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PROTECTCHILDREN.CA

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

IT IS YOUR BUSINESS



CANADIAN CENTRE *for* CHILD PROTECTION®
Helping families. Protecting children.





The Canadian Centre for Child Protection (C3P) is a national charity dedicated to the personal safety of all children. Our goal is to reduce the sexual abuse and exploitation of children, assist in the location of missing children, and prevent child victimization through a number of programs, services, and resources for Canadian families, educators, child-serving organizations, law enforcement, and other parties.

Learn more about our 35+ years of protecting children at protectchildren.ca.

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INTRODUCTION

Child sexual abuse is a serious problem within our society and occurs more frequently than people realize. In order to protect children, it is important to understand what child sexual abuse is, how it happens, and how to recognize behaviour that may signal a child is in distress. Understanding the role of technology in the recording of child sexual abuse and proliferation of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) on the internet is equally critical.

Did you know?

		
<p>Before age 15, approximately 1 in 10 children are sexually abused by an adult.^{1,2}</p>	<p>In most child sexual abuse cases, the offender is known to the child.^{3,4}</p>	<p>Most cases of child sexual abuse never come to the attention of police and/or child welfare.^{5,6}</p>
	<p>Child sexual abuse has adverse impacts on health and well-being.^{7,8}</p>	
		<p>Project Arachnid[®] issues thousands of CSAM removal notices every day to internet service providers around the globe.⁹</p>
		<p><i>Note: Project Arachnid is a web platform designed to detect known images of CSAM and issue removal notices to providers around the world.</i></p>

¹ Cotter, A. (2021). Criminal victimization in Canada, 2019. *Government of Canada, Statistics Canada*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2021001/article/00014-eng.htm>

² Heidinger, L. (2022). Profile of Canadians who experienced victimization during childhood, 2018. *Government of Canada, Statistics Canada*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2022001/article/00016-eng.htm>

³ Ibrahim, D. (2022). Online child sexual exploitation and abuse in Canada: A statistical profile of police-reported incidents and court charges, 2014 to 2020. *Government of Canada, Statistics Canada*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2022001/article/00008-eng.htm>

⁴ Heidinger, L. (2022). Profile of Canadians who experienced victimization during childhood, 2018. *Government of Canada, Statistics Canada*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2022001/article/00016-eng.htm>

⁵ Ibrahim, D. (2022). Online child sexual exploitation and abuse in Canada: A statistical profile of police-reported incidents and court charges, 2014 to 2020. *Government of Canada, Statistics Canada*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2022001/article/00008-eng.htm>

⁶ Heidinger, L. (2022). Profile of Canadians who experienced victimization during childhood, 2018. *Government of Canada, Statistics Canada*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2022001/article/00016-eng.htm>

⁷ Afifi, T. O., MacMillan, H. L., Boyle, M., Cheung, K., Taillieu, T., Turner, S., & Sareen, J. (2016). Child abuse and physical health in adulthood. *Health Reports*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 82-003-X. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-003-x/2016003/article/14339-eng.pdf>

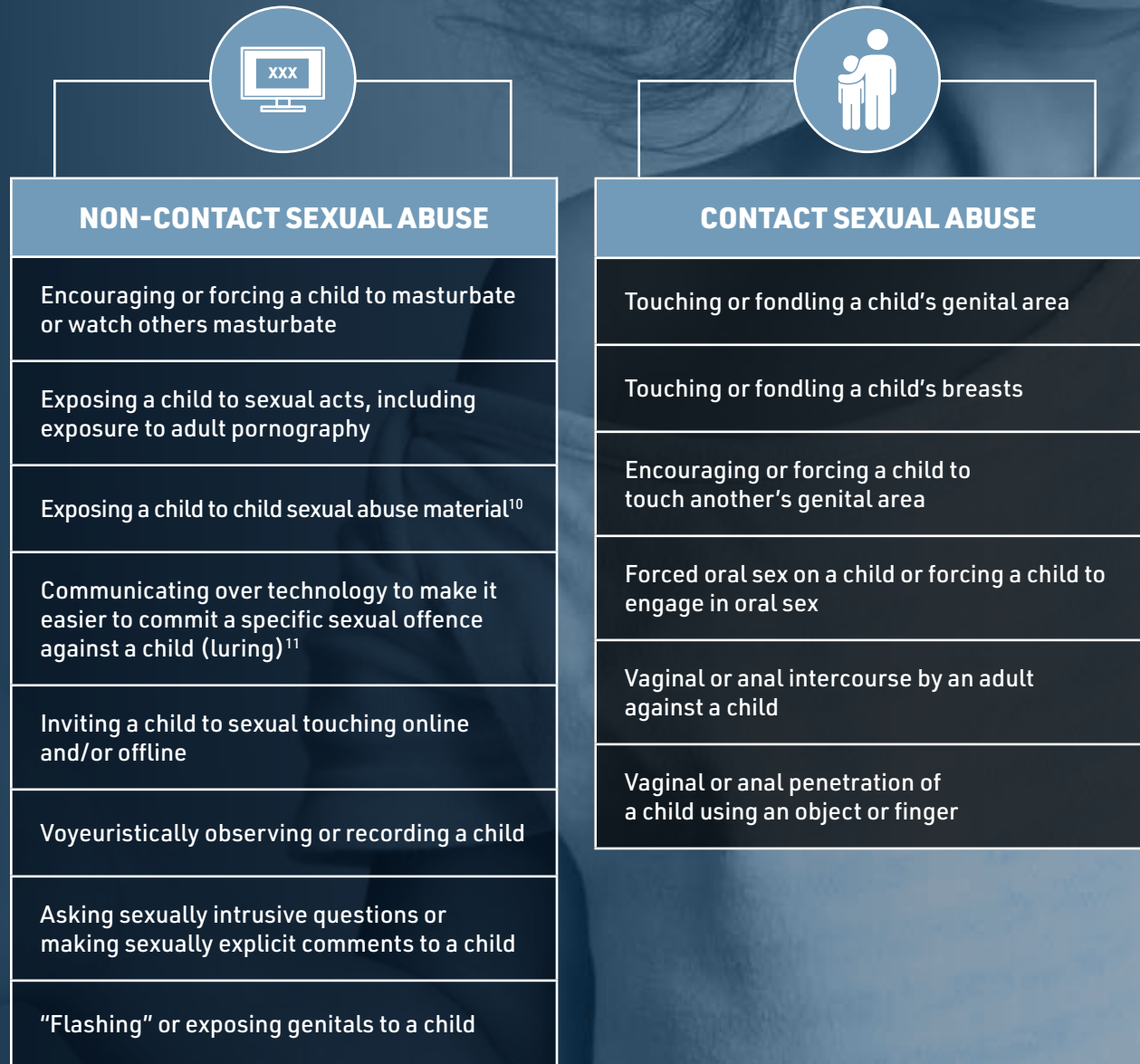
⁸ Turner, S., Menzies, C., Fortier, J., Garces, I., Struck, S., Taillieu, T., Georgiades, K., & Afifi, T. O. (2020). Child maltreatment and sleep problems among adolescents in Ontario: A cross sectional study. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 99, 104309. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104309>

