



What is Child Sexual Abuse?

This information sheet provides a definition of child sexual abuse. You may find the content distressing.

Child sexual abuse and exploitation is any act of inappropriately exposing or subjecting a child (under the age of 18) to sexual activity, contact or behaviour by an adult for the purposes of gratification (sexual or otherwise).

Child sexual abuse is a global problem that knows no physical, financial, socioeconomic, geographic, cultural or gender boundaries.

All forms of child sexual abuse are a profound violation of the human rights of the child and a crime under law and the impacts of this crime are far-reaching for children, families and communities.

Sexual abuse and exploitation can involve a range of behaviours including but not limited to:

- Forced or unwanted sex, both penetrative or non-penetrative
- Forcing a child to strip or masturbate
- Inappropriate touching of a child, whether clothed or unclothed
- Engaging in any kind of sexual activity in front of a child, including watching pornography
- Taking, downloading, viewing or distributing sexual images of children
- Possessing images of child sexual abuse
- Encouraging a child to perform sexual acts in front of a webcam or any recording device
- Grooming a child (or their parent or carer) – Grooming refers to the way some offenders form relationships and build trust with children, parents, carers, teachers and other children in order to get close to a child and create the opportunity for sexual abuse or exploitation. It can be difficult to identify because the behaviour itself may not be abusive or sexual. Grooming can occur online as well as in person.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: QUICK STATS

- Child sexual abuse affects around 1 in 5 before the age of 18 (Price-Robertson, Bromfield and Vassallo, 2010; Mills, Kisely, Alati, Strathearn, & Najman, 2016; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017).
- In around 90% of cases the person doing the sexual activity is known to the child and family (Tarczon and Quadara, 2012; Quadara et al., 2015; Ventus, Antfolk, & Salo, 2017).
- 98% of all child sexual abuse reports made by children are found to be true (O'Donohue, Cummings & Willis, 2018).
- Approximately 1 in 3 cases of child sexual abuse are instigated by other young people (Der Bedrosian, 2018; McKibbin, 2017; Finkelhor, Omrod & Chaffin, 2009).
- Children with a learning disability are 2.5 times more likely to be the subject of a sexual abuse allegation than children without a learning disability (Helton, Gochez-Kerr & Gruber, 2018).

If you have observed any of the above or have serious concerns relating to the sexual abuse of a child, contact Policelink on 131 444.

For further information regarding child sexual abuse and reporting options, please contact Bravehearts' Information and Support Line on 1800 2720 831 or visit your local State or Territory Child Protection Services website.

IF YOU BELIEVE A CHILD IS AT IMMEDIATE RISK, CONTACT EMERGENCY SERVICES ON 000.