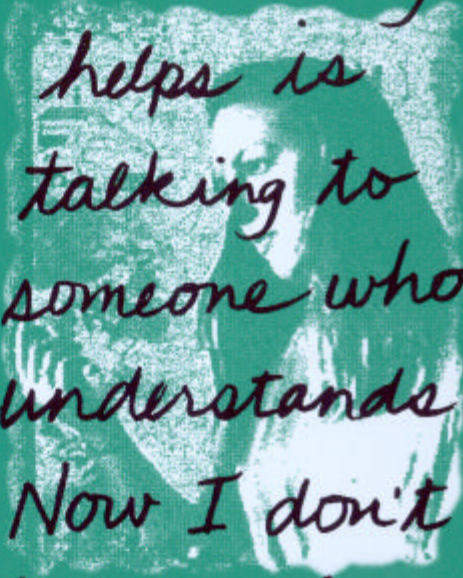


When Teenage Girls Have Been Sexually Abused



"What really
helps is
talking to
someone who
understands
Now I don't
feel so alone."

This booklet answers these questions:

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Why this booklet?

This booklet is written for teenage girls who have been sexually abused.

You are not alone. One in four girls and one in six boys has been sexually abused by the time they are eighteen. One way of looking at these numbers is to imagine a classroom of twenty teenagers. Four or five girls and three or four boys in that class will have been sexually abused by the time they leave high school.

The most
important
thing we
can say to
teens is
"talk
about it."

You may have been sexually abused by someone in your family or by someone you casually dated. You may have been sexually abused by more than one person.

You may have been abused recently or when you were a little girl.

You may have always remembered about the abuse or you may have started to remember just recently.

You may have had an experience that scared or confused you and you wonder if it might have been sexual abuse.

Whatever your experience, this booklet can help you.

It will:

- 1 define sexual abuse;
- 2 outline laws about sex between teenagers and sex between teenagers and adults;
- 3 help you understand your feelings about the abuse;
- 4 tell how you can get help — either for yourself or for a friend.

You can use this booklet by reading it yourself, reading it with a friend or trusted adult, or giving it to a friend who needs help.

In this booklet we use the pronouns *he/him/his* to refer to the abuser, unless the reference is specifically to 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.

What is sexual abuse?

Sexual abuse is an abuse of power. If someone older or bigger has forced or pressured you into sexual activity, that's sexual abuse. When older and more experienced people make teenagers feel they're not "cool" or sophisticated if they don't have sex, that's a form of sexual abuse. You can be sexually abused without being touched. If you've been forced to watch sexual acts, movies, or videos, or read pornographic magazines, that's sexual abuse. If someone continually refuses to respect your privacy while you're dressing or when you're in the bathroom, that's also sexual abuse.

What is sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment is a form of sexual abuse. It's sexual attention you didn't want and didn't ask for. If a coach suggests you'll play on the team if you let him kiss you, that's sexual harassment. If a teacher makes sexual comments about your clothing, body, or looks, that's sexual harassment. Sometimes a boss or older employee will make sexual suggestions to teenage girls on the job. Often people who sexually harass pretend they were only teasing, that it was no big deal. They suggest you have no sense of humour. But sexual harassment isn't funny. No one has to put up with humiliating, degrading remarks, looks, and gestures. No one has to pretend it doesn't bother them. Sexual harassment is against the law and you should report it. A women's centre or a sexual assault centre can direct you to the appropriate human rights agency.

You can use
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by reading
it with a
friend or
trusted adult,
or by giving
it to a
friend who
needs help.

Why do we have laws about sex?

There are laws about sexual activity written into the Criminal Code of Canada to protect people, especially young people, from exploitation and abuse. The laws recognize that some people are able to dominate and use others simply because they have more power. Some people are stronger, bigger, older, smarter or richer than others. Some, like parents, teachers, baby-sitters or coaches, may have positions of authority and trust. Others have power because they use weapons. Laws about sex are designed to protect less powerful people from those with more power.

What laws should I know about?

Sexual Interference, Section 151 of the Criminal Code of Canada. An adult must not touch any part of a child under age 14 “for sexual purposes”.