⁹ Canadian Center for Child Protection. (2021). *Project Arachnid: Online availability of child sexual abuse material. An analysis of CSAM and harmful-abusive content linked to certain electronic service providers*. https://protectchildren.ca/pdfs/C3P_ProjectArachnidReport_en.pdf

What is child sexual abuse?

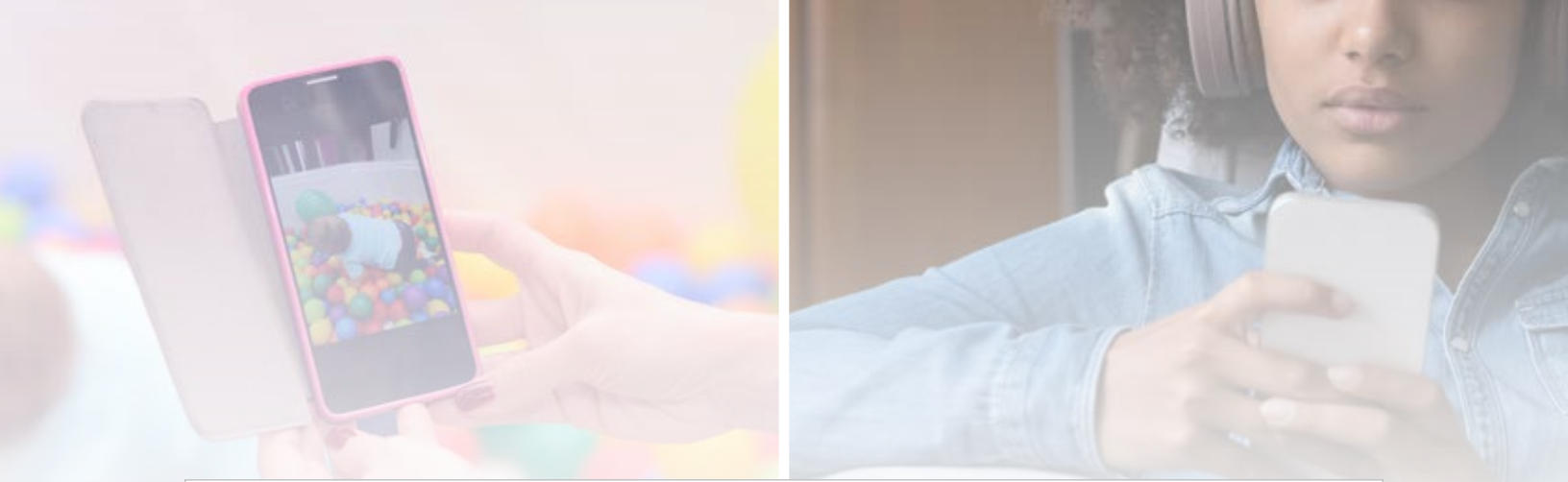
Child sexual abuse includes a wide range of behaviours and situations. Offences can range from one-time occurrences to multiple occurrences; from one offender to multiple offenders; from non-contact to contact sexual offences; with or without the use of violence.

