



10 things
every parent
should know
to protect your
teen from
sexual abuse
trauma

- Meghan Hurley, LCSW

#1: Teens need to understand what sexual abuse / sexual assault is and that it has most likely happened to someone they know.

What is sexual abuse???

The definition of child sexual abuse is broader than most people realize. Often a traumatic experience for children and teens, child sexual abuse is a criminal offense punishable by law in many societies. It includes:

- any sexual act between an adult and a minor, or between two minors, when one exerts power over the other.
- forcing, coercing or persuading a child to engage in any type of sexual act.
- non-contact acts such as exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, voyeurism, and communicating in a sexual manner by phone or Internet.

What is sexual abuse???

Tip #1

- Sexual abuse can be physical, verbal and/or emotional. It is an abuse of power and often of trust by someone who uses another person for his or her own sexual pleasure.
- In contrast to the specific criminal act of rape, the term sexual assault can describe a range of criminal acts that are sexual in nature, from unwanted touching and kissing, to rubbing, groping or forcing the victim to touch the perpetrator in sexual ways. But sexual assault overlaps with rape because the term includes rape.
- Everyone has the right to feel safe all the time. If someone is making you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, then it could be sexual abuse.

(The extent of the abuse does not necessarily determine the extent of the trauma)

Most people think of adult rape as a crime of great proportion and significance, and are unaware that children are victimized at a much higher rate than adults.

Nearly 70% of all reported sexual assaults (including assaults on adults) occur to children ages 17 and under.

Child sexual abuse is likely the most prevalent health problem children face with the most serious array of consequences.

Teens should know that sexual abuse is common and can happen to anyone.

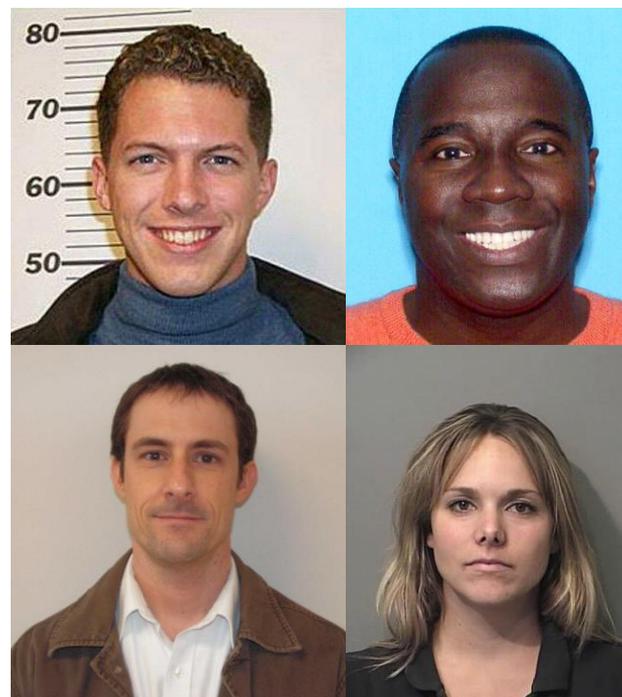
- **Child sexual abuse is not rare. Retrospective research indicates that as many as 1 out of 4 girls and 1 out of 7 boys will experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 18.**
- **Youths have higher rates of sexual assault victimization than do adults. In 2000, the rate for youths aged 12 to 17 was 2.3 times higher than for adults.**
- **Victims do not meet a specific profile. Families affected span every ethnicity and race, religion, level of education, and economic background**

What does a sex offender look like?

Creepy and obvious?



But in reality they can be:



#2

Know who sexually offends. Do not rely on the sexual offender registry!

VICTIMS KNOW THEIR OFFENDERS over 90% of the time

Offenders are :

- Family members
- People in a position of trust
- Peers!

Teens are often abused by other teens -- Acquaintances and Intimate partners

- 51.1% of female victims of rape reported being raped by an intimate partner and 40.8% by an acquaintance
- 52.4% of male victims report being raped by an acquaintance and 15.1% by a stranger

How common is teen sexual assault?

Unfortunately, teen sexual assault is very common. Recent studies have found that:

- One in four teen girls was verbally or physically pressured into having sex during the past year.
- One in 10 high school girls—and one in 20 high school boys—reported being forced into sex.
 - More than one third of acquaintance rape victims are between the ages of 14 and 17.
- One in three teens is a victim of sexual or other abuse by a dating partner each year.

The most common age of people charged with a sex offense?

