

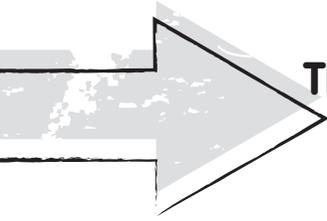
You Are Not Alone

A handbook about sexual abuse for youth, parents and caregivers

Lawyers For Children wishes to express our gratitude to Lisa Lubell, LCSW, for updating this handbook with care and expertise, to Lauren Kernan for her excellent copy editing, and to the young people and members of LFC's staff who have generously provided their comments and suggestions.

We offer sincere thanks to Lyn Kennedy Slater, Ph.D., who researched and wrote the original version of this handbook for Lawyers For Children.

Lawyers For Children is a nonprofit organization providing critically-needed, top-quality legal representation and social work services to over 4,000 children and young people in foster care in New York City every year. We advocate on behalf of our clients in foster care, abuse, neglect, termination of parental rights and custody proceedings. In addition, Lawyers For Children engages in policy and reform efforts to benefit all children in foster care throughout New York State. To learn more about LFC, visit our website at www.lawyersforchildren.org, call us at 212-966-6420, or write to Lawyers For Children at 110 Lafayette Street, 8th Floor, New York, NY 10013.



**This book will give you the
following information:**

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INTRODUCTION

This book is for young people who may have been sexually abused, know someone who has been sexually abused, and/or are worried about their own sexual behavior towards others.

Sometimes adults want to help but don't know how. You can share the information in this book with parents, foster parents, social workers, child care workers, counselors, teachers, or other responsible adults. They can help you or someone you know get the most appropriate services.

This book is also here to remind you that **you are not alone!**

NO

What Is Sexual Abuse?

No one, including a member of your family, has the right to look at or take pictures of your sexual parts, touch your body in sexual ways, make you look at or touch their body, make you watch their sexual activities or sexual movies, or have sex with you. No one has the right to threaten harm to you or to anyone else if you tell someone about sexual abuse. You have the right to seek help from someone who will be able to protect you.¹



How many young people have been abused?

Many young people have been sexually abused or know someone who has been abused. Most young people who have experienced sexual abuse were abused by someone they know: a parent or sibling, another relative, or someone they know outside their family. Some abusers are individuals that young people loved and trusted. Others are acquaintances and still others are strangers.

It is hard to know exactly how many young people have been sexually abused. In 2008, at least 80,000 children (anyone under 18) were sexually abused in the United States. *But these are only the cases that have been officially reported.* Many children don't tell anyone about abuse. Therefore, many more than 80,000 young people may have been sexually abused in 2008. Here are the best estimates:

- About 1 in 4 girls have been sexually abused before the age of 18.
- About 1 in 6 boys have been sexually abused before the age of 18.²

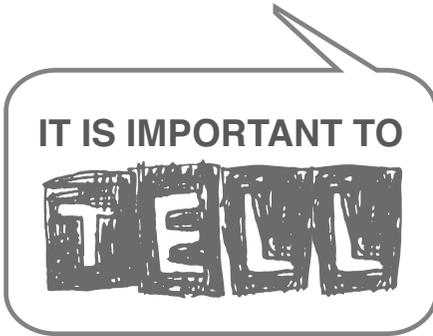
¹ Adapted from Gary F. Kelly, *Sex and Sense: A Contemporary Guide for Teenagers*. Barron's Educational Series, Inc.: Haupauge, New York, 1993.

² Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Study of the CDC data collected between 1995-1997.

Who to Tell About the Abuse

If you are being abused, you need to talk to someone. If the right people know what is happening to you, they can protect you from the abuser.

The decision whether to tell someone about abuse can be a difficult one. There are a lot of reasons to tell, but there are also reasons why the idea of telling someone about the abuse may seem frightening and complicated.