The following are examples of contact and non-contact sexual abuse, but are not meant to be an exhaustive list:



¹⁰ Child sexual abuse material (CSAM) is any image, video, or other recording of a minor being sexually abused or that is exploitative. This can include recordings that focus on a child's sexual organs, sexual posing, or sexual acts involving a child. It should not be confused with pornography. An offender may be involved in accessing, creating, possessing, and/or distributing CSAM, all of which involve the sexual abuse and/or exploitation of children. While some CSAM offences may involve a contact offence (e.g., creating CSAM at the same time the contact offence is committed), others may not (e.g., accessing CSAM).

¹¹ The *Criminal Code of Canada* offence called "luring of a child" is when someone uses telecommunications to communicate with someone they believe to be under the age of 18 years in order to facilitate committing a specified sexual offence against that child. Online luring, which often includes grooming, generally involves manipulation to increase compliance for the purpose of sexually exploiting the child.



THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY AND THE INTERNET IN CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

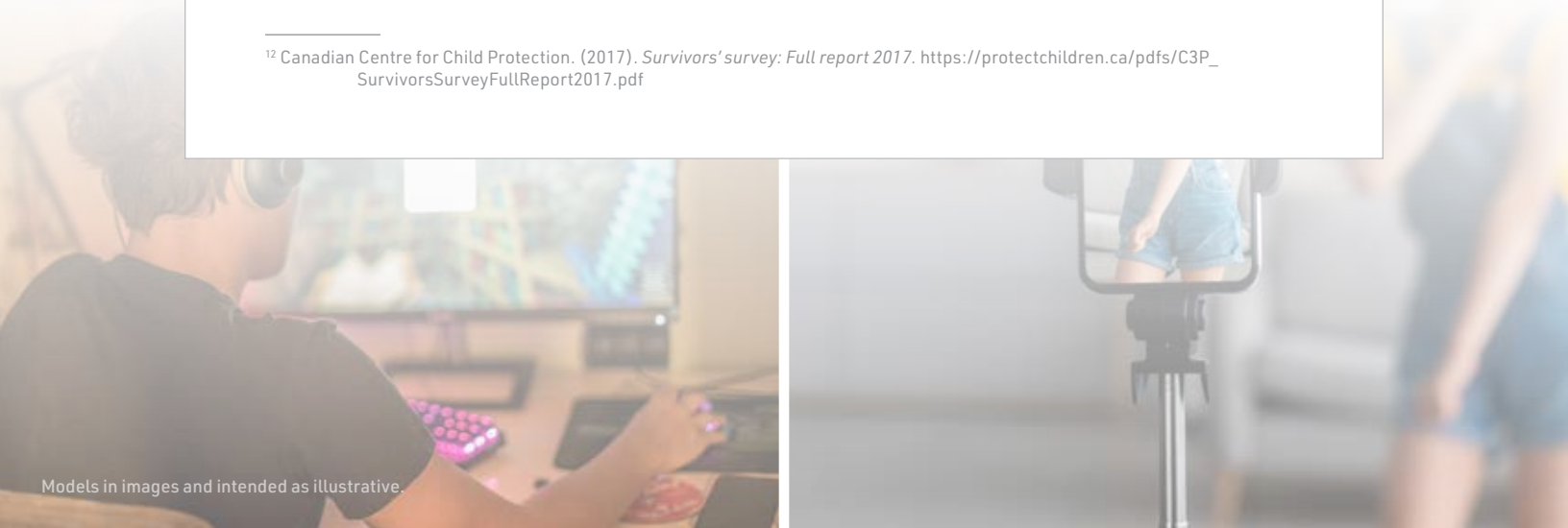
The role of technology in facilitating sexual offences against children has increased significantly. It is commonly misused to create a record of the abuse, which is called child sexual abuse material (CSAM).

CSAM is often created and used for a sexual purpose, and can involve an image, video, or drawing of a child being sexually abused or posed in a sexual way. Children of all ages – from infants and toddlers to school-aged children and teens – can be depicted in CSAM.

CSAM adds an additional layer of trauma for survivors who have no control over how their images/videos are used and shared. Nearly 70% of respondents to C3P's International Survivors' Survey indicated they constantly worry about being recognized by someone who has seen images/videos of their abuse.¹²

To learn more about how C3P is supporting and advocating for survivors of CSAM, along with utilizing Project Arachnid to address the removal of this abusive material, visit protectchildren.ca.

¹² Canadian Centre for Child Protection. (2017). *Survivors' survey: Full report 2017*. https://protectchildren.ca/pdfs/C3P_SurvivorsSurveyFullReport2017.pdf



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THE IMPACT OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

It is widely understood that sexual abuse affects a child's emotional, psychological, cognitive, interpersonal, and physical well-being. Some symptoms may include:

- Learning difficulties due to changes in concentration, attention, memory, impulse control, and organization
- Emotional imbalance, such as extreme moods, anxiety, depression, and numbness
- Difficulty forming relationships and trusting others
- Physical complaints such as headaches, stomach aches, and chronic pain
- Change in appetite
- Disruptions in sleeping patterns – not sleeping at night, unable to get up in the morning, sleeping more during the day
- Self-harming behaviour such as cutting, using drugs, consuming alcohol, smoking, promiscuity, recklessness
- Sensitivities to sound, touch, taste, movement
- Lack of coordination

Note: There may be no observable impacts

Sexual abuse that does not include physical contact can still have a psychological and emotional impact on victims.