14

- *The US Bureau of Justice reports: “The single age with the greatest number of offenders from the perspective of law enforcement was age 14.*
- *About 1 / 3 of all sex offenders are adolescents*

Stats on teens who sexually offend

Juveniles who commit sex offenses against other children are more likely than adult sex offenders to offend in groups

They are most likely to offend in their home, the home of the victim or at schools,

The number of youth coming to the attention of police for sex offenses increases sharply at age 12 and plateaus after age 14. Early adolescence is the peak age for youth offenses against younger victims.

Females constitute 7% of juveniles who commit sexual offenses

Most adolescent offenders do not meet the criteria for pedophilia

Adolescents who sexually offend are more responsive to treatment than adults. They do not appear to continue to reoffend into adulthood, especially when provided with appropriate treatment.

- We try to protect our young kids from assault by teaching them Stranger Danger. When they are sexually assaulted by someone they know they are unprepared and confused. They then feel that they let it happen and become invested in the secret.
- Child sexual abuse can be really confusing. Just because the child is being abused does not mean he / she does not love the perpetrator and may even seek out the relationship.

Tip #3

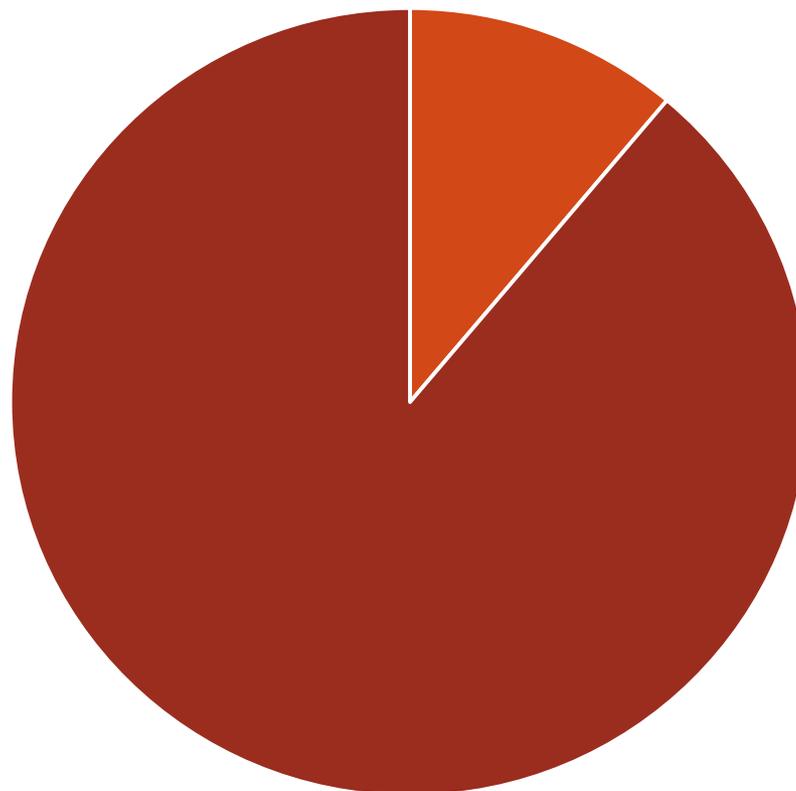
Be able to recognize “grooming”



Most parent teach their children to avoid “grab and go situations”. But children rarely fear their offenders prior to the abuse.

For the offender this is not simply about sexual gratification. It is about power and control and manipulation.

How offenders get kids to keep the secret.....



The offender will identify the child's needs and make a point to fill these needs.

It often doesn't take physical force to sexually assault a victim. Threats, manipulation, guilt trips, trickery or intimidation can make a victim feel like they cannot refuse sex.

“If you really loved me, you'd do it”

“I'm going to tell everyone we did it anyway, so you might as well.”

“If you tell I'm going to kill myself”

In the words of the victim:

- “I never thought a guy like him could like me. He made me feel so special”
- “I felt really sorry for him. He had such a hard life and I just felt bad for him.”
- “ He was my best friend, but he didn’t like any of my friends”
- “He just kept pouring me shots”
- “He made me feel like I owed him”
- “I didn’t feel ready but he just kept asking and I wanted him to leave me alone”
- “Once he had the pictures of me he had total control”

Tip #4

Be approachable. Sexual abuse trauma lies in the secrecy.

Some of the research.....

- Consistently studies show that only about 1/3 of adult sexual abuse survivors disclosed in childhood.
- Only 10% of children disclose while the abuse is still happening. (Saunders)
- 43% of children initially deny allegations of abuse (Lawson & Chaffin)
- 75% of children don't tell within the first year (Elliot & Briere)

The Trauma is in the Secrecy

Prevention programs can try to teach kids how to resist but they need to know “My power is after”. Telling is critical to healing. They will be able to do this if they know “Secrets Aren’t Safe!”

