



RCC

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre

Child  
Sexual  
Abuse



## What do we mean by Child Sexual Abuse?

Child sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his or her gratification or sexual arousal or that of others. The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006 makes it a crime for anyone to engage in a sexual act with a child under the age of 17.

A child is never in a position to make a valid or informed choice about appropriate sexual acts. Sexual abuse may range from fondling or petting to full vaginal, oral or anal intercourse. Incest refers to sexual abuse by a family member.

A child may also be abused without any direct physical contact, for example, through being photographed or filmed, taught to act in sexualised ways or made to watch sexual acts.

## Who sexually abuses children?

While the majority of abusers are men, both men and women sexually abuse children. In most cases, children are abused by somebody they know - a family member, baby-sitter, neighbour, authority figure. In about a quarter of cases, the abuser is him or herself a child or teenager.

The stereotype of the child sexual abuser suggests that they are instantly recognisable as suspect. In fact, in most cases, child sexual abusers appear to be ordinary, trustworthy people and the majority operate very effectively and 'normally' in society. Child sexual abusers come from every type of social background. In some cases, they may be socially skilled individuals who take up leadership roles in the community.

A paedophile is a person whose only sexual interest is in children. The majority of those who sexually abuse children are not paedophiles, but heterosexuals who have adult sexual relationships as well as abusing children.

## Who is abused?

Both boys and girls are sexually abused.

Children are sexually abused to an equal extent across all social classes, and in both rural and urban areas.

In research in Ireland one in three women and one in five men, reported having been sexually abused as a child (The SAVI Report: Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland. McGee, H., et al., Liffey Press, 2002)

## What are the effects of sexual abuse?

The child has to cope not only with the pain, fear and trauma of the abuse, but is usually forced to take on the secret, and therefore has to disguise what is happening to him or her, and its impact. Children develop extraordinary means of doing this, showing great courage and creativity, while also being very significantly impacted.

The impact of sexual abuse varies, and can depend on factors such as the nature and extent of the abuse, the relationship of the abuser to the child, the stage in development at which the abuse occurs, and other factors in the life

of the child, such as whether the child has experiences of love and safety, as well as the experiences of abuse and trauma. The child may learn to numb out, to ‘not be there’, to appear as though everything is fine; he or she may learn to be invisible or alternatively may act out confusion and pain.

The effects may include a loss of trust, low self esteem and emotional deadness. Children can often believe that they are responsible for the abuse, and feel guilty and ashamed as a result.

Sexual abuse prevents the development of a feeling of trust and safety in the world, and as the child moves on into adolescence and adulthood, she or he may find it difficult to form close, loving relationships. Sexual abuse victims may feel themselves to be worthless and this may lead to them being treated badly by other people and being repeatedly victimised in adulthood.

They may experience difficulties in intimate relationships and in their sexual life. Fear may dominate the person’s life, often manifesting as anxiety or panic attacks, hyper-vigilance, insomnia and nightmares. The experience of trauma may lead to the development of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

People frequently experience deep emotional pain, which may, in some cases, lead to depression, self harm or suicidal ideation. Some people may resort to alcohol, substance or food abuse in an effort to cope with post trauma symptoms.

While many people who have experienced sexual abuse create lives which are meaningful and worthwhile for themselves and those around them, the trauma of sexual abuse can also have an impact on every aspect of the person's life. However, skilled therapeutic help will enable the person to leave behind the effects of sexual abuse and move on into a life which can be rich and satisfying.

## What should I do if somebody tells me they are being or have been sexually abused?

Believe them, and let them know that you do. Reassure them that they are doing the right thing in telling. Everybody has the right to a life free from abuse. Listen to what they are telling you. You may be the first person they have spoken to about their experience. Do not try to make them 'forget about it'. Let them

know that you will support them in whatever needs to be done.

Telling about sexual abuse is very difficult. Often the person feels that he or she will be blamed. In your response, let them know you do not blame or judge them. The person may also be very concerned about what will happen to them or to the abuser.

Give them the National 24 Hour Helpline number **1800 77 88 88**, which is available for victims, family and friends.

