Tackling Child Sexual Abuse

Edited by Justin Healey

ISSUES IN SOCIETY
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INTRODUCTION

Tackling Child Sexual Abuse is Volume 393 in the ‘Issues in Society’ series of educational resource books. The aim of this series is to offer current, diverse information about important issues in our world, from an Australian perspective.

KEY ISSUES IN THIS TOPIC
Child sexual abuse occurs when an adult, adolescent or child uses their power or authority to involve a child in sexual activity. Child sexual abuse can cause significant physical and emotional harm to a child, which lasts into adulthood. Female and male survivors of child sexual abuse are increasingly speaking out about their traumatic experiences and the betrayal of trust by offenders.

What are the myths and misunderstandings about child sexual abuse? What forms does it take? What are the behavioural signs to look out for in children and perpetrators? How do you report your concerns or personal experiences of abuse?

The book explores the prevalence, forms and impacts of child sexual abuse, and the responses to disclosure of child abuse by children and survivors. How can society break the silence, bring perpetrators to light, and better protect our children?

SOURCES OF INFORMATION
Titles in the ‘Issues in Society’ series are individual resource books which provide an overview on a specific subject comprised of facts and opinions.

The information in this resource book is not from any single author, publication or organisation. The unique value of the ‘Issues in Society’ series lies in its diversity of content and perspectives.

The content comes from a wide variety of sources and includes:
- Newspaper reports and opinion pieces
- Website fact sheets
- Magazine and journal articles
- Statistics and surveys
- Government reports
- Literature from special interest groups

CRITICAL EVALUATION
As the information reproduced in this book is from a number of different sources, readers should always be aware of the origin of the text and whether or not the source is likely to be expressing a particular bias or agenda.

It is hoped that, as you read about the many aspects of the issues explored in this book, you will critically evaluate the information presented. In some cases, it is important that you decide whether you are being presented with facts or opinions. Does the writer give a biased or an unbiased report? If an opinion is being expressed, do you agree with the writer?

EXPLORING ISSUES
The ‘Exploring issues’ section at the back of this book features a range of ready-to-use worksheets relating to the articles and issues raised in this book. The activities and exercises in these worksheets are suitable for use by students at middle secondary school level and beyond.

FURTHER RESEARCH
This title offers a useful starting point for those who need convenient access to information about the issues involved. However, it is only a starting point. The ‘Web links’ section at the back of this book contains a list of useful websites which you can access for more reading on the topic.
SEXUAL ABUSE

A FACT SHEET OVERVIEW FROM BETTER HEALTH CHANNEL

Sexual abuse (also referred to as sexual assault) can be experienced by anyone. When a child experiences sexual assault, it is commonly referred to as child sexual abuse. In recent years, female and male survivors of child sexual abuse have spoken out about their experiences.

Increased openness and a willingness by adult survivors to discuss sexual abuse, as well as the development of service support networks, has led to greater community understanding of this issue. Healthcare professionals have also learned a great deal about child sexual abuse and its effects from these stories.

Childhood and sexual abuse

In telling their stories, many adult survivors have found common factors in their experiences, including:
- They were usually abused by someone they knew.
- The abuse often started when they were very young.
- The abuse was generally not an isolated one-off incident and happened over many months or years.
- The abuse was often accompanied by threats and verbal or emotional abuse, and sometimes physical violence.

Fear stops sexually abused children from seeking help

Most women and men were too scared to report the abuse while they were children. Their reasons for being afraid included:
- Their abuser might have threatened to harm them and other family members if they told anyone about the abuse.
- They felt there was no one they could trust to talk to.
- They didn’t think that anyone would believe them.
- They feared they would be taken away from home.
- They thought they might lose their mother or father if they knew.
- They thought the abuse was their fault.

Common misunderstandings of sexual abuse

Many misunderstandings surround the sexual abuse of girls and boys. Some of these include:
- ‘Children fantasise and lie about sexual abuse’ – this is not true. Children rarely lie or imagine sexual abuse.
- ‘Males who have been abused, grow up to become abusers’ – the research does not show this to be true.
- ‘Males will become homosexual because of the abuse’ – again, the research does not support this.
- ‘It’s only dirty old men or homosexual men who abuse’ – most abusers are heterosexual males from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Some abusers are female.
- ‘Child sexual abuse is harmless’ – this is not true. Sexual abuse of children has the capacity to cause serious damage to a child’s physical, social and emotional development, and can cause withdrawal and emotional problems into adulthood. The longer the abuse goes on, the greater the long-term problems will be.
- ‘Children provoke the abuse and enjoy it’ – this is not true. Abusers often tell this lie to their victims.

Summary

- Sexual abuse (also referred to as sexual assault) can be experienced by children, women and men.
- Understanding of this issue has grown through the increased openness and willingness of adult survivors to discuss sexual abuse, as well as development of service support networks.
- Children who experience sexual abuse may show physical signs or changes in behaviour. If you suspect sexual abuse or have been told about it by a child, you must report it.
Signs of sexual abuse

The main message from survivors is about the importance of paying attention to children’s behaviour. If children are being sexually abused, there may be physical signs such as bleeding from the vagina or anus (back passage), sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or poor hygiene.

However, signs in a child’s behaviour are more likely. These include:
• Significant changes in behaviour, aggressive behaviour or regression (going back) to an earlier stage of development (for example, bedwetting)
• Sexual behaviour that is not appropriate to the child’s age
• Depression or social withdrawal
• Getting into trouble at school (sometimes to avoid going home)
• Self-harming behaviours (for example, self-mutilation, suicide attempts or prostitution).

Talking to children about sexual abuse

It can be distressing to discover or suspect a child has experienced sexual abuse. Most people feel a range of emotions, including anger, sadness, shock, disbelief, disgust and helplessness.

Remember that:
• If the child appears to be under stress, encourage them to talk. Children will often tell little bits of information at a time to test the reactions of adults. It is important to stay calm and not convey your feelings to the child, as this may prevent the child from saying anything more.
• The child’s feelings about themselves may be influenced by your initial reaction to the abuse. If the child senses a horrified response, this may reinforce and perpetuate a child’s feelings of guilt and shame.
• Be supportive and tell them you believe them.

• Reassure them that whatever has happened, it is not their fault.
• Reassure the child that they did the right thing in telling you. Many abusers threaten the child to prevent disclosure.
• Tell the child that some adults do wrong things and that the abuser is responsible for the abuse.
• Do everything possible to comfort and reassure the child. Explain what action you will take next. Do not make promises that you will not be able to keep, or promise the child confidentiality. The child has enough secrets and needs someone to act on their behalf to stop the abuse.

If you believe the child may be being sexually abused, report your concerns immediately to the appropriate person in your own organisation and Child Protection.

Reporting your concerns of sexual abuse

Taking action to help protect a child can be scary. You do not need proof that a child is being sexually abused to report your concerns, only a reasonable belief that a child or young person is being harmed or is at risk of harm. Remember, you may be the only person who can help stop the abuse by reporting your concerns.

Recovering from sexual abuse

Survivors of sexual abuse usually need professional help to recover. Support groups can be very valuable. Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASA) provide specialist counselling and advocacy, and also support family members.

WHERE TO GET HELP

• Child Protection Service – to report child abuse. Contact your local office or the DHS Child Protection Crisis Line on Tel. 131 278.
• Police – to report the abuser.
• Centres Against Sexual Assault, Tel. 1800 806 292 (24 hours) – for support and counselling.
• National Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence hotline, Tel. 1800 737 732 (24 hours) – for support.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

• Children are not responsible for sexual abuse.
• Sexual abuse is a crime.
• Children often talk about the abuse a little at a time.
• It is very common for survivors to repress memories of abuse.
• Sexual abuse is experienced by girls and boys. Children cannot stop sexual abuse.

This fact sheet was produced in consultation with and approved by, Department of Human Services.

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SEXUAL ABUSE IN CHILDHOOD

Child abuse and neglect occurs in a range of situations, for a range of reasons. Children are rarely subject to one form of abuse at a time. In this resource extract, ASCA explains psychological, emotional and social problems relating specifically to childhood sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse describes any incident in which an adult engages a minor in a sexual act, or exposes the minor to inappropriate sexual behaviour or material. Sexual abuse also describes any incident in which a child is coerced into sexual activity by another child. A person may sexually abuse a child using threats and physical force, but sexual abuse often involves subtle forms of manipulation, in which the child is coerced into believing that the activity is an expression of love, or that the child brought the abuse upon themself. Sexual abuse involves contact and non-contact offences.

How many children are sexually abused?
- Approximately one third of women surveyed in Australia have reported sexual abuse in childhood (Flemming 1997; Glaser 1997; Mazza, Dennerstein et al. 2001). Approximately 10% of Australian men report sexual abuse in childhood (Goldman and Goldman 1988).

Who is most likely to be sexually abused?
- Whilst all children are vulnerable to sexual abuse, girls are more likely to be sexually abused than boys. Disabled children are up to seven times more likely to be abused than their non-disabled peers (Briggs 2006).

How often is sexual abuse reported to the authorities?
- In one study of Australian women, only 10% of child sexual abuse experiences were ever reported to the police, a doctor, or a health agency (Flemming 1997).

Who sexually abuses children?
- Across all community-based studies, most abusers are male and related to the child (Flemming 1997). Most adults who sexually abuse children are not mentally ill and do not meet the diagnostic criteria for ‘paedophilia’.

In one study of Australian women, only 10% of child sexual abuse experiences were ever reported to the police, a doctor, or a health agency.

Signs in childhood
Sexually abused children exhibit a range of behaviours, including:
- Withdrawn, unhappy and suicidal behaviour
- Self-harm and suicidality
- Aggressive and violent behaviour
- Bedwetting, sleep problems, nightmares
- Eating problems e.g. anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa
- Mood swings
- Detachment
- Pains for no medical reason
- Sexual behaviour, language, or knowledge too advanced for their age.

Signs in adulthood
Adults sexually abused as children have poorer mental health than other adults. They are more likely to have a history of eating disorders, depression, substance abuse, and suicide attempts. Sexual abuse is also associated with financial problems.
in adulthood, and a decreased likelihood to graduate from high school or undertake further education (Silverman, Reinherz et al. 1996).

**ORGANISED SEXUAL ABUSE**

Organised sexual abuse refers to the range of circumstances in which multiple children are subject to sexual abuse by multiple perpetrators. In these circumstances, children are subject to a range of serious harms that can include child prostitution, the manufacture of child pornography, and bizarre and sadistic sexual practices, including ritualistic abuse and torture.

- What are the circumstances in which children are subject to organised sexual abuse?
  - Many children subject to organised abuse are raised in abusive families, and their parents make them available for abuse outside the home. This abuse may include extended family members, family ‘friends’, or people who pay to abuse the child (Cleaver and Freeman 1996). Other children are trafficked into organised abuse by perpetrators in schools, churches, state or religious institutions, or whilst homeless or without stable housing.

Adults with histories of organised abuse frequently have long histories of suicide attempts and self-harm, and they often live with a heavy burden of mental and physical illnesses.

- Who is most likely to be sexually abused in organised contexts?
  - Children who are vulnerable to organised abuse include the children of parents involved in organised abuse, and children from unstable or unhappy family backgrounds who may be targeted by abusers outside the family.

- Who sexually abuses children in organised contexts?
  - Organised abuse, like all forms of child abuse, is primarily committed by parents and relatives. Organised abuse differs from other forms of sexual abuse in that women are often reported as perpetrators. Research with female sexual abusers has found that they have often grown up in environments, such as organised abuse, where sexual abuse is normative, and, as adults, they may sexually abuse in organised contexts alongside male offenders (Faller 1995).

**Signs in childhood**

Young children subject to organised sexual abuse often have severe traumatic and dissociative symptoms that inhibit disclosure or help-seeking behaviour. They are often very withdrawn children with strong suicidal ideation. They may exhibit disturbed behaviours while at play or when socialising with their peers or other adults.

**Signs in adulthood**

Organised abuse, and ritual abuse, is a key predisposing factor the development of Dissociative Identity Disorder and other dissociative spectrum disorders. Adults with histories of organised abuse frequently have long histories of suicide attempts and self-harm, and they often live with a heavy burden of mental and physical illnesses.

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Child sexual abuse occurs when an adult, adolescent or child use their power or authority to involve a child in sexual activity. Child sexual abuse can cause physical and emotional harm to a child.

Sexual abuse can be physical, verbal or emotional and can include but is not limited to the following:
- Kissing or holding a child in a sexual manner
- Exposing a sexual body part to a child
- Having sexual relations with a child
- Talking in a sexually explicit way that is not age or developmentally appropriate
- Making obscene phone calls or remarks to a child
- Sending obscene mobile text messages or emails to a child
- Fondling a child in a sexual manner
- Persistently intruding on a child’s privacy
- Penetrating the child’s vagina or anus by either the penis, finger or any other object
- Oral sex
- Rape
- Incest
- Showing pornographic films, magazines, internet sites or photographs to a child
- Having a child pose or perform in a sexual manner
- Forcing a child to watch a sexual act
- Child prostitution.

Grooming refers to the process by which some people who are responsible for the sexual abuse of children groom people in the community, such as parents, carers, teachers and children to establish trust and gain access to a child.

Some people who are responsible for the sexual abuse of children spend considerable time targeting, enticing and trapping a child for sexual purposes. Grooming involves the person responsible for the sexual abuse integrating themselves into places where they have access to children and then grooming the adults to create opportunities for the person to abuse their victims. Grooming behaviour can be difficult to identify as it can sometimes include the use of in some contexts, appropriate behaviours.

Some examples of grooming behaviour can include a person:
- Regularly offering to babysit a child for free or take a child on overnight outings alone
- Actively isolating a child from other adults or children
- Insisting on physical affection such as kissing, hugging, wrestling or tickling even when the child clearly does not want it
- Being overly interested in the sexual development of a child
- Insisting on uninterrupted time alone with the child
- Enjoying taking lots of pictures of children
- Sharing alcohol or drugs with younger children or adolescents
- Exposing their genitals to a child.

A child may say things, do things or exhibit physical signs that may indicate sexual abuse, even if they do not disclose clear information.

Some indicators of child sexual abuse may include:
- Displaying greater sexual knowledge than normally expected for their age or developmental level
- Inappropriate sexual play and behaviour with themselves, other children or dolls and toys
- Hints about sexual activity through actions or comments that are inappropriate to the child’s age or developmental level
- Excessive masturbation or masturbation in public after kindergarten age
- Persistent bedwetting, urinating or soiling in clothes
- Persistent sexual themes in their drawings or play time
• Running away
• Destroying property
• Hurting or mutilating animals
• Creating stories, poems or artwork about abuse
• Difficulty concentrating or being withdrawn or overly obedient
• Having unexpected redness, soreness or injury around the penis, vagina, mouth or anus
• Having torn, stained or bloody clothing, especially underwear
• Recurring themes of power or control in play.

A child may say things, do things or exhibit physical signs that may indicate sexual abuse, even if they do not disclose clear information.

Should any of the above be present, a child may need parents or other adults to take action to keep them safe from any further harm. Without a disclosure it is important to talk to a sexual abuse specialist about observed behaviours.

To help protect a child from sexual abuse:
• Be suspicious if an adult wants to spend time alone with your child
• Be wary of people who are overly affectionate or generous with gifts to your child
• Be careful about the company your children keep. Watch children’s behaviour for signs of stress – their reactions to certain individuals may tell you something
• Teach children about being safe in a way that does not frighten them
• Teach children that the parts of their bodies covered by underwear are private
• Teach children anatomical names for body parts, such as penis or vagina
• Encourage children to tell someone they trust if anyone tries to touch their private parts
• Carefully consider who else you might want your children to tell if you are not available – let your children know these contact options
• Speak to children who are under school age about personal safety in simple language and repeat the same rules often – play ‘what if’ games to reinforce the message
• Teach children of primary school age basic family safety rules and how to apply them in potentially dangerous situations
• Assist adolescents to think independently, and to develop decision-making and assertiveness skills
• Know who is supervising your children when they are away from home
• Listen to your children and trust what they say, even if it shocks you – children rarely make up stories about sexual abuse.

You have a right to know your children are safe. Ask organisations about their policies, activities and who is looking after your children.

Remember:
• People who work with children have an obligation to keep them safe
• Adults who work with children must have a blue card from the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian
• Organisations should have written policies available to read showing how they respond to child sexual abuse allegations
• Organisations must provide activities that are suited to the developmental stage of the children involved
• Organisations must supervise all children in their care.

CHILDREN AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

The following advice is aimed at parents and carers, from South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault (SECASA)

Children's behaviour and sexual assault

Not all your child's behaviour will be related to the sexual assault. Children have different worlds to grown-ups. As a parent, you think you know everything in their world, but you don't. Things are important to a child that perhaps a grown up wouldn't register as important. This is because we have big people's concerns. Parents need to remember the child's world.

It is important to remember that everyone in a family will feel distress following a child's disclosure of sexual assault, and will each react or behave differently as a result of this distress. A common reaction for parents is to suddenly place their child or children 'under a microscope' where every thought, feeling and behaviour is attributed solely to the sexual assault(s).

Similarly, if you have read about or know of a child who had disclosed sexual abuse, you may begin to 'see' such signs in your child. Perhaps you were sexually assaulted as a child, and now feel hyperaware in relation to your child's behaviours.

Things that impact on a child's world

Remember that many things might influence your child's behaviour. Take into consideration the bigger picture of the child's world.

Things like:

- Having difficulties at school
- A falling out with their best friend
- The death of a pet
- Arguments with siblings
- Nearby people changing their behaviour
- The onset of puberty or other developmental considerations.

Some other examples:

Changes in normal routines

Perhaps your child used to love to go to the shops for you and this has suddenly stopped following the child's disclosures. They may have liked going to the shops because the people at the local milk bar gave them a chocolate or friendly words. Now they don't want to go because the shopkeepers have changed, or perhaps they are afraid to walk past a new dog.

Being afraid of the dark

Your child may always have been dubious or afraid of the dark, but you were either unaware of it or had just forgotten about it. It may not have just started when they got sexually assaulted at age seven.