While sexual abuse can have harmful long-term effects on a child, early detection with appropriate support and counselling is vital to the healing process.



Models in image and intended as illustrative.

WHAT IS CONCERNING BEHAVIOUR?

(Particularly with children 12 years old and under)

Children communicate how they are feeling through their behaviour, so it is important to pay attention to behavioural changes. If you notice a child exhibiting any of the behaviours outlined below, provide support and assistance to help determine what is causing the child's symptoms of distress.

- 1. Advanced sexual knowledge:** The child has sexual knowledge beyond their level of development. This may include information about certain smells, sounds, tastes, and/or visual details of sexual activity.
- 2. Sexualized behaviour:** The child acts out explicit sexual behaviour. The behaviour is inconsistent with behaviour of children the same age. Other children and adults may be complaining about the behaviour. This behaviour could involve toys, peers, or adults.
- 3. Withdrawn/depressed:** The child becomes increasingly withdrawn. They resist playing with their usual friends and withdraw from activities they previously enjoyed.
- 4. Clingy:** The child becomes extremely clingy and resists doing anything independently.
- 5. Decline in school performance:** The child's performance at school declines and their grades drop.
- 6. Distressed around a particular adult:** The child shows distress or resistance to spending time with a particular adult.
- 7. Excessively seeks time with a particular adult:** The child excessively seeks time with a specific adult who gives them extra attention, gifts, or privileges.
- 8. Aggressive:** The child seems agitated and acts out aggressively towards others (yelling, hitting, putting others down).
- 9. Self-destructive:** The child is physically harming themselves and sharing feelings indicating a lack of self-worth (for example, "I wish I was dead," "I shouldn't be alive," "What's the point in living?").
- 10. Physical symptoms:** The child shows physical signs of abuse in the genital region (such as pain, bleeding, discharge, bladder infection).
- 11. Disrupted sleep patterns:** The child's sleep patterns suddenly change. They may have difficulty falling and/or staying asleep, experiencing nightmares or night terrors, sleeping all the time, wetting the bed.

It is important to note that changes in a child's behaviour should be further explored, regardless of whether sexual abuse is suspected to be the reason.

Sexual abuse is a process. It often begins before sexual touching starts.

GROOMING

Grooming is a process used by offenders to sexually abuse children. It is a calculated way to build trust with a child and the adults around a child with the purpose to gain access and secure time alone with a child. In extreme cases, offenders may use threats and physical force to sexually assault or abuse a child.

Grooming is a gradual and escalating process that begins with subtle behaviours and boundary transgressions. These transgressions are rationalized and normalized to desensitize the child and adults around the child to accept the behaviour. The behaviours then escalate into sexualizing a legitimized relationship that has been established with the child. Tactics such as bribes, gifts, and games may be used to coerce the child. Survivors often say the grooming and the betrayal was the most corrosive part of the abuse.

The purpose of grooming is to:

- Manipulate the perceptions of other adults around the child
- Manipulate the child into becoming compliant, which reduces the likelihood of a disclosure and increases the likelihood that the child will repeatedly return to the offender
- Reduce the likelihood of the child being believed if they do disclose
- Reduce the likelihood of the abuse being suspected

If something doesn't seem quite right, trust your instincts

Red flag behaviour:

- Repeated use of poor judgment when interacting with children
- Normalizing or minimizing inappropriate interactions with children
- Distorting relationships with children (e.g., adults using children to meet their own emotional needs, treating children as mini adults)
- Frequently initiating or creating opportunities to have exclusive time alone and/or communication with a child (or certain children)
- Making others feel uncomfortable by ignoring social, emotional, or physical boundaries or limits with adults and children
- Refusing to let a child set their own limits or teasing or belittling a child to keep them from setting limits
- Excessive touching, hugging, kissing, tickling, wrestling with, or holding children, especially when a child does not want this physical contact or attention
- Communicating with a child outside their role with the child (e.g., secretive, frequently, via social media, late at night, about topics unrelated to their role)
- Frequently making sexual references or telling sexual/suggestive jokes to children or in the presence of children
- Exposing children to adult sexual interactions without apparent concern
- Encouraging children to behave sexually towards each other
- Giving special attention to or displaying favouritism towards certain children, and then withholding attention to punish and exclude a child
- Displaying preferences for children of a certain age and gender



- Excessively bathing a child
- Deliberately walking in on a child changing
- Deliberately walking in on a child toileting
- Asking a child to watch the adult toileting or changing
- Tickling and/or “accidentally” touching genitalia
- Activities that involve removing clothes (e.g., massaging, swimming, wrestling)
- Playing games that include touching genitalia (e.g., measuring games)
- Teasing a child about breast and genital development
- Discussing sexually explicit information with a child or in the presence of a child
- Wanting and/or taking pictures of children in underwear and sexual posing for a sexual purpose
- Exposing a child to adult pornography

While there’s no checklist for identifying a sex offender, or those with a sexual interest in children, adults can help protect children by watching out for red flag behaviours and boundary transgressions.