Invitation to Sexual Touching, Section 152. An adult must not invite a child under the age of 14 to touch him/herself or the adult “for sexual purposes”.

Sexual Exploitation, Section 153. An older person who holds a special position of trust and responsibility (for example, a teacher, minister, baby-sitter or doctor) must not touch any part of a young adult, aged 14-17 “for sexual purposes”; nor can that person invite a young person aged 14-17 to touch him/her “for sexual purposes”.

Sexual Exploitation is like Sexual Interference and Invitation to Touching, but there are two differences: 1) the young person is 14 years or older; and 2) the older person is in a position of trust. For example, a doctor sexually touching a 16-year-old girl could be charged under Sexual Exploitation.

However, if an 18-year-old and a 16-year-old decide to have sexual relations on a date, that is legal as long as the older person was not taking care of the younger, or was not responsible for the younger one in any way.

Incest, Section 155. Sexual intercourse with other family members is a crime.

Anal Intercourse, Section 159. No two persons may engage in anal intercourse (putting a penis in another person’s anus) if one of those persons is under 18, or if one person does not consent, no matter what the age.

Telling the police, Section 140. If you are over the age of 12 it is a crime to tell the police that a sexual offence took place if you know it didn’t.

Sexual assault, sexual assault with a weapon, aggravated sexual assault, and willfully transmitting sexual diseases are also considered serious crimes.

These laws are *not* made to stop sexual activity between teenagers. They are to protect teenagers from sexual exploitation. They are also to protect all children under age 14 from sexual abuse by teenagers and adults.

What is consent?

When one person agrees to a sexual activity with another person, the law says that person has “given consent”, and the sexual activity is legal. However, there are a number of situations in which a person *cannot* legally give consent.

There is no consent when:

- ❶ one person is under 14 and the other more than 2 years older;
- ❷ one person is between 14 and 17 and the other is in a position of trust and authority;
- ❸ one person is older than 16 and the other person uses authority, threats, lies or force to get consent.

The laws about Sexual Exploitation apply **whether the young person believes she/he has given consent or not.**

So, There Are Laws About Sex! by Wendy Harvey and Thom McGuire is a book that explains what is legal and what isn't. It's available in Canada and it's easy to read. You can usually get it from a sexual assault centre or from a sexual abuse counsellor. If you want to know more about your rights, talk to a lawyer. Each province has a law society that will give you the names of lawyers specializing in sexual abuse matters.



Who is sexually abused?

Every year thousands of teenage girls and boys in Canada are sexually abused. Many teenagers were sexually abused when they were still in elementary school or earlier. For many girls, it started at home when they were little. It may have continued for years. If you were sexually abused when you were little, you are vulnerable to being abused again as a teenager. If that early experience made you believe you don't deserve to be treated with respect, you might find it hard to stand up for yourself as you grow up.

Who are the abusers?

Abusers can be older teenage boys or adult men; older teenage girls or adult women; boys your own age that you date or who are casual friends.

The majority of abusers are male, although both teenage girls and boys can be sexually abused by women. Teenage girls are most often abused by someone in the family or by an older person they know and trust (like a family friend or a person in position of power or authority). They are sometimes abused by someone their own age; for example, someone they're dating or are partying with.

A lot of 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 teenagers. 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.

Marie's story

My older brother started to touch me sexually when I was eight and he was thirteen. At first I liked all the attention and the treats he brought

me. As the abuse went on I wanted him to stop but he wouldn't. He threatened to tell our parents I'd done something bad if I told about the abuse. I thought they'd believe him. He finally left home when he was nineteen and the abuse stopped.

When he was gone I thought that was the end of feeling bad. But it wasn't. Everyone I dated treated me like I didn't matter. I kept trying to get them to love me even when I didn't like them. One day I told my best friend about my brother. She told her mom who reported the abuse.

My parents were upset when they found out but now I'm glad they know. A counsellor helped me understand that the abuse wasn't my fault. She helped me see I deserve to be treated with respect.

Abusers are sexual bullies who like to use their power on someone younger, smaller, or less powerful.

