or leave. Don't worry about hurting someone's feelings.

Incest is a form of sexual abuse that is defined as any sexual contact or behavior between family members. The most common form of incest occurs between an older family member—a parent, stepparent, uncle, or cousin—and a child or teenager. Incest can happen to girls and boys. The best way to stop incest is to tell someone.

Emotional abuse can include swearing at, yelling at, or insulting a young person, usually over and over again. It also can include denying a young person basic emotional needs, such as affection or security. Emotional abuse often accompanies physical and sexual abuse. Experts consider emotional abuse to be very serious, especially because victims feel bad about themselves.

Criminal **neglect** is when a parent does not provide care for a young person's safety and health—necessities like food, proper clothing, a place to live, or medical care. Leaving kids alone for long periods or kicking them out of the house also can be interpreted as neglect.

Young people often blame themselves for the family crisis brought on by abuse, but it is not their fault.

From time to time, all parents and children have problems, but most parents or adults do not abuse their children. Most parents who abuse their children love their children but never learned how to channel their anger, frustration, or sexual expressions in mature and responsible ways.

Abuse and neglect affect the way young people view themselves and the rest of the world. Many people who were abused as children find it hard as

adults to like themselves or to trust other people. As children, they learned to expect very little from adults except pain. They may find it hard to believe that people can really care about them.

Because of the long-term pain it produces, child abuse can have a serious impact on communities. To deal with child abuse, we must recognize it and report it.

Reporting child abuse can be difficult, but it is the first step toward stopping it. Many teenagers who are abused feel the only thing they can do is run away from home, which can cause more harm than good.

Abuse can and should be reported to teachers, guidance counselors, or law enforcement officers.

Reports also can be made to child protective services, a unit of government that usually can be found in a local social services agency.

If you feel things are not so great in your family, you might ask yourself, "Am I abused?" There's no easy answer for this. But if things in your life hurt or confuse you, it's a good idea to check it out with an adult you trust.

It is important to tell someone who can help you decide if there is abuse in your family. If you tell someone who does not believe or help you, tell someone else. It takes courage to ask for help, but if you are abused and you tell someone, things can change. In most cases, families in which abuse occurs get the help they need and the abuse can stop. You may never have a perfect family, but you can begin a life in which you are not hurt and abused. Your community has people who can help you.