Being sad or upset

You as parents might be arguing. This does impact on and upset children. These arguments may not be linked to the sexual assault. Parents tend to think of these incidents as minor and of little importance in the grand scheme of things, but children do not see it this way. You may not think the kids can hear you or know you are fighting. Kids have a way of going quietly about the house and hanging around the doorways without you being aware of them being there. Sometimes they might just go back to their room if you're having an argument, and not say anything. However, all the while they will be trying to make some sense of the argument for themselves and may make misinterpretations such as "you don't love me", "you are fighting because of me", or "you don't believe/care about me."

Attention-seeking behaviours

Sometimes the child will be doing things just for attention. Kids get a good response when they do certain things, and when they want attention, probably subconsciously,
they do the same thing that got a response last time.

**Knowing about sexualised images**

Some people say “my child has never seen sexual images”. Unless they blindfold them whilst out driving around to avoid seeing billboards, of course they will see them. The child might have come out at 8.45 at night to ask for a drink of water and you are watching Basic Instinct or some other modern movie or advertisements on the television and they see things or hear things that you are not really aware of.

It is difficult to monitor what images your child absorbs whilst visiting at friends’ or family members’ homes, or indeed even at the local shopping centre. So of course they are exposed to sexual images. These need to be taken account of.

**School avoidance**

If the child doesn’t want to go to school you may suspect one of the teachers of sexual abuse, but perhaps it’s a bully, missed homework or perhaps the child just doesn’t want to go to school.

**Being sad for ‘no reason’**

It could also be an anniversary, like if something happened around Christmas time, then a child might remember that. A developmental consideration would explore the onset of puberty and topsy-turvy hormones. On a general note, your child may well require more sleep.

**Separation issues vs sexual assault**

Some parents say that a child has been sexually assaulted when they come back from an access visit with their father. You ask, “How do you know?” They then list all the symptoms that you get from a child who is distressed about separation. They are very similar to a child who has been distressed by a sexual assault. In young children you may not get the same degree of sexualised behaviour, but you may get some sexualised behaviour such as masturbating for comfort.

The adults are already experiencing their own pain from the separation, and they may be unable to look clearly at how their child is coping or suffering. Children may well try to parent you by comforting you or by not showing you the extent of their sad feelings. Very often children may tantrum, howl, regress or withdraw. As a result, despairing parents may begin to doubt their decision. We all try to think that everything will be OK. This will happen on balance, but things probably won’t be OK for the first six months or year.

**What do I do?**

People need to think about what else is going on around them. You as parents see these behaviours, and you may think your child has been sexually assaulted. Don’t struggle with worries about sexual assault on your own.

Telephone a trained counsellor at SECASA or the Department of Human Services (Child Protection) to discuss your concerns and explore what may be happening for your child and family. Whilst these concerning behaviours may indicate sexual assault to you, they may also be signals related to other things impacting upon your child or family.

WHAT WE ARE LEARNING ABOUT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

KEY POINTS FROM A REPORT PRODUCED BY THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

KEY POINTS

Child sexual abuse covers many different behaviours. There is no single profile of a typical victim or perpetrator, nor can the impacts be easily defined or applied to all survivors. However, there are trends we can learn from, and systems that institutions can put in place to better identify risks and protect children in the future.

Nature and prevalence

- Legal definitions of child sexual abuse are inconsistent, but we know it involves a range of sexually abusive behaviours.
- There is no conclusive research on the prevalence of child sexual abuse in Australia, and even less is known about its prevalence in institutions. More work needs to be done.

Institutions

- Abuse happens in a variety of institutions but has occurred more frequently in some.
- We are learning why abuse happened in institutions as they changed over time, and what needs to be done to make today’s institutions child safe.

Legal framework

- State and territory governments address child sexual abuse through a combination of laws that include pre-employment screening, and child protection and criminal laws.
- The laws vary between jurisdictions.

Victims

- All children in institutions and out-of-home care are potentially at risk of sexual abuse.
- Some children are more vulnerable to abuse, based on various factors including age, gender, ethnicity, disability, and prior abuse or neglect.
- Some children may also be more vulnerable to abuse because of situational factors connected to where they are living or being cared for, such as extensive periods of unsupervised contact with adults.
- Everyone’s experiences of abuse and institutional responses will differ, and these experiences will affect people differently.

Perpetrators

- Institutions need to understand the types of perpetrators and their characteristics so they can identify, prevent and respond to abuse.
- Perpetrators can hold any position in an institution.
- Biological, psychological, environmental and interpersonal factors may influence whether abuse occurs.
- Perpetrators might use grooming behaviours and manipulate children, adults and processes to create opportunities to abuse.

Perpetrators of child sexual abuse

This report extract from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse explains what is understood about offender profiles.

A significant body of research focuses on the perpetrators of child sexual abuse.93 We have gained insights into:

• Common characteristics
• Environments where abuse can occur.

There are a number of theories of why perpetrators abuse children. Recent theories describe how various biological, psychological, environmental and interpersonal factors may lead to a person sexually abusing a child.94

Our early work suggests that to prevent child sexual abuse, it may be more effective to address risk factors rather than profile likely offenders. For example, in many instances, pre-employment screening and child safe procedures could have prevented abuse.

IDENTIFYING COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

Literature looks at biological, psychological and interpersonal factors

A number of recently developed theories describe how various biological, psychological and interpersonal factors may lead to a person sexually abusing a child.

The literature suggests that particular factors seem to be associated with perpetrators of child sexual abuse, including:

• Prior abuse and neglect
• Experiencing harsh discipline as a child from parents and carers
• Poor attachment and dysfunction in their own family
• Poor social connections with others (such as loneliness or poor social skills)
• Higher sex drive and preoccupation with sex
• More deviant sexual interests
• Using sexual activities or behaviours to relieve anxiety or stress

• More tolerant attitudes to adult-child sex
• Attitudes that minimise perpetrator culpability.95

There may be three broad types of perpetrators

To identify risk factors and develop recommendations on child sexual abuse, we must understand the types and characteristics of perpetrators. Awareness will also help the community to identify and respond to concerning behaviour or abuse.

While the traditional view has been that most abusers are serial, predatory perpetrators, research now suggests that most abusers are usually opportunistic or situational perpetrators.101

Most perpetrators are male

Research has shown that men are far more likely to sexually abuse a child than women.102 However, some women might act as a co-abuser with a male partner.103 This is reflected in what we are being told at private sessions, where 86.6 per cent of perpetrators were male.

Some experts question whether lower rates of reporting against female perpetrators truly reflect the rarity of female abusers. They ask whether there could be other reasons for its under-reporting.104 One possible reason is societal attitudes that discourage male victims from disclosing abuse by female perpetrators. For example, these victims might feel that they would not be believed or taken as seriously. Experts suggest such attitudes are illustrated by lesser criminal penalties applied to female perpetrators compared with men who committed similar abuse.105

Perpetrators can hold any position in the institution

A perpetrator may hold any position in any institution. However, during private sessions, we have heard that one in four perpetrators were members of the clergy or religious orders. Many participants also reported teachers and foster carers as perpetrators.

We recognise there is a lack of comprehensive and definitive research on the prevalence of

THEORIES SUGGEST THERE ARE THREE TYPES OF PERPETRATORS WHO SEXUALLY ABUSE CHILDREN

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<tr>
<th>Serial, predatory perpetrators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serial perpetrators are high-frequency chronic offenders. They choose victims based on situational factors and are likely to actively manipulate environments to create opportunities to abuse. They are the most difficult perpetrators to deter but the frequency of abuse can be reduced through situational prevention.96</td>
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<th>Opportunistic, occasional perpetrators</th>
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<td>Opportunistic perpetrators usually commit occasional, low-level criminal acts. They have a greater stake in conformity and their behaviours are strongly influenced by personal and social constraints.97 They are more likely to commit abuse where situational factors weaken these constraints. For example, they might abuse when a lack of appropriate controls, such as a code of conduct or reporting procedures, obscures personal responsibility for the abuse.98 Increasing personal and social constraints reduces the likelihood of abuse.</td>
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<th>Situational perpetrators</th>
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<td>Situational perpetrators will commit abuse in reaction to environmental factors.99 They often behave impulsively, when overcome by temptation or a temporary failure of self-control.100 For example, they might commit abuse if they are alone with a child who is bathing. Situational prevention strategies can prevent abuse.</td>
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Some perpetrators are peers

Some child sexual abuse occurs between peers. We are aware there is a range of complex factors that will influence whether a child shows abusive behaviours, including whether they have experienced prior abuse or maltreatment. These factors may have changed over time.

We have heard – through submissions and discussions at our first round-table, held in April 2014 – that this is an area of concern and could have significant implications in institutions and out-of-home care.

Australian police statistics from 2003-04 show that children under 17 committed 9 to 16 per cent of all the child sexual abuse offences recorded.

Acknowledging ways that child sexual abuse can occur

Environmental factors can influence whether child sexual abuse occurs

Awareness of the way abuse occurs can help institutions identify behaviours, prevent risks and report incidents of abuse.

In particular:

- Situational and opportunistic offenders are more likely to commit abuse when certain environmental factors are present.
- Perpetrators may follow steps or patterns of behaviours, including targeting, grooming behaviours and maintaining secrecy.

For both opportunistic and situational perpetrators, the surrounding environment is crucial to their decisions to offend or not.

Serial, predatory perpetrators, on the other hand, will actively create environments to abuse. Reducing cues and opportunities for abuse by adjusting the environment can be effective in preventing abuse.

These theories support the need to focus on creating safe institutional environments rather than focusing on the perpetrators or victims. This approach has a promising track record: it has been successful in reducing assaults on adults (physical and sexual), car thefts, robbery and shoplifting.

There are higher numbers of perpetrators within some institutions

The Royal Commission wants to find out why there have been a significant number of perpetrators in certain institutions.

In particular, we will examine:

- The circumstances that lead to abuse occurring in these institutions
- The selection processes and training of staff members
- The formation and structure of these institutions

This will increase our understanding of systemic issues and inform our future work and recommendations.
In Case Study No 1: Steven Larkins manipulated processes
Evidence during this public hearing described how Larkins often manipulated processes and people. For example, he evaded a state-run vetting process and manipulated Working with Children Check procedures to gain and maintain access to children.

In Case Study No 2: Jonathan Lord took advantage of situations
Evidence described how Lord took advantage of situations and environments. For example, he used a bus trip where a child sat on his lap, and babysitting, as opportunities to abuse.

Perpetrators also manipulate people, processes and situations
Perpetrators often manipulate people, processes and situations to create opportunities to abuse. In particular, they try to gain and maintain access to children. They also establish trusting or controlling relationships with children and adults so the abuse is not disclosed or reported.

Grooming comprises of two main elements of:
• Building a trusting relationship with the child and carer
• Isolating the child to abuse him or her.

It is important to understand what grooming behaviours are and how to identify them. Perpetrators “take advantage of ambiguities over boundaries and behaviour to groom children through touch, inappropriate conversations, and a lack of supervision.”

Grooming behaviours can also be used to avoid detection once abuse occurs. This can include creating a relationship that will discourage the child from disclosing the abuse to others.

Grooming behaviours can be difficult to recognise or distinguish from seemingly innocent actions. However, as perpetrators and victims often know each other for a year or more before the first incident takes place, there is an opportunity to prevent abuse if visible signs of grooming are identified and reported.

Observable signs include:
• A graduation from attention-giving and non-sexual touching to increasingly more intimate and intrusive behaviours

A survivor reflects on their experiences of grooming
“There was at least one other incident where there had been questions about what type of person this was. But a real trust had been built up at the adult level. I think that was one of the reasons I could come forward and say anything – would I have believed.”

Institutions must understand and recognise grooming behaviours
Grooming describes behaviours that are used to prepare a child with the intention of sexually abusing them.

A survivor reflects on the impact of grooming
“The impact of grooming is [as] profound as the physical assault. It is as damaging and lifelong in its effect, in my case, as most of the others. I just don’t think that’s emphasised as much.”

A survivor explains how a perpetrator exercised power over children
“He had a finely honed process that he had down pat – ways to groom children and creating a whole situation where he was the king. Everybody wanted to be with him, everybody wanted to be like him. He could make you do anything he wanted and you’d just do it.”

ENDNOTES
95. Whitaker et al., above note 93, pp.529-548.
97. ibid.
98. ibid.
99. ibid.
100. ibid.
101. ibid, p.51.
102. A Lamont, ‘Who abuses children?’, NCPC Resource Sheet, Australian Institute of

103. Irenyi et al., above note 68, pp.7-8.
104. ibid, p.8.
105. ibid.
111. ibid.
116. ibid, p.12.
117. ibid, p.11.
118. ibid, p.12.
119. Exhibit 2-0041, ‘Expert report of Professor Steven Smallbone’, Case study 2, EXP. 0001.0001.0001_R at 0007_R.
121. Exhibit 2-0041, ‘Expert report of Professor Steven Smallbone’, Case study 2, EXP. 0001.0001.0001_R at 0006 and 0007_R; Irenyi et al., above note 68, p.10.

Who sexually abuses children?

Extract from a fact sheet produced by Child Family Community Australia

Research focusing on perpetrators of child sexual abuse is extensive compared to other forms of abuse. Evidence overwhelmingly indicates that the majority of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by males (ABS, 2005; McCloskey & Raphael, 2005; Peter, 2009). In a US study examining the characteristics of perpetrators in substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect (US DHHS, 2005), 26% of all cases involving male perpetrators were associated with sexual abuse compared to just 2% of cases involving female perpetrators.

Contrary to other types of abuse, research suggests that a far greater number of child sexual abuse offences are perpetrated by adults who are not in a caregiver role (ABS, 2005; US DHHS, 2005). Findings from the ABS Personal Safety Survey (2005) indicated that for participants who had experienced sexual abuse before the age of 15, only 13.5% identified that the abuse came from their father/stepfather, 30.2% was perpetrated by other male relative, 16.9% by family friend, 15.6% by acquaintance/neighbour, and 15.3% by other known person (ABS, 2005).

Although males clearly constitute the majority of perpetrators, a review of the evidence for female sex abusers (McCloskey & Raphael, 2005), suggested that females do abuse in a small proportion of cases. Data from the US National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) showed that males made up 90% of adult child sexual assault perpetrators, while 3.9% of perpetrators were female, with a further 6% classified as ‘unknown gender’ (McCloskey & Raphael, 2005). In a study comparing male and female perpetrated child sexual abuse using data from the 1998 Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (Peter, 2009), 10.7% of child sexual abuse incidents were found to be perpetrated by females. McCloskey and Raphael (2005) argued that female perpetrators of child sexual abuse could be much higher as many cases go under-reported.

The application of criminological theory regarding situational crime has helped identify three broad typologies of child sex abuse:

In situational crime prevention theory, situational crime is defined as an occurrence that: ‘...occurs where and when the right people are present’ (Peter, 2009). This application of criminological theory regarding situational crime has helped identify three broad typologies of child sex abuse.

1. **Situational perpetrators** will commit abuse in reaction to environmental factors and often behave impulsively when overcome by temptation or a temporary failure of self-control. For example, they might commit abuse if they are alone with a child who is bathing (Irenyi et al., 2006; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2014).

2. **Serial perpetrator** predators are considered high-frequency chronic offenders who choose victims based on situational factors and are likely to actively manipulate environments to create opportunities to abuse. Opportunistic occasional predators are more likely to commit abuse when a lack of appropriate controls, such as a code of conduct or reporting procedures, obscures personal responsibility for the abuse.

3. **Situational perpetrators** will commit abuse in reaction to environmental factors and often behave impulsively when overcome by temptation or a temporary failure of self-control. For example, they might commit abuse if they are alone with a child who is bathing (Irenyi et al., 2006; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Sexual Abuse, 2014).

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The most reliable statistics we have on child sexual abuse come from child protection data; however, since these figures represent only those cases which were detected and reported, it’s likely that they are only the tip of the iceberg. It is highly probable that child sexual abuse is vastly under-reported, given the ‘hidden’ nature of the crime, the vulnerability of children, and the barriers many children (especially those who are very young) face to disclosing sexual abuse. Many reports about child sexual abuse are only made much later in life, and many children who experience sexual abuse will grow up without ever telling anyone about the abuse.

- The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that in 2005, around 1.3 million Australians were survivors of child sexual abuse.¹
- Close to 1 million of these survivors were female, and around 300,000 were male.²
- Representative surveys conducted with Australian adults have found that 2.8% of men and 10.3% of women had been sexually abused during childhood.³
- Most child sexual abuse is committed by someone the person knows and trusts, often a family member or friend, and most often a man.⁴ More than half of child sexual abuses are committed by a father, stepfather, or other male relative.⁵

**At-risk groups**

Child sexual abuse can happen to anyone. However, statistics suggest that women are more likely to have experienced child sexual abuse than men.⁶

For a range of complex reasons, some people may be more vulnerable to child sexual abuse and its effects than others. This is particularly the case for people who may already live with social or economic marginalisation – for instance, because of poverty and social isolation, homelessness or housing insecurity, domestic violence, drug and alcohol use, or mental illness – and research suggests that childhood disability, mental health and/or behavioural problems are all risk factors for child abuse (including sexual abuse).⁷ Marginalised people might also experience more barriers to reporting sexual abuse and accessing support.⁸ In addition to this, we know that children who are exposed to one kind of abuse (whether it is sexual, physical, emotional, or takes some other form) are at increased risk of being exposed to other kinds later in life.⁹

**IMPACTS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

Child sexual abuse is a highly traumatic experience, with varied and profound impacts. Its effects can stay...
with someone for a lifetime (although it’s important to emphasise that survivors of child sexual abuse do have the ability to overcome the effects of the abuse, especially with the right support). Ultimately, because of the widespread and impactful nature of child sexual abuse, it has a range of consequences for families, communities, and society as a whole.

