

SIGNS OF ABUSE

There are usually signs of abuse in a victim that a parent can spot. However some of these signs may seem quite insignificant at the time so a parent who does not know about the sexual abuse should not blame themselves.

Following are some common indicators of incest:

- Avoiding a particular member of the family
- Fear of being alone with a particular person
- Drastic changes in school performance
- Drastic mood changes
- Inappropriate and unexplainable knowledge of sex and sex play
- Bed wetting or nightmares
- Child has money or candy that cannot be explained
- Fear of going home
- Irritation or pain around the genital area
- Painful urination

The problem of incest is not going to disappear. But as a society we must be aware of its existence and know that it knows no class, race or religious boundaries.

Children are in more danger from someone they know or are related to than from a stranger. We must all remember that the child should be the number one priority. If one child is being abused, that's one too many.

BOOKS AVAILABLE

"Traumatic Abuse and Neglect of Children"
– John Money, Gertrude Williams

"Sexual Abuse: Incest Victims and their Families"
– Jean Goodwin

"Out of Harm's Way" – Dawn Hayden

"Incest: A Victim's Search as to Why"
– Elsie Marlowe

"The Best Kept Secret" – Florence Rush

"The Silent Children" – Linda Tschirchart-Sanford

"Incest: Long Term Consequences for the Victim"
– Anita Vandenburg



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INCEST SURVIVORS

The effects of being betrayed by someone who is supposed to be responsible for your well-being can be overwhelming to a child. The impact will alter that person's life and affect every relationship he or she ever engages in.



THE REALITY:

Some children must run away from home for protection, rather than running to it.

A child's home is supposed to be a safe and happy place where he can grow up to be a healthy and productive adult. When a child is harmed or threatened, he should be able to run home for protection and comfort. Children deserve these things, but for many, that just isn't the reality. For far too many children, going home is a terrifying experience.

Although society may not want to fully accept it, the fact that hundreds of Canadian children are sexually abused by a relative or close family member can no longer be ignored.

Reports of incest are at a higher rate than they have ever been and most victims still do not report the abuse.

DEFINITION:

Some of the most common forms of sexual abuse do not include intercourse.

Fondling, oral sex and masturbation are all sexual abuse acts that are committed upon children.

ADULTS WHO RECALL ABUSE

One defense mechanism of sexual abuse victims that society is only now beginning to learn more about is the blocking of those memories from the mind. Some victims find memories of the abuse to be so disturbing and terrifying that they subconsciously force themselves to forget they were ever abused. It may not be until years later, in adulthood, that the victim remembers the incest.

THE VICTIMS

Victims of sexual abuse by a relative probably suffer more than other sexual assault victims, especially when the abuser is a close relative. Some children live in fear of their father, not knowing the next time he will do bad things to them. Most incest victims are female, but there are also many male victims. There are probably many more male victims than is realized because it may actually be harder for boys to disclose sexual abuse.

The age of most victims is between six and ten years of age, but there are cases of abuse when the child was still in diapers.

Despite the abuse, many victims still love their abuser, who could be their father or mother.

Many fathers tell the child they are abusing that if the secret gets out, daddy will go to jail, the child will be sent to a foster home, mommy will be hurt, and the family will be torn apart. This makes the child feel responsible for the abuse or for keeping the family together and ensures his silence.

Some children fear their abuser will hurt them or perhaps begin abusing another child if they do not endure it.

Other children worry that they will not be believed. Children often feel responsible for the abuse and therefore feel dirty and guilty.

There are many possible explanations for why an incest victim would not disclose the abuse. If a child does reveal the secret, it sometimes happens between three and seven years after the abuse started.

The impact of incest differs from victim to victim and situation to situation. Therapy for incest victims usually centers on helping them realize and accept that the abuse was not their fault.

THE FAMILY

The sexual abuse of a family member is difficult to accept. When the abuser is also a part of the family, it threatens to tear the family apart. Loyalty is divided between the abuser and the victim. This kind of turmoil adds to the victim's suffering. Some family members would rather avoid a scandal and keep and deal with the problem within the family. They may take steps to keep the abuser away from the victim, but this only harms the victim more.

Parents and children must remember that the offender is the only one responsible for the abuse - not the child. If a child reveals stories of abuse, parents should not ignore them. The child should be made aware that the decision to tell was the right one and that they have done nothing wrong.

THE OFFENDER

The average incest abuser is between 30 and 40 years of age. He is usually intelligent and has a decent job. He probably does not have a criminal record. Most incest abusers molest only their own children or children in their family. They do not necessarily collect pornography. They do not necessarily have a specific desire or preference to have sex with children.

Abusers may abuse their children because they are having troubles with a spouse or it may be a way of hurting someone in the family. It may simply be that the opportunity is there and they do not have to risk an extramarital affair.

They might consider the risk of discovery to be low. The average abuser has a total of two victims.