Responding to odd interactions

If you become aware of interactions between a child and an adult that seem inappropriate, remember to carefully identify the behaviours of concern as opposed to making assumptions about the adult's intentions. Consider the following:

- 1. Use your instincts as a guide.** Ask yourself whether a reasonable observer would feel comfortable witnessing the behaviour. Consider the context – is the behaviour an appropriate response to the child's needs or does it fall outside those guidelines? Does the behaviour seem inappropriate for the situation and the age of the child?

EXAMPLES:



Appropriate behaviour: An educator who rubs a Grade 1 student's back to console them after falling and hurting themselves on the playground.



Inappropriate behaviour: A soccer coach who rubs a 16-year-old's back while they are on the sidelines waiting to go into the game and persists even when the teen gestures for them to stop.

Ask yourself:

- Does the interaction between the child and the adult seem odd?
- Is the child singled out and favoured by the adult?
- Does it make you or the child feel uncomfortable?
- Does the adult exhibit odd behaviour frequently?
- Has anyone else made a comment about or noticed the adult's odd interaction with the child?

Children with special needs: With some children, certain behaviours may be appropriate as they may be used to calm the child (such as rubbing the child's back), which would therefore be responding to the child's needs. These behaviours should be formalized as part of an individualized plan for that particular child.



2. Control your reaction. Remain calm and focus on the child's needs. Children look to an adult's response in these situations.

3. Determine how the child feels about the behaviour. Find out whether the child feels uncomfortable, scared, or confused. Keep in mind that the child may not reveal their true feelings for a variety of reasons, including to avoid causing trouble, to protect the individual, out of embarrassment or shame, or they may enjoy the attention, etc.

4. Do not dismiss your concerns. A child may not see any issues or reasons for concern; that does not mean your concerns are misguided. Once again, trust your instincts.

5. Take action. Report the questionable behaviour to the organization the individual works for or volunteers for, and/or to the appropriate oversight body.

Important: If you suspect a child is in need of protection, for example if you suspect child sexual abuse, you may be required by law to report it. See page 19 for more information about mandatory reporting.

The focus should be on whether the adult's behaviour presents a risk to a child.

MYTHS about offenders

- Offenders always force children into sexual activity
- Most offenders are strangers
- All offenders were sexually abused as children
- All offenders look creepy and weird
- Nice people who like and help children would never sexually abuse them

FACTS about offenders

- Adults who sexually abuse children usually know the child in some capacity
- For adults who sexually offend against children, it is more common for the offender to be male than female
- Adults who sexually abuse children include those who have been or are in adult sexual relationships
- Offenders may test a child's boundaries with other adults around, such as "accidentally" touching them in private areas while rubbing their backs, tickling, wrestling, etc.
- Some offenders start engaging in concerning behaviour during adolescence



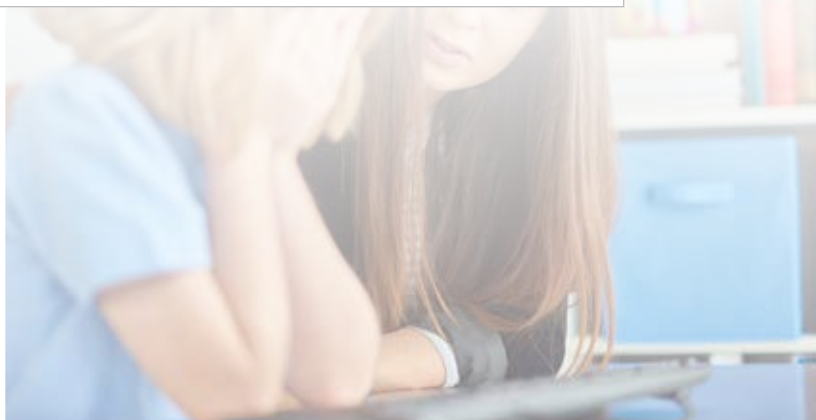
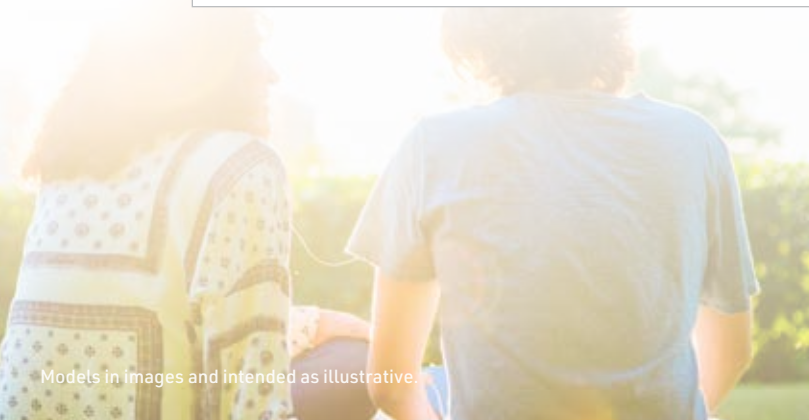
DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL ABUSE

While it is difficult to think of a child having to come forward and disclose sexual abuse, it is important that adults are appropriately prepared to respond. The likelihood of receiving a disclosure from a child can hinge upon the behaviour of the protective adult figure in their life. A willingness to disclose sexual abuse will greatly increase if the child senses that the adult is capable of managing the sensitive information.