If the abuser was nice to you sometimes, like Marie's brother was to her, it can be confusing. You begin to believe that a person will be nice to you or love you only if you do what that person wants. You might believe your feelings, thoughts and needs are less important than the other person's. Sometimes you think sex is the price you have to pay for attention.

Everyone deserves to be respected, listened to and cared about. If someone treats you in a way that hurts you, frightens you or makes you angry, in the way Marie's brother did, that's abuse. If they won't stop when you ask, that's abuse too.

When you're not respected or listened to, you feel bad about yourself. Then, like Marie, you could be abused again.

Danielle's story

I was eight when my mom and dad separated and my brother and I missed my dad a lot. Then, my mom started dating Jim and he moved in. He was really nice at first. He played with us and made me feel special. I asked him to tuck me in at night. Then he started to touch me all over. I felt confused, especially when he touched me in my private parts. I asked him to stop but he didn't listen. He said if I told he'd go away. I didn't want that to happen so I didn't say anything.

I felt trapped. Then, when I was thirteen, a teacher told us about sexual abuse. She said you should tell someone if it's happened to you. I thought about it all week then I told her about Jim. She reported it to the social worker and now Jim can't live with us any more.

My mom cried all the time and my brother was mad at me because Jim wasn't there to play video games with him. I wished I hadn't told anyone. Finally I told my teacher about how awful I felt and she helped our family get counselling. The counsellor helped my brother see that Jim caused all these problems, not me. The counsellor also gave my mom support. That was a relief because I wanted to make her feel better but didn't know how to do it.

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

Sometimes when a family finds out about the abuse, it seems to cause even more problems. Like Danielle, you might wish you hadn't told, but you can find support as she did. You could talk to your teacher or counsellor or another family member, like a grandparent. Let them know you and your family need help.

Karen's story

When I was nine, my baby-sitter Janet molested me. The way she touched me made me feel good at first. But then when I wanted her to stop, she wouldn't. I finally told my mom. She was angry. She didn't ask Janet to babysit again but she never talked to me about the abuse. I felt really ashamed because I thought she blamed me. Now I'm 13 and sometimes I feel uncomfortable when I'm alone with another girl. It's hard for me to make close friends. I'm afraid that if other girls know about the abuse they'll think I wanted it to happen. They might think I'm a lesbian. I really feel alone.

It's helpful to find a counsellor who knows about sexual abuse to help you sort out what happened.

When kids are abused by someone of the same sex, like Karen was, they often 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. If you are confused about your sexual identity, talking to a counsellor can help.

Karen thinks her mom has never talked to her about the abuse because she blames Karen. But it's probably because her mom, like a lot of parents, doesn't know how to talk to her about the abuse.

Why should I tell?

There are four important reasons for telling someone about the abuse:

① *To stop the abuse.* Sexual abuse is against the law and you have a right to be protected by the justice system. Police, social workers and judges are all part of a system that has more power than the abuser.

② *To help sort out your feelings.* You might want to see a sexual abuse counsellor or join a support group for teenage girls

who've been sexually abused. It's a relief to talk to people who understand.

③ *To make sure you're physically OK.* You might be worried the abuse has damaged your body in some way, or think you've caught a sexually transmitted disease. Once you've told, you can have a doctor check you out so you know your body's OK.

④ *To stop the abuser from hurting anyone else.* Sexual abusers often abuse victim after victim until someone stops them.

What might keep me from telling?

① *You might be afraid.* The abuser might have threatened to hurt you. Or you might think you won't be believed or that you'll be blamed for the abuse. You could be afraid of talking to social workers and police and be afraid of testifying in court because you don't know what to expect. However, there are trained people who can help you through each step.

② *You might be embarrassed* because you think you should have stopped the abuse yourself. If you were tricked, you might think you should have seen from the beginning what kind of person the abuser was. It helps to remind yourself you were only a child when it happened and the abuser was much more powerful than you were.

③ *You might not want the abuser to get into trouble* because you still care about him or because you're afraid your family will be mad at you if they can't see him any more or if he goes to jail. Remember you are not responsible for any trouble the abuser gets into — the abuser is.