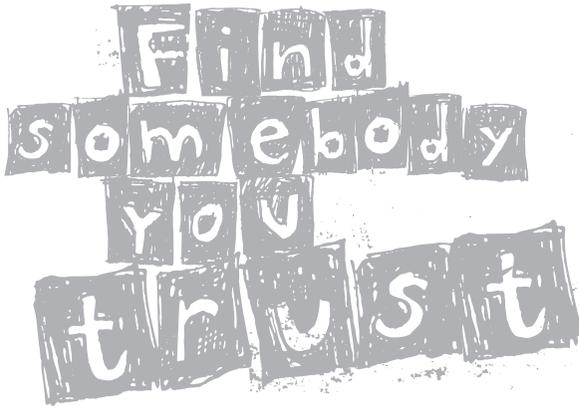


Some young people have said that they want to tell someone because:

- They feel frightened being the only one who knows about the abuse.
- They feel alone and very different because they have this secret.
- They want someone to talk to.
- They hope that someone else can help them stop the abuse.
- They feel confused, and hiding this secret is hurting them.
- They are afraid a younger sibling will also be abused.

Some young people have said that they don't want to tell about the abuse because:

- They are afraid that no one will believe them.
- They have already told, and no one has helped them.
- The abuser has told the young person that if they tell, terrible things will happen to them and to those they care about.
- They are afraid that they will be taken away from their families.
- They believe that the abuse is their own fault.
- They feel that their own sexual behavior is out of control.
- They feel confused and guilty if the sexual touching felt good.



Finding the right adult to tell about the abuse

It is important to try to find somebody you TRUST. This will make it easier to talk about what has been happening. This person can be a family member, a friend, a teacher, a doctor, a social worker, a counselor, or just about any adult with whom you feel comfortable.

Sometimes adults do not know what to say when you tell them that you are being sexually abused. They may say the wrong things if they are very upset. They may say that they do not believe you. They may say “why didn’t you tell me?” or “why did you let this happen?” They may get very angry.

You should keep in mind that if an adult says the wrong things, or does not say anything at all, this does not mean that you have done anything wrong by telling him or her. It just means that this adult may not be the right person to help you. Try not to be too discouraged— think about whether there is another trustworthy adult that you can tell or give this adult time to calm down. You should always remember that you are telling the truth and that the abuse is wrong and should not be happening to you.

The right adult to tell will be an adult who understands that sexual abuse is NOT your fault.

These are helpful things that an adult can say:

“I’m sorry this has happened to you.”

“We’ll tell someone about what happened so it won’t happen again.”

“Thank you for telling me about what happened to you.”

“You didn’t do anything wrong.”

“You did the right thing by telling me.”

“There are things that we can do to help you feel better.”

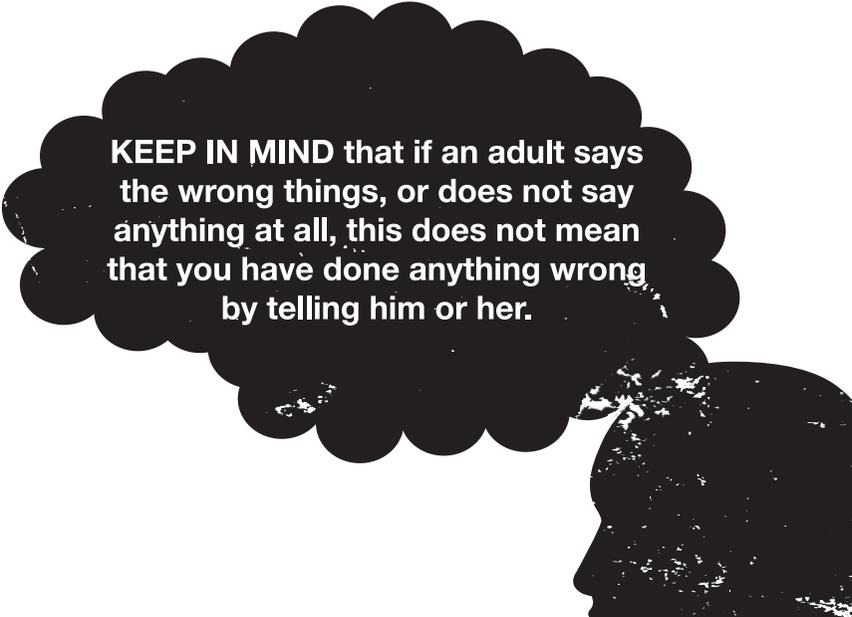
Where can you go to report abuse?