Disclosure has often been described or portrayed as a one-time event. Although that can occur, the fact is that most disclosures span days, months, or years. If the disclosure process is interrupted by a negative reaction, for example, from the protective adult figure in their life, the child may discontinue the disclosure.

Ask yourself the following:

- How can I increase the likelihood a child would tell me if something happened to them?
- Would I know if a child was trying to tell me something happened to them?
- What do I think a disclosure would sound or look like?
- How would I respond?



Models in images and intended as illustrative.

MYTHS about disclosure

- If a child is sexually abused, they always immediately tell a safe adult in their life
- Children are always going to disclose if directly questioned by their parent or an adult authority figure who can help

FACTS about disclosure

- Research indicates that, for many complex and valid reasons, children often delay disclosing experiences of sexual abuse. For example, for children who were sexually or physically abused by an adult, approximately one-third disclosed the abuse to a source of support before the age of 15, such as a family member, friend, or teacher.¹³ Many survivors delay disclosure until adulthood, and some never disclose the abuse^{14,15}
- Children do not always realize that what they have experienced constitutes abuse, so they don't disclose
- Disclosures often unfold gradually, and may be presented in a series of hints
- Children often imply something has happened to them without directly stating they were sexually abused. They may be testing the adult's reaction to their "hint." If they are ready, they follow up with a larger hint to see if the person can handle hearing about it

¹³ Burczycka, M. (2017). *Section 1: Profile of Canadian adults who experienced childhood maltreatment*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/14698/01-eng.htm>

¹⁴ McElvaney, R. (2015). Disclosure of child sexual abuse: Delays, non disclosure and partial disclosure. What the research tells us and implications for practice. *Child Abuse Review*, 24(3), 159–169. <https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2280>

¹⁵ Canadian Centre for Child Protection. (2017). *Survivors' survey: Full report 2017*. https://protectchildren.ca/pdfs/C3P_SurvivorsSurveyFullReport2017.pdf



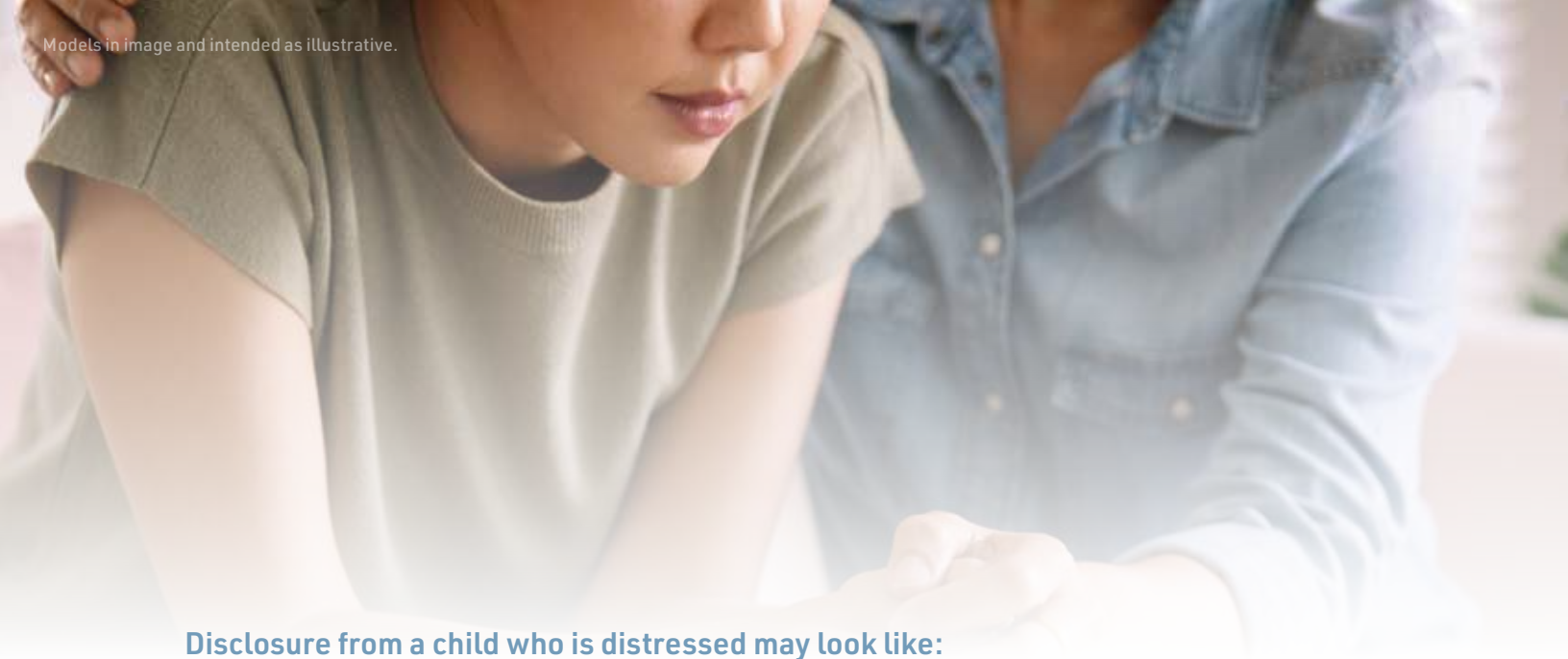
HOW DO I KNOW IF A CHILD IS DISCLOSING?