Why kids don't tell

- Most sexual abuse victims FREEZE and do not say “No” which leads them to believe it is their fault.
- Kids believe that they can stop future abuse. If it happens a second time they fear that they will be in trouble for not telling initially.
- Embarrassment, Shame, and Self Blame
- PTSD avoidance -- telling will make it real and they believe they can pretend it did not happen.
- Fears that no one would believe them
- Fear that they will be seen or treated differently
- Loyalty for the perpetrator – don't want to ruin his life
- Do not want to burden parents
- Fear of trouble due to substance abuse
- Fear of being blamed
- Uncertainty if it was abuse – “not sure if it counted”

And many children are afraid that they did something to cause the abuse.

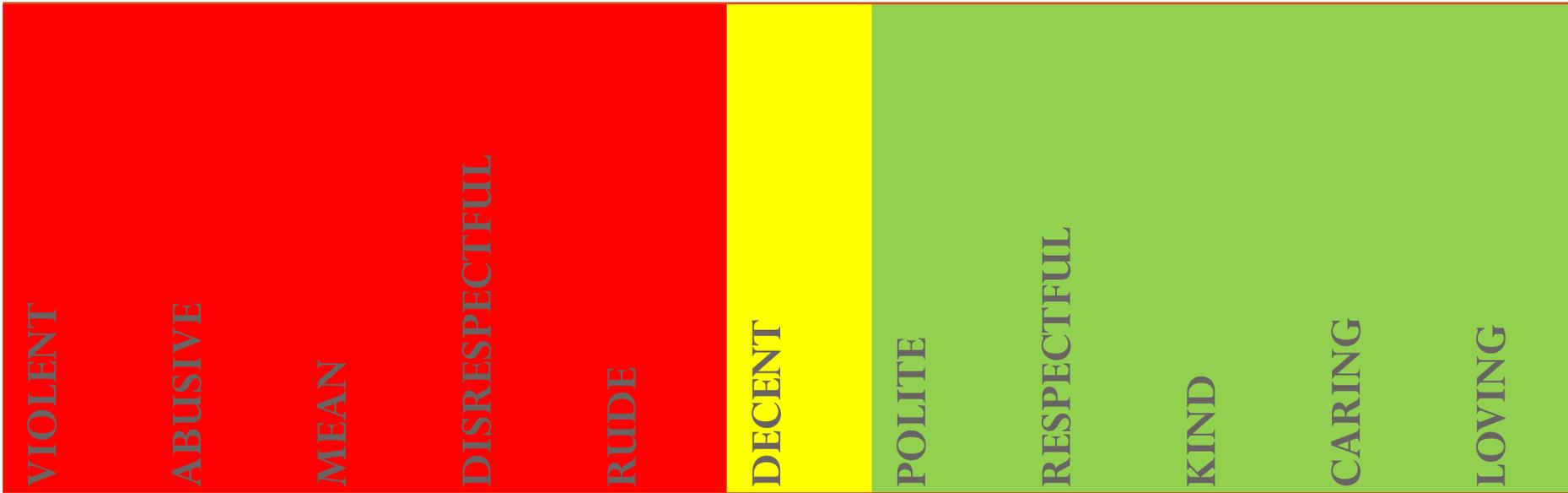
Many victims do get blamed – think of situations where the victim is at fault. We don't want to believe people are capable of this so we look at what the victim could have done to protect themselves

Many children do not tell for fear they will be blamed.

It is never the victim's fault

- Even if they were drunk
- Even if they propositioned a (legally) older adult
- Even if they are they are sexually active
- Even if they dress inappropriately

CONTINUUM OF DECENCY



False Reports

many children fear that they will not be believed.....

- Fabricated sexual abuse reports constitute only 1% to 4% of all reported cases.
- Of these reports, 75% are falsely reported by adults and 25% are reported by children.
- Children only fabricate ½% of the time.
- If the real victims are not telling why would someone make this up?

Tip #5

Teach your teens “Safe Sexual Values”

Talking to your children about sexual contact will of course be influenced by culture and family values. However these rules are critical.....

