

Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP)



GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

When and How Do I Suspect and Prevent Abuse in My Child?

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10 FAQs on WHEN AND HOW DO I SUSPECT AND PREVENT ABUSE IN MY CHILD?

1. What is "child abuse"/What parents must know? Is there any way, parents can keep children safe from abuse?
2. Who abuses? What kinds of abuse may happen to any child? Is getting angry on a crying baby to calm is abuse? How to calm a crying baby without getting angry?
3. What should I do on suspecting a "Child Abuse"? How the legal system addresses "Child Abuse" in India? Is all of physical punishment to discipline children damaging?
4. The signs of identification will surely help us to know that the child is under abuse. But, what if the similar signs are shown by a child who might be having no such incidents (may be behaving so because of other reasons). How to differentiate?
5. What would be the right age to tell the biological name of the private parts to children? When should a kid learn about consent?
6. There are some students who will be knowing completely about the sex and trying to spoil the other student in this situation as a parent and teacher, what can be done to avoid?
7. What shall be done when a very young child touches other adults and children inappropriately? To what extent is it okay for children to touch or explore their private parts or of a fellow child of the same age?
8. My girl child shies away from any male fellow of age 30–45 years, might be uncle, her sir, or my friends even after repeated meetings but she is quite comfortable with male of grandparent's age or male below age of 30 years. For this reason, she does not want to join any sports where she will be taught by sir or refrain herself from even any video chats where any uncle or our male relative is present. I am really confused. Kindly guide.
9. If a child is not able to forget the trauma, are there chances that a child can turn violent (physically/sexually) and begin to harm others (no self-harm)? Will it take another curve in case of sexual assault.... meaning are there any chances that a child wants to continue it and he or she may indulge in unfair relationship?
10. Please tell how can children ever recover from such an experience? How does a parent possibly handle knowing that their child was sexually assaulted? I am fearful that I would fall apart.

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When and How Do I Suspect and Prevent Abuse in My Child?



Source: iSTOCK.



Source: Pixabay.

Q1

What is “child abuse”/What parents must know? Is there any way, parents can keep children safe from abuse?

When someone who is taking care of a child hurts the child’s feelings or physical body is termed as “child abuse”. Normally, physical abuse occurs as pattern of frequent and intentional acts. Caregivers may not realize what they are doing is an abusive act. They may understand it as “routine disciplining the child” to make him/her behave right, for example, shaking the baby (under 5 years old) vigorously for excessive crying may injure the soft brain, called *abusive head trauma* that may lead to permanent damage and even to death.



Husband arguing with wife in front of little daughter.
Source: iSTOCK.

Children need to be considered as individuals with right to life with dignity and no more the property of their parents/caregivers. Boys or girls both may be equally abused in any family, their physical hurt may heal but the hurt feelings or emotional trauma may go along with them for long or lifelong.



Family as a whole needs protection
Source: Pixabay.

Take Home Messages

What parents must know?

To save children from abuse

- If parents know abuse is damaging and what to do? We can keep all children safe.
- Prevent children getting harmed by domestic violence.
- Abusive head trauma is 100% preventable. Never shake the baby out of anger.
- Parents must learn themselves how to manage anger when stressed.
- Boys are equally sexually abused as girls; they need protective shield too.
- Children with disability are more vulnerable to abuse. They may need extra watch.
- Children of parents in prison vulnerable to abuse, should get monitored by state.
- Most children face sexual abuse within four walls of their home. Allow them to say, listen carefully, and believe.
- Watch your child if avoiding somebody known/eye contact with you.
- First thing in the management of child abuse is stop further abuse.
- Online abuse of children—parents must keep watch all the time.
- Good health and development show concern, if regression.
- Avoid gender discrimination, treat boys and girls equally.
- Learn about positive parenting, children have right to be treated as individual.
- Face changes in developmental milestones without fear but with confidence.
- Give them age-appropriate understanding of good touches and bad touches.
- Help children to talk/know about their bodies with correct terms and confidence.
- Growing up for children should be an achievement with fun, participate with confidence.
- Age-appropriate sexuality education along with lifeskill education in schools is the need of the hour for children to know do's and dont's.
- Single parent child is more vulnerable to abuse.
- Prevent and report child marriages.

A beaten up child learns it is appropriate to control people through methods of pain and torture.



Source: iSTOCK.

Q2

Who abuses? What kinds of abuse may happen to any child? Is getting angry on a crying baby to calm is abuse? How to calm a crying baby without getting angry?