Hints of disclosure

What disclosure from a child might sound like:

- "What do you think of _____?"
- "_____ is mean."
- "_____ does not pay attention to me anymore."
- "_____ likes boys better than girls."
- "I don't want to go to _____'s house anymore."
- "I don't like _____ anymore."
- "Please don't go! Please don't leave me with _____."
- (Child desperately tries to avoid being left alone with a certain individual)*
- "I don't like it when you're gone."
- "I feel uncomfortable when you aren't here."
- "I'm not comfortable with _____."
- "I'm bad."
- "You'll be mad at me."
- "_____ gets mad a lot."
- "_____ did things to me."
- "_____ does bad stuff to me that I don't like."
- "_____ plays games with me that I don't like."

Models in image and intended as illustrative.



Disclosure from a child who is distressed may look like:

- Freezing emotions – not showing emotion
- Excessive sadness and worry
- Extreme aggressiveness and risk-taking behaviour
- Sudden resistance to being alone with a person whose company they previously enjoyed
- Unexpected hostility towards caregivers or those closest to them

Avoid immediately concluding behavioural changes are because of sexual abuse – this is only one of many possibilities.

Why a child might not tell

A child who has experienced sexual abuse will often delay disclosure or not disclose if they:

- Feel they will not be believed
- Have been manipulated and groomed by the offender and made to feel like a participant in the abuse
- Have either been threatened with violence, or there is a threat of violence against their family, friends, or pets
- Do not want to lose perceived benefits (e.g., gifts, status, or playing time on a sports team, academic recognition)
- Believe that they are receiving love and acceptance from the offender
- Fear judgment
- Can't identify a safe adult to tell
- Feel shame and embarrassment
- Fear their life will change dramatically (e.g., loss or breakup of family)
- Do not recognize that they have been victimized
- Have not been believed when previously attempting to disclose

How to respond and support a child during a disclosure

"While it is upsetting to hear a child disclosure, the child's needs must come first. Appropriate reactions to a child's disclosure of sexual abuse are crucial as they affect the severity of his/her overall trauma."

– David Finkelhor, *Child Sexual Abuse: New Theory and Research*

LISTEN

What a child needs when disclosing is for you to listen. They may fear adults' reactions, as well as not being believed. It takes incredible courage to share such an experience. Listen attentively.

CONTROL YOUR REACTION

Do not over or underreact. Be aware of your facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice – the child will be sensitive to your reaction. A child can pick up on differences between what an adult is saying and how they are acting. If body language and verbal language do not match, the child will feel confused.

DO NOT CORRECT LANGUAGE

A child who has been sexually abused may use slang or idiosyncratic words for genitals and sexual acts. You should not educate a child about correct terms during a disclosure – doing so could make the child feel judged, and might prevent the child from continuing to disclose. Also, be careful not to repackage what the child is saying or to make assumptions about what has happened.

TAKE IT SERIOUSLY

Let the child know that what they are telling you is very important. Explain to the child that you are going to listen very carefully to what they have to share.

AFFIRM THE CHILD FOR THEIR COURAGE

It takes tremendous courage to disclose sexual abuse, and a child will often assume responsibility for the abuse. Assure the child they did the right thing by telling you, and they are not alone.

PROTECT THE CHILD AND OTHER CHILDREN FROM OVEREXPOSURE

Respect the child's need for privacy and confidentiality, and make sure that no other children are around to hear the child's disclosure. Only adults who will be directly involved in taking action should be present.

SHOW WARMTH AND CARING

Use a calm voice and get down to the child's level in order to make eye contact with the child. A child who discloses needs appropriate support and understanding.

AVOID MAKING PROMISES

Tell the child that you will take quick action. Avoid making promises about matters that you have no control over (e.g., "I will make sure the offender goes to jail.").

REPORT THE DISCLOSURE

If a child discloses an abuse experience or you suspect the child has been abused, you may be required by law to immediately report this to a child welfare or law enforcement agency. See page 19 for more information about mandatory reporting.

Disclosure is typically more a process than a one-time event.

DENIAL

Sometimes children deny that abuse took place, even after making a disclosure. This is especially the case if the child is questioned by an adult authority figure. It is important for adults to understand that children are often hesitant, and may seem confused or uncertain during a disclosure. Be careful not to disregard a child's possible disclosure just because it appears vague or inconsistent, or fluctuates and/or seems unbelievable. If they deny abuse took place, or appear hesitant and/or unclear, avoid assuming the child doesn't need adult assistance.

Models in image and intended as illustrative.