④ *If the abuse has stopped, you might think there's no point making a big deal of it.* But it is a big deal. No one has a right to do what he/she did to you.

⑤ *You might not be sure it was sexual abuse.* If you're confused, it's important to find a counsellor who knows about sexual abuse to help you sort out what happened.

"The counsellor kept reminding me that I wasn't responsible. After awhile I knew it was true and I felt a lot better."

Who should I tell?

Your parents could be the best people to tell. That will depend on whether or not the abuse happened in your family. It will also depend on how well you get along with your parents. If you think one or both of them will believe you and help you, tell them. If you're not sure, tell another adult you trust. If you're worried that your parents' reactions will be too much for you to handle, tell someone else. Your parents will learn about the abuse in the end, but sometimes it's easier to tell someone outside your family first. That person could be a neighbour, teacher, coach,

counsellor, or other trusted adult. If that person doesn't help, tell someone else and keep telling until you have the help you need.

The person you tell must report it to the child protection authorities or the police. Or, you could phone a crisis support line, the child protection authorities, or the police yourself.

Telling can be scary but once you've told someone, you're not alone. Telling about the abuse gives you a chance to be safe again and to get some support for yourself. Once you tell, you're free from carrying the secret any longer.



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

Here are some of the most common reactions to sexual abuse:

Disbelief

"Sometimes I wonder if it really happened. It's so hard to believe my father could do that to me. I almost feel like it happened to someone else."

This is a normal reaction. It's a way for your mind to take in what happened without being overwhelmed. If the abuse went on for a long time, to survive you might have told yourself it wasn't really happening. If this is true for you, you need time to let it all sink in. Some days you might feel sure about all the details of the abuse and other days you might feel it never happened at all.

Minimization

"I kept telling myself that what my brother did to me was just sex play between kids. But now I remember crying and begging my mom and dad to take me shopping with them. I didn't want him to baby-sit me. I know I wouldn't have been that scared if we were really just playing."

Sometimes when you've been abused you tell yourself it wasn't that bad. This is called "minimization". It's another way of coping with being abused. You think if you tell yourself it wasn't so bad, then you won't feel so hurt, angry or scared .

Fear

"I feel so scared all the time. I keep seeing people who look like the uncle who abused me. Once I saw a van that looked like his and I froze."

Often you'll be afraid of many things: that it will happen again, that you can't trust anyone, that no one will believe you, that you'll be blamed for the abuse.

Whatever your fears, you have to figure out what you need to do to feel less afraid. Here are some possibilities: find out from the police or a social worker what you can do if the abuser tries to contact you; begin to see a counsellor; or join a support group where you can talk to other girls who've been in the same situation.

Sadness

"Sometimes I miss my dad. Last week was Father's Day and I cried because I didn't have a dad like other kids do. I want a dad who protects me and loves me, not a dad who abused me."

You might feel sad because things have changed so much. You might wish that everything could be the way it was before the abuse started.

You might also feel sad because you've spent so much time taking care of others and you've never felt taken care of yourself. You might feel you've never had a chance to be just a kid.

You might miss the offender, especially if he spent time with you and made you feel special. Even though he abused you, he might have been the only person who made you feel important.

You might feel sad because some people in your life aren't close any more. Some might not believe you. Others won't understand what you have been going through. You might feel lonely because you keep your feelings inside, or because you think no one wants to listen.

Tell someone
and keep
telling until
you have
the help that
you need.
Once you tell,
you're free
from
carrying
the secret
any longer.

Anger

"My sister and I used to get along but since I told about the abuse, we fight all the time. My grandpa abused me, not her. She's upset that he doesn't live with us any more. It seems like she doesn't care about me. So I take her clothes and things without asking and we get into more fights."

You'll probably feel angry for a lot of reasons. You'll probably feel angry at the abuser because of what he did; or at your parents because you think they should have known and should have protected you. You might wish social workers, police, and other adults would stop asking you questions when you want to be left alone. You could be angry at friends because they don't seem to understand.

