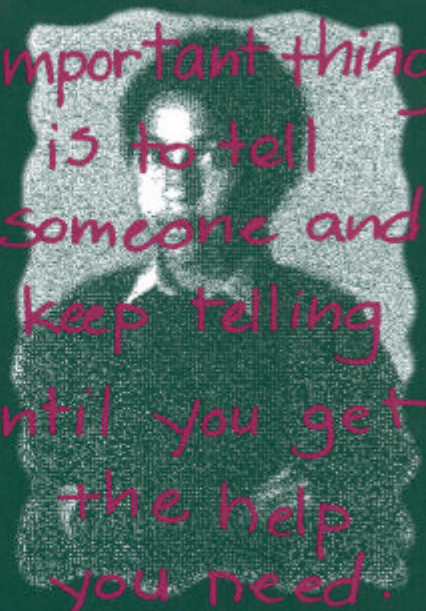


When Girls Have Been Sexually Abused



The most
important thing
is to tell
someone and
keep telling
until you get
the help
you need.

A Guide For Young Girls

This booklet answers these questions:

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A foreword for parents

This booklet is written for girls who've been sexually abused. Most nine- to twelve-year-olds will be able to read it easily but some will need an adult's help. Younger children might need help with some of the words and ideas.

Even if your child can read the book by herself, it will help if you read it with her. This will give her a chance to ask questions and talk about feelings it might bring up. If

you think reading the booklet could bring up too many feelings for you, then read it alone first to become comfortable with the content before you read it with your child.

*You might
want to
read this
with your
mom or dad
or someone
else you trust.*

What is this booklet about?

If you're a girl and you've been sexually abused, this is a special booklet for you. It will help in three ways. It will:

- ➊ Explain what sexual abuse is.
- ➋ Tell you how to get help .
- ➌ Help you understand your thoughts and feelings.

You don't have to read this booklet all at once. Read as much as you want, then put it down until you feel like reading it again. If there are words you don't understand, ask someone to help you.

In this booklet we use the pronouns *he/him/his* to refer to the abuser, unless we are talking specifically about a girl or woman. We do this for two reasons: first, it makes reading easier; and second, we know from statistics that sexual abuse against girls is most often carried out by men and boys.

You might like to read this with your mom or dad or someone else you trust. Reading it with someone can help them understand how you're feeling. It can also make it easier for you to talk about the abuse.

In this booklet you'll find seven stories about girls who've been sexually abused. Michelle, Rajvinder, Amy, Karla, Kim, Diane and Maria aren't their real names, but their stories are real and so are their feelings. Even though your own experience was different, you probably have feelings much like theirs.

You don't have to read
all of this booklet at once.
Read as much as you want,
then put it down until
you feel like reading again.

Michelle's story

When Michelle was eight, her older brother said he'd teach her about sex. When he showed her his penis and touched her genitals she felt good. He said he'd buy her a T-shirt if she let him touch her again. So she said yes. He said it had to be a secret and if she told she'd get in a lot of trouble. After that he wanted to touch her all the time but Michelle wanted it to stop.

She talked to her grandmother about what was happening because she felt her grandmother wouldn't be angry with her. Her grandmother told a social worker and Michelle's parents. They stopped her brother from abusing her and got help for both him and Michelle.

Many abused children are afraid to tell because the abuser threatens them. When Michelle's brother wouldn't stop, she was afraid. She had bad dreams and couldn't concentrate at school. She feels much safer now that she's told and the abuse has stopped.

What is sexual abuse?

Sexual abuse is when someone touches your private parts (the parts of your body that are covered by a bathing suit),

and makes you feel confused or uncomfortable. It's the kind of touch you feel you have to keep secret. The person who touches you knows that he isn't supposed to touch private parts of your body, like your genitals, breasts, or bum, but he does it anyway.