The abuser: Studies show that people who are abusing children, often were abused in their own childhood, abuser may also be prone to substance abuse. Addiction to alcohol, drugs, or similar substances generally leads to violent behavior causing the person to harm others. Poor or indebted parents may consider children as major cause for their difficulties. Societal trends may allow physical punishment to make children disciplined. In this way, children are abused in schools by their teachers, caretakers or at home by own parents.

Declining parental values and norms, inability to adjust with the nature of the infant, and burden of responsibilities may act as trigger for abuse.



Alcoholic father with the child.
Source: Pixabay.

Parents who abuse their child:

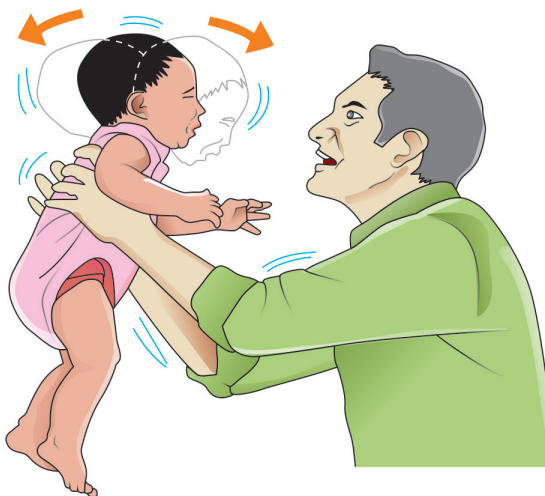
- May be found talking negative about their child or call no good.
- Would try avoiding the child not meeting others.
- Hardly can explain about the child’s injuries properly or show abnormal behavior.
- May not show concern for the child.

TYPES OF ABUSE

Physical Abuse

When a child is physically hurt. Hitting hardly by hand or with any object, for example, a belt or stick causing cuts, bruises, or pain. Punching, pushing, choking, burning, painful grabbing, dragging, and kicking are all physical abuses.

Shaking the child (under 5 years old) to stop crying may cause *abusive head trauma* leading to deafness, blindness, neurological damage, and even to death. Never leave your baby with a person who easily gets irritated, has temper problem or a history of violence. It is OK to ask for help, crying is a normal behavior in infants, it is a part of normal development.



Source: Social Axiom Foundation (Project CACA)

- How to calm the baby?: <https://youtu.be/j2C8MkY7Co8k>.
- <https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/videos/settle-a-crying-baby?>
- The Australian parenting website: raisingchildren.net.au.

Sexual Abuse

It is called when any adult uses child for sexual reasons or involves the child in sexual act. If an older or powerful child uses younger or weaker child for sexual excitement or gratification, also called “sexual abuse”.



Source: iSTOCK.

“Sexual abuse” also includes noncontact abuse, making a child view sexual acts, or show sex organs, fondling, oral sex, penetration, child prostitution, pornography, and online sexual exploitation.

Neglect

Ignoring the basic needs of the child such as enough food, clothing, housing, medical care, supervision, education/schooling, attention that means what is needed to take care of a child is not done by an adult caregiver is called "Neglect".



Source: iSTOCK.

Q3

What should I do on suspecting a "Child Abuse"? How the legal system addresses "Child Abuse" in India? Is all of physical punishment to discipline children damaging?



Source: iSTOCK.

If you are suspecting a child being abused or child tells you of abuse, then you can contact the following:

- Child Welfare Committee
- Police
- Hospital/one-stop center
- Prevent child marriage by reporting on BBA (NGO) helpline 1800-102-7222
- The Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses (POCSO) e-box at ncpcr.gov.in (online reporting to national commission for protection of child rights)
- Child Helpline 1098.

Never take the law into your own hands or threaten a person. Let the legal system do its work.

*KOMAL—A Film on Child Sexual Abuse by Child Line 1098. www.youtube.com
https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=komal*

Even if you are not sure about the abuse, but have concern is quite enough. The concerned authority will look in to find out if anything is wrong? It is better to report as first thing to do is to stop further abuse.

- According to Juvenile (teenager) Justice Act 2015, there is a process of compulsory reporting if any one comes across any unattended child.
- We have the guidelines regarding the corporal punishment brought out in 2011 by NCPCR (National Commission for Protection of Child Rights).

We would like to suggest parents to go for softer innovative methods as an alternative rather than using severe physical force to make a child disciplined and helpful in a long run.



Source: iSTOCK.