If you do not already know an adult whom you feel comfortable telling about the abuse, look for a responsible adult in your school or community. You should know, however, that adults in certain jobs are mandated reporters. A mandated reporter is someone who is required by law to report the abuse to the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). ACS is then supposed to investigate and provide help.

Your lawyer is not a mandated reporter, and he or she can help you understand exactly when an adult must report abuse.

The following people are mandated reporters in New York State:

- teachers
- guidance counselors
- social workers
- therapists
- drug and alcohol counselors
- doctors
- nurses
- dentists
- psychiatrists or psychologists
- district attorneys
- police officers



KEEP IN MIND that if an adult says the wrong things, or does not say anything at all, this does not mean that you have done anything wrong by telling him or her.

Other ways to report abuse:

You can always directly report abuse to the **Child Abuse Hotline**. The adults at the hotline will report the abuse to the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). This hotline is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

You can go to your local police precinct and ask to speak to the Youth Officer or Special Victims Detective.

You can go to a neighborhood center that has programs for young people, such as **The Door** or your local community center. If you are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning you can also talk to someone at the **Youth Enrichment Services (YES) Project** of the NYC LGBT Community Center. If you want to talk to someone after having been paid for sexual activity, call **GEMS**.

If you are being abused in school, you can tell a teacher, social worker, or counselor, or you can call the Special Commissioner of Investigation of the **NYC Department of Education**.

If you are in foster care and are being abused by a staff person or foster parent, you can call the **Children's Rights Unit of ACS**. You can also call your lawyer or social worker at **Lawyers For Children** or **The Legal Aid Society Juvenile Rights Practice**.

Don't forget that you can always call the **Child Abuse Hotline** or **911**.

Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-342-3270

The Door 212-941-9090

YES Project 212-620-7310

GEMS 212-926-8089

NYC Department of Education 212-510-1500

Children's Rights Unit of ACS 212-676-9421 or 212-676-9035

Lawyers For Children 212-966-6420 or 1-800-244-2540

The Legal Aid Society Juvenile Rights Practice 212-312-2260

Police 911



What to Expect from the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and Criminal Justice System

Who will investigate the report of abuse?

Depending on how old you are, who the abuser is, and the nature of the abuse, the Administration for Children's Services and/or the criminal justice system may get involved. Some abuse will be handled by one or the other, and some abuse will be handled by both systems.

In New York City, the police, ACS workers, hospitals, and lawyers try to work together so you won't have to be interviewed by too many people. You may be accompanied to or asked to go to a Child Advocacy Center where everyone can meet together for one interview. The staff there is specially trained to make this a safe and comfortable experience.

The Administration for Children's Services is supposed to protect you and keep you safe. The job of the criminal justice system is to focus on the abuser.

1-800-342-3270

Child Abuse
Hotline



ACS's

job is to protect you
+ keep you safe

Family Court

ACS has caseworkers who will interview you. If ACS decides to bring the case to Family Court, you will be assigned a lawyer, called an “Attorney for the Child,” who will usually be from Legal Aid or Lawyers For Children. The job of the Attorney for the Child is to work for YOU, not for your parents or for ACS. Your attorney (lawyer) will protect your rights, help you find appropriate services, and make sure the judge is aware of your wishes.

Family Court does not have the power to send an abuser to jail simply because the judge believes that the abuse did happen. However, you can ask your lawyer to get an “Order of Protection” for you that is signed by the judge, which says that the abuser cannot go near you. Your lawyer can ask for an Order of Protection that is very specific and can forbid the abuser from contacting you at home, at school, or by telephone. With an Order of Protection, you can call the police if you see the abuser. The abuser may be arrested for being near you and then may go to jail.

Criminal Court

The criminal justice system has the power to send an abuser to jail if he or she is found guilty of abuse. The job of the District Attorney is to convict the abuser, NOT to act as your lawyer. You may be a witness in the case against the abuser. If you are going to testify, the District Attorney’s job is to prepare you for court and help you feel comfortable about being a witness. If you have already been assigned an attorney in Family Court, he or she can be present during your meeting with the District Attorney.





What to expect if the abuse is reported to ACS

Within 24 hours of receiving a report of sexual abuse, ACS is required to send a caseworker to investigate. The caseworker will want to see you and ask some questions. The caseworker's most important job is to make sure you are safe. The worker should try to talk to you in a private and neutral place (like your school or a friend's house).