**Physical and mental health**
- People who were sexually abused as children are more likely to develop mental health problems, and to engage in self-harming behaviours including attempted suicide and harmful use of non-prescription drugs and alcohol.10
- People who were sexually abused as children suffer from more physical health problems than the general population, and have higher healthcare costs.11
- Adults who experienced child sexual abuse are more likely to have problems with drug and alcohol use than the general population, and are much more likely to have attempted suicide.12

**Economic impacts**
- The average annual healthcare costs of people who were sexually abused as children are more than double those of people who were not abused.13
- For people who were both sexually abused and physically abused as a child, this figure rises to more than six times the annual healthcare costs of people who weren’t.14

**Social impacts**
- The impact of child sexual abuse extends beyond the survivor and their immediate family. The whole community experiences flow-on effects, ranging from the impacts of self-harming behaviours (such as using drugs or alcohol) that survivors might use to cope with the trauma, to the loss of social cohesion resulting from poor outcomes in education and employment, and the social isolation linked with physical and mental health issues.15
- Some studies estimate that around 60-90% of women in Australian prisons are survivors of childhood sexual abuse.16

**SYSTEM RESPONSES TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

**Legal**
Anyone who engages sexually with a child in Australia is committing a sexual offence. Laws that deal with child sexual abuse vary in each jurisdiction, however, there may be differences in the legal response depending on the circumstances of the abuse – for instance, in cases when older minors who are close in age engage in sex without coercion, when a teacher or person of authority is involved, and so on.

Many states and territories have specialised policing units that investigate child sexual abuse and provide support to survivors. Because children are particularly vulnerable, special support arrangements are generally made for them in providing statements to police and when participating in the court process.

**Community**
There are a variety of support services for children who have been sexually abused in each state and territory, as well as for adults who experienced sexual abuse as a child, regardless of whether the abuse has been reported or not. These include support services attached to forensic sexual abuse units (which are generally based at hospitals and can collect forensic evidence about recent abuses), or services based in the community that offer counselling or other kinds of therapeutic intervention, support for survivors and families, legal advice, and so on.

**Government**
The Australian Government has responded to child sexual abuse at a policy level in a number of ways. The key national policy documents that deal with child sexual abuse include COAG’s *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022* and the *National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009-2020*. State and territory governments also have their own strategies or plans that tackle violence against women and children.

**DEFINITIONS**
‘Child sexual abuse’ refers to any sexual behaviour between an adult and a child below the age of consent.17 It can also refer to non-consensual sexual activity between two minors, and any sexual activity between a young person and a person in a position of power and authority (like a parent or teacher). In Australia, each jurisdiction has different legal definitions of child sexual abuse.
Sexual activity can include:
• Vaginal or anal sex, with a penis, finger, or another object
• Oral sex
• Touching genitals, breasts, or other intimate areas
• Exposure to or involvement in pornography
• Voyeurism (being watched doing intimate things)
• Exhibitionism (deliberately exposing genitals or other intimate body parts, for example)
• Other behaviours, such as talking about sexually explicit things which are developmentally inappropriate for the child’s age, including sending sexual text messages or emails, and so on.

Child sexual abuse can happen to anyone, regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, cultural background, or any other aspect of identity.

RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

RESEARCH

Australian Institute of Family Studies: www.aifs.gov.au
Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault: www.aicsa.gov.au
Child Family Community Australia (CFCA) information exchange: www.aifs.gov.au/cfca
Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse: www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

COMMENTARY

Our Watch: http://ourwatch.org.au

LEGISLATION

ACT


NSW


NT


QLD


SA


TAS


VIC


WA


REFERENCES

2. ibid.
4. ibid.
5. ibid.
11. ibid.
12. ibid.
13. ibid.
14. ibid.
15. ibid.
CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE (BEFORE 15 YEARS OF AGE)

Almost 1 million women (956,600, or 12%) reported having experienced sexual abuse before the age of 15. More than 90% of victims knew the perpetrator (ABS, 2006a).

Of male respondents, 337,400 reported experiencing sexual abuse before the age of 15. Again, more than 80% of male victims knew the perpetrator.

Two thirds of all respondents (67.6%) reported being sexually abused before the age of 11.

Both males and females reported experiencing sexual abuse as a child by someone known to them. However, during their life course women were more likely to have reported being sexually abused by family members:

- Fathers, step-fathers and other male relatives (including siblings) made up more than half (51.6%) of perpetrators for females, and approximately one-fifth (21.4%) of perpetrators against males.
- Similar proportions of females and males were sexually abused by a family friend (16.5% and 15.6%, respectively) or an acquaintance/neighbour (15.4% and 16.2%, respectively).
- However, nearly 1 in 5 males under the age of 15 were sexually abused by a stranger (18.3%), compared to less than 1 in 10 females aged under 15 years (8.6%).

**COMMON TYPES OF CHILD MALTREATMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Abuse</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglect</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**ENDNOTES**

11. These figures tell us how many women were victims of sexual abuse before the age of 15. What the data does not make explicit is whether respondents were sexually assaulted by more than one perpetrator, or whether they incurred multiple experiences of sexual abuse (see ABS, 2006a, Table 29, ‘Experience of Sexual Abuse, Before the age of 15 – Selected characteristics’, p.42).

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The latest reported child protection substantiation statistics from an annual report produced by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Nationally, emotional abuse was the most common primary type of abuse or neglect substantiated for children (40%), followed by neglect (28%). However, there was some variation between jurisdictions, with neglect being the most common type substantiated for children in Queensland, South Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory (Figure 3.3). Across Australia, physical abuse was the primary type substantiated for 19% of children who were the subject of substantiations. This ranged from 12% in the Australian Capital Territory to 26% in Victoria. Sexual abuse was the reason for substantiation for 14% of children (Figure 3.3).

This reporting of substantiated type of abuse or neglect is based on the type of abuse or neglect that is considered most likely to place the child at risk or be most severe in the short term – generally known as the ‘primary’ type of abuse or neglect. Other types of abuse or neglect may also be recorded as part of the substantiation. The co-occurrence of abuse and neglect refers to substantiations where both primary and other types of abuse are recorded. Table 3.3 shows the co-occurrence of primary types of abuse or neglect with other types of abuse or neglect that were recorded. Along with being the most common primary types reported, emotional abuse and neglect were also the most likely types to co-occur, with average co-occurrences of 29% and 26% respectively. Emotional abuse co-occurred in nearly half (47%) of all substantiations where physical abuse was the primary type of substantiated abuse or neglect and in just over one-quarter (26%) of substantiations where sexual abuse was the primary type. Neglect co-occurred in 30% of cases where emotional abuse was the primary type of substantiated abuse and in one-quarter (25%) of substantiations where physical abuse was the primary type. The co-occurrence of sexual abuse was much lower than all other types of abuse or neglect, with an average co-occurrence of less than 2% (Table 3.3).

![Diagram showing the percentage of children who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications received during 2013-14, by type of abuse or neglect, states and territories.]

1. Only the abuse type for the first substantiation in the year that is most likely to place the child at risk or be most severe in the short term is reported.
2. Percentages exclude cases where the type of abuse was not stated/inadequately described.

### Table 3.3: Co-occurrence of Substantiated Types of Abuse and Neglect, 2013-14 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary type of abuse or neglect</th>
<th>Physical abuse</th>
<th>Sexual abuse</th>
<th>Emotional abuse</th>
<th>Neglect</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical abuse</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>9,198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>6,805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional abuse</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>18,012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglect</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>12,941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average co-occurrence</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>47,032</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Excludes Queensland as data were not available. As such, the total number of substantiations reported does not match the number reported in Table 3.1.
b. Excludes 6,621 cases for NSW where the same type of abuse/neglect was recorded as both a primary and co-occurring type of abuse/neglect.
c. Not all jurisdictions were able to provide data for all types of co-occurring abuse or neglect – some jurisdictions are only able to report primary and secondary types. Therefore the proportion of co-occurring abuse types may be understated.
d. ‘Average co-occurrence’ is equal to the number of cases where the type of abuse or neglect of interest was identified as co-occurring, divided by the number of cases where the given type of abuse or neglect was not the primary type.

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The effects of childhood sexual abuse

This reproduced booklet from South Eastern CASA looks at the psychological and long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse. It also examines the child sexual abuse accommodation syndrome, PTSD and the Stockholm syndrome.

Psychological effects

1. Fear. The offender may swear the child to secrecy and say that if they tell something bad will happen. Sexual abuse is usually accompanied by coercion, bribery or threats. The child is afraid to tell because of what the consequences might be, e.g. punishment, blame, abandonment or not being believed.

2. Helplessness/powerlessness. Children in this situation often feel that they have no control over their own lives or even over their own bodies. They feel that they have no choices available to them.

3. Guilt and shame. The child knows something is wrong and blames him or herself not others. The offender will often encourage the child to feel that the abuse is his or her fault and sometimes s/he will feel that s/he is a ‘bad’ person.

4. Responsibility. The offender often makes the child feel responsible for keeping the abuse a secret. Sometimes the child also feels responsible for keeping the family together and the burden of this responsibility interferes with experiencing a normal childhood.

5. Isolation. Incest victims feel different from other children. They must usually be secretive. This even isolates them from non-offending parents and brothers and sisters.

6. Betrayal. Children feel betrayed because they are dependent upon adults for nurturing and protection and the offender is someone who they should be able to love and trust. They may also feel betrayed by a non-offending parent who they feel has failed to protect them.

7. Anger. Not surprisingly this is one of the strongest feelings which many children have about their sexual assault. Children may feel anger against the perpetrator and also against others who they feel failed to protect them.

8. Sadness. Children may feel grief due to a sense of loss, especially if the perpetrator was loved and trusted by the child.

9. Flashbacks. These can be like nightmares which happen while the child is awake. They are a re-experience of the sexual assault and the child may experience all the feelings again which they felt at the time.

Long-term effects

In the long term the child may also experience a number of effects as an adult.

These may include:

1. Depression, anxiety, trouble sleeping.

2. Low self-esteem.

3. ‘Damaged goods’ syndrome. i.e. negative body image due to self-blame. This may be intensified if physical pain was experienced during the abusive incidents.

4. Dissociation from feeling.

5. Social isolation.

6. Relationship problems such as an inability to trust, poor social skills or a reluctance to disclose details about themselves.

7. Self-destructive behaviour such as substance abuse or suicide attempts.

8. Sexual difficulties such as fear of sex or intimacy, indiscriminate multiple sex partners or difficulty in reaching orgasm.

9. Parenting problems such as fear of being a bad parent, or fear of abusing the child or being overprotective.

10. An underlying sense of guilt, anger or loss.

11. ‘Flashbacks’ and/or panic attacks.

The child sexual abuse accommodation syndrome

The child sexual abuse accommodation syndrome was developed by Roland Summit, M.D. It is a simple and logical model which can be used to help in understanding and accepting the ways in which many children react to sexual abuse. The syndrome classifies the most typical reactions of child sexual abuse victims, dividing them into five categories.
It is worth noting that children are often put through a ‘grooming process’ before the sexual abuse commences. They are initially chosen for being compliant and therefore unlikely to complain or tell anyone. The offender may then go to considerable lengths to build up the child’s trust, for example the child may be given presents or told that they are ‘special’.

The five categories of the syndrome are:

1. **Secrecy**
   Abused children tend to keep the abuse a secret. They do so for a variety of reasons. They may be afraid of the abuser who may have threatened the child or someone whom the child loves. Physically abused children may be afraid of being beaten again. The abuser may have promised safety to the child or child’s loved ones if the child keeps quiet. Neglected or emotionally abused children long for their parents’ approval and affection – they may keep silent for fear of losing the parents’ love.

2. **Helplessness**
   Children are inherently helpless and subordinate. They are small, dependent, and emotionally immature. For all of these reasons, they cannot escape from a dangerous situation. Children who try to protect themselves are usually overridden by more powerful adults. When their attempts to protect themselves fail, these children come to believe that they are helpless. Eventually they stop trying to protect themselves overtly. Instead they may withdraw, go physically limp or dissociate.*

   *‘Dissociation’ is a way in which some children survive abuse by escaping mentally while the abuse is happening. The body and the mind seem to separate. While the body is being hurt, the child no longer feels it because the mind manages to escape to a safe place. Different children may dissociate in different ways. One example is ‘leaving’ the body and floating on the ceiling over the bed where the abuse is occurring. The child may even watch what is happening but it is as if it were happening to someone else. The child feels nothing.

3. **Entrapment and accommodation**
   Children who keep their abuse a secret and continue to feel helpless inevitably feel trapped. However, they learn to accept the situation and survive. The helpless child faced with continuing victimisation must learn to somehow achieve a sense of power and control. The child may eventually come to blame him or herself, believing s/he has provoked the abuse.

   Physically abused children may refer to their bad behaviours as reasons why their parents must punish them. Emotionally abused or neglected children may imagine unacceptable traits in themselves. Physically, sexually and emotionally abused children may also employ defensive mechanisms (e.g. dissociation or blocking out the memory) in an attempt to accommodate to the abuse.

4. **Delayed, conflicted and unconvincing disclosure**
   Adults who ask a child to disclose abuse must recognise that this request may precipitate an acute crisis for the child. Initial disclosures may be fraught with anxiety, retractions and inconsistencies. Therefore it may sound unconvincing. Because the child has used various defensive mechanisms to cope with the abuse, memory may be fragmentary, perceptions may be altered and information may be scattered and sparse.

5. **Retraction**
   Children who do disclose abuse may be flooded with guilt, fear and feelings of betrayal or confusion. The adults’ immediate responses may frighten them further. For example, the child may be removed into foster care, the parent may be put in prison and members of the child’s family may suffer. All this may make the child retract the disclosure. Children gravitate towards the safety of a familiar situation, no matter how painful it is. Most abused or neglected children remain loyal to their families and, if given a choice, frequently want to stay with their abusive parents.

   It should be noted that this is a ‘model’ describing reactions, not an absolute. Like all models it does not mean each child will show all aspects of this syndrome. There have been some problems reported in the US with courts taking the model so literally that if children
Post traumatic stress disorder

Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is used by psychologists and psychiatrists as a framework for the treatment of sexually abused children. It is valuable in identifying the existence of specific behaviours that should be addressed in therapy. PTSD describes symptoms which are characteristic in many cases of sexual abuse but it is important to note that it does not apply to all sexually abused children. PTSD can sometimes appear many years after the original event. A diagnosis of PTSD is often used in court reports e.g. for applications for Criminal Injuries Compensation.

The criteria for a diagnosis of PTSD are:

- **1.** The person has experienced an event that is outside the range of usual human experience and that would be markedly distressing to almost anyone.

- **2.** The re-experiencing of the trauma in at least one of the following ways:
  - a. Recurrent and intrusive recollections of the event.
  - b. Recurrent distressing dreams of the event.
  - c. Sudden acting or feeling as if the event were recurring e.g. ‘flashback’ episodes, hallucinations, illusions.
  - d. Intense psychological distress at exposure to events that symbolise or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event.

- **3.** A numbing of responsiveness or reduced involvement in the external world some time after the trauma, indicated by:
  - a. Diminished interest in activities and/or
  - b. Feelings of detachment or estrangement from others and/or
  - c. Constricted affect e.g. unable to have loving feelings or to feel anger.

- **4.** In addition, at least two of the following sets of symptoms must be present:
  - a. Hyperalertness or being easily startled.
  - b. Sleep problems.
  - c. Guilt about surviving or behaviour required to survive.
  - d. Problems with memory or concentration.
  - e. Avoidance of activities that arouse recollection.
  - f. Intensification of symptoms if events symbolise or resemble the traumatic event.

The Stockholm syndrome

The Stockholm syndrome was originally developed to explain the phenomenon of hostages bonding with their captors. The name refers to a bank holdup in Stockholm, Sweden in 1973 when four people were held hostage for six days by two men. The hostages and their captors bonded with each other and the hostages actually came to see their captors as protecting them from the police. One was even reported as later becoming engaged to one of the captors.

Subsequent research found that such a reaction had occurred in all the ‘hostage’ groups studied, including cult members, battered women, incest victims and physically or emotionally abused children. Researchers have concluded that this seems to be a universal phenomenon which may be instinctive and thus play a survival function for hostages who are victims of abuse.

There is no universally accepted definition of the Stockholm syndrome but it has been suggested that it is present if one or more of the following is observed:

- a. Positive feelings by the captive towards his/her captor.
- b. Negative feelings by the captive toward the police or authorities trying to win his/her release.
- c. Positive feelings by the captor towards his/her captive.

It has been found to occur in circumstances where there is:

- a. A perceived threat to survival and a belief that the captor is willing to carry out that threat.
- b. Perception by the captive of some small kindness from the captor within the context of terror.
- c. Isolation from perspectives other than those of the captor.
- d. Perceived inability to escape.

The following explanation has been put forward for the phenomenon.

The abuser (or captor) terrifies the victim, who cannot escape, by threatening his or her physical or psychological survival. As a result of being terrified the victim needs nurturance and protection. Being isolated from others, the victim must turn to the abuser for this if s/he turns to anyone. If the abuser shows the victim some small kindness this creates hope in the victim, who then ignores her rage at the terror-creating side of the abuser (because this rage would be experienced as overwhelming) and bonds to the positive side of the abuser.

With the hope that the abuser will let him or her live, the victim works to keep the abuser happy. In trying to determine what will keep the abuser happy, the victim’s own needs, feelings and perspectives must take second place and s/he unconsciously takes on the world view of the abuser. The victim sees the abuser as the ‘good guy’ and those trying to win his/her release (e.g. police or therapists) as the ‘bad guys’, as this is the way the abuser sees things.

Over a period of months or years, the victim’s entire sense of self may come to be experienced through the eyes of the abuser. The victim may have extreme difficulty leaving the abuser, if the opportunity arises, because s/he no longer sees a reason to do so.

For victims of sexual abuse, their families and therapists, the Stockholm syndrome is useful in explaining the victim’s experiences, current symptoms and the relationship between victim and abuser. It can help remove the tendency of
The long-term effects of child sexual abuse: key messages

- Child sexual abuse covers a broad range of sexual activities perpetrated against children, mostly by someone known and trusted by the child.
- The research on the longer-term impact of child sexual abuse indicates that there may be a range of negative consequences for mental health and adjustment in childhood, adolescence and adulthood.
- Not all victims experience these difficulties – family support and strong peer relationships appear to be important in buffering the impact.
- Recent research indicates that male victims are less likely to disclose their abuse and take longer to do so. Male and female victims may be impacted in different ways.
- It is not straightforward to tease out the effects of child sexual abuse and other adverse experiences in childhood and adulthood (including being victimised again), but more recent rigorous research is better able to do so.
- Aspects of the abuse, including the relationship with the perpetrator and the betrayal of trust, the age and gender of the child, and the particular form of abuse are significant factors.

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The victim denies the abuser’s violence against him/her and focuses on his positive side.

**Explanation:** An unconscious attempt to find hope (and thus a way to survive) in a situation in which s/he would otherwise feel powerless and overwhelmed.

The victim feels shame for abuse done to him/her.

**Explanation:** Reflects the victim having taken the abuser’s perspective (namely, that s/he caused the abuse and therefore it was deserved).

The victim resents outsiders’ attempts to free him/her from the abuser.

**Explanation:** The victim knows that the abuser is likely to retaliate against him/her for any disloyalty shown, so s/he resists others’ attempts to free her or to hold the abuser accountable for the abuse.

The victim identifies with the ‘victim’ in the abuser.

**Explanation:** This represents the projection of the victim’s own victim status onto the abuser. It enables the victim to feel sympathetic and caring towards the abuser.

The victim believes s/he deserved the abuser’s violence.

**Explanation:** This represents an attempt to feel that s/he controls when and whether the violence/abuse is done and thus permits him/her to believe s/he can stop the abuse.

The victim rationalises the abuser’s violence against him/her.

**Explanation:** An attempt to maintain a bond with the abuser (and thus hope of survival) in the face of behaviour (abuse) that would otherwise destroy that bond (hope).

Victim uses abuser-as-victim explanation to account for the abuse.

**Explanation:** This represents an effort to see the abuser in a positive light so as to maintain the bond (since the bond provides the victim with the only hope of surviving).

The victim feels hatred for that part of him/her which the abuser said led to the abuse.

**Explanation:** To improve chances of survival, the victim internalises the abuser’s perspective, including the reasons given for the abuse.

The victim fears the abuser will come to get him/her, even if he is dead or in prison.

**Explanation:** The victim knows the abuser is willing to ‘get’ him/her because he has done so at least once before. The victim remains loyal in anticipation of his return.

SURVIVING SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse is a serious crime and can have many short- and long-term effects on a victim or survivor. The effects of sexual abuse are not the same for every person. People may feel a variety of emotions that depend on their own circumstances, explains the Women’s and Children’s Health Network.

Sexual abuse can be physical, verbal and/or emotional. It is an abuse of power and often of trust by someone who uses another person for his or her own sexual pleasure. Sexual assault refers to any unwanted actions that are of a sexual nature that make the victim feel frightened or hurt them in some way.

What kinds of things are sexual abuse?

Everyone has the right to feel safe all the time. If someone is making you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, then it could be sexual abuse.

So, what might be happening? It could involve:
• Having parts of your body touched in a sexual way
• Being kissed inappropriately, in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable
• Being told to touch parts of your own body
• Being made to touch parts of another person’s body
• Being made to watch someone masturbate or touch their own body in a sexual way
• Being made, by coercion or physical force, to act or model for pornographic purposes, or to watch pornographic material
• Being watched while showering or changing
• Putting objects (including penis and fingers) in the anus or mouth, and for young women, the vagina
• Making you have sex, or do sexual things with other people (rape)
• Making sexual comments and suggestions to you
• Sending sexual comments or suggestions to you via SMS or email.

Sexual abuse, sexual assault and the law

Sexual assault, rape and sexual abuse are illegal. The law says that if you did not freely agree to any sexual acts, then you have not said ‘yes’. Legally you can only agree to sexual acts if you are over 17 years old.

It is not OK for someone to offer money, favours or gifts to try and get you to do sexual things that you do not want to do. It is not OK for someone to...
blackmail you, use physical force or threaten you or people you care about, to get you to do something which makes you feel uncomfortable or makes you feel bad about yourself.

When people sexually abuse others, they know what they are doing and they should know that it is against the law.

You have the right to say NO.

How do you keep yourself safe?

Remember that everyone has the right to feel safe all the time.

When you were in primary school, you probably did some lessons with your teacher about keeping yourself safe.

• You would have made a list of trusted adults, starting with people in your life with whom you felt able to talk, even about the secret stuff in your mind.
• You would have asked those people if they felt OK about being your trusted adult.
• Maybe you would have added adults in your life at school: teachers, school counsellors or the school chaplain.
• Maybe you would have added your doctor, sports coaches or any adults outside the family who you knew would listen, keep your confidence and help you when needed.
• Finally, you would have made a list, like the one in this topic, of organisations that could help you.

As a class you probably spent some time thinking about “what you could do if ...” in lots of different situations, and then wrote down and sorted through ideas about how to keep safe and help you sort out the problem.

The last things you would have learnt were:
1. Telling someone about your problem was the first step to solving it.
2. To tell and keep on telling until something is done.

Coming forward – why is it hard to tell?

Some young people feel that if they disclose (tell someone about what happened) they will be harshly judged by those around them. Sometimes they feel like they are to blame in some way. Often the abuser will say things like, “He/she was asking for it by wearing clothes like that, or behaving like that”, or “She/he made me think it was OK”.

No one can make anyone think sexual abuse is OK. People choose what they want to think or do. What is important is to remember that sexual abuse is an abuse of power and it is not your fault.

People who abuse may use tactics to stop you telling anybody about what has happened to you.

• Making threats of violence to you or your family
• Giving you gifts, money or favours to keep you from telling anybody
• Making friends with your family
• Convincing you that it was your fault
• Convincing you that it will be bad for you and your family if you tell someone
• Threatening that you will lose your job
• Threatening to send or post information about you (including photos of you) on the internet
• Sending threatening text messages.

Not telling anybody when something happened does not mean that you are weak or stupid, that you
wanted it, or that you could have stopped it. It may have been the safest option for you at the time. But when you are ready, it does help to tell a trusted person about what has happened – this person may be able to protect you in the future, or help you to come to terms with what has happened.

**What are the effects?**

The effects of sexual abuse can vary a great deal. You could be reminded of the abuse in many different ways and at different times, and often this might feel out of your control. Even if you have access to help that you find supportive, it will not take the past away, but may lessen the long-term negative effects and help you to develop more coping skills. Choose someone you feel completely comfortable with, who respects you and listens to you, to help you through this very difficult time.

**Relationships**

- The abuse may have been perpetrated by someone you knew, making you feel unsure and afraid of trusting anyone again.

**Poor self-perception**

- Your self-esteem or view of yourself may have changed, and would be different to that of someone who has not experienced such trauma. You may feel really bad and lose confidence in yourself.

**Nightmares or flashbacks**

- It is common to experience nightmares, and for memories of what happened to come at unpredictable times. Things such as places, smells, rooms, or clothes can remind you or trigger memories of the abuse.
- The topic Post Traumatic Stress Disorder may be useful if you have these sorts of feelings.

Sexual abuse also puts people at risk of sexually transmitted infections, and for girls, an unwanted pregnancy.

**What am I feeling?**

As there can be so many effects from sexual abuse, you can have a difficult time emotionally dealing with so much at once. You may believe that the abuse has not affected you, but then you might feel emotions that you can’t explain, or have sudden mood swings.

**Fear**

- You may have felt a very strong sense of fear at the time of the abuse because of the abuser.
- You may not have spoken out in order to protect yourself, fearing that you would be at more risk if the abuser found out that you reported it or told someone.

**Anger**

- You may feel angry toward the abuser who has done this to you.

- You may feel angry toward yourself, thinking that you should have been able to stop it from happening.

**Isolation**

- Although many people experience sexual abuse, it is common to feel alone and isolated since most people do not talk about it.
- Knowing that there are other people you can relate to may help you to not feel so isolated.

**Sadness**

- You may feel sad about the invasion into your privacy, and for the loss of your rights.

**Guilt**

- Guilt is a terrible emotion to feel during or after a sexually abusive situation, and must be reversed.
- The abuser should feel guilty, not you. Abuse of any form is about power, not about sex.
- If you are feeling guilty, then the abuse will still be living strongly within you and it is important to change this. A counsellor may be able to help, and a good friend can be helpful too.

**Confused**

- With all those emotions, it might be fair to feel confused. If the abuser was someone you were once close to, you may even still feel love for them, or not know what to think.
- Do not be hard on yourself for feeling confused. Remember, you are a survivor.

**What if I felt like I enjoyed it?**

Some young people worry because their bodies may appear to become sexually aroused by what is happening to them, even though it frightens them. This is a physical reaction and it is your body’s way of coping with the situation. This does not mean that you wanted or enjoyed the abuse.

**Will I become an abuser too?**

Often in the media they make it seem that young people who are sexually abused go on to become abusers themselves. This is not true and the link between the two is in no way proven. You have a choice about whether this is true for you. There is no reason to believe that if you have been abused you will become a perpetrator of abuse in the future. You have control over your life and can make choices based on what is right for you.

**On the road again to healing your self-esteem**

It is time to get back in contact with the ‘real’ you. Get to know yourself again. Put what you want as a high priority.

Here are some things you could ask yourself as you get ‘on the road’ to healing your self-esteem:

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Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Issues in Society

Helping someone

If someone you know has decided to tell you that they have survived sexual abuse, chances are it was one of the most difficult things they have ever had to do, and that they trust you heaps! It may also freak you out!

You may feel that it is too difficult for you to talk about, or you don't know what to say.

• Make sure they know you believe them.
• Listen to what they say, and do not expect them to tell you everything about the experience to prove that what they are saying is true.
• Acknowledge what has happened, what they are saying and what they are feeling.
• Encourage them to seek support, but don't pressure them.
• Be open to helping them but be clear with each other about what you can and cannot do.
• Don’t put pressure on yourself thinking that you must come up with solutions for your friend's complex issues.
• Reassure the person that he or she has survived a huge trauma and therefore is a strong and courageous person. Acknowledge the courage it has taken to talk to you.

If you are worried and don't know what to do to help your friend, it may be a good idea for you to talk to one of your trusted adults or contact any of the resources listed on this page.

It is not a good idea to talk to other friends in your group. How would you feel if someone told your other friends about something you had said in confidence?

Sex and sexual relationships

Being subjected to sexual abuse can get you feeling very confused about the whole idea of sexuality and intimacy. You may feel a variety of emotions if you are presented with making a decision about sexual intimacy. You may find difficulty trusting someone enough to become intimate. It would probably be helpful to talk with a counsellor about this.

Does this mean I’m gay?

A common misconception is that if a young man is sexually abused by a man, it means that you become sexually attracted to men. Being attracted to other men is not related to whether or not you were sexually abused by men. Being same-sex attracted is about love and forming positive relationships. Being raped or abused does not need to impact on whether you are attracted to men or women.

Yarrow Place student project information booklet

The Yarrow Place Rape and Sexual Assault Service (South Australia) has published a booklet which contains a lot of information about rape and sexual assault, including the law, rights of survivors of rape and sexual assault, recovering from rape and sexual assault, impacts of sexual abuse and myths and facts.

• Yarrow Place
  www.yarrowplace.sa.gov.au
• Student project information booklet

There is also information on their site about:

• Supporting a woman who has been raped or sexually assaulted
• Supporting a man who has been raped or sexually assaulted.

RESOURCES

• Centre Against Sexual Assault (Victoria), www.casa.org.au
• South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault Australia
  www.secasa.com.au
• Human rights. Human rights covers many very important issues. Human rights are about respect, justice and equality for everyone. This site has heaps of information on the history of human rights, human rights in Australia, and human rights issues around the world: www.humanrights.gov.au/info_for_students/index.html

FURTHER READING

• Australian Centre for studies of sexual assault and rape, www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/
• South East Centre Against Sexual Assault Australia 'Working with adult survivors of child sexual abuse', www.secasa.com.au/index.php/workers/50/133

The information in this article should not be used as an alternative to professional care. If you have a particular problem, see a doctor, or ring the Youth Healthline on 1300 13 17 19 (local call cost from anywhere in South Australia).


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CHAPTER 2
Responding to child sexual abuse

Responding to children and young people’s disclosures of abuse

This paper from the National Child Protection Clearinghouse discusses the topic of children and young people’s disclosures of abuse

The paper outlines what we know through research and practice about how, why, what and when children and young people are likely to disclose. It offers suggestions for parents, family members, friends, professionals or others to help respond to children and young people at the time of disclosure and in the longer term. Most research into children and young people's disclosures has focused on disclosures of child sexual abuse, however, many of the issues canvassed are also likely to be relevant to disclosures of other types of abuse (i.e. physical, psychological and emotional abuse). The information in this paper is drawn from a range of sources developed through both research and practice.

At the point of disclosure
When a child discloses that he or she has been abused, it is an opportunity for an adult to provide immediate support and comfort and to assist in protecting the child from the abuse. It is also a chance to help the child connect to professional services that can keep them safe, provide support and facilitate their recovery from trauma. Disclosure is about seeking support and your response can have a great impact on the child or young person's ability to seek further help and recover from the trauma.

When might a child or young person disclose?
Children and young people can disclose abuse at any time. If the abuse is ongoing over a period of weeks, months or years, they may disclose while the abuse is happening. Others might disclose either immediately after the abuse has ended or years later. Many children do not disclose abuse at all during childhood (London, Bruck, Ceci, & Shuman, 2005; Ullman, 2003). Delays in disclosure may be linked to a range of factors including concerns regarding the consequences of disclosing. For example, one study found that many children expected negative consequences for themselves and/or another person (usually their mother or sibling) if they disclosed (Malloy, Brubacher, & Lamb, 2011). These expected consequences included physical harm and/or death.

Supporting the importance of the initial, informal disclosure, Keary and Fitzpatrick (1994) found that once a child had disclosed abuse to a family member or another adult they were more likely to disclose again during formal investigations by child welfare workers. The timing of the child or young person's disclosure will influence his or her immediate needs, and this, in turn, will determine the most appropriate response. For a child or young person who discloses that he or she is currently being abused, the immediate priority is safety and protection from further abuse. In this situation some adults have a legal obligation to notify the appropriate authorities, although these obligations differ between states and territories. For example, in the Northern Territory all adults are required to report their concerns when they have reasonable grounds to believe that a child has suffered or is suffering maltreatment.1 Sometimes authorities will already be aware of allegations made against a perpetrator and as a result, any children or young people who have spent time with that person might be approached as part of a police investigation. If you are unsure if an investigation is already taking place, any disclosure made by a child or young person should be reported to the appropriate authorities. After disclosure, a child or young person also needs support, advocacy and assistance to recover from the trauma of being abused.2

How children and young people disclose abuse
A child or young person’s disclosure is seldom straightforward because they can disclose abuse in several ways. Many of the ways children and young people disclose abuse are indirect or accidental. Children sometimes attempt to alert adults they trust to the fact they are being, or have been abused, by their behaviour or by making ambiguous verbal statements (Collings, Griffiths, & Kumalo, 2005; Shackel, 2009; Ungar, Barter, McConnell, Tutty, & Fairholm, 2009). For example, a child or young person might suddenly refuse to attend the house of a previously loved relative, or could begin saying and doing sexual things that are inappropriate
This document contains information that will help family, friends, other adults and professionals to respond to a child’s disclosure of abuse. However, the way that individuals respond to abuse will differ according to their role in the child’s life.

If you are a parent, family member or friend

Children and young people are most likely to initially disclose abuse to either a parent or same-aged friend (Priebe & Svedin, 2008; Shackel, 2009). Hearing that a child or young person has been abused is distressing, and this will be felt even more acutely if you are a friend or relative. It is also possible that the perpetrator is known to you and may even be a family member. Services that are available for children can also help support family members and friends of victims and guide you through the next steps. Available services can also be found in the NCPC Resource Sheet on Helplines and Telephone Counselling Services for Children, Young People and Parents (Lohoar & Price-Robertson, 2011), www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/sheets/rs23

It is important to remember that whilst it is your role to be a supportive listener, it is not your role to counsel the child or investigate his or her claims. Child protection workers will undertake investigations and professional counsellors may be accessed to provide counselling.

If you work for an organisation

Organisations should ideally have in place a set of protocols to respond quickly and effectively to disclosures of abuse (Irenyi, Bromfield, Beyer, & Higgins, 2006). If you work for an organisation and a child or young person in the care of that organisation discloses abuse that has been perpetrated by someone associated with that organisation, it is imperative to follow the organisation’s protocols as well as make a report to the relevant statutory child protection department in your state/territory. If there are no protocols in place, your management or you should contact the relevant child protection department in your state immediately. Most importantly the needs and welfare of the child or young person must take priority over any perceived threat to the reputation of the organisation or associated individuals (Irenyi et al., 2006).

If a child or young person discloses abuse that is occurring, or has occurred, outside the organisation, you should support the child or young person by believing him or her and reassuring them that telling was the right thing to do. If your organisation does not have protocols in place for such circumstances, you should still inform management and the relevant statutory child protection department in your state. Finally, keep information confidential. Only those people who must know should be informed of the disclosure.

It is important to remember that whilst it is your role to be a supportive listener, it is not your role to counsel the child or investigate his or her claims. Child protection workers will undertake investigations and professional counsellors may be accessed to provide counselling.

If you are a child protection worker

Although the current document is aimed at people hearing initial disclosures of abuse, the information may still be useful to child protection workers but should be considered in conjunction with the appropriate state/territory child protection legislation and your particular organisational protocols. (See NCPC Resource Sheet, Australian Child Protection Legislation (Holzer & Lamont, 2009), www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/sheets/rs14/rcs14.html for further details on each state/territory).

Locating the appropriate agency in your state or territory

Up-to-date contact details for the statutory child protection departments with responsibility for receiving and responding to reports of child abuse can be found in the NCPC Resource Sheet on Reporting Abuse and Neglect: State and Territory Departments Responsible for Protecting Children (Rosier, 2011), www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/sheets/rs26 In most cases it is possible to make anonymous reports, although it must be remembered that if an anonymous report is made, authorities cannot subsequently contact the person making the report if clarification or further information is required.

There are a number of reasons for children and young people to retract or delay their disclosure, including:

- Pressure or threats from the perpetrator
- Relationship to the perpetrator
- Expected consequences of telling (e.g. physical injury/death, family separation, parental distress)
- Pressure from the child’s family
- Fear of negative reactions from parents or family
- Fear of not being believed
- Feelings of embarrassment, shame and self-blame, and/or

For males specifically: fears of stigmatisation, being labelled a victim or being labeled homosexual (Alaggia, 2004; Alaggia, 2005; Hershkowitz et al., 2007; Malloy et al., 2011; Ullman, 2003).

Children may disclose spontaneously (disclosure as an event) or indirectly and slowly (disclosure as a process). The type of disclosure may be impacted by developmental features of the child, such as their age at onset of abuse and/or age at time of disclosure, with preschool children being less likely to spontaneously disclose than older children (Lippert, Cross, & Jones, 2009; London et al., 2005; Shackel, 2009). Understanding disclosure of abuse as a process may help adults to be
patient and allow the child or young person to speak in their own way and their own time (Sorensen & Snow, 1991) while maintaining an awareness of any changes in behaviour or emotions that may indicate abuse is occurring or increasing. If you have suspicions that abuse is occurring, even if you are unsure, it is better to report your suspicions than to do nothing.

What to do during the disclosure

In this section we discuss in more detail things you can do to be supportive while a child is disclosing. It is important to remember, however, that if a child has decided to speak to you, then there is a good chance they trust you. Simply by calmly and empathically listening and offering support, you are helping the child or young person.

There are some general tips for responding to disclosure (Bussey, 1996; Office for Children Youth and Family Support, 2006; Queensland Department of Communities, 2004; Victorian Department of Human Services, 2006):

- Always listen to and support the child or young person and thank them for helping you to understand.
- Don't make promises you can't keep.
- Reassure the child or young person it is right to tell.
- Don't be afraid of saying the 'wrong' thing.
- Maintain a calm appearance.
- Give the child or young person your full attention.
- Let the child or young person take his or her time.
- Let the child or young person use his or her own words.
- Accept the child or young person will disclose only what is comfortable and recognise the bravery/strength of the child for talking about something that is difficult.
- Tell the child or young person what you plan to do next. Do not confront the perpetrator.

These points are discussed in further detail below.

Always listen to and support the child or young person

It is essential that when a disclosure is made that you support and reassure the child or young person. Remember, it is the role of appropriate authorities to investigate the truth of the claim. Your role is to support the child or young person. Quizzing the child or young person for details or asking him or her to repeat their story a number of times can create the impression you doubt what the child or young person has said. This type of quizzing might also be interpreted as “leading” the child and might have unintended consequences if any legal action is taken.

Don't make promises you can't keep

Child abuse, particularly child sexual abuse, relies on secrecy. Other forms of abuse are also usually hidden. Children learn at a very young age to hide what is happening to them. Sometimes they fear repercussions for themselves or other family members. In other instances they may fear the consequences for parents whom they love in spite of the abuse. Because of this, a child or young person might ask an adult to promise secrecy before disclosing. Such a promise should not be made. By telling the child: "I can't make that promise, but I can tell you I will do my best to keep you safe" you can reassure the child and encourage him/her to speak out about abuse.

Reassure the child or young person that it is right to tell

A child or young person disclosing abuse needs to be reassured that the adult is not angry he or she has disclosed the information. If the adult exhibits distress, the child or young person must also be reassured that the adult’s reaction is because adults want children to be safe. Reassure the child or young person that he or she is not the cause of the distress. Also address any concerns about the child or young person's safety, particularly if he or she fears potential consequences of disclosing. The child or young person may need to be reassured of the same things repeatedly over an extended period of time, especially if legal proceedings follow the disclosure. It is vital that the child or young person knows that the abuse and anything that happens afterwards are the responsibility of the perpetrator for committing the abuse, not the child or young person for disclosing. For example, if parents separate after a disclosure of child abuse, the child or young person needs frequent reassurance it was not his or her fault.

Don't be afraid of saying the 'wrong' thing

Children will very rarely disclose a secret if they have decided not to (Bussey, 1996). Therefore, if a child or
young person has revealed to you that they have been
or are being abused, it is a sign that they trust you and
that simply speaking to you will be helpful. Try not to be
distracted by needing to know exactly the ‘right’ thing
to say. As long as you listen supportively then the child
or young person will benefit from talking to you.

**Maintain a calm appearance**

Inevitably a disclosure of child abuse will evoke strong
feelings for the adult hearing it. For some, the news may
be overwhelming. Although potentially difficult, it is
helpful if you can be calm and patient. Allow time for
the child or young person to trust that he or she will be
listened to and helped. It can be useful to remember,
particularly when the disclosure is of past abuse, that
the child or young person has already survived the abuse.
The only thing that has changed is your awareness of
it. If the child or young person becomes aware of your
distress you can explain that you are upset because adults
are meant to care for children and you are sad because
some adults hurt children.

**Give the child or young person your full attention**

A child or young person might not always begin
talking about what happened to them in the best place.
If you are in a busy and/or noisy place, ask the child or
young person if you can move to a place where you can
hear him or her properly. Whilst remaining sensitive to
the child or young person’s needs, let him or her know
that you want to be able to give him or her your full
attention. Respect his or her wishes about where the
best place is: some localities may trigger memories or be
reminders of abuse (e.g. being alone in a quiet, isolated
place with an adult).

**Let the child or young person take his or her time**

Disclosing is difficult for children and young people
and something they may only be able to do a little at
a time. Allow the child or young person to take his or
her time to speak. Some children may not wish to talk
much about the abuse and might want to resume some
regular activity soon after disclosing. Others, however,
might need to talk for longer about different aspects
of their experience. It is important the child or young
person does not feel rushed or panicked and that you
have plenty of time to soothe and reassure him or her.
As mentioned earlier, some children or young people
might not disclose directly and the process of indirect
disclosure may potentially take several days or weeks.
During this time it is possible to gently and occasionally
let the child or young person know that you will listen
to anything he or she has to say when they are ready.

While it is important the child or young person has
control over the process, this must also be balanced with
his or her safety, and the safety of other children or young
people. If the child or young person has not disclosed but
you have reasonable grounds to suspect abuse, you may
need to go to the police or child protection authorities
in your state. You do not necessarily have to have a
full disclosure to go to the authorities and can discuss
concerns without making a formal report.

**Let the child or young person use his or her words**

Children and young people have their own way of
describing their experiences. It can be useful to clarify
what they mean by asking: “Are you saying ...?” It is
important not to assume you and the child or young
person mean exactly the same thing. It is also important
not to ask questions that suggest the ‘right’ words to a
child or young person, or in a way that can be seen as
putting words in the child’s mouth. If your conversation
with the child or young person is later used during legal
proceedings, it is important that the child or young
person’s account is not seen as having been distorted by
your questioning (Powell & Snow, 2007). Any questions
asked should be relatively general and aimed at eliciting
just enough information in order to work out what action
is required and which authority should be contacted.

Allowing the child or young person to use his or
her own words is important so that their discomfort
is minimised. Let the child or young person know it is
okay to use any words they want to or to say whatever
they need to. It is also important that the child or
young person use his or her own words in case there is
a subsequent court case.

**Accept that the child or young person will
disclose only what is comfortable and
recognise the bravery/strength of the child
for talking about something that is difficult**

It is important that children and young people
disclosing abuse feel in control of their situation. This
is to counter the experience of violation and loss of
control caused by the abuse. It is also important to
acknowledge the child’s bravery and strength in talking
about something that is difficult. Understanding that a
child or young person may reveal only minimal details
of abuse will help you to accept the disclosure under
the child’s or young person’s terms. It is possible to gently
prompt with questions such as: “Can you tell me more
about that?” but it is best not to press the child or young
person for details.

**Let the child or young person
know what you will do next**

When explaining to a child or young person what
you will do next, it is important to ensure he or she
understands. Try to avoid speaking about organisations
and authorities that the child or young person may not
be familiar with without explaining the organisation’s
name, its purpose and what its staff will do. Advise the
child or young person that in order for them to be safe
they will need to talk to another person (police or child
protection) about their experience and that you will
support him or her through that experience. Let the

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child or young person know he or she can ask about what will happen next as often as he or she needs to.

In an overwhelming situation, information can be hard for children to retain and they may need reminding. Only reveal the disclosure to those absolutely necessary. If you believe you need to discuss the disclosure with others outside the police or child protection authority (e.g. a school counsellor, Principal etc.) let the child or young person know. Child abuse often leaves children feeling disempowered and lacking control in their own life. Making sure the child or young person is fully aware of each step can make the process less intimidating and can help return a sense of power and safety.

Do not confront the perpetrator
It is imperative you do not confront the perpetrator of any type of abuse or discuss the child or young person’s disclosure with him or her. This could create a potential risk for the child or young person’s safety. Also, perpetrators of child abuse can work hard to shift responsibility from themselves to others and some kinds of child abusers (specifically sexual abusers) are charismatic people who can concoct plausible excuses for their behaviour and seek to shift the blame to others (van Dam, 2001). Confronting an alleged perpetrator of sexual or other types of abuse should only be done by professional child protection workers or the police.

Summary
An adult’s response to a child or young person’s disclosure of abuse can be central to a child or young person’s ongoing safety and their recovery from the trauma of abuse. If an adult does not take action when there are suspicions that a child is being abused, it may place the child at serious risk of ongoing abuse and prevent the child’s family from receiving the help they need.

In summary, it is important to:
• Listen to and support the child or young person
• Reassure the child or young person he or she did the right thing
• Don’t make promises you can’t keep, and
• Contact the appropriate authorities.

Having accurate information about child abuse can help adults to support a child or young person who has disclosed and to feel less overwhelmed. Further information and support to help children, young people and the families in which young people have been abused can be found in the NCPC Resource Sheet on Risk Assessment in Child Protection (Price-Robertson & Bromfield, 2011), www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/sheets/rs24

ENDNOTES
1. Details of these requirements can be found in the NCPC Resource Sheet on Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse (Higgins, Bromfield, Richardson, Holzer, & Berlyn, 2010), www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/sheets/rs14/rs14.html

REFERENCES
Sexual abuse is defined as any type of sexual behaviour involving a child where the child has less power or there is a significant disparity in the developmental function or maturity of the child and another person involved in the behaviour.

Child sexual abuse includes any type of sexual behaviour involving a child where:

- The child is the subject of bribery, coercion, a threat, exploitation or violence
- The child has less power than another person involved in the behaviour
- There is a significant disparity in the developmental function or maturity of the child and another person involved in the behaviour
- It includes inappropriate touching, exposure to sexual acts or pornographic materials and sexual penetration.

**PHYSICAL INDICATORS**
- Bruises or bleeding from external genitalia, vagina or anal regions
- Blood stained underwear
- Pregnancy or fear of pregnancy
- Signs of pain, itching or discomfort in the anal or genital area
- Urinary tract infections
- Self-mutilation.

**SEXUAL ABUSE**

**BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS**
- Inappropriate interest in sexual matters
- Knowledge of sexual behaviour inappropriate to age
- Regression to infantile behaviour
- Sudden unexplained fears
- Emunization and/or encopresis (wetting and soiling)
- Excessive attention getting, aggression or clingy behaviour
- Recurrent physical complaints
- Depression, withdrawal into fantasy, suicidal pre-occupation
- Disclosure directly or indirectly through drawings, play or writing
- Sexualised behaviours inappropriate to age (including sexually touching other children or themselves), public masturbation or disrobing
- Disclosure of involvement in sexual activity directly to an adult, indirectly to a friend or in a disguised way (for example "I know a person who ...")
- Inappropriate expressions of affection
- Promiscuity
- Criminal sexual behaviour
- Decline in academic performance
- Running away from home.

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THE DYNAMICS OF DISCLOSURE
OF CHILD SEXUAL VICTIMISATION

This article by Rita Shackel is part of a Right Now focus on the rights of children and youth

The sexual abuse of children is a global problem – it occurs in every country and cuts across all socio-economic, educational and ethnic groups in society. According to the World Health Organisation, approximately 20 per cent of women and five to 10 per cent of men report being sexually abused as children. Despite such figures, which consistently reveal child sexual abuse is an extensive problem throughout communities worldwide, it is generally recognised that such statistics likely represent merely the tip of the iceberg of the actual incidence and prevalence of child sexual victimisation in society.

Child sexual abuse encompasses a wide range of sexual misconduct perpetrated against children and may occur in a wide range of situations and contexts. In general terms child sexual abuse is

“considered to be any sexual activity between a child and an adult, or older person ... [and may] include fondling genitals, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or any other object, fondling of breasts, voyeurism, exhibitionism and exposing or involving the child in pornography”.

Thus child sexual abuse may involve actual touching or direct sexual contact with a child as well as sexual misconduct without any direct or actual physical contact with the child victim. Moreover, child sexual abuse may be directed towards the commercial sexual exploitation of children, but also and indeed more frequently, occurs for the personal sexual gratification of a sole adult abuser. Some recent research suggests that “situational and environmental factors” or simply “the opportunity” to sexually offend against a child may represent a key factor in the commission of such crimes.

However, irrespective of the precise nature, form or situation of such abuse, child sexual victimisation is usually strongly characterised by a hidden dimension or element(s) of secrecy. Child sexual abuse in its varied forms usually occurs in private and typically is not corroborated or evidenced by medical or other types of physical evidence. In cases of intra-familial child sexual abuse, this dimension of secrecy is often key to the abuse remaining hidden from others and thus continuing undetected over a protracted period of time. Moreover and not surprisingly, rarely will there be any witnesses to this type of misconduct. In most cases the victim’s allegations of abuse constitute the only evidentiary basis for proof of the alleged abuse. Thus the victim’s credibility is often central to authorities pursuing and proving an alleged case of child sexual abuse.

Accordingly, in investigation of such allegations, and later if a case is pursued for prosecution, disclosure of the alleged abuse by the victim will often be a paramount focus and a matter closely scrutinised by investigators and prosecutors. The disclosure of alleged child sexual abuse is undoubtedly a key dynamic of this type of sexual victimisation, but unfortunately the dimensions of victims’ disclosure are commonly misconstrued or distorted by the legal process. This creates barriers to the successful prosecution of such cases and may also result in the victims of such abuse being treated in ways that fail to properly recognise their emotional needs and especial vulnerability.

The underlying dynamics of disclosure of child sexual victimisation are complex. How and when a victim of child sexual abuse will disclose their victimisation depends on the interaction of a complex matrix of factors that arise in the individual case, such as, for example the age of the child, the nature or seriousness of the abuse and the child’s relationship with the perpetrator. In forensic contexts the underlying dynamics of disclosure of child sexual abuse by a victim, are still generally not well understood or realised in a way that is sufficiently nuanced. The individual nature and circumstances of child sexual victimisation are often not recognised and thus the unique dynamics of disclosure of this type of crime tend also to be homogenised by the legal process. This process of homogenisation of crimes of child sexual abuse by legal processes creates difficulties for the investigation and prosecution of such crimes and will often thereby compromise the rights and dignity of the victims.

A prime aspect of disclosure of child sexual abuse that continues to be poorly understood by the legal process is the fact that victims of such abuse will commonly
delay in disclosing and reporting their victimisation. Indeed many victims never disclose their abuse at all, but for many victims who do disclose child sexual abuse, delay in disclosure will often be protracted. The findings of research suggest that the majority of victims of child sexual abuse will not disclose their victimisation in childhood but rather are more likely to reveal their experiences of abuse in adulthood.

It is thus surprising that there is still so much for us, particularly as agents of the legal process and the criminal justice system, to discover why some victims decide to disclose their abuse as children and others do not do so until they are adults. We also need to better understand what factors might be predictive of, or at least associated with, earlier rather than later disclosure by victims. One of the most comprehensive national studies on delayed disclosure in child sexual abuse cases undertaken in the United States found that few variables successfully predicted disclosure behaviour. The authors did report, however, that the older age of a victim and abuse by a stranger were associated with more rapid disclosure. Ultimately though, research findings which do not delineate clear patterns of disclosure indicate that the myriad of variables that impact the dynamics of abuse, although complex, must be recognised by the legal process. Any bright-line presumptions concerning the disclosure behaviour of victims of child sexual abuse are unjustified and unwarranted.

Another aspect of disclosure of child sexual abuse that also continues to be poorly understood within the forensic context, which is often misconstrued in investigation and prosecution of such crimes, is the medium and the mode of disclosure of such abuse by victims. Legal processes tend to presume that victims of child sexual abuse will not only disclose such victimisation promptly but that disclosure will occur via certain predictable and clearly identifiable pathways. Namely, disclosure by child victims will most often be to a significant non-offending adult such as a parent or other close relative and such disclosure will be deliberate and purposeful on the part of the victim. Psychological research, however, has revealed that other pathways of disclosure are also common. For example, a considerable body of empirical research has shown that many victims of child sexual abuse disclose their abuse accidentally rather than in a purposeful or in a direct manner. Similarly, in contrast to common expectations that disclosure by a victim will be made to an adult, research suggests that many victims of child sexual abuse instead disclose to a peer or a sibling.

In the investigation of child sexual abuse offences, questions pertaining to disclosure of the allegations of such abuse are commonly configured around misconceived expectations about modes of disclosure. When disclosure is exposed as having occurred via an alternate pathway, questions about the legitimacy of such pathways then arise and such perceived incongruences between the victim’s allegations of abuse and disclosure of such abuse, often will fuel suspicions about the victim’s credibility. Put very simply, when a victim of child sexual abuse discloses in a way contrary to the expectations of the legal ideal, i.e. soon after the alleged abuse and via purposeful and direct disclosure to a trusted adult, the veracity of the allegations tends to be called into question. Ultimately such views may drive decision-making in the case in directions that precipitate bias and which are prejudicial and unfair.

The fact that legal processes homogenise the responses of victims of child sexual abuse suggests that such processes are not sufficiently attuned to the individual needs of victims. Moreover, the focus in investigation and prosecution of certain types of cases may thus end up being misplaced and may therefore risk perpetuating or indeed even generating ill-based presumptions around victim behaviour that are simply not valid in certain types of cases. An example of this problem can be seen by examining what should arguably be recognised as two distinct and different groups of cases involving allegations of child sexual abuse; those on the one hand that involve allegations of abuse made when the complainant is still a child, and those cases of alleged child sexual abuse involving disclosure and/or reporting when the complainant is an adult.

Unfortunately, although many cases of child sexual abuse are only finally and for the first time investigated when the victim is in adulthood, there is a surprising paucity of information and appropriately nuanced understanding of how these cases differ from those in which the victim is a child. Simply understanding how and why the dynamics of the abuse situation may have impacted and inhibited disclosure/reporting of the abuse is important in terms of building a case for prosecution and dealing with relevant issues of evidence and proof that may arise in the case.

Understanding the key dynamics and dimensions of a crime is important in order to ensure that the legal process responds appropriately to the needs of the victims of particular crimes, but such understandings are also an essential part of properly shaping how legal processes respond to certain crimes.

Without these understandings there is a risk that in investigation and prosecution of such cases an improper focus will manifest and irrelevancies will assume an inappropriate or disproportionate significance. If this occurs, issues within the case may be wrongly construed as being relevant to adjudging the substance of the allegations and/or the credibility of the complainant. Consequently the interests of the administration of justice and of society generally will not be served.

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We all have a role in protecting children: end the silence on abuse

Child protection is everyone’s responsibility, write Amy Conley Wright and Lynne Keevers in this piece from The Conversation

The recent string of major child sexual assault scandals, in Australia and other countries, can create a feeling of disgust and an urge to look away from an ugly reality. Yet we must confront and take collective responsibility for child protection by acknowledging that it happens every day and that we have to talk about it. Societal silence on child sexual abuse protects perpetrators and enables abuse to continue.

Child sexual assault is a lot more common than we may think. The Australian Institute of Family Studies reported in 2013 that as many as one in six boys and one in three girls has experienced sexual abuse.

Most recently, the media reported sexual exploitation on a mass scale of an estimated 1,400 children in Rotherham, UK, between 1997 and 2013, and the failure of social services and the police to intervene appropriately. The Rotherham report is full of examples of how children were groomed for eventual abuse in public view, receiving inappropriate gifts and attention from men.

Web of deceit depends on secrecy

Research shows offenders typically plan their sexual abuse of children with care. They may ‘groom’ children by offering presents and compliments. The offender often establishes a trusting relationship with the family and friends of the child, tricking and manipulating them to reduce the likelihood of them discovering the abuse.

The result of this web of deceit is to divide and isolate the child from siblings, friends and especially non-offending parents. In this way abusers protect themselves, ensure ongoing access to the child and secure power over the child and others in the child’s life.

Secrecy is fundamental to the success of these grooming techniques and has powerful effects on the child. Because the rule against breaking the silence is reinforced in families as well as socially and culturally, children and adult survivors often report that they feel guilt, shame and fear when telling their stories. Self-blame, fear of retribution, a sense of powerlessness, mistrust of self and others, over-responsibility and protection of others are common effects of being trained to be silent and sexually available.

Once the societal silence is broken, we must change the language we use, which currently promotes secrecy and shaming. The language and concepts that come to mind around child sexual abuse are not helpful. There is an assumption that the victimiser is a sick weirdo and the victim is damaged goods.

But because it is so common, we regularly interact with both perpetrators and victims of child sexual abuse in our daily lives. Indeed, they may be people we like and admire.

The frequency of this problem suggests that sexual offenders are not all paedophiles, evil or ‘sick’ but ordinary family members and friends. It also tells us that many victims of sexual abuse manage to deal with the effects of abuse, live productive lives and contribute to the wellbeing of our communities.

Antidote is casting light in dark places

Fortunately, it does not necessarily take much to stop child sexual abuse. Because this type of exploitation thrives on silence and secrecy, the antidote is bringing the issue to light. We need to create an atmosphere that encourages people to question confusing or uncertain behaviours and practices in order to take action before children are harmed. This means being willing to take the risk of potentially looking paranoid when questioning an adult’s behaviour toward a child.

We also need to reexamine our policy approach to child sexual abuse. The current dominant model prioritises individualised, one-on-one counselling services. Other responses to people who have experienced childhood sexual abuse, such as community development, preventative approaches and collective social action, are restricted to the margins of practice.

Some services, such as the West Street Centre, a government-funded, community-based organisation in Wollongong, New South Wales, offer an alternative. The centre links individual talk-based therapy and group work to collaborative and community efforts to tackle issues of abuse and violence. Survivors of child sexual abuse join with others to challenge secrecy and speak up about their experience. Listening by other community members is emphasised.

In this way, survivors of sexual abuse begin to pioneer a new way for their families and communities. When children hear adults talking openly about sexual abuse, they learn from example and follow.

Child protection cannot be a job that is relegated to an authority, be it the police, social services, or a school. Child protection is everyone’s responsibility.

Children will be protected when everyday citizens take personal responsibility for child protection. This will start when people are willing to have hard conversations, change the assumptions about child sexual abuse victims and perpetrators, and have the courage to act when they have concerns about the children in their communities. We all need to look at this issue, not look away.

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Tackling Child Sexual Abuse 35
Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

This document from the Department of Social Services explains the Letters Patent and Terms of Reference for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

Why the Royal Commission has been set up

Child sexual abuse is a crime, and a terrible breach of the right of every child to grow up safe and happy. Child sexual abuse is often associated with other forms of abuse including physical abuse, exploitation, and neglect. All have long-term effects on survivors and their families. There are also costs to the economy and society as a whole.

Australia has committed at an international level to do everything it can to protect children from all forms of abuse. This includes taking action to help prevent child abuse from happening and, when child abuse does happen, to help ensure that cases are identified, reported, investigated, and followed up.

It is recognised that public, non-government and private organisations provide important services and support to help children and their families.

These include childcare, cultural, educational, religious, sporting and other organisations, which play an important role in helping children to grow up safe and happy.

But it is important that laws, rules and practices are in place to ensure organisations protect children against the risk of sexual abuse and that claims of abuse and the impacts of abuse are appropriately responded to.

It is important that this inquiry explore claims of systemic failures by institutions to protect children from sexual abuse and related matters.

The inquiry should identify what can be done in the future to better prevent and respond to child sexual abuse, including holding perpetrators to account and providing justice to victims.

People who have been affected by child sexual abuse will be able to share their experiences with the inquiry if they want to, to assist with healing and to inform the Commissioners’ recommendations.

The Australian and state and territory governments have committed at the most recent Council of Australian Governments meeting to support this inquiry, and giving it their full cooperation.

What the Royal Commission will investigate

The Commissioners will examine past and current child sexual abuse in organisations and may make findings and recommendations on:

• How organisations with a responsibility for children have managed and responded to claims of sexual abuse and other forms of abuse and neglect associated with child sexual abuse
• Whether organisations have done enough to respond to child sexual abuse when it has happened
• What organisations can do to better protect children under their care
• What organisations should do to identify child sexual abuse and related matters

The ‘Letters Patent’ is the legal document from the Governor-General that gives instructions to the Commissioners about the scope of the inquiry and what the Commissioners should investigate and make recommendations on. The Letters Patent also formally appoint the Commissioners.

The full Letters Patent document is available online at www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

This explanation document should not be taken to in any way to replace the Letters Patent document, or to have any legal standing.
encourage people to report it

• How organisations should respond when they find out information that suggests that sexual abuse of children under their responsibility is happening, or has happened in the past

• What the barriers and failures have been to reporting, investigating and dealing with cases of child sexual abuse in organisations, and how these barriers can be removed in the future

• What organisations should do to support survivors where child sexual abuse does occur

• What organisations should do to ensure victims receive justice, including through redress by organisations, and investigation and prosecution of perpetrators.

The Commissioners can make any recommendations that they think will help improve the way things are done in the future or help existing survivors.

This includes looking at laws, as well as the policies, rules and structure of organisations.

What the Royal Commission will cover

The Royal Commission is focused on child sexual abuse within organisations and institutions.

The Commission will also look at matters related to child sexual abuse. This means any unlawful or improper treatment of children that is connected or associated with child sexual abuse generally, or in a particular case.

This recognises that other forms of abuse including physical abuse and neglect often happen with sexual abuse, and if connected they can be examined by the Commission.

The Commissioners can look at any public or private organisation that is, or was in the past, involved with children, including non-government organisations and government agencies (including police and justice), schools, sporting clubs, orphanages, foster care, and religious organisations.

This includes where they consider an organisation caring for a child is responsible for the abuse or for not responding appropriately, regardless of where or when the abuse took place.

The Commission will not specifically examine child sexual abuse outside organisations, such as in the family. However, any recommendations made by the Commissioners are likely to improve the response to child sexual abuse wherever it happens.

How the Commissioners will conduct their inquiry

To carry out the inquiry, the Commissioners will:

• Consider the experiences of people affected by child sexual abuse in organisations

• Look at archives, records and documents and consider submissions and statements from public, non-government and private organisations

• Look at the laws, as well as policies and practices of institutions, organisations and governments to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse

• Take into account the findings, recommendations, and information from past and existing inquiries, where appropriate. This can include drawing on the stories of witnesses from other inquiries (with their consent).

The Commissioners will make sure that people telling their stories have appropriate support in dealing with any trauma that might come up from discussing their abuse.

The Commissioners will also make sure that people with special needs can participate fully in the inquiry. For example, this could include interpreters for people who speak a language other than English, assistance for people with disabilities, and help preparing submissions for people who need assistance with reading and writing.

The Commission will make sure that organisations are given enough time to search and respond to requests for documents and records.

Handling of individual cases

The Royal Commission can not prosecute individuals. The Commission can refer individual cases to relevant law enforcement bodies, such as police, for investigation and, where appropriate, prosecution in a timely fashion.

The Commissioners will consider appropriate mechanisms for how the Commission might inquire into and investigate particular cases, including past cases, as appropriate. Mechanisms might include examining archives and records and working with relevant law enforcement bodies such as police. This includes establishing investigative units to support their inquiry.

In handling evidence about specific cases, the Commissioners will take care not to do anything that could disrupt a current or future criminal prosecution or compensation case.

Timing and reporting

The Commissioners will begin their inquiry as soon as possible.

The Commission will prepare an interim report by 30 June 2014 so that governments and organisations can start taking action on the Commission’s early findings and recommendations.

In this interim report, the Commissioners will identify when their final report will be completed. The Terms of Reference will set an end date for the Royal Commission of 2015, but this date will be subject to the advice of the Commissioners in their interim report.

The Prime Minister can extend the final reporting date which has happened in previous Commissions.

The Commissioners will also be able to provide other interim reports throughout the life of the Royal Commission as appropriate.

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Department of Social Services.
Report makes a compelling case to extend sex abuse royal commission

The child sex abuse royal commission has asked for more time and money to complete its investigation, reports Michael Salter for The Conversation

On Monday, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse released its interim report, detailing for the first time the full scope and comprehensiveness of its inquiry into institutional child sexual abuse in Australia.

In the report, the commissioners list the valuable outcomes of their inquiries to date. This includes holding more than 1,600 private sessions and receiving more than 1,600 written accounts from survivors of sexual abuse. By the end of May, more than 160 allegations had been referred to police.

By the end of June, 13 public hearings had been held around Australia to examine particular case studies of institutional abuse. Over 1,000 people are still waiting to attend a private session, and the commissioners have identified 70 cases of institutional abuse that deserve a public hearing.

The report details the impacts of the royal commission to date, including substantive cultural and policy shifts within institutions with responsibility for children.

The commission has also gathered vital and previously unavailable data on the dynamics of institutional abuse as well as commissioning original research in the area. This work will inform child protection policy well into the future.

The royal commission is funded until the end of 2015. The report makes a compelling case for a two-year extension at a cost of an additional A$104 million.

The commissioners note that without an extension and more funds, they will be unable to fulfil their terms of reference. A large number of survivors will be denied the chance to testify. Important incidents of institutional abuse will not be scrutinised via a public hearing.

While the results of the royal commission to date are impressive, it is the process by which these are being achieved that is particularly striking.

Public inquiries and survivor testimony

Since 1980s, state, territory and Commonwealth governments have invited public representations in dozens of inquiries into the identification, intervention, management and prevention of child abuse.

To name just a few, public inquiries have been held in NSW (1997), Queensland (1999), Western Australia (2002), Northern Territory (2007) and South Australia (2008). At a federal level, there have been inquiries into the Stolen Generation (1997), the treatment of child migrants (2001) and children in institutional or out-of-home care (2005).

The testimony of child abuse survivors has been central to most of these inquiries. It is widely acknowledged that the experience of testifying in a public inquiry can be cathartic but can also come at a high emotional and psychological cost to the adult abuse survivor.

It is therefore concerning to find repetition of child abuse inquiries at a state and federal level. This gives rise to repeated solicitations for the same traumatised population to reprise their testimony. This carries risks for these individuals but also raises questions about the value being afforded to their testimony.

When each inquiry is branded as a definitive resolution of historical injustices, only to be apparently superseded by an even more definitive inquiry, then the worth of public inquiry is brought into question, and the confidence of survivors in the process is destabilised.

The royal commission’s approach

When the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was first announced,
there were questions about the need for yet another public inquiry into child abuse, particularly since most prior inquiries had also been focused on children in institutions and out-of-home care.

In the report, the commissioners articulate a clear response to these concerns. Firstly, they note that previous inquiries into child abuse focused on specific situations and case studies rather than broader questions of institutional responsiveness and responsibility. The implementation and evaluation of the recommendations of these inquiries have been ad hoc at best.

As the public hearings of this royal commission have made clear, clearly more work remains to be done to ensure that institutions are safe for children.

Secondly, the commissioners have sought to maximise the benefit of testifying while minimising the risk. They have consulted widely with community groups and mental health experts to develop a process that is supportive and validating. Survivors of abuse have been given the option of verbal or written testimony.

The conduct of the royal commission has generally reaffirmed the seriousness of the abuses described by survivors, and the importance of responding to the needs of affected adults as well as children.

It may be that one of the inquiry’s most important outcomes can’t be captured in a graph or pithy statistic. By placing survivor testimony at the centre of solutions to institutional abuse, the royal commission is signalling a major shift in the value that is attributed to the perspectives and experiences of adults abused as children.

By documenting this testimony in a supportive and compassionate manner, the royal commission is also demonstrating that an ethos of justice and an ethos of care are intimately linked to one another.

Michael Salter is a Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Western Sydney.
The community has come to acknowledge that fundamental wrongs have been committed in the past which have caused great trauma and lasting damage to many people.

Although a painful process, if a community is to move forward, it must understand where wrongs have occurred.

We have gathered information which would justify a public hearing into more than 1,000 institutions. We obviously could not hold anywhere near that number of public inquiries.

Recommendations for change are being developed. When our task is complete we will have documented a period in Australian society when institutions failed the children in their care. Many well-intentioned people did not understand and did not respond to failures which should have been obvious. When an institution provided residential care it is common to find sexual abuse accompanied by high levels of physical abuse and exploitation of the children’s labour.

A picture is emerging that although sexual abuse of children is not confined in time, the conjunction of prevailing social attitudes to children and an unquestioning respect for authority of institutions by adults created the high risk environment in which thousands of children were abused.

The norm that “children should be seen but not heard” provided the opportunity for some adults to abuse the power which their relationship with the child gave them. When the required silence of the child was accompanied by an unquestioning belief by adults in the integrity of the carer for the child, the power imbalance was entrenched to the inevitable detriment of many children. When, among adults who are given the power, there are people with an impaired psycho-sexual development, a volatile mix is created.

The problems faced by many people who have been abused are the responsibility of our entire society. Society’s values and mechanisms which were available to regulate and control aberrant behaviour failed. This is readily understood when you consider the number of institutions where inadequate supervision and management practices have been revealed. Both individual institutions and governments failed in their responsibility to children. Where once silence was demanded, a child’s complaint, however tentative in its communication, must be heard and given an appropriate response.

A picture is emerging that although sexual abuse of children is not confined in time, the conjunction of prevailing social attitudes to children and an unquestioning respect for authority of institutions by adults created the high risk environment in which thousands of children were abused.

The power of the institution must never again be allowed to silence a child or diminish the preparedness or capacity of adults to act to protect children.

The Royal Commission has been tasked with considering many issues, including “ensuring justice
for victims through the provision of redress by institutions”. Our research and consultation in relation to redress is now well advanced and we anticipate publishing a paper in January which will invite public responses to this complex issue.

The power of the institution must never again be allowed to silence a child or diminish the preparedness or capacity of adults to act to protect children.

Everyone accepts that there should be an effective response available to all survivors. That response should include three elements. There should be an opportunity to engage with the institution where they were abused, receive a meaningful apology and be otherwise supported in a spiritually and culturally appropriate manner. Second, access to counselling or psychiatric care should be provided as they may need it during their lifetime. Third, a lump sum payment which marks the abuse and recognises the failure of the institution to keep the person safe as a child.

Some of the institutions have ceased to exist. Others have no money. Leaving survivors of some institutions without effective redress, but making it available to others, falls short of the goal of ensuring justice for victims. The community must look both to government and the institutions with the necessary resources to come together to provide a response which provides appropriate redress for all who have suffered sexual abuse as children in an institutional context.

We have heard of institutions that are reluctant to accept that the abuse happened when only one person has complained about the alleged offender. However, when others come forward, the institution in most cases readily accepts the allegations and negotiates redress payments or damages. Experience tells us that if a person acts in a particular manner on one occasion, given similar circumstances or opportunity, they are likely to act in the same manner again. This assumption lies behind Chief Justice de Jersey’s discussion last year of the possibility of evidence being tendered in a criminal trial of the prior convictions of an accused. Judges in England can now admit this evidence. Chief Justice de Jersey, when commenting on this reform, asked whether a jury should be denied knowledge that an alleged rapist committed another rape six months earlier or that an accused charged with fraud has a string of similar convictions for dishonesty?

This is but one of the issues we must consider in the criminal justice component of our work. There are many others and the commissioners look forward to engaging with the legal community, survivors and others with an interest in the criminal law to enable us to develop recommendations for government.

The Hon Justice Peter McClellan is the chairman of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

This is an edited version of a speech he gave in October 2014.

Reproduced with the kind permission of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Child sex tourism (CST) is a prominent issue facing today’s globalised world and borders, as there is a large transnational market for the sexual abuse of children (David, 2000). The organisation End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography & Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT) defines CST as involving the “sexual exploitation of children by a person or persons who travel from their home district, geographical region or home country in order to have sexual contact with children” (Beaulieu, 2008). This practice often involves the exploitation of children in developing states by those from western countries and can result in a demand for trafficked children (Beaulieu, 2008).

Child sex tourism was largely brought to global attention in the 1990s through campaigning from NGOs such as ECPAT (Beaulieu, 2008; O’Connell Davidson, 2005) and government legislation tackling this issue has been enacted in multiple countries in response. As a result of the growing international concern regarding the commercial sexual exploitation of children (McNicol and Schloenhardt, 2012), Australia has played a role in installing extra-territorial offences related to these crimes. This issue is particularly significant to Australia as its citizens have been recognised as one of the key groups of consumers of this tourism in South-East Asian countries (Macintosh, 2000; Brungs, 2002). In addition, the geographical proximity of Australia to South-East Asia, a hot spot location for child sex tourism, increases the importance of this issue to Australia (Johnson, 2011).

Sexual activity with children is condemned almost universally as an abuse of human rights and international treaties have proved to be important in recognising this as an issue to be tackled.

**UN TREATIES AND CHILD SEX TOURISM**

As sexual activity with children is condemned almost universally as an abuse of human rights, international treaties have proved to be important in recognising this as an issue to be tackled (David, 2000).

Australia is a signatory to the 1989 *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which recognises the responsibility of states to “undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse” (UNCRC, 1989, Article 34). Additionally Australia in 2007 ratified the *UN Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography* (UNOPSC, 2000), which further highlights this obligation and the concern at the continuation of this practice. This latter protocol is particularly significant as it provides more detailed obligations for signatories regarding commercial sexual exploitation of minors and prevention and prosecution of these activities (Brungs, 2002). This policy also mandates the extra-territorial criminalisation of commercial sexual enterprises involving children (McNicol and Schloenhardt, 2012). Thus the integration of these policies into domestic laws is particularly important in combating this practice (Brungs, 2002). As Australia is a signatory to these conventions it has a legal and moral obligation to combat this tourism and prosecute those involved.

**EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN AND JURISDICTIONAL LOOPHOLES**

Child sex tourism has evolved out of individuals exploiting weak legal frameworks in developing countries in order to avoid prosecution for their crimes (Beaulieu, 2008). As the child sex industry earns significant capital for these countries, laws policing this exploitation are often poorly enforced (Brungs, 2002) providing an opportunity for offending. Additionally, this practice provides offenders with anonymity and
the ability to escape responsibility for their actions in their home country. By creating laws designed to combat this and through campaigns to raise awareness the aim according to O’Connell Davidson (2005) is to reduce the perception that these kinds of crimes are low-risk for the offender. Ultimately, it is these legislative loopholes combined with the economic difficulties within developing countries that help to fuel this tourism.

EXTRA-TERRITORIAL LEGISLATION

Extra-territorial legislation aims to prosecute offenders (Australian Citizens, residents and corporations) in Australian courts that commit CST offences overseas (Ireland-Piper, 2010). This legislation attempts to address the jurisdictional limitations on laws by states and prosecute citizens and residents who commit crimes overseas. Australia and at least 40 other countries as of June 2008 have instituted extra-territorial laws to combat child sex tourism (Beaulieu, 2008). According to Piotrowicz (1997, p.108), Australia became one of the ‘vanguard’ nations in enacting its 1994 extra-territorial legislation to combat child sex tourism and legal loopholes.

Initially the Crimes (Child Sex Tourism) Amendment Act 1994 was created to prosecute Australian residents and citizens engaging in sexual acts with children under 16 overseas. This legislation was intended for deterrence and for added enforcement of local laws (McNicol and Schloenhardt, 2012). Through the 1994 Amendment Act and later alterations in Division 272 of the Criminal Code in 2010, Australia has shown a continued effort to combat this exploitation. Whilst the 1994 Act dealt with prosecuting Australians who specifically engage in sexual acts with children under the age of 16 overseas, the updates in the legislation in 2010 attempt to broaden the scope of those criminalised and victimised (McNicol and Schloenhardt, 2012). This was intended to strengthen the existing legislation, and ensure that the further advent of technology and paedophiles being able to ‘groom’ and ‘prepare’ (McNicol and Schloenhardt, 2012, pp. 376-377) their victims was included to provide a proactive element. Additionally the inclusion of “young people” aged 16-18 who are sexually exploited by others in a position of trust or authority (Ireland-Piper, 2010, p.22), represents a move to ensure the prosecution of those responsible through a wider recognition of victimhood.

These laws represent a crucial facet of Australia’s efforts to tackle CST however organisations such as ECPAT (Beaulieu, 2008) have questioned their success and those of others like it. Between 1994 and 2011 in Australia there was a 70% conviction rate for child-sex tourism offences among the approximately 30 people who were charged (McNicol and Schloenhardt, 2012). Whilst this is promising, the low number of individuals charged highlights the difficulties in locating these offenders and holding them accountable. Although well intended at attempting to address the loopholes in international law, these laws are criticised as being deficient due to the difficulties in locating evidence and prosecuting those involved (McNicol and Schloenhardt, 2012). One of the key issues that this legislation has faced in Australia is the difficulty in gathering evidence in other jurisdictions across borders (Piotrowicz, 1997), especially with the age and situation of the children involved. Furthermore McNicol and Schloenhardt (2012) have highlighted the problems in ensuring a fair trial for the accused offender given the extra government and AFP resources at the disposal of the prosecution.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, child sex tourism though mostly occurring outside of Australia’s borders constitutes a significant problem for Australia. As signatory to the relevant UN conventions Australia has an obligation to protect these children and prosecute the individuals involved. While not perfect, extra-territorial legislation has provided a means for Australia to take a legal stand against these human rights abuses.

REFERENCES


A
larm was raised this week when it emerged that Bernard McGrath, a former Catholic brother sought in Australia over 252 child sex charges, was able to leave New Zealand for Sri Lanka ahead of an extradition order. The order had been delayed for some months and this created a window of opportunity for McGrath to flee. He has reportedly spent much of 2012 living on a tea plantation in the Sri Lankan highlands. His alleged victims in Australia raised concerns that he posed a considerable risk to children there.

Following international media attention, McGrath flew back to New Zealand this week to appear in court over the extradition order. He had previously been jailed in New Zealand in 2006 for five years for sexually abusing boys but he was paroled in 2008.

There is something deeply unsettling about the notion of a convicted sexual abuser fleeing to South-East Asia to avoid further charges. It has been reported that “organised child-sex rings” operate throughout Sri Lanka. This follows on from the recent arrests in Thailand of two Australian men charged with sexual offences against local children.

The vulnerability of children in the region to abuse by Australian men is well recognised. In 1994, Australia criminalised a range of sexual activities with children by Australians in jurisdictions outside Australia. This legislation was designed to deter offenders and also to support the policing of sexual abuse in other countries.

Recent changes in 2010 broadened the definition of sexual activity and increased penalties. The authorities have taken a more pre-emptive approach by targeting ‘grooming’ behaviours and attempting to intervene in the ‘planning’ stages of sex tourism.

Campaigns against child sex trafficking, exploitation and slavery tend to use poignant images of children that play on Western ideas of childhood ‘innocence’. The clear message is that the problem of sexual exploitation will be solved if children are protected from predatory paedophiles.

However this belies the complex situation faced by impoverished children and families in developing countries. Widespread rural poverty, low wages and limited education can force children into sexual exploitation. Professor Julia O’Connell Davidson suggests that other forms of subsistence living are so degrading that sexual exploitation can be seen as preferable by children and their families.

It also overlooks the role that developed countries play in promoting consumerism and economic policies that exacerbate the vulnerability of children in...
developing countries. Macro-economic reforms that reduce social and welfare spending can remove safety nets for poor children.

Meanwhile, the promotion of tourism for economic growth in developing nations introduces large numbers of Westerners into countries that may have less formal protections for children or where organised crime runs much of the sex industry. For some Western tourists, paying for sex with minors as well as adults can be part of their ‘consumer’ experience as empowered wealthy foreigners.

This is a ‘market’ catered for by sexually abusive networks that can flourish relatively openly in developing countries with limited regulation and policing.

The issue of child sexual exploitation is therefore one of both demand and supply: the willingness of Australian men to seek out minors for abuse while overseas, as well as the constrained choices facing children in those countries.

Legislation in Australia can address demand. The available evidence suggests that Australia is active in preventing and policing sexual abuse by Australians overseas, and in helping police forces in the region to do so.

However the issue of supply is more complicated. It speaks to the powerlessness of children in a globalised world, and the social impacts of economic reforms pushed by Western powers in the name of development and growth.

It is also important to recognise sexual exploitation and “sex for favours” amongst vulnerable minors in Australia. Child prostitution is usually seen as a problem for ‘other’ nations, but public inquiries in Australia and overseas find vulnerable teenagers swapping sex for paltry amounts of money, alcohol and drugs.

Many of these children are in out-of-home care and their sexual exploitation is often known to the authorities at the time. These underage teenagers, like their counterparts in developed countries, face limited opportunities for financial or emotional support. They may accept this support when it is offered by adult men in exchange for sex.

The issue of sexual exploitation will not be solved by policing alone ... measures must be taken to address the broader social and economic issues that underpin children’s vulnerability to abuse.

Men such as McGrath become lightning rods for community disgust at sexual exploitation and abuse. Increased international cooperation can limit opportunities for such abusers to “slip through the net”.

However the issue of sexual exploitation will not be solved by policing alone. Instead measures must be taken to address the broader social and economic issues that underpin children’s vulnerability to abuse and this raises uncomfortable questions about the conditions of children in Australia and abroad.

Michael Salter is a Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Western Sydney.

ONLINE CHILD SEX EXPLOITATION

INFORMATION FROM THE AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE

The AFP Child Protection Operations (CPO) team performs an investigative and coordination role within Australia for multijurisdictional and international online child sex exploitation matters within the online and travel and tourism environments. These matters include those to and from Australian state and territory police, government and non-government organisations (including Internet Service Providers and Internet Content Hosts), the Virtual Global Taskforce (VGT), international law enforcement agencies, Interpol and members of the public.

The AFP investigates online child exploitation which occurs using a telecommunications service, such as computers with internet connectivity or mobile phones. The types of offences investigated include accessing, sending or uploading child exploitation and abuse material.

Grooming and procuring of children over the internet is also investigated by the AFP. This is when an adult has made online contact with a child under the age of sixteen with the intention of facilitating a sexual relationship.

In April, 2010, the Australian Government introduced changes to legislation which increased the penalties applying to these offences. Australians who groom or procure a child for sexual activity overseas can be imprisoned for up to 15 years. The reforms also enhanced the coverage of offences for using a carriage service, such as the internet, for sexual activity with a child or for child abuse material.

AFP investigations may also focus on internet sites carrying child abuse material and operated from an ISP in Australia. In cases where the site content is not hosted within Australia, the matter is referred to overseas law enforcement agencies.

If you know about a child who is in immediate danger or risk call 000, Crimestoppers on 1800 333 000, or contact your local police.

HOW TO OBTAIN INFORMATION ON INTERNET SAFETY

The AFP encourages people to protect themselves and their children online. ThinkUKnow Australia, is a partnership between the Australian Federal Police and Microsoft Australia, and is supported by ninemsn. ThinkUKnow aims to raise awareness among parents, carers and teachers of the issues which young people face online. The website provides information on the technologies and applications young people use to have fun online, the risks they may face and how to stay in control, and how to report when things go wrong. There are also resources which can be downloaded, an e-newsletter, and a button for reporting abuse.

The Virtual Global Taskforce is made up of police forces from around the world working together to fight online child abuse. The website contains a lot of information for young people and adults about internet safety, as well as a button for reporting abuse.

There are other websites available – namely, the Cybersmart and Stay Smart Online websites – which contain valuable internet safety tips and other information for children and adults, as well as a button for cybersafety help.

HOW TO REPORT SUSPICIOUS BEHAVIOUR ONLINE

Online suspicious behaviour may involve a person suspected of being an adult who has been having a conversation with a child online and is saying and doing inappropriate things or trying to meet up with the child in the real world. Young persons may also be lured into revealing personal information or images online.

Children, as well as adults acting on behalf of children, can report abuse or illegal activity online by using our online child sex exploitation form or by clicking on the ‘Report Abuse’ button on the ThinkUKnow or VGT websites.

Your report will go directly to the AFP and contact may then be made with you.
New national network for reporting online child sexual abuse content

Australian efforts against the trade in online child sexual abuse material have been significantly strengthened with the finalisation of formal agreements between the Australian Communications and Media Authority and the police forces of Queensland and Victoria, according to this announcement from ACMA. Arrangements are now locked in place with every Australian police force, creating a ‘national spine’ along which the ACMA can make targeted and timely reports where there is evidence that child sexual abuse material has a connection with a particular jurisdiction. The ACMA can now report child sexual abuse content which appears to be produced, hosted in, or accessed from anywhere in Australia.

“This national network – the first of its kind in Australia – greatly strengthens the ACMA’s role supporting the crucial work of Australian law enforcement against online child sexual abuse content,” said ACMA Deputy Chair and Cybersafety spokesman, Richard Bean.

“We see our close relationship with the ACMA as an important element in our overall strategy to turn the tide of child sexual abuse and exploitation online,” said Victoria Police Deputy Commissioner, Graham Ashton. Commissioner Lay’s sentiments were echoed by Queensland Police Service Deputy Commissioner (Specialist Operations) Ross Barnett who said “Defeating the trade in illegal online material requires real cooperation between Commonwealth and State authorities. This newly-established network is a great example of a cooperative arrangement in practice.” The announcement comes on the first day of the Combating Child Exploitation Material Online regional cooperation forum being co-hosted by the ACMA and the Australian Federal Police. This event provides a significant regional focus to the ongoing issue of online child exploitation – with key stakeholders in Sydney from law enforcement, industry and non-government organisations. For more detail: www.acma.gov.au/CCEMOforum

Forum key note presentations are being delivered by the AFP, INHOPE (the International Association of Internet Hotlines for the eradication of child sexual abuse material online) and the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, which is a global movement to protect children from sexual exploitation and abduction. Forum participants include Australian state police forces; the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (USA); the Internet Watch Foundation (UK); the Internet Hotline Centre (Japan); and End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT International), as well as hotlines for public reports about online child sexual abuse in Australia, Thailand, Cambodia, New Zealand and the Philippines.

Reports about offensive or illegal online content should be made to the ACMA Hotline: www.acma.gov.au/hotline If you are aware a child or other person is in immediate danger, or is at risk of serious harm, call the police on Triple Zero (000).
© Commonwealth of Australia.


Do not use this reporting form to report emergencies or concerns which require a high priority response, such as a child who is in immediate danger or risk. In those cases call 000, Crimestoppers on 1800 333 000 or your local police station.

REPORTING BY INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS/INTERNET CONTENT HOSTS

The AFP works in partnership with Internet Service Providers (ISP) and Internet Content Hosts (ICH) in the battle against the sexual exploitation of children online. If you are an ISP or ICH and have become aware of child exploitation or child abuse material on your server(s), then you are required to report this to the AFP. The Attorney General’s website provides information on the Legislative responsibilities of ISPs and ICHs. You may report matters by using the ISP/ICH online form.

Key links
- ThinkUKnow Australia, www.thinkuknow.org.au
- Virtual Global Taskforce, www.virtualglobaltaskforce.com
- Stay Smart Online, www.staysmartonline.gov.au
- Cybersmart, www.cybersmart.gov.au

Contact us
If you know about a child who is in immediate danger or risk call 000, Crimestoppers on 1800 333 000, or contact your local police.
Many questions about child sexual abuse have still not received adequate answers. Why and how does child sexual abuse occur and therefore how may it be prevented? Can children protect themselves from abuse and what should the role of the community, schools and parents be?

Developed countries have sophisticated data collection systems to document what seems to be an ever-rising incidence of abuse and prevention programs have proliferated in recent decades. Yet many countries have found that reports exceed the capacity of social services to intervene with any but the most severe cases or those with the highest likelihood of repeat or ongoing abuse. Large numbers of children are abused each year both by individuals acting alone or in networks and by people who are protected by institutions.

Clearly, greater efforts towards prevention of child sexual abuse are required. A model described by Finkelhor many years ago (1984) remains useful to provide some structure for a discussion of prevention. Finkelhor’s model does not explain why abuse occurs but does offer ideas about how it occurs, suggesting that there are four conditions that must be met for abuse to occur. Each stage in the Finkelhor model offers the potential for targeted prevention interventions.

Although Finkelhor’s model identifies where a broad variety of prevention interventions could be targeted, stages 3 and 4 of the model provide the best opportunities for protecting children through school and parent-focused approaches.

School-based prevention approaches

School-based programs in particular are often targeted at stage 4, aiming to equip children with the knowledge and skills to act in ways that reduce the likelihood of abuse occurring and helping them to report abuse and to seek help if abuse occurs. School-based programs are needed because some parents lack the knowledge or skills to be able to provide the required safety messages themselves. Without education children do not understand that sexually abusive behaviour is wrong, are most likely to keep sexual misbehaviour secret, and do not know how to report sexual misbehaviour.

School-based child protection programs typically focus on helping children to:
• Identify their ‘private parts’ (i.e. parts of their bodies that, in general, should not be touched by others)
• Identify when they feel uncomfortable in situations involving touching
• Understand and assert their rights (e.g. to reject unwanted touching, bullying and harassment)
• Enlist adult support (i.e. to ‘tell someone you trust’ if they feel unsafe)
• Not keep ‘bad secrets’ (i.e. to identify the difference between bad or scary secrets and other secrets, and to tell adults about bad secrets)
• Not blame themselves for their victimisation (Briggs & Hawkins, 1997, p.212).

Evaluation of school-based prevention programs

A collaboration lasting more than two decades has evaluated school-based prevention programs in Australia and New Zealand aimed at equipping children with greater knowledge to protect themselves against sexual abuse (e.g. Briggs & Hawkins, 1997). Not all programs have equal outcomes. Two particular models of interest are the Protective Behaviours program used in various parts of Australia (in South Australia since 1985) and the Keeping Ourselves Safe model used in New Zealand schools with the support of New Zealand Police.

When children were interviewed before the Protective Behaviours program and again one year later there was little improvement in ‘safe’ responses to interview questions. Much better results were found from the New Zealand Keeping Ourselves Safe program where, for example, three quarters of the children had learned that secrets must never be kept if they involve ‘rude’ behaviour (Briggs & Hawkins, 1994).

The Protective Behaviours program teaches that “We all have the right to feel safe all of the time” and “Nothing is so awful that we can’t talk about it to someone”. A weakness of the program is that it assumes that sexual abuse will cause ‘unsafe’ feelings and does not take into account the context of child sexual abuse, which may well occur in an apparently affectionate relationship.

A meta-analysis of 16 school-based child sexual abuse prevention programs (Rispens, Aleman, & Goudena, 1997) showed that such
programs are successful at teaching children sexual abuse concepts and self-protection skills. What is more difficult to know is whether sexual abuse is actually less frequent in children who have received training.

Such an ‘acid test’ study would require random allocation to control and intervention groups and tracking of actual abuse on a longitudinal basis – difficult because we know very well that reported abuse is a very insensitive measure of actual abuse. Nonetheless, Gibson and Leitenberg (2000) showed that eight per cent of female undergraduates who had received a ‘good touch–bad touch’ sexual abuse prevention program in school reported having been subsequently sexually abused, whereas the rate was 14 per cent for women who had not received any school-based prevention program.

**Understanding from abusers who have been abused themselves**

The complex issue of why some men who were sexually abused as children grow up to become child sexual abusers themselves has some implications for child-focused prevention approaches. A study comparing men in Australian prisons for child sexual abuse with non-offenders who had been abused as children showed that a context of the sexual abuse being perceived as normal or even enjoyable was associated with later offending (Briggs & Hawkins, 1996).

One implication from the study is that child protection programs that depend on children’s assertiveness or their recognition of unwanted or uncomfortable touching may not be as effective in stopping abuse. Since paedophiles often use sophisticated grooming processes, this presents a particular challenge to prevention programs which rely to some extent on children distinguishing between ‘good touch’ and ‘bad touch’ and ‘good secrets’ versus ‘bad secrets’.

**Parent-focused prevention approaches**

Stage 3 of the Finkelhor model alludes to the secrecy required for acts of abuse to occur and it is here that parents might be encouraged to be careful in their assessment of the conditions under which it is safe to leave their child alone with an older juvenile or adult. This is a difficult area because, as Babatsikos (2010) has demonstrated, in spite of statistics showing that children are most often abused by people they know and trust, parents often still believe that strangers are the greatest threat to their children and are not ready to confront the reality of risks closer to home.

Prevention programs which target parents are needed to supplement school-based programs that leave the onus on the child to prevent and report abuse. Research on parents’ role in sexual abuse prevention is relatively rare as most prevention efforts have been inclined to focus on educating children to protect themselves through school-based programs.

Recent work by Babatsikos (2011) has explored the ways in which parents manage the risk of sexual abuse. Her findings identified the need for response strategies beyond reporting to authorities (because parents were hesitant to contact authorities when incidents occurred) and the need to emphasise the subtleness of grooming behaviours to parents (because grooming is a key strategy used in sexual abuse and its subtle nature means that it may easily remain undetected). Other considerations include helping parents to initiate child abuse prevention discussions (since parents often reported a lack of confidence or skill in this area) and developing general communication skills with children.

A challenge for the prevention field is to find ways to provide parents with realistic information and to offer reasonable and sensible protection strategies without...
Next steps

This discussion has demonstrated that the quality of the evidence for the value of child protection programs in preventing child sexual abuse is relatively poor, and that there are a number of factors which may impact on the effectiveness of programs. Tomison and Poole’s (2000) review of Australian protective behaviours programs found no RCT-level evaluative studies, and these methodological issues require attention. Given the sophistication of the grooming processes used by some child sexual abusers, the veil of secrecy and/or threats used by abusers, and children’s incomplete cognitive development, it is unreasonable to expect children to be self-sufficient with sexual abuse prevention. Broader complementary family and community prevention approaches are also needed.

Of course most fathers are protective of their children and most men are not abusers. The fact that, statistically at least, some people who should be able to be trusted may be potential abusers is difficult to contemplate. How can programs that identify fathers, step-fathers and neighbours as potential abusers be made palatable?

Integrating family and community prevention programs with those offered in schools seems an important but difficult task. Such integration will have to confront the tendency towards denial which has already been identified as an important consideration in training teachers to meet their duty as mandated reporters of abuse (Hawkins & McCallum, 2001). The current Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse is just the latest reminder of the depths of the problem faced by our society. Psychologists may be able to assist in the development of prevention programs which better integrate child, family and community approaches and thus help to make prevention measures more effective.

REFERENCES

WORKSHEETS AND ACTIVITIES

The Exploring Issues section comprises a range of ready-to-use worksheets featuring activities which relate to facts and views raised in this book.

The exercises presented in these worksheets are suitable for use by students at middle secondary school level and beyond. Some of the activities may be explored either individually or as a group.

As the information in this book is compiled from a number of different sources, readers are prompted to consider the origin of the text and to critically evaluate the questions presented.

Is the information cited from a primary or secondary source? Are you being presented with facts or opinions?

Is there any evidence of a particular bias or agenda? What are your own views after having explored the issues?

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Brainstorm, individually or as a group, to find out what you know about tackling child sexual abuse.

1. What is child sexual abuse, and who is at risk?

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2. What does the term ‘grooming’ mean in relation to child sexual abuse?  
   (Provide some examples in your answer)

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3. What is child sex tourism, and what legal processes are in place to address this issue?

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Complete the following activities on a separate sheet of paper if more space is required.

Sexual abuse is a serious crime and can have many short- and long-term effects on a victim or survivor. The effects of sexual abuse are not the same for every person. People may feel a variety of emotions that depend on their own circumstances.

Write a few paragraphs explaining the following psychological methodologies that are often used to help understand the short- and long-term effects of abuse on victims. Include an explanation of each methodology and the ways it is used to understand victims of child sexual abuse, and include examples.

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

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CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE ACCOMMODATION SYNDROME

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STOCKHOLM SYNDROME

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DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

Complete the following activities on a separate sheet of paper if more space is required.

In groups of two or more, consider ways in which the following areas can help protect children from child sexual abuse situations. Compile a list of at least 3 points for each topic to assist your group discussion, and include possible scenarios. Share your findings with other groups in the class.

BODY AWARENESS

TRUSTING FEELINGS

GETTING SUPPORT
Complete the following multiple choice questionnaire by circling or matching your preferred responses. The answers are at the end of the next page.

1. Which of the following are potential indicators of child sexual abuse? (Select any that apply)
   a. Pain or itching in the genital area
   b. Stained or bloody undergarments
   c. High academic performance
   d. Recurring urinary tract infections
   e. Bruised external genitalia
   f. Happy disposition
   g. Poor peer relationships
   h. Drawing pictures of smiling faces and rainbows
   i. Inappropriate interest in sexual matters
   j. Sexually transmitted diseases

   a. 1900
   b. 1907
   c. 1979
   d. 1989
   e. 2007
   f. 2012

3. Match the following types of abuse to the corresponding examples of behaviour:
   1. **Neglect**
      a. Excessive discipline, beating, shaking, burns, cuts, poisoning, choking, being tied up, held underwater, suffocated, strangled, given drugs or alcohol, bruising, welts, broken bones, and internal injuries.
   2. **Physical abuse**
      b. Suggestive behaviour, exposing genitals, fondling or touching private body parts, viewing pornographic material, masturbation, oral sex or penetration of the anus or vagina with any object.
   3. **Emotional abuse**
      c. Not providing adequate supervision, food, shelter, clothing, medical aid, nursing or providing unhygienic living conditions, keeping a child strapped in or restrained for long periods, leaving dangerous substances around.
   4. **Sexual abuse**
      d. Being told consistently they are no good, being rejected and shown no affection, being subjected to verbal abuse and threats, being isolated from friends, being restricted socially, being locked up.
4. Respond to the following statements by circling either 'True' or 'False':

a. Australians who groom or procure a child for sexual activity overseas can be imprisoned for up to 15 years.  
   True / False

b. Approximately 20 per cent of women and 5 to 10 per cent of men report being sexually abused as children.  
   True / False

c. Most sexual abusers are old men dressed in raincoats who hang around in parks.  
   True / False

d. It is OK for someone to offer money, favours or gifts to try and get you to do sexual things that you do not want to do.  
   True / False

e. Most sexual abuse is done by people known to the victims.  
   True / False

f. Australia is not a signatory to the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which recognises the responsibility of states to "undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse".  
   True / False

g. In 2005 around 1.3 million Australians were estimated to be survivors of child sexual abuse.  
   True / False

h. Child sexual abuse can happen to anyone, regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, cultural background, or any other aspect of identity.  
   True / False
Many adult survivors of child sexual abuse have found common factors in their experiences, including: they were usually abused by someone they knew; the abuse often started when they were very young; the abuse was generally not an isolated one-off incident and happened over many months or years; the abuse was often accompanied by threats and verbal or emotional abuse, and sometimes physical violence (Better Health Channel, Sexual abuse). (p.1)

Sexual abuse of children has the capacity to cause serious damage to a child's physical, social and emotional development, and can cause withdrawal and emotional problems into adulthood (ibid). (p.1)

Approximately one third of women surveyed in Australia have reported sexual abuse in childhood (Adults Surviving Child Abuse, Types of child abuse). (p.3)

Whilst all children are vulnerable to sexual abuse, girls are more likely to be sexually abused than boys. Disabled children are up to 7 times more likely to be abused than their non-disabled peers (ibid). (p.3)

In one study of Australian women, only 10% of child sexual abuse experiences were ever reported to the police, a doctor, or a health agency (ibid). (p.3)

It is important to remember that everyone in a family will feel distress following a child’s disclosure of sexual assault, and will each react or behave differently as a result of this distress (SECASA, Children and sexual assault). (p.7)

State and territory governments address child sexual abuse through a combination of laws that include pre-employment screening, and child protection and criminal laws (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Interim report Volume 1). (p.9)

Some children may be more vulnerable to abuse because of situational factors connected to where they are living or being cared for, such as extensive periods of unsupervised contact with adults (ibid). (p.9)

While the traditional view has been that most abusers are serial, predatory perpetrators, research now suggests that most abusers are usually opportunistic or situational perpetrators (ibid). (p.10)

Australian police statistics from 2003-04 show that children under 17 committed 9-16% of all the child sexual abuse offences recorded (ibid). (p.11)

In a US study examining the characteristics of perpetrators in substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect, 26% of all cases involving male perpetrators were associated with sexual abuse compared to just 2% of cases involving female perpetrators (AIFS, Who abuses children?). (p.13)

The ABS estimates that in 2005, around 1.3 million Australians were survivors of child sexual abuse (Our Watch, Reporting on Child Sexual Abuse). (p.14)

Around 60-90% of women in Australian prisons are survivors of childhood sexual abuse (ibid). (p.15)

Anyone who engages sexually with a child in Australia is committing a sexual offence (ibid). (p.15)

Child sexual abuse can happen to anyone, regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, cultural background, or any other aspect of identity (ibid). (p.16)

Almost 1 million women (956,600, or 12%) reported having experienced sexual abuse before the age of 15. More than 90% of victims knew the perpetrator (Tarczon, C and Quadara, A, The nature and extent of sexual assault and abuse in Australia). (p.17)

Of male respondents, 337,400 reported experiencing sexual abuse before the age of 15. More than 80% of male victims knew the perpetrator (ibid). (p.17)

Physically, sexually and emotionally abused children may also employ defensive mechanisms (e.g. dissociation or blocking out the memory) in an attempt to accommodate the abuse (SECASA, The effects of childhood sexual abuse). (p.21)

Male victims are less likely to disclose their abuse and take longer to do so (Cashmore, J and Shackel, R, The long-term effects of child sexual abuse). (p.22)

Most sexual abuse is done by people known to the victims. Men and women who sexually abuse young people are of many different ages and appearances (Women’s and Children’s Health Network, Surviving sexual abuse). (p.24)

Often in the media they make it seem that young people who are sexually abused go on to become abusers themselves. This is not true and the link between the two is in no way proven (ibid). (p.25)

Children and young people can disclose abuse at any time. If the abuse is ongoing over a period of weeks, months or years, they may disclose while the abuse is happening. Others might disclose either immediately after the abuse has ended or years later. Many children do not disclose abuse at all during childhood (Hunter, C, Responding to children and young people’s disclosures of abuse). (p.27)

An adult’s response to a child or young person’s disclosure of abuse can be central to a child or young person’s ongoing safety and their recovery from the trauma of abuse (ibid). (p.31)

Approximately 20% of women and 5-10% of men report being sexually abused as children (Shackel, R, The dynamics of disclosure of child sexual victimisation). (p.33)

Australian citizens have been recognised as one of the key groups of consumers of child-sex tourism in South-East Asian countries (Cohen, E, Child-Sex Tourism: an Australian issue across borders). (p.42)

In 1994, Australia criminalised a range of sexual activities with children by Australians in jurisdictions outside Australia. This legislation was designed to deter offenders and also to support the policing of sexual abuse in other countries (Salter, M, Fighting child sexual exploitation overseas and at home). (p.44)

Australians who groom or procure a child for sexual activity overseas can be imprisoned for up to 15 years. (AFP, Online child sex exploitation). (p.46)
Child abuse
Child abuse is an act by parents, caregivers, other adults or older adolescents that endangers a child or young person’s physical or emotional health or development. Child abuse can be a single incident, but usually takes place over time. In Australia, there is no national definition of what constitutes child abuse and neglect – each state/territory has its own legislation and definitions.

Child in need of protection
A child or young person who is being (or has been) or is at risk of abuse or neglect and who has no one with parental responsibility who is willing and able to protect them. There are variations to this definition in different states, territories and jurisdictions and to the threshold at which statutory services can intervene.

Child maltreatment
Also known as child abuse and neglect, child maltreatment is the broad term for the acts or behaviour of parents, caregivers and others that endanger a child or young person’s physical or emotional health or development. Child maltreatment can be a single incident, but it is usually a pattern of behaviour that takes place over time. Child maltreatment is commonly classified into four main types: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect. Children often experience different forms of maltreatment in combination.

Child protection
Statutory services designed to protect children who are at risk of serious harm.

Child sexual abuse
Any incident in which an adult engages a minor in a sexual act, or exposes the minor to inappropriate sexual behaviour or material. Sexual abuse also describes any incident in which a child is coerced into sexual activity by another child. This sexual activity does not just mean sexual intercourse; it means any sexual activity including flashing, fondling, masturbating and oral sex.

Child sex tourism
The sexual exploitation of children by a person or persons who travel from their home district, geographical region or home country in order to have sexual contact with children. This practice often involves the exploitation of children in developing states by those from western countries and results in their physical and emotional development and wellbeing.

Dissociation
A way in which some children survive abuse by escaping mentally while abuse is happening. The body and the mind seem to separate. While the body is being hurt, the child no longer feels it because the mind manages to escape to a safe place. Different children may dissociate in different ways.

Emotional abuse
Behaviour that destroys the confidence of a child resulting in emotional deprivation or trauma.

Grooming
Refers to the process by which some people who are responsible for the sexual abuse of children groom people in the community, such as parents, carers, teachers and children to establish trust and gain access to a child.

Investigation
Where a community services department seeks to obtain more detailed information about a child who is the subject of a notification, and makes an assessment about the harm or degree of harm to the child and their protective needs.

Mandatory reporting
The legal requirement to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect. All jurisdictions possess mandatory reporting requirements of some description. However, the people mandated to report and the abuse types for which it is mandatory to report vary across Australian states and territories.

Neglect
Refers to the failure by a parent or caregiver to provide a child (where they are in a position to do so) with the conditions that are culturally accepted as being essential for their physical and emotional development and wellbeing.

Notification
Contact made to an authorised department by a person or other body making an allegation of child abuse or neglect, child maltreatment or harm to a child. A notification involves one child only. More than one notification about the same event is counted as one notification.

Online grooming
When an adult has made online contact with a child under the age of sixteen with the intention of facilitating a sexual relationship.

Physical abuse
Refers to the non-accidental use of physical force against a child that results in harm to the child. Behaviours include shoving, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, punching, kicking, biting, burning, strangling and poisoning.

Post traumatic stress disorder
PTSD is used by psychologists and psychiatrists as a framework for the treatment of sexually abused children. It is valuable in identifying the existence of specific behaviours that should be addressed in therapy. PTSD describes symptoms which are characteristic in many cases of sexual abuse but it is important to note that it does not apply to all sexually abused children. PTSD can sometimes appear many years after the original event.

Substantiation
Where it is concluded, after investigation, that a child has been, is being or is likely to be abused, neglected or otherwise harmed. Substantiations are classified into one of four categories (physical, sexual or emotional abuse, or neglect) depending on the main type of abuse or neglect that has occurred.

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Websites with further information on the topic

Act for Kids  www.actforkids.com.au
Adults Surviving Child Abuse (ASCA)  www.asca.org.au
Australian Childhood Foundation  www.childhood.org.au
Australian Institute of Family Studies  www.aifs.gov.au
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare  www.aihw.gov.au
Bravehearts  www.bravehearts.org.au
Broken Rites Australia  www.brokenrites.org.au
Bursting the Bubble  www.burstingthebubble.com
Centre Against Sexual Violence Inc  www.casv.org.au
Child Abuse Prevention Service Inc (CAPS)  www.childabuseprevention.com.au
Child and Youth Health  www.cyh.com
Child Wise  www.childwise.org.au
Kids Helpline  www.kidshelp.com.au
NAPCAN  www.napcan.org.au
Raising Children Network  www.raisingchildren.net.au
Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia  www.rape-dvservices.org.au
RespondSA  www.respondsa.org.au
Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse  www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au
South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault (SECASA)  www.secasa.com.au

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