1. Teach your teens about consent. Both parties must be willing and actively saying yes to any physical contact with sexual parts.
2. The risk of any type of unwanted sexual contact will be considerably lower if the two individuals have had a conversation about sexual expectations.
3. Any Sexual contact between adolescents should be with same age peers.
4. It is never okay to have sexual contact with family members.
5. Sending photos that expose private body parts can be a criminal offense

Table I
Consensual Sex — Criminal Penalty

		Age of Party							
		10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Age of Party	10	NC	NC	NC	NC	4F	4F	4F	4F
	11	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	4F	4F	4F
	12	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	4F	4F
	13	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	4F
	14	4F	NC						
	15	4F	4F	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC
	16	4F	4F	4F	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC
	17	4F	4F	4F	4F	NC	NC	NC	NC
	18	4F	4F	4F	4F	4F	NC	NC	NC
	19	4F	4F	4F	4F	4F	NC	NC	NC
	20	4F	4F	4F	4F	4F	NC	NC	NC
	21	4F	4F	4F	4F	4F	NC	NC	NC
	22	4F	4F	4F	4F	4F	NC	NC	NC
	23	4F	4F	4F	4F	4F	NC	NC	NC
	24	4F	4F	4F	4F	4F	NC	NC	NC
	25	4F	4F	4F	4F	4F	1M	NC	NC
	26	4F	4F	4F	4F	4F	1M	1M	NC

Code: NC=No Crime; 4F=Class 4 Felony; and 1M=Class 1 Misdemeanor.



I NEED FEMINISM BECAUSE
MY UNIVERSITY TEACHES
'HOW TO AVOID GETTING RAPED'
INSTEAD OF
'DON'T RAPE'
AT FRESHMEN ORIENTATION.

Sexual education is missing these messages:

- Know your limits and try to speak out if they are crossed. Your power may be later if you can't speak out in the moment.
- You have the right to change your mind
- You never “owe” anyone sex. Sex should be mutually fun.
- Using alcohol and drugs can impair your ability to think and communicate clearly. The law says you cannot consent if you are using.
- Talk about party safety. The buddy system, watching your drink, back up plans.
- Avoid being isolated
- Trust your instincts

Make sure your child understands coercion

If your teen is feeling pressured to do something sexual and does not know how to get away from the situation, or is afraid that saying “no” will break up the relationship, it may be a sign that he or she is being coerced or emotionally forced to do something against his or her will.

It is also sexual assault if the victim is drunk, drugged, unconscious, or too young (ages of consent differ from state to state) or mentally disabled to be legally able to agree to sexual contact.

Tip #6

Teach your child that the foundation of a healthy sexual relationship is consent

Consent means making an active and enthusiastic Yes. If your teen felt they could not safely say “No”, it was not consent. If someone tries to convince your teen to do something sexual— even if he or she has done it with that person before, but now really does not want to—he or she has the right to say “no.”

CONSENT IS ABOUT CHOICE

- Yes means Yes vs No means No
- Consent is an active enthusiastic Yes
- Consent requires equal power. Unless both parties are comfortable saying No there is no consent
- Giving in out of fear is not consent
- Giving in out of deceit and / or manipulation is not consent



How to avoid sexually assaulting someone

Rule #1 If he or she is not psyched STOP

She/he is not psyched if:

- Crying
- Moving away
- Not kissing back or reciprocating
- Giving in on the 9th request
- Making up excuses to leave
- You are taking pants off and she is pulling them back on

She / he is psyched if:

- Looks happy
- Looking at you, touching you, kissing you, laughing and smiling
- Telling you what she /he wants
- Clearly wants to stay
- Taking your clothes off

Tip #7

Know the signs of sexual abuse

Signs are usually subtle, and for many victims there are no signs whatsoever

Signs are

- Physical
- Emotional
- Behavioral
- Sexual

Victim's of sexual assault may:

- Feel afraid, ashamed, angry, sad, lonely, betrayed, or depressed.
- Feel guilty and confused if you knew or had a relationship with the attacker, even though the assault was not your fault.
- Feel like you have no friends or that your friends won't believe you.
- Want to hurt someone else or yourself.
- Feel like taking steps to defend yourself.
- Feel helpless to stop the assault.
- Feel hopeless about whether anything can be done.
- Be afraid to go anywhere that the attacker might be.
- Feel anxious all the time.
- Feel bad about yourself or your body.