Medical Exams

The caseworker will want to make sure that you are physically healthy. Child Advocacy Centers and some hospitals in New York City have doctors who specialize in investigating sexual abuse. The ACS worker will try to take you to one of these places. If the abuse happened less than 72 hours before, you should be taken to a hospital immediately because there may still be physical signs of the abuse that can be useful in court. No matter when the abuse occurred, you can request that the doctor who does the medical examination has experience with sexual abuse.

- **The doctor, nurse or social worker at the CAC or hospital should prepare you by explaining the procedures first. You can ask questions about any part of the exam.**

- **You can also ask about other concerns: pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, STD testing, etc.**

- **A well-trained and sensitive professional will not rush you and will answer your questions clearly in terms that are understandable.**

Will you have to leave home?

The ACS caseworker will want to make sure that you are safe. If the abuser lives in the same house as you, he or she should move out. If this can't happen, you may be placed with a relative or in a foster home to live until things can be worked out. If you have a relative or another trusted adult you want to live with, you should tell your ACS worker immediately. The ACS worker can also help you and your family get counseling and other services.

ACS will decide whether to take the case to Family Court. Remember that in Family Court an attorney is assigned to represent you. The attorney will advocate for your wishes including who you want to live with and what you need to feel safe and comfortable. Your attorney will also talk to you about whether you need or want to testify in court. In Family Court, the judge will listen to your attorney and decide where you will live and what services may be necessary.

What to expect if the abuse is first reported to the police

If the police are the first to be notified of the abuse they will want to talk to you. They may bring you to the emergency room of a hospital. If the hospital is not one that specializes in sexual abuse, you can ask the doctor who does the physical exam if he or she has any experience with sexual abuse, or you can ask to go to a Child Advocacy Center.

The police and the District Attorney will then continue to investigate. The District Attorney may interview you and he or she will decide whether there is enough evidence against the abuser to start a criminal case.

Depending on your age and who the abuser is, the police may also call ACS.



KEEP IN MIND
that no investigator should
ever require you to confront or
talk to the abuser.

How You May Be Affected by Sexual Abuse

There are many different ways that being sexually abused can affect a young person.

1. The abuse can affect you on the **inside**.
2. The abuse can affect you on the **outside**.
3. The abuse can also affect your **body**.

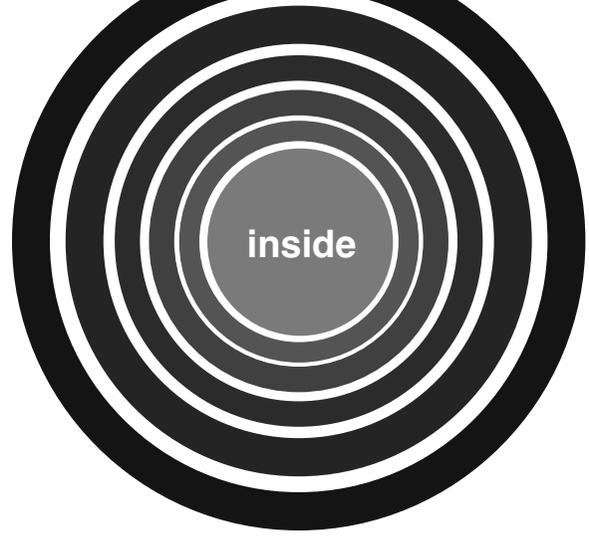
The following are some ways that young people have felt after being sexually abused. Some young people feel some or all of these things. Some young people do not feel any of these things and feel other things instead. It is okay to feel however you feel. It is normal for the abuse to affect you in a variety of ways.

These are some ways that young people who have been sexually abused have said that they are feeling on the inside:

- Some feel depressed or have sad feelings and cry a lot.
- Some feel guilty or feel that the abuse is their fault.
- Some feel nervous and frightened.
- Some have nightmares.
- Some think about the abuse happening over and over and are not able to stop these thoughts.
- Some have “flashbacks”- intense memories of the abuse that feel like it is happening all over again, often triggered by a situation or feeling that reminds them of the abuse.
- Some have thoughts of suicide or think “I would be better off dead.”
- Some feel hopeless and feel like they have no future to look forward to.
- Some have angry feelings, feel out of control and explode when they don’t want to.