- In case of sexual abuse, we have the provision of compulsory reporting but for all other forms of abuse it becomes our moral responsibility to report about the children who have been abused and should always act in their best interest while dealing with them or issues related to them.
- After the new law POCSO (Protection of Children Against Sexual Offences) Act 2012 came into force from 14th November 2012, the concept and management of child sexual abuse (CSA) has changed a lot safeguarding the best interest of the child at every step including:
 - Rehabilitation
 - Compensation
 - Adopting all legal procedures in a child-friendly manner

POCSO (Amendment) Act 2019

- Applies to all persons below 18 years of age.
- Gender neutral (male, female, and transgender can be victim or accused).
- It gives set of guidelines to all stakeholders to perform in child-friendly manner and in the best interest of the child.
- Age of consent for sex is 18 years, even with consent sex between under 18 years is a crime.
- There is mandatory reporting by all working with children if coming across CSA, failing to report is a punishable offense.
- Statement of the child recorded preferably by a lady police officer not less than rank of subinspector (not in uniform) not in police station but at the place of choice of the child.
- Burden of proof is on the accused (accused must prove not guilty).
- Trial conducted in camera in special court by the session judge and by giving frequent breaks to the child.
- Defense lawyer can put up questions through the judge only not to the child directly.
- There is provision of death penalty for the penetrating sexual assault below 12-year-old child.
- Punishment is as per the graded severity.
- Support person provided to the child at every step and interpreter, special educator if needed.

Q4

The signs of identification will surely help us to know that the child is under abuse. But, what if the similar signs are shown by a child who might be having no such incidents (may be behaving so because of other reasons). How to differentiate?

- Since child abuse is receiving so much attention by the media, it is natural for the parents to be concerned about sexual behavior means that their child has been sexually abused. Commonly, the sexual behaviors in children occur by the age of 13 years.
- Sexual behavior must be understood by keeping in mind various factors such as parent's view on sexuality, factors impacting the family, cultures and customs of the family, daycare arrangements, etc.
- A detailed history including the tensions in the family, child's access to sexual materials or acts, domestic violence and risk factors for abuse may help to manage safety plans for children with sexual behavior problems.
- Pediatricians should be able to differentiate between normal and abnormal sexual behaviors based on the types of behavior shown by the child and the age and development level of the child.

Parents who view all sexual behaviors as wrong and unacceptable may interpret the child's sexual behavior as abnormal even when it is in the normal developmental range. Parent's overreaction to normal sexual behavior may lead to increase in such behaviors.

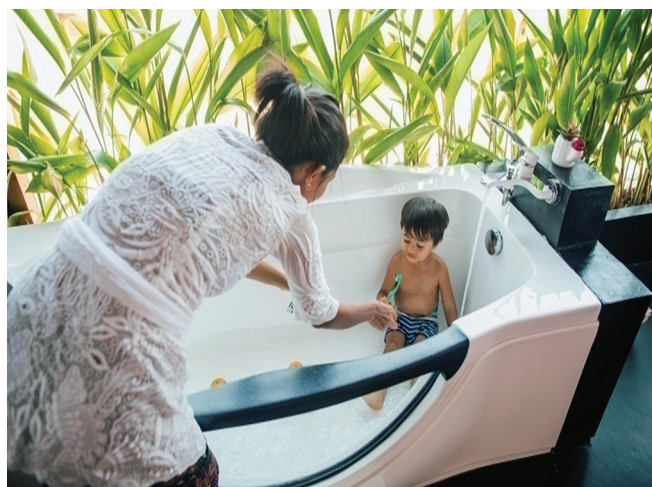
Questions for Caretakers Regarding Sexual Behaviors in Children

- When was the behavior noticed for the first time?
- Have there been recent tensions in the family?
- The behavior may be related to recent changes such as parents' separation or a new sibling.
- Does the behavior involve other people? Most sexual behavior problems involve other people.
- How often have you noticed such behavior? Is the nature or regularity of the behavior changing? Increase in the regularity may indicate anxiety or stress. Can the child be easily distracted from such behavior?
- How do you react to such behavior (Troubled behavior by the caretaker may worsen the behavior)?
- Does the behavior occur at home/daycare/school or both (If it occurs only at home, it may be because of the tensions or changes in the family)?

