

# Personal Safety for Children

## Rural Abuse Helpline and Outreach Project

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# Rural Abuse Helpline and Outreach Project

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- Goal of the project : To increase awareness of sexual abuse and its impact on victims, families and communities among isolated rural populations in Huron and Perth Counties, including the Anabaptist communities. To increase self-identification by victims of childhood sexual abuse whether current or past with the result of increasing reporting of abuse and connection with social support services.

# Activities

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## Increase awareness through:

- Development and distribution of printed materials in easy-access areas
- Presentations and speaking engagements to professionals and parents
- Development of lesson plans for school children
- Meetings with members of Anabaptist Community
- Establishment of a Rural Abuse Helpline
- Broad mailing of postcards to identified isolated rural areas with information on the Rural Abuse Helpline

# Child Sexual Abuse

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Sexual abuse is an abuse of power. It involves sexual activity forced on a child by either an adult or an older, more powerful child. Because the victims are powerless to stop the abuse and are confused about what is happening they may suffer deep emotional damage even if there is no physical damage.



# Did You Know

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- Evidence shows that 70% of sexual abuse victims are girls and 30% are boys; many experts believe that the number of male victims is actually higher as boys are less likely to tell than girls.
- Any child can be abused. Young children and children with disabilities are more vulnerable
- Studies show that in over 90% of cases a child is abused by a family member or someone they know. Very few children are abused by strangers
- Abuse occurs in all communities. Abuse is just as common in rural communities as it is in cities.

# Did You Know

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- Abusers may develop a relationship with your child to gain access, They use many tactics to ensure a child's silence such as threats, bribery and physical force. They may tell the child that participating in sexual activities is a way to repay favours.
- The majority of abusers are male. Some victims have themselves been abused as children.
- Studies have found that some abusers victimized more than 70 children before anyone listened and/or recognized the signs and symptoms of abuse.
- Child Sexual Abuse is very frequently unreported.

# What are the signs and symptoms of Abuse

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- Physical symptoms such as difficulty in walking or sitting, pain in urination, frequent psychosomatic illnesses
- Excessive bathing



# What are the signs and symptoms of Abuse

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- Excessive masturbation
- More sexual knowledge than is appropriate for the child's age
- Changes in mood and behavior
- Sleep problems or nightmares
- Feelings of low self worth  
talk of being damaged
- Self mutilation or cutting,
- Running away
- Exceptional secrecy



# What are the long term consequences of sexual abuse

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- Post traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety disorders such as panic attacks, social phobias
- Victims often lose interest in school and other activities
- Difficulty in trusting others, relationship problems, fears of intimacy
- Unhealthy behaviors such as substance abuse and risky sexual behavior
- Running away from home and in some cases turning to prostitution

# What are the long term consequences of sexual abuse

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- Chronic health problems including obesity
- Struggles with sexual identity issues
- Suicide



# Why children do not tell when they have been abused:

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- Children often fear that if they tell, the abuser will harm them or hurt someone they love even their favorite pet. Abusers use many tactics to gain access to children and to ensure their silence; these tactics include threats, bribery and physical force. Some abusers “groom” their victims by disguising behaviors as educational; or as a type of punishment or a reward. They may tell a child that cooperating is a way they can repay favours.

# The Terrible Secret

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- One of the reasons sexual abuse is so damaging to children is that almost always the abuser makes the child keep it a secret. The shared secret then becomes a source of shame and lowers the child's sense of self worth

# If your child has been abused the damage may take many forms

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- Guilt – children may feel they are in some way responsible.
- Fear - If the abuser has told them that something terrible will happen if they reveal the secret they may be afraid.
- Grief– children may stop seeing the world as a safe and friendly place.

# If your child has been abused the damage may take many forms

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- Anger – because they can't get back at the abuser, they may lash out at others.
- Depression – they may seem sad, and less playful. They may lose interest in school, friends and activities.
- Helplessness: because they feel helpless they may become victims for further abuse.

# Reporting Child Sexual Abuse

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- A person who suspects that a child is being sexually abused or is at risk of such abuse is required by law to report such concerns immediately to the Children's Aid Society.
- All reports of child sexual abuse are assessed by the Children's Aid Society. In cases where an investigation is required the society works together with the police to ensure that the child is safe and that the family is supported.
- In all cases, the person reporting is protected from any kind of legal action, provided the report is not falsely made.

# How can you Help

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If a child discloses abuse

This is a very emotionally difficult time for the child. The following messages are very important for the child to hear:

- “It is good that you told me”
- “I believe you”
- “It is not your fault”
- “I will do my best to help you”

# How can a counselor help you and your child :

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We may feel we want to “put the abuse behind us” and forget it ever happened but denying the abuse may lead to problems later in life. It is important that you and your child understand the confusing emotions experienced when the abuse was taking place and afterwards. It is important that child victims of abuse understand that they are not to blame for the abuse; that they are taught ways to protect themselves in the future and that they feel safe to tell a trusted adult if they are abused again. Counsellors are people trained to listen and help you and your child

# As a member of your community you can help prevent child abuse by:

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- Supporting public education and child abuse prevention programs in schools and the community
- Teaching children how to recognize, say “no” to abusive behavior and tell a trusted adult.
- Reporting suspicions of abuse to local authorities

# Where you can go for help

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Rural Abuse Helpline and Outreach

1-877-33- TALK NOW