## What should I do if I know or suspect a child is being sexually abused?

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs guidelines places an onus on everyone to report knowledge or concerns about a child who is being abused or who may be at risk of abuse. Although at present you have no legal obligation to do anything, if you do not take action, the abuse may continue and other children may be at risk.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has responsibility for all cases of sexual abuse.

You should contact the local social work duty service in the area where the child lives and tell them your concerns. A report can be made in person, by telephone or in writing. The social worker will want to know the reasons you have for believing or suspecting that a child is being abused. She/he will also want your name, but that will usually remain confidential. If a child is in danger outside office hours, you can contact the Gardaí.

Tusla, Child and Family Social work services:  
<http://www.tusla.ie/services/child-protectionwelfare/contact-a-social-worker>

## What help is available for victims of sexual abuse?

If you have been sexually abused yourself, or know somebody who has been abused in the past, there are services available to help. The Dublin Rape Crisis Centre provides a comprehensive professional psychotherapy programme for adults (male and female) who have been sexually abused as children. The first step for the person who wishes to access therapy within the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre is to phone the National 24 Hour Helpline **1800 77 88 88**. Contact details of local Rape Crisis Centres are at the back of this leaflet.

The Child and Family Agency social workers based in local offices are responsible for organising therapeutic help for children. The CARI foundation also provides therapy for children.

It is important to remember that no matter how great the difficulties a person experiences in coping with the effects of sexual abuse, it does not mean they are developing permanent psychiatric or emotional problems. The process of recovery will allow the person the possibility of a full and healthy life.

Tusla, Child and Family Social work services:  
<http://www.tusla.ie/services/child-protectionwelfare/contact-a-social-worker>

CARI National Office, Dublin  
Tel +353 1 8308529  
Email: [info@cari.ie](mailto:info@cari.ie) (general queries)  
[www.cari.ie](http://www.cari.ie)  
CARI National Helpline  
Lo Call 1890 924 567  
(Republic of Ireland)

## The services of the DRCC

- A National 24 Hour Helpline **1800 77 88 88**
- A crisis counselling service for recent victims, male and female, of rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment.
- Long-term therapy for adult victims, male and female, of childhood sexual abuse and past sexual violence.
- Interpreters provided for non English speakers and deaf clients.
- Accompaniment at the Sexual Assault Treatment Unit for victims of sexual violence.
- Court Accompaniment.
- Advocacy, Legal Advice and Awareness Raising.
- Training for professionals who work with victims of sexual violence.
- Training programmes on preventing and dealing with bullying, harassment and sexual harassment in the workplace.
- Research and Statistics

## Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Support Centres

ATHLONE MIDLANDS	Freefone 1800 306 600
CARLOW (Sth Leinster)	Freefone 1800 727 737
CORK	Freefone 1800 496 496
DONEGAL	Freefone 1800 448 844
DUBLIN (National 24 Hour Helpline)	Freefone 1800 778 888
GALWAY	Freefone 1800 355 355
KERRY	Freefone 1800 633 333
KILKENNY	Freefone 1800 478 478
MAYO	Freefone 1800 234 900
MIDWEST	Freefone 1800 311 511
NORTH EAST	Freefone 1800 212 122
SLIGO, LEITRIM AND WEST CAVAN	Freefone 1800 750 780
TIPPERARY	Freefone 1800 340 340
TULLAMORE	Freefone 1800 323 232
WATERFORD	Freefone 1800 296 296
WEXFORD	Freefone 1800 330 033



# RCC

*Preventing and healing  
the trauma of rape  
and sexual abuse*

## National Helpline

24 Hours a day, 7 days a week,  
personal support and advice.

## Helpline 1800 77 88 88

A new beginning at the end of the line

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre

70 Lower Leeson St., Dublin 2

Tel: 01 661 4911

Fax: 01 661 0873

Email: [rcc@indigo.ie](mailto:rcc@indigo.ie)

[www.drcc.ie](http://www.drcc.ie)

Material prepared by the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre © DRCC 2015

**TÚSLA**

An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency

Funded by the Child and Family Agency