- If the behavior involves other persons, how old is the person? If the person involved in the behavior is 4 or >4 years apart in age (it is age-inappropriate).
- If the activity is forceful or threatening? (It is abnormal).
- Does the child face fear or anxiety during the behavior? Or, has the child shown emotional and behavioral problems?
- Is there any violence with the people living in their home?
- Does the child have access to any sexual activity or material-like pornographic movies, nudity, Internet or any text including sexual language?
- Children may enact what they see or hear. Has anyone ever spoken about sexual abuse with the child? (Sexual behaviors are linked to sexual abuse, physical abuse, and ignorance).

Q5

What would be the right age to tell the biological name of the private parts to children? When should a kid learn about consent?



Bonding at bath-time
Source: iSTOCK.

To be safe, teach your child from the very beginning may be 1–3 years of age about different parts on his or her body—mouth, breasts, genitals, buttocks, etc. And that no one should be allowed to see or touch them without permission. Please also tell the parents or caretakers to help their children in body wash. A dentist may need to look in their mouth or a doctor/nurse may look at their private parts in the presence of one of the parents.

It is normal for kids around 3 years of age to start asking questions about their body parts, so you must use this time to tell them the correct names of their body parts. Bathing time can be used the best to do the same.

- The first step for a healthy sexual development in a child is to teach and talk to them about it openly without any shame and hesitation.
- Recent research shows that knowing the correct names helps to know and imagine bodies easily that may further help to avoid sexual abuse or talk about it if it happens. When a child is abused or manhandled, knowing the correct language will help both child and the adult deal with it maturely.
- Encourage your children to have further conversations freely.
- Talk to your children about the difficult things in life so they can talk about their doubts and curiosities without any hesitation.



Q6

There are some students who will be knowing completely about the sex and trying to spoil the other student in this situation as a parent and teacher, what can be done to avoid?

- Taking care of sexual behavior problems is an important aspect of growing up in helping children develop normally.
- They need appropriate information about sexual development and education on sex and reproduction.
- It is important for families to talk about it when they think is the right age to have sexual relationship.
- It is important for the parents to know normal sexual behavior at different ages:
 - *Preschool age:* Children of this group are curious about their bodies and keep on exploring them.
 - *Grade school:* They are still interested in their bodies but are more aware of social rules of sexual talks and behavior.
 - *Middle school:* In this group, children are aware of sexual feelings with onset of puberty.
- Several children with sexual behavior problems have history of sexual abuse but, on the other hand, most children who have been sexually abused do not develop sexual behavior problems.
- Those children who are sexually abused at a younger age, those who are abused by a family member or abuse involved penetration are at greater risk of developing sexual behavior problems.

The parents should know:

1. What sexual behavior is normal and what is abnormal?
2. Learn effective ways of correcting sexual behavior:


Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao

Hello Children!

If you feel uneasy about someone touching you inappropriately, you should not keep quiet. You must:


1. Not blame yourself.
2. Tell someone whom you trust.
3. You can also inform National Commission for Protection of Child Rights through the **POCSO e-box**.

When you get an unsafe touch, you may feel bad, confused and helpless
 You need not feel "bad" because it's not your fault




Press This Button

POCSO e-box available at NCPCR@gov.in





If you are below 18 years of age, and are troubled or confused or abused or in distress or know some other child who is...

Call **1098**...because some numbers are good!
 They change lives!!!



CHILDLINE 1098 - a national 24 hours toll free emergency phone service for children in distress is an initiative of CHILDLINE India Foundation supported by Ministry of Women & Child Development





Ek Kadam Swachchhta ki or

Source: Social Axiom Foundation (Project CACA).

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Q7

What shall be done when a very young child touches other adults and children inappropriately? To what extent is it okay for children to touch or explore their private parts or of a fellow child of the same age?

- In children, it is commonly seen that they try to touch and view other people's private parts or stand too close to them or touch their own genitals. Such behavior becomes less common after 5 years of age.
- Such sexual behavior can become a problem, if it becomes a habit. For example, a 3-year-old boy who touches his genitals many times during the day cannot focus on other activities, is showing a normal sexual behavior but with a high rate which is not right.
- The actions that are less common in the list of normal sexual behavior need more focus to make sure that there is no sexual problem.