When someone makes you touch their private parts or shows you pictures of children or adults touching each other's private parts, that's also sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse can be confusing because sometimes the touch feels good, as it did with Michelle, but you also feel bad. You feel like you're doing something wrong that you have to hide from other people. Sometimes you don't like the touching but you do like the special attention the abuser gives you. For instance, if your babysitter lets you stay up late and then he touches you, it can be confusing. You like staying up late but you don't like being touched that way.



Who is sexually abused?

Every year in our country thousands of girls and boys are sexually abused. One way of thinking about how many children are sexually abused is to imagine a classroom of twenty children. Four or five of the girls and three or four of the boys will be sexually abused before they finish high school. So you can see that if you've been abused, you aren't alone. It happens to other kids too.

If you've been sexually abused, you're not the only one. It's much more common than you might think, and it happens to both girls and boys.

Rajvinder's story

When Rajvinder started piano lessons she liked her teacher. But then he started putting his arm around her when he was teaching her a new piece. He kissed her and touched her breasts. He said if she told anyone, he'd say she was lying and everyone would believe him. She felt trapped.

Finally she told her parents. They reported it to the police. She also told a friend at school and soon everyone knew. Rajvinder was worried about what other kids would think of her. But then some other girls and a boy said they'd also been abused by the piano teacher. Hearing about Rajvinder helped the other children tell their stories and stop their own abuse.

Who does the abusing?

Most abusers are men and teenage boys but they can be women and teenage girls too. Sometimes boys and girls your own age are sexually intrusive with other children but that doesn't happen as often. An abuser can be someone you may live with, like a dad or a brother. Or it can be a cousin or an aunt. Abusers are sometimes people who are supposed to take care of you and protect you, like teachers, coaches, baby-sitters and doctors. Abusers are sometimes strangers but usually they're people you already know, like Rajvinder's piano teacher.

We don't understand all the reasons why people sexually abuse children but we do know this: it's always the abuser's fault, not yours.

Some people think that if a man abuses a boy, or a woman abuses a girl, the abuser must be gay or lesbian. That is most often not the case. Most gays or lesbians want to be sexual with other gay or lesbian adults, not with children. Abusers are sexual bullies who like to use their power over someone younger, smaller or less powerful than they are, whether they abuse girls or boys or both.

We don't really understand all the reasons why people sexually abuse children but we do know this: it's always the abuser's fault, not the child's.

Was it my fault I was sexually abused?

No, it wasn't. The person who abuses a child is someone with more power than the child. The abuser is usually older, bigger and stronger than you are. The abuser usually knows how to scare you or make you feel guilty so you won't tell about the abuse. He knows how to trick you so you're confused and afraid to tell. Even if the abuser made you do something wrong, like lie to your parents or sexually touch a younger child, it's still not your fault. It's always the adult's fault the abuse happened because the adult is supposed to help and protect you, not abuse you.

Amy's story

When Amy's mom and dad were divorced, Amy really missed her dad. Then her mom met Bob and Amy liked him. He called her his little princess. When he moved in, Amy was happy. She asked Bob to read her a story and tuck her into bed every night. But then Bob started to touch her private parts. Amy liked being tucked in but she didn't like the touching. She felt guilty and confused.

Amy felt the abuse was her fault because she was the one who asked Bob to read to her and tuck her in. But it wasn't her fault. Bob was older, bigger, and knew better.

Karla's story

When Karla was nine, she went to summer camp. Heather, her counsellor, took her for walks after lunch when the other campers had to rest. Sometimes Heather kissed her on the mouth and made Karla touch her breasts. Karla didn't know what to do. But she told her mom when she got home. Her mother said she must be making it up and she wouldn't talk about it.

Now Karla feels confused and ashamed. And she feels different from other kids because she's been abused by another girl. When kids are abused by someone of the same sex, they sometimes think that means they're gay or lesbian. It doesn't. Whether you grow up to be attracted to men or women may have nothing to do with being sexually abused.