Sometimes you don't know who or what you're mad at. You might yell at a friend when you're really mad at the abuser. If there's been a lot of violence in your family, your own anger might scare you. If you're worried about what you might do when you're angry, a counsellor or someone you trust can help you find safe ways to express it.

Relief

"I always felt crazy and different from other kids. I used to wear layers and layers of clothes, even on the hottest days. My friends used to tease me about it. I feel better now that I understand that I was trying to make myself feel safer."

You'll probably be relieved that the secret is finally out and you don't have to pretend any more. As you learn more about the effects of sexual abuse, some of your feelings and behaviour will make more sense to you.

Should I go for counselling?

Yes, especially if you:

❶ Feel depressed for days at a time. If you feel like hurting yourself or killing yourself, get help right away! You don't have to keep feeling this way.

❷ Worry that people are tired of listening to you talk about the abuse and your feelings.

❸ Wish you'd never told about the abuse. When you feel this way, you probably need more support. It can help to talk to a counsellor or join a support group, or both.

❹ Have nightmares and feel afraid the abuser could hurt you again.

❺ Have questions about the abuse but don't know who to ask.

❻ Start doing things you've never done before. For example, if you start skipping school or having sex with people you hardly know.

❼ Use alcohol or drugs and find yourself in unsafe situations.

❽ Feel guilty or ashamed about the abuse.

❾ Worry about testifying in court.

❿ Worry that you might sexually abuse children. The more you can talk about the abuse and about your fear of abusing others, the less likely you are to abuse anyone. If you have already sexually abused someone, get help immediately.

As you
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about
sexual
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What's a support group?

Many communities have groups for teenage girls who've been sexually abused. Usually a counsellor will help the group become a safe place to talk. It helps to be able to talk to others who've had experiences like yours and who understand how you're feeling.

What happens in these groups?

"I thought I'd have to go into all the detail, like I did when I talked to the social worker and the police. But I didn't. In the group we talk about things



that really bother us, like how Katie's mom keeps telling everyone about the abuse, even though it embarrasses Katie. Like how hard it is to concentrate at school when court's coming up. Or how some of us feel different from other teenage girls because of the abuse. It's such a relief to be with people who know what I'm going through. I thought I'd never be able to talk in a group, but I do."

In a support group, you can talk about anything that's important to you — parents, school, friends, boyfriends, sex, alcohol, and drugs as well as the abuse itself and how you feel about it.

"I loved the times we did drawings. I drew my nightmares so I could get them out of my system. Another girl made a clay sculpture of the abuser — then smashed it. She said it helped her get her anger out. My favourite time was when we practised how to deal with guys who make rude, sexual remarks to girls at school."

Each group is different but they're usually a mixture of fun, talk, and other activities.

"It helped to talk to others who had experiences like mine and who understood how I felt."

Will I ever recover from sexual abuse?

YES! Even teens who were abused for years recover from sexual abuse. You can grow up feeling good about yourself, having fun, having healthy relationships and rewarding work, and being a good parent.

The first step in recovering from sexual abuse is to tell someone. The next step is to find people who will support and care about you while you're recovering from the abuse. Many of the things that make you feel bad about yourself are connected to the abuse. As you start to understand how the abuse interfered with your growing up, you'll discover wonderful things about yourself that were covered up because of the abuse.

Yes! Even teens who were abused for years recover from sexual abuse. You can grow up feeling good about yourself, having fun and having healthy relationships.

Suggested Reading

Fay, Jennifer J. *Top Secret*. Santa Cruz, California: Network Publication, 1982.

Harvey, Wendy, and Thom McGuire. *So, There are Laws About Sex!*, Vancouver, B.C.: Butterworth's Canada, 1989.

Novels:

Asher, Sandy. *Things are Seldom What They Seem*. New York, N.Y.: Delacorte Press, 1983.

(A story about a girl whose friend is sexually abused by the drama coach.)

Howard, Ellen. *Gillyflower*. New York, N.Y.: Atheneum, 1986.

(A story about a girl who is sexually abused by her father.)

**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
Health Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada K1A 1B5
Tel: 1-800-267-1291
Fax: 1-613- 941-8930

 TDD line: 1-800-561-5653