Sexual development and behavior in Children: https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/sexual_development_and_behavior_in_children.pdf

Q8

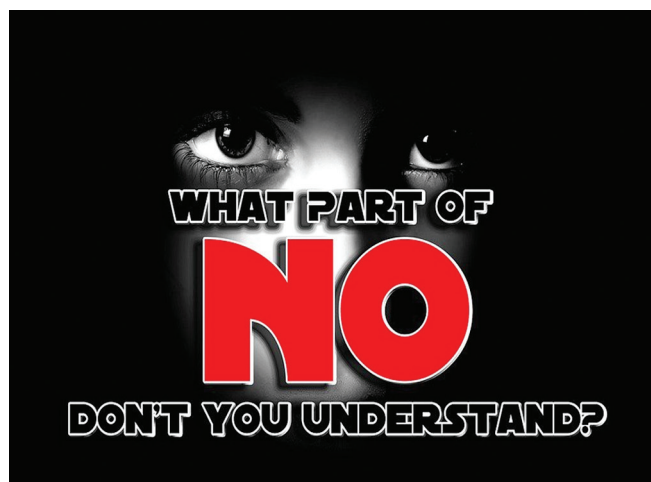
My girl child shies away from any male fellow of age 30–45 years, might be uncle, her sir, or my friends even after repeated meetings but she is quite comfortable with male of grandparent's age or male below age of 30 years. For this reason, she does not want to join any sports where she will be taught by sir or refrain herself from even any video chats where any uncle or our male relative is present. I am really confused. Kindly guide.

When the abuse is suspected in a child, the focus should be on the appropriate parental response, diversion from such behaviors in social events, going through hints for additional assessment, referring to a counselor if the behavior continues or reporting the matter to protective agencies (under the law).

When the abuse is not suspected but the sexual behavior needs extra assessment, the child must be referred to a mental health professional where the professional may take a full detailed history from you as well.

Q9

If a child is not able to forget the trauma, are there chances that a child can turn violent (physically/sexually) and begin to harm others (no self-harm)? Will it take another curve in case of sexual assault..... meaning are there any chances that a child wants to continue it and he or she may indulge in unfair relationship?



Source: Pixabay.

Studies have shown that ignorance and abuse of a child in his/her childhood may lead to a criminal behavior in adulthood. Child abuse may also lead to other health problems for the child. CSA causes a painful life experience and no single sign or symptoms show up among all the victims of sexual abuse.

Sexually abused children are usually treated with special attention and affection for their sexual behavior. This may contribute to advanced sexual activity among the children who have gone through CSA. This behavior may also continue into adulthood. For example, the adult victims may think that providing sex to others may help them to receive love and affection.

Several studies have shown that CSA leads to sexually risky behavior in women.

Q10

Please tell how can children ever recover from such an experience? How does a parent possibly handle knowing that their child was sexually assaulted? I am fearful that I would fall apart.



Source: iSTOCK.

Understanding the Impact of Sexual Abuse

If a professional says to you or you feel that your child has been sexually abused, understanding the effects of abusive experiences may help you to know how the sexual abuse has affected your child's behavior.

Effect of Sexual Abuse on Children and Adolescents

- Sexual abuse violates physical and emotional limitations, so the children who are abused may feel that the world is an unsafe place to be or may think that adults are not trustworthy, or they may also not be aware of the unsafe situations. There are many factors that influence how children think and feel about the abuse happened to them, how it affects them and how to cope up with them.
- Resilience in children and young adults after experiencing sexual abuse enables them to thrive despite the traumatic event, there are ways to help your child or young adult to build resilience.

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<https://www.cineink.com/radio/child-abuse-sexual-exploitation-bullying-bennett-university-students-share-stories.html/>
The recording was part of the workshop: <https://youtu.be/hZhA34UeTI4>.
4. Child Line for the beautiful documentary on sexual abuse “Komal”.
5. Time Media School for the 19 min Video on sexual abuse.
6. All iSTOCK images have been purchased by Dr Kiran Aggarwal. All Pixabay images are free online. Images from Social Axiom Foundation are supplied as voluntary assistance to IAP guidelines.

USEFUL RESOURCES

- Child Helpline 1098: childlineindia.org
- POCSO e-box: ncpcr.gov.in
- Child Abuse Study 2007 (MWCD Govt. of India)
- POCSO Amendment Act 2019
- User Handbook on POCSO Act: NCPCR
- Juvenile Justice Act Rules 2016
- <https://www.aafp.org/afp/2010/1115/afp20101115p1233.pdf>
- https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/sexual_development_and_behavior_in_children.pdf
- https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/f_abused.pdf. Sexual Behaviors in Children: Evaluation and Management: Nancy D Kellogg, MD, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, San Antonio, Texas.
- <https://www.hindustantimes.com/lifestyle/relationships/study-reveals-spanking-may-affect-brain-development-of-a-child-101618287968399.html>.



Source: Pixabay.