Talking to a counsellor or adult she trusts would help Karla see she has nothing to feel ashamed of. Karla wondered why her mother wouldn't talk to her about the abuse. It's probably because her mother, like a lot of parents, doesn't know how to talk to her about sexual abuse.



How can I get help?

Kim's story

At first Kim liked visiting her aunt and uncle on the farm because she could feed the animals. Then when she was seven, her uncle started making her touch his penis when they were alone in the barn. He said he'd hurt her little brother if she told, so she didn't. This went on for three years.



Kim wanted to tell her friend Manuel about the abuse but she was afraid. Manuel could tell something was bothering her and when he finally asked what was wrong, she told him and felt better right away. He understood because he'd been abused by his soccer coach. He said his abuse stopped when he told his mother. Kim was afraid to tell her parents, but she decided to tell her teacher. Manuel went with her when she told.

Abusers have power over you as long as you keep the abuse a secret. You can't stop it by yourself. So the most important thing you can do to stop the abuse is tell someone, like Kim did. That person must then tell the police or social worker who will work to protect you. They can use the law to help make sure the abuser can't hurt you again.

Think carefully about who you want to tell. Unless your mom or dad is the abuser, your parents are usually the best people to tell. But if you think they won't believe you, or that they'll blame you, or be too upset to help, then tell someone else. It's also a good idea to tell someone outside your family if the abuser has threatened to hurt someone in your family.

Here are some other people you can tell:

- grandparent
- aunt or uncle
- teacher or school counsellor
- coach or Girl Guide leader
- neighbour you like
- social worker or police officer

If the first person you tell doesn't help you, tell someone else. Keep telling until someone listens and helps. Don't give up! You don't have to be abused any more.

Even if the abuse has stopped, it's still important to tell. You'll feel better if you don't have a big secret to hide. And the abuser can be stopped from hurting someone else.

How will I feel and what will happen after I tell?

You'll probably feel a lot of different things. At first you'll probably feel relieved that you don't have to keep the secret any more. Then there'll be some things you'll have to do:

① The police and social worker will interview you about the abuse and you'll be asked a lot of questions.

② You might need to go to a doctor . The doctor will want to make sure your body is OK and has not been damaged by the abuse.

③ You might have to go to court later to tell the judge and lawyers what happened to you. But you won't be alone and there will be people to help you and to explain everything.

④ People may want you to go to a sexual abuse counsellor.

"I

thought

it would

be

really

hard to

talk to

someone

but my

counsellor

understands

how I

feel."

Once you
tell
someone
who
believes
you,
you won't
be alone
and
you'll
start
to feel
safe
again.

Sometimes you might wish that all the upset was over and things were back to normal. If you liked the abuser, you might feel sad or angry because you can't see him any more. Just remember, things will get better.

What will the sexual abuse counsellor do?

Diane's story

Diane's dad used to come into her bedroom and touch her all over. Sometimes he would put his penis in her mouth. She thought you always had to obey your dad, so when he told her not to tell anyone, she didn't. But when she saw her dad come out of her sister's room one night she thought he was abusing her too. She told her aunt who phoned the police. Her dad went to jail for abusing Diane and her sister.

Both Diane and her sister went to a counsellor. Diane talked about how afraid she was of her dad. She told the counsellor how she wished someone had protected her like she had protected her sister. The counsellor helped her paint and write about how awful the abuse made her feel. Together Diane and the counsellor figured out what to say when the other kids asked where her dad was. After sessions with the counsellor, Diane started to feel better.

A sexual abuse counsellor is someone who will understand what you've been going through. A counsellor can:

- ① Help your family understand you better. They can help your parents make you feel safer and listen to your feelings.
- ② Help your parents with their own feelings about the abuse so that you don't have to worry about them being too upset.
- ③ Help you talk about your feelings.
- ④ Help you let your anger out so you don't feel mad all the time.
- ⑤ Help you understand how sexual abuse is different from normal, healthy sexuality. You can ask the counsellor questions about what the abuser did to you and how your body felt.



