

HBO ORIGINAL

GREAT PHOTO, LOVELY LIFE

INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE ABOUT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

By Elizabeth Letourneau, PhD, director of the Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

All of us want to be informed when it comes to sexual abuse—to protect ourselves and loved ones from experiencing abuse or engaging in harmful behavior. The more information we have about who is truly at risk of engaging in or experiencing harmful sexual behavior and under what conditions, the more effective we will be at preventing it from occurring.

WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention define child sexual abuse¹ as the involvement of a child (a person less than 18 years old) in sexual activity that violates the laws or social taboos of society and that the child:

- » Does not fully comprehend
- » Does not consent to or is unable to give informed consent to, or
- » Is not developmentally prepared for and cannot give consent to

Abuse also involves the creation, distribution, and use of illegal images (child sexual exploitation materials) and online child sexual exploitation.

In the U.S., about 25% of girls, and 5% of boys will experience sexual abuse prior to age 18.² Globally, about one in nine children will experience child sexual abuse.³ Most of this abuse is committed by people well-known to the child, not strangers. This includes people within the family, individuals close to the family, and problem sexual behavior against children by children. This is true even for online abuse and exploitation.^{4,5}

DISCUSSING SEXUAL ABUSE WITH FAMILY MEMBERS

In *Great Photo, Lovely Life*, the people affected by child sexual abuse experienced victimization (including director Amanda's older sister and mother), perpetrated harm (Amanda's grandfather), were complicit in harm (Amanda's grandmother), and experienced the extended emotional fallout of abuse (Amanda). Some fell into multiple groups. Amanda's mother was a victim of child sexual abuse and was viewed by her oldest daughter as complicit in that daughter's abuse. It is to each of these groups that we refer when we talk about people affected by abuse.

For people impacted by child sexual abuse, feeling heard, seen, and supported by family members are among the strongest predictors of recovery and well-being. To learn more about how to have these often difficult conversations, [RAINN](#)—the largest anti-sexual violence organization in the U.S.—offers a “Telling Loved Ones About Sexual Assault” guide for disclosing and discussing sexual abuse with loved ones.

Conversations about child sexual abuse can also help to keep children and teens safe from experiencing or engaging in harmful sexual behaviors. Research has shown that teens whose parents talked openly with them about online risks and who provided advice on whether, when, and how to share information virtually were less likely to experience online exploitation and abuse.⁶ For information about how to discuss sexual abuse with teens and younger children, the [Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse](#) has resources for parents and children under the “Get Support” tab on their website.

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¹ https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/can/CSA-Factsheet_508.pdf

² Gewirtz-Meydan, A. & Finkelhor, D. (2020). Sexual abuse and assault in a large national sample of

children and adolescents. *Child Maltreatment*, 25(2), 203-214.

³ Stoltenberg, M., van IJzendoorn, M. H., Euser, E. M., & Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J. (2011). A global

perspective on child sexual abuse: Meta-analysis of prevalence around the world. *Child Maltreatment*,

16(2), 79-92.

⁴ Gewirtz-Meydan, A. & Finkelhor, D. (2020). Sexual abuse and assault in a large national sample of

children and adolescents. *Child Maltreatment*, 25(2), 203-214.

⁵ Finkelhor, D., Turner, K., & Collier, D. (2022). Prevalence of online sexual offenses against children in

the U.S. *JAMA Open Network*, 5(10), Article e2234471.

⁶ Wachs, S., Michelsen, A., Wright, M., Gómez-Guadix, M., Almendros, C., Kwon, Y., Na, E.Y., Sittichai, R., Singh, R.,

Biswal, R., Gómez, A., Vengarde, T. A. Routine-Activity Approach to Understand Cybergrooming Victimization

Among Adolescents from Six Countries. *Cyberpsychol Behav Soc Netw*, 2020

RESOURCE GUIDE

There are many resources available for people affected by child sexual abuse. Here we list several long-standing U.S.-based resources, though this is not an exhaustive list.

Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse

Dr. Elizabeth Letourneau directs the Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse at the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University. The Moore Center has led efforts to end child sexual abuse since its founding in 2012. The center's homepage includes a "[Get Support](#)" tab that lists resources for people affected by child sexual abuse, including parents and children to prevent abuse, for survivors of abuse, and for people concerned about their own thoughts or behaviors.

National Children's Alliance

The NCA is the largest network of child advocacy centers in the country. Child advocacy centers support child abuse victims and their parents and many also provide services to children and teens with problem sexual behaviors. To find a child advocacy center near you, search [NCA's Interactive Map](#) or [Interactive Map of Tribal Coverage](#).

National Sexual Violence Resource Center at Respect Together

Respect Together seeks to create a culture that values and upholds all people being treated with respect and living free from all forms of sexual violence and oppression. Within Respect Together, the National Sexual Violence Resource Center maintains a [Directory of Organizations](#) that lists state and territory resources for people affected by child sexual abuse, including victim/survivor support organizations and local communities of color sexual assault organizations.

RAINN

RAINN—the Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network—is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization. RAINN organizes the National Sexual Assault Telephone Hotline (1.800.656.4673), an online chat service, and a mobile app for survivors. RAINN partnered with The Trevor Project to provide culturally relevant services to [LGBTQ+ survivors](#) of sexual violence.

Stewards of Children - Darkness to Light

Darkness to Light is an organization committed to empowering parents and all adults to prevent child sexual abuse. They offer child sexual abuse prevention and training programs for parents and professionals, as well as hotline staffed with trained crisis counselors (1.800.656.HOPE).

Stop It Now! USA

Stop It Now! aims to prevent the sexual abuse of children by mobilizing adults, families and communities to take actions that protect children before they are harmed. Anyone affected by or concerned about child sex abuse can access their national prevention [Helpline](#) (1.888.PREVENT), email, and chat services, an interactive Online Help Center, and an "Ask Now!" advice column. Stop It Now! also provides dedicated resources for teens and young adults with questions or concerns about their own or a friend's sexual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors at [What's OK?](#).

Violence Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The CDC is the U.S. agency tasked with preventing harm and was among the first government agencies in any country to recognize that violence—like disease—is preventable. The CDC funds numerous child sexual abuse prevention program evaluations. Learn more at their [Child Sexual Abuse Fast Facts](#) page.