HOW TO INCREASE THE LIKELIHOOD YOU WOULD RECOGNIZE A DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL ABUSE FROM A CHILD

- Increase your overall awareness about what child sexual abuse is, how it happens, and how to recognize behaviour that may signal a child is in distress
- Increase children's awareness about personal safety using developmentally appropriate educational materials (visit kidsintheknow.ca for details)
- Nurture a consistent, positive relationship with children
- Listen to and appreciate children's feelings, hopes, and fears, and make sure children know you are available to listen and help
- Notice and respond to changes in children's typical behaviour patterns

TAKING ACTION

Reporting child sexual abuse

If you are concerned that a child is being abused or is at risk of harm, share your concerns with a child protection authority or police in your area. Sharing the information you have is important. It will be up to the entity that receives the report to determine what action is appropriate in the circumstances. Children depend on the action of adults to protect them. If you have concerns about a child, tell someone, report it.

Minimizing or denying what appears to be a disclosure of sexual abuse from a child is not uncommon. Concerns often revolve around worrying about interfering, being wrong, and causing problems for the family or the accused. **Reporting is simply telling what you know to the appropriate authorities – you are not required to prove anything. Reporting is essential to protecting a child, as it provides professionals with the information they need to be able to look into the matter, and take steps to ensure the child’s safety. It also allows the parents or guardians, assuming they are not the ones putting the child at risk, to take proactive steps to protect their child.**

You may also have a legal duty to report. A legal duty to report is a legal obligation that is set out in the law. Each province/territory has a law that outlines the scope of the duty for that jurisdiction.¹⁶ Failing to report when you have a legal duty to do so may result in penalties such as a fine, imprisonment or loss of employment – the precise penalties also vary by province or territory. A legal duty is NOT the same as a moral duty; a legal duty is limited to what is set out in the law itself. Even if the information you have does not meet the threshold of a legal duty to report, you can always contact police or child protective services in your area to consult before formally reporting. In some provinces/territories, you may be able to consult without sharing your contact information.

¹⁶ To find out more information about reporting obligations in your province, visit the following website: <https://www.cybertip.ca/en/child-sexual-abuse/duty-to-report/#province-territory-reporting>

Note that, with respect to historical abuse or abuse that is now over, you may or may not still be required to report it. If a person learns about sexual abuse that is no longer occurring, or that took place a long time ago, there may not be a specific legal duty to report because there is no child in direct need of protection/intervention. Nonetheless, reporting what you know may still be very important, especially if the abuser still has access to children. Keep in mind that sexual offending is generally not limited to one victim or one set of circumstances, and just because a situation with one child has ended does not mean that the person who committed the abuse is safe to be around other children. The information you share may be critical to preventing future abuse, or to disrupting/stopping abuse that is in progress.

Reporting concerning behaviour

If you observe or hear about concerning behaviour or a situation between an adult and a child that does not hit the threshold to suspect abuse, but is inappropriate and questionable, report your concerns. If the individual has contact with the child through a child-serving organization, report your concerns to the organization. If the individual has contact in another capacity (coach, teacher, babysitter), report your concerns to the parents and/or the appropriate authorities.



Models in image and intended as illustrative.

How to provide ongoing support to a child following a disclosure

STRUCTURE

Keep activities and routines the same. Structure and familiarity will offer security to the child.

CONNECTION

Let the child know you care by being present and communicating openly and frequently with them. Check in with the child regularly to see how they are doing.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Make sure the disclosure and information about the abuse is limited to those who need to know, and those people are not openly discussing what happened.

BOUNDARIES

Model and maintain healthy relationship boundaries and re-establish boundaries if the child acts out inappropriately or unsafely. Maintaining healthy boundaries and consistent expectations increases security for the child.

When a child is abused by someone in the family or by a trusted family or community member, the sense of betrayal can be overwhelming. Protective parents/guardians are often lost about what to do and how to help their child. To assist families in navigating the recovery process, C3P has developed tailored resources for protective parents/guardians looking to pick up the pieces.

Visit protectchildren.ca/survivors to learn more.

FOR PARENTS

How can risks be reduced?

TEACH your child about personal safety. Visit kidsintheknow.ca and protectkidsonline.ca for age appropriate resources.

LEARN about behaviours and situations that present risks to children and youth. For more information, refer to sections *Grooming* and *Responding to odd interactions* in this guide.

BE INVOLVED in your child's life. Attend their activities and pay attention to interactions between the adults and children.

SCREEN AND CHECK child protection policies at the organizations and activities your child attends. For more information, download *3 Steps for Choosing a Child Safe Organization* at protectchildren.ca/childsaforg.

SUPERVISE your child. Know their whereabouts and with whom they are building relationships.

ACCOMPANY your child to public areas (e.g., washrooms, stores) and to extracurricular activities.

COMMUNICATE with your child and create opportunities for them to share their feelings/stories/opinions/perspective with you.

PAY ATTENTION to changes in your child's behavior patterns – it can be a sign that your child may be in distress.

USE THE CORRECT TERMS for body parts when talking with your child. Explain the difference between okay/safe and not okay/unsafe touching. Encourage them to always tell you about any touching or secrets that are not okay/unsafe. For more information visit kidsintheknow.ca.

MODEL appropriate boundaries between adults and children. Discuss with your child the role of adults vs. children (i.e., an adult's job is to protect and look out for the best interests of children).

PAY ATTENTION AND RESPOND to interactions between children