

# PREVENTING CHILD

# SEXUAL ABUSE

## WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

Child sexual abuse is the involvement of a child (person less than 18 years old) in sexual activity that violates the laws or social taboos of society and that he/she

- ✔ 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<sup>1</sup>



## WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS?

Many children wait to report or never report child sexual abuse. Experiencing child sexual abuse is an adverse childhood experience (ACE) that can affect how a person thinks, acts, and feels over a lifetime, resulting in short- and long-term physical and mental/emotional health consequences.

Examples of physical health consequences include:

- ✔ unwanted/unplanned pregnancies<sup>2</sup>
- ✔ physical injuries<sup>3</sup>
- ✔ long-term chronic conditions such as heart disease, obesity, and cancer<sup>4</sup>

Examples of mental health consequences include:

- ✔ depression<sup>5</sup>
- ✔ post-traumatic stress disorder

Examples of behavioral consequences include:

- ✔ substance abuse
- ✔ risky sexual behaviors<sup>6</sup>
- ✔ suicide or suicide attempts<sup>7</sup>

# HOW BIG IS THE PROBLEM?

## 1 IN 4 GIRLS AND 1 IN 13 BOYS

experience child sexual abuse at some point in childhood<sup>8</sup>.

## \$9.3 BILLION

The total lifetime economic burden of child sexual abuse in the United States in 2015 (although this is likely an underestimate of the true impact of the problem since child sexual abuse is underreported)<sup>9</sup>



## APPROXIMATELY 90%

of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone the child or child's family knows<sup>10</sup>.

## APPROXIMATELY 3.7 MILLION

children experience sexual abuse each year in the United States<sup>11</sup>.

## CURRENT GAPS IN CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION

Adults must take the steps needed to prevent child sexual abuse. Adults are responsible for ensuring that all children have safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments. Resources for child sexual abuse have mostly focused on treatment for victims and criminal justice-oriented approaches for perpetrators. While these efforts are important after child sexual abuse has occurred, little investment has been made in primary prevention, or preventing child sexual abuse **BEFORE** it occurs. Thus, limited effective evidence-based strategies for proactively protecting children from child sexual abuse are available. More resources are needed to develop, evaluate, and implement evidence-based child sexual abuse primary prevention strategies to ensure that all children have safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

CDC surveillance systems, violence prevention initiatives, and efforts to support partners in the field have increased our understanding of child sexual abuse, but critical gaps still need to be addressed. We can all lead efforts to prevent child sexual abuse and improve the health, well-being, and quality of life for children, families, and communities. CDC has identified gaps in research and practice that are important to address in our efforts to promote primary prevention of child sexual abuse.

## Improve surveillance systems and data collection

- ✔ Develop and implement surveillance systems to assess child sexual abuse perpetration and victimization in real-time to measure recent and lifetime exposure
- ✔ Use standard definitions and measures of child sexual abuse to increase availability and quality of data
- ✔ Collect data focused on victimization AND perpetration of all forms of child sexual abuse to improve our understanding of all aspects of child sexual abuse

## Increase understanding of risk and protective factors

- ✔ Develop research that assesses exposure to child sexual abuse and risk and protective factors over time to inform primary prevention efforts
- ✔ Identify risk and protective factors for child sexual abuse at multiple levels of influence—individual, relationship, community, and societal
- ✔ Examine and identify distinctions between different types of child sexual abuse perpetration to inform primary prevention efforts
- ✔ Determine how risk and protective factors for child sexual abuse perpetration interact with other forms of violence perpetration to better prevent all forms of violence

## Strengthen and develop evidence-based policies, programs, and practices

- ✔ Further evaluate evidence-based approaches in different populations, communities, and settings
- ✔ Identify, develop and evaluate programs and practices that reduce youth and adult perpetrated CSA
- ✔ Develop and evaluate comprehensive primary prevention programs, practices, and policies that address individual, relationship, community, and societal factors that impact child sexual abuse

## Disseminate and implement evidence-based policies, programs, and practices

- ✔ Act on the best available evidence now – scale-up, implement, and communicate information about existing evidence-based strategies to prevent child sexual abuse
- ✔ Explore how to adapt the existing evidence-based interventions for different populations and settings
- ✔ Identify strategies for effectively communicating best practices for child sexual abuse prevention among practitioners, researchers, clinicians and others working directly with children

Youth and family-serving organizations, public/governmental agencies, faith communities, and others must have the information necessary for effective primary prevention strategies. Child sexual abuse is preventable, and CDC provides leadership, using a public health approach, to reduce children's exposure to sexual abuse and ensure safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for all children.

# REFERENCES

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TO LEARN MORE PLEASE VISIT:

[www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/childsexualabuse.html](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/childsexualabuse.html)

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