- Some find it hard to trust people.
- Some feel different and alone.
- Some feel “spaced out,” like they are watching themselves from far away.



These are some of the things that young people have said are happening to them on the outside:

- Some do not go to school because they cannot concentrate or pay attention.
- Some who have been abused by a man or boy do not trust any men or boys. If they have been abused by a woman or girl, they may not trust any women or girls. Or they may not trust any adults if no adult ever listened to them and protected them. They may overreact and get in trouble with adult staff or teachers.
- Some run away.
- Some leave their families and go into foster care.
- Some do not get along with young people their age because they feel like no one their age will understand what they are going through.
- Some feel that they can't help touching other children in ways that make those children and their parents angry.

- Some fight with and act out in anger towards adults and other young people to keep them from getting too close.
- Some find themselves in more situations where they are being hurt.
- Some become involved with people and activities that use sex to make money.
- Some find themselves taking care of everyone else and not taking care of themselves.

These are some of the things that young people have said are happening with their bodies:

- Some eat too much or too little.
- Some think they are fat when they are not.
- Some try to hide their bodies by wearing a lot of baggy clothes.
- Some do not shower because they are afraid that someone will come in the bathroom when they are naked and alone.
- Some wet their beds.
- Some do not take care of their health because they are afraid of going to the doctor.
- Some feel they can't help touching their private parts in public.
- Some have a lot of headaches or stomach aches.
- Some have seizures.
- Some are afraid of having diseases.
- Some worry that they are broken, dirty or damaged inside.
- Some think that people can see just by looking at them that they have been sexually abused.
- Some are afraid of sex.
- Some have too much sex, unsafe sex or just feel out of control in terms of sex.



- Some use alcohol and drugs to try to forget about the abuse.
- Some feel like cutting or hurting their bodies in other ways.
- Some feel they are separate from their bodies. Sometimes this leads to commercial sexual exploitation, such as strip-club dancing and prostitution.



The Services and Professionals That Can Help with a Healthy Recovery

There are programs for young people who have been sexually abused. You can ask a parent, social worker, lawyer, foster parent or other adult friend to help you find out about these programs. For a list of programs available in New York City, see the resource guide in the back of this handbook.

These are the kinds of services that are out there:

Individual Counseling: You can talk to a therapist or counselor in private about any feelings, problems, or concerns that you have about the abuse and how it affects your life. If you feel comfortable talking with adults, individual counseling may be a good choice. You can ask the therapist or counselor if they have experience and/or training in the area of sex abuse before you agree to see them on a regular basis.

Group Therapy: If you feel safer or more comfortable talking with people your age or think that they are the only people who can understand the way that you feel, group therapy may be a good choice. In group therapy, young people who have been sexually abused can share their feelings with each other. A therapist helps run the group.

Family Therapy: This is therapy that includes your whole family. Family therapy may be helpful if your parents or siblings are having a difficult time believing or dealing with what happened, are not talking about it, or are pretending that it did not happen. This may also be helpful when the abuser is a family member who admits that what they did was wrong and accepts responsibility for the abuse.

Creative Arts Therapy: This is therapy that helps you express yourself by using art, music, writing and/or dance. It can be especially helpful if

By asking for the services that will help you recover, you can begin to take back some of your power!

you have a hard time talking about the abuse and your feelings and you need to work through your experience in a different way.

Sex Education: This is important because you may think that all sex is wrong or that sex can never feel natural and good. Sex, in the right situations, can be a fulfilling part of life. Sex education can help you to learn about responsible, healthy sex.

If you are worried about your own sexual behavior towards others: There are programs that can help you understand why you are behaving in certain ways and how this behavior may affect others. Also, these programs can teach you to control your sexual behavior and deal with your feelings in ways that are not hurtful to you or others.

Remember This:

There are many different types of programs. You do not have to attend them all; you can choose to attend the type of program or programs that you think will be the most helpful to you. Good services will help you cope with the effects of being sexually abused and will also teach you ways to protect against future sexual abuse.



The good news is that with the right kind of help, people can and do recover from sexual abuse.

