

# Sexual abuse is a silent epidemic in communities

Sexual abuse is a silent epidemic that affects our community. It can cause great emotional and physical injury and can affect every area of a person's life. No one deserves to be sexually assaulted. One who experiences sexual abuse can never regain the childhood years they had lost to sexual abuse.

The following are general behavior changes that may occur in children and teens who have been sexually abused: depression, anxiety, eating disorders, running away, sleep disturbances, passive or overly pleasing behavior, nightmares, low self-esteem, physical complaints, self-destructive behavior, school problems, hostility or aggression, withdrawal from family, or usual activities, drug or alcohol problems, excessive bathing or poor hygiene, sexual activity or pregnancy at early age, suicide attempts.

One who experiences sexual abuse have many different (and often overwhelming emotions).

Fear of:

- the abuser
- being taken away from home
- causing trouble
- losing adults important to them
- being different.

Anger:

- At the abuser
- At other adults around them who did not protect them
- At themselves (feeling as if they caused the trouble)
- Because "something is wrong with me."
- Because they feel alone in their experience
- Because they have trouble talking about the abuse

Sadness:

- About having something taken from them
- About being betrayed by someone they trusted
- About growing up too fast

Guilt:

- For not being able to stop the abuse
- For believing they "consented" to the abuse
- For "telling"-- if they told For keeping the secret if they—if they did not tell
- About being involved in the experience

## Confusion:

-Because they still may love or care about the abuser or because their feelings change all the time.

Children and teens who have been sexually abused frequently copy adult sexual behavior. They might imitate what they witnessed or experienced by sexual play with other children, themselves, pets and toys. They also display a sexual knowledge through language behavior than beyond what is normal for their age. Some children may have unexplained pain, swelling, bleeding or irritation to the mouth or genital area; urinary infections or transmitted diseases.

To often children and teens do not tell anyone about the sexual abuse because they:

- are too young to put what happened into words
- were threatened or bribed by the abuser to keep the abuse a secret.
- feel confused by the attention and the feelings accompanying the abuser
- are afraid no one will believe them
- blame themselves
- feel too ashamed or embarrassed to tell
- worry about getting into trouble or a loved one into trouble.

Silence enables sexual abuse to continue. Silence protects the offenders and hurts children that are being abused. Sexual abuse is an extremely difficult and damaging experience. Children no longer need to suffer in silence. Start reporting sexual abuse and no matter how uncomfortable it may be, speak to your children about sex. For instance the good touch bad touch is great for young children. The sooner we start to educate ourselves the sooner these perverts and pedophiles will realize this type of behavior is not welcome in our community.

For more information on sexual abuse or domestic violence contact the DOVE Program at (218) 983-4656 or the 24-hour crises line number is 1-877-830-3683.