How do other girls feel when they've been sexually abused?

Here's what other girls have felt:

Fear. Like Michelle and Kim, you might be afraid of the person who abused you. You might be afraid it will happen again. You might be afraid to trust people or afraid you'll be blamed for the abuse. You might be afraid there's something wrong with your body because of the abuse. No matter what you're afraid of, once you tell someone, you won't be alone and you'll start to feel safe again.

Sadness. Like Amy, you might feel sad and want everything to be the way it was before the abuse happened. You might feel sad and alone and think no one understands how you feel. You might also miss the person who abused you.

Shame. You might feel bad about yourself, and different from other kids, because of the abuse, like Karla did. When you think there's something wrong with you and that's what made the abuse happen, you're feeling ashamed. Try to remember you didn't make the abuse happen. The abuser did. It wasn't your fault.

Remember you didn't
make the abuse happen.
The abuser did and it
wasn't your fault.

Anger.

Maria's story

Maria baby-sat for friends of her parents. When the husband drove her home afterwards, he tried to kiss her on the mouth and touch her breasts. She didn't know what to do. When he let her out of the car he said if she told anyone he'd say she was lying. She was afraid no one would believe her so she kept it secret. But inside she was angry. She teased her little brother until he cried, stole money from her mother's purse, and started to get detentions in school. One day her mom shouted at her because she hadn't done her chores again and Maria started to cry. She finally told her mom about the abuse. Then her mom understood why she'd been so angry.

Anger is good because it tells us something is bothering us. But when we can't talk about it the anger comes out in ways that cause more problems, like it did with Maria.

You might feel angry, like Maria did. You might be feeling all the mad feelings that you had to keep inside when you were being abused. You might feel mad at your family because they didn't know about the abuse or didn't protect you. You might feel angry because your family is upset about the abuse. You might feel angry because you have to talk to social workers and police, or you have to go to court.

It's OK to feel angry but it's important to let your feelings out without hurting someone. Your counsellor or a person you trust can give you ideas about how to express your anger safely.

Will I ever get over the abuse?

Yes! Even if the abuse went on for a long time, you'll get over it. You'll need love and understanding, and help in sorting out your thoughts and feelings. But in the end, you'll feel just like an ordinary kid again.

Yes! Even if the abuse went on for a long time, you'll get over it and feel like an ordinary kid again.

Here are other books about sexual abuse you can read:

Jance, Judy A. *It's Not Your Fault*. Edmonds, WA.: Charles Franklin Press, 1985.

Foon, Dennis, and Brenda Knight. *Am I the Only One?* Vancouver, B.C.: Douglas & McIntyre, 1985.

**This is one of five booklets in the
Sexual Abuse Information Series II:**

When Girls Have Been Sexually Abused
A Guide For Young Girls (Cat. # H72-21/101-1994)

When Males Have Been Sexually Abused
A Guide For Adult Male Survivors (Cat. # H72-21/102-1994)

When Your Partner Has Been Sexually Abused
A Guide For Partners (Cat. # H72-21/103-1994)

When Teenage Girls Have Been Sexually Abused
A Guide For Teenagers (Cat. # H72-21/104-1994)

Sibling Sexual Abuse
A Guide For Parents (Cat. # H72-21/105-1994)

**Sexual Abuse Information Series I
includes the following booklets:**

Sexual Abuse – What Happens When You Tell
A Guide For Children (Cat. # H72-21-67-1991)

When Teenage Boys Have Been Sexually Abused
A Guide For Teenagers (Cat. # H72-21-68-1991)

When Boys Have Been Sexually Abused
A Guide For Young Boys (Cat. # H72-21-69-1991)

Sexual Abuse Counselling
A Guide For Children And Parents (Cat. # H72-21-70-1991)

When Children Act Out Sexually
A Guide For Parents And Teachers (Cat. # H72-21-71-1991)

The booklets are available from:

National Clearinghouse on Family Violence
Family Violence Prevention Division
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