Possible Warning Signs that your child has been sexually assaulted:

- Unusual weight gain or weight loss
- Unhealthy eating patterns, like a loss of appetite or excessive eating
- Signs of physical abuse, such as bruises
- Signs of depression, such as persistent sadness, lack of energy, changes in sleep or appetite, withdrawing from normal activities, or feeling “down”
- Anxiety or worry
- Falling grades
- Changes in self-care, such as paying less attention to hygiene, appearance, or fashion than they usually do
- Expressing thoughts about suicide or suicide behavior
- Substance Abuse
- Self Harming behaviors

What parents assume will be the signs of sexual abuse:

- Physical evidence – 40% of the time they expect injuries
- The child will fear the offender– 84% of the time
- That their child would tell them (only 40% of the time parents learned of sexual abuse because the child told thme directly)

Tip #8

Recognize that teens are watching a lot more porn than you realize

Consider how porn influences ideas on

- gender
- sexuality
- aggression
- consent
- race
- queer sex
- relationships and intimacy
- body images

“There’s nowhere else to learn about sex....and porn stars know what they are doing.”

Teenagers have reported that porn was their primary source for information about sex — more than friends, siblings, schools or parents.

If you don’t do it like the guys in porn, you fear she’s not going to like you.”

Tip # 9: Know how to respond

Children whose caretakers accepted the possibility that their Child might have been sexually abused disclosed almost 3.5 times more than those whose caretakers denied any possibility of abuse (63% versus 17%)

Why tell? Telling....

- Helps victims overcome shame
- Helps a victim know they are not alone
- Exposes the person offending and can stop future abuse
- Gets the victim help and support
- Can clarify confusion about what happened
- Sets an example for other survivors
- Breaks the silence in which sexual abuse thrives
- Gives me my power back by no longer following the abusers rules

THE TEAMS

TEAM VICTIM

THE VICTIM MUST ASK
THE BYSTANDER TO
SHARE THE BURDEN
OF THEIR PAIN. THE
VICTIM DEMANDS
ACTION,
ENGAGEMENT, AND
REMEMBERING

TEAM OFFENDER

IT IS VERY TEMPTING
TO TAKE THE SIDE OF
THE PERPETRATOR.
ALL THE
PERPETRATOR ASKS
IS THAT YOU DO
NOTHING....HEAR,
SEE, SPEAK NO EVIL

(Judith Herman)

In fact it is more likely that adults who suspect sexual abuse fail to report it.

Barriers to adults taking action

- Not knowing or recognizing 'warning sign' behaviors that should elicit concern and prompt more questions
- Fear of being wrong about suspicions or acting on concerns that are ultimately unfounded.
- Fear of making things worse for the child.
- A belief that they can make it stop without involving authorities
- Not knowing where to turn for credible information or to safely explore options.



Research indicates the impact of the trauma, or how resilient a child is, has more to do with the response and the support system, than with the actual type of abuse that occurred.

A caregivers reaction is critical to healing. Disbelief can be detrimental.

Parent capacity for support



Parent capacity to report

How to respond

- Avoid big reactions – remain calm
- Tell your child you believe them and thank them for telling
- Do not say anything that may blame or shame your child
- Do not ask a lot of questions
- Call the police or child protection and let them conduct the interview

Why calling the police is essential

- Team offender has one rule: do not call the police
- Offenders generally will not stop on their own (you may protect your child but what about others?) Not getting caught only reinforces the behavior
- Reporting is the only way to get the child support and therapy
- Going to the police communicates to a child that this is not their fault, that the offender did something very wrong, and the victim has nothing to be ashamed of.

Who to call

Department of Human Services

- 1-844-CO-4-KIDS
- Your local law enforcement

Tip #10

Make your child a least likely victim

- Your child understands the trauma is in the secrecy
- Your child understands the nature of sexual abuse and places sole responsibility on the abuser
- Your child knows who they can talk to
- Your child is clear on consent
- Your child has a variety of healthy ways to get attention
- Your child knows they can appropriately question authority and be respected
- Your child is comfortable talking to you about sex
- Your child has appropriate supervision and is not isolated

[Jones, Maggie *What Teenagers are Learning from Online Porn* 2/7/18](#)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/07/magazine/teenagers-learning-online-porn-literacy-sex-education.html>

<https://thepornconversation.org/>

Vernacchio, Al “For Goodness Sex: Changing the Way We Talk to Teens About Sexuality, Values, and Health”

Herbenick, Ebby “Sex Made Easy: Your Awkward Questions Answered for Better, Smarter Amazing Sex” 2012

- <https://www.nsvrc.org/statistics>
- planned parenthood consent video
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNN3nAevQKY&t=49s>
- Tea consent video
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZwvrxVavnQ>
- Article for teens about consent:
<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/consent-how-to>

www.enoughabuse.org

NSVRC.org (National Sexual Violence Resource
Center)

www.stopitnow.com

www.darknesstolight.org

www.nctsn.org

[https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/teen
sexual_assault_parents.pdf](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/teen_sexual_assault_parents.pdf)

Childwelfare.gov

To schedule a presentation, or request more
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