



## Victim Services Unit

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### *What is Sexual Abuse?*

Sexual abuse can be defined as forced sexual activity with a child by another person. This is inappropriate behavior that is harmful to the child both physically and emotionally.

Sexual abuse can be physical, such as fondling the child's genitals or non-physical, such as using the child in the production of pornography.

The abuser may use intimidation, deceit, or bribes in order to get the child to comply and may make the child promise not to tell.

A child may be sexually abused by:

- A parent or grandparent
- A brother or sister
- A relative or family friend
- A neighbor
- A teacher or day care provider
- A babysitter
- A stranger

#### **Physical signs:**

- Lacerations, irritations, swelling, bleeding, or pain in the genital or anal area
- Vaginal or penile discharge
- Pregnancy
- Venereal disease
- Enuresis (wetting)
- Encopresis (soiling)
- Frequent unexplained sore throats, yeast, or urinary infections

#### **Emotional symptoms:**

- Depression
- Low self-esteem
- Guilt / self-blame
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Sadness
- Negative body image

#### **NOTE:**

*These signs and symptoms do not necessarily mean that your child has been sexually abused. They are only intended to be used as guidelines. The most reliable indicator of child sexual abuse is the child's verbal disclosure.*

### *If You Suspect Your Child has Been Abused*

#### **Believe Your Child:**

- It is very important for parents to listen to their children. If your child confides in you that he or she has been abused, believe that your child is telling the truth and take immediate action.

#### **Be Supportive:**

- Tell your child that he or she was right to talk about what has happened. Tell your child that you love him/her and that he/she is not responsible for what happened. Allow your child to talk and to ask questions and be as honest as you can. Remember that your child needs to know that you believe and support him/her.

#### **Do Not Be Judgmental:**

- Do not ask probing or leading questions or criticize your child's feelings or actions. Do not show shock, disapproval, or disappointment.

#### **Do Not Project Your Feelings Of Anger Or Sadness Onto The Child**

#### **Use Your Child's Vocabulary To Discuss Body Parts**

#### **Report The Incident Immediately**

- Department of Child Safety - 1-888-767-2445
- Mesa Police Department—480-644-2211

#### **Or your local law enforcement office.**

### *Children and Sexual Assault*

The Mesa Police Department Victim Services Unit can assist with information regarding Victims' Rights, Victim Compensation, case status, navigation of the criminal justice system and referrals to other appropriate helping professionals or organizations according to your specific needs.

**This brochure provides information for you and your family on dealing with sexual abuse.**

Reactions to a traumatic event may appear immediately following an event, or they may appear days or weeks later. Children who have experienced a traumatic event commonly express their feelings through behavioral changes. This expression occurs because children often do not possess social, developmental, or psychological maturity to fully comprehend what has happened to them.

## *Common Reactions*

- **Fear** — fear of being separated, fear of being in closed-in areas, fear of new situations, excessive clinging.
- **Sleep disturbance** — nightmares, refusal to sleep alone, interrupted sleep, excessive sleep
- **Physical complaints** — stomach aches, headaches, dizziness, and other bodily symptoms with no physical cause
- **Change in eating habits** — loss of appetite, reluctance to eat, eating binges, hoarding of food
- **Regressive behavior** — loss of toilet training, thumb sucking, bed wetting, fear of darkness
- **School performance** — difficulty concentrating, refusal to attend, decline in performance, difficulty with peer relationships, disruptive behavior.
- **Change in demeanor** — withdrawal, emotional numbing, confusion, anger outbursts, loss of trust in others, expressions of guilt, crying, whimpering

Just as every child is unique, so is every child's reaction to a traumatic event. Your child may display one, a few, or all of these reactions. That being said, it is important to remember that most children experience reactions for brief periods.

We all have a need for the sense of security and reassuring your child that they are safe and that those they love are safe is one of the healthiest responses you can provide.

Providing a balance of honest information about the incident and education about prevention of future incidents is a wonderful way to help your child gain awareness, a sense of control, and reduce the impact of the traumatic event.

Remember that children desire to please and succeed. Monitoring your discussions about the incident, the child, and your feelings and fears is important. Doing so provides respect for your child's privacy and feelings and may minimize their sense of shame, guilt or responsibility about what occurred.

Another way to respect your child is by allowing them to decide whether they want to talk. For some, art or playing may be the most comfortable way of expression.

Sometimes family secrets surface and grudges develop, resulting in opposing systems of allies. Respect and privacy of the child need to be a priority, therefore you may need to be selective about who you share the information with. Take into consideration how the person you are sharing the information with will react and try to prepare for unexpected responses.

## *Rules and Routines*

It is common for parents to relax rules and disrupt routines when a child has experienced a difficult event. The reality is that rules and routines help them maintain their sense of safety, security, and assist with their recovery.

Parents forget or don't see a child as resilient. Recovery for a child is usually done with little difficulty when provided with support and safety. Parents, on-the-other hand, are usually more upset during the recovery process.

## *Benefits of Counseling*

Some of the benefits of seeking counseling are:

- Reviewing the incident and processing the event can help victims clarify what actually occurred.
- Legal and judicial decisions can be discussed and utilized as part of the promotion of healing and resolution.
- The disruption due to trauma can make daily functioning difficult. Counseling can help develop coping skills and strategies, allowing for the continuance of school, work or relationships.
- Establishment of a support network helps to decrease the negative physical, psychological and emotional effects that often result from the traumatic experience.

Survivors can utilize the experience as an opportunity to build and practice assertiveness, confidence, and protective instinct skills.

## *Resources*

### **211 - Community Information and Referral**

211  
[www.211arizona.org](http://www.211arizona.org)

### **Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence**

(602) 279-2900  
[www.acesdv.org](http://www.acesdv.org)

### **ChildHelp USA**

602-271-4500

### **Department of Child Safety**

1-888-767-2445

### **La Frontera EMPACT Crisis Hotline**

(480) 784-1500

### **Mesa Family Advocacy Center**

480-644-4075

### **Mesa Police Department**

480-644-2211

### **RAINN Help Line**

800-656-4673

### **Office for Victims of Crime**

U.S. Department of Justice  
810 Seventh Street NW., Eighth Floor  
Washington, DC 20531  
(202) 307-5983  
[www.ovc.gov](http://www.ovc.gov)

### **Sexual Violence Prevention and Education Program In Arizona**

[www.azrapeprevention.org/need\\_help](http://www.azrapeprevention.org/need_help)

### **Stop It Now!**

1-888-773-8368  
[www.stopitnow.org](http://www.stopitnow.org)