

# Myths and Facts about Child Sexual Abuse

**Myth #1:** Child sexual abuse occurs only among strangers. If children stay away from strangers, they will not be sexually abused.

- **Fact:** The National Department of Justice (DOJ) statistics indicate that in approximately 85% of the cases, the offender is known to the victim. He/she is usually a relative, family member, baby-sitter/other care giver, or older friend of the child. About 10% of perpetrators of child sexual abuse are strangers to the child.

**Myth #2:** Children provoke sexual abuse by their seductive behavior.

**Fact:** Seductive behavior is not the cause. Responsibility for the act ALWAYS lies with the offender. Sexual abuse sexually exploits a child not developmentally capable of understanding or resisting and/or who may be psychologically or socially dependent on the offender.

**Myth #3:** The majority of child sexual abuse victims tell someone about the abuse.

**Fact:** According to a study by Dr. David Finkelhor, close to 2/3 of all child sexual abuse victims may not tell their parents or anyone else because they fear being blamed, punished or not believed. Additionally, many victims feel that the abuse may be their fault in some way.

**Myth #4:** Men and women sexually abuse their children equally.

**Fact:** Men are the offenders 94% of the time in cases of child sexual abuse. Men sexually abuse both male and female children. 75% of male offenders are married or have consenting sexual relationships. Only about 4% of same-sex abuse involves homosexual perpetrators; 96% of the perpetrators are heterosexual.

**Myth #5:** If the children did not want it, they could say, "STOP!"

**Fact:** Children generally do not question the behavior of adults, and have been taught to obey adults. They are often coerced by bribes, threats, and use of a position of authority.

**Myth #6:** All sexual abuse victims are girls.

**Fact:** Studies on child sexual abuse indicate one of four females under the age of 18 and one of five to six males under the age of 18 are child sexual abuse victims.

**Myth #7:** Family sexual abuse is an isolated, one-time incident.

**Fact:** Studies indicate that most child sexual abuse continues for at least two years before it is reported. And in most cases, it doesn't stop until it's reported.

**Myth #8:** In family sexual abuse, the “non-offending” parent always knows.

**Fact:** While some “non-offending” parents know and even support the offender's actions, many, because of their lack of awareness, may suspect something is wrong, but are unclear as to what it is or what to do.

**Myth #9:** Family sexual abuse only happens in low-income families.

**Fact:** Family sexual abuse crosses all classes of society. There is no race, social, or economic class that is immune to family sexual abuse. Incest estimated to occur in 14% of all families. 10 to 20% of American children are incest victims; 90% of the victims are female, and 90% of the abusers are fathers or stepfathers.

**Myth #10:** Non-violent sexual behavior between a child and an adult is not damaging to the child.

**Fact:** Nearly all victims will experience emotional trauma such as confusion, shame, guilt, anger, and a poor self-image. Child sexual abuse can result in long-term relationship problems and be perpetuated from generation to generation. Dr. Nicholas Groth, who has worked extensively with sexual offenders, reports that 60% of convicted sexual offenders have reported histories of child sexual abuse victimization.

Information provided by Red Flag Green Flag Resource Center of Fargo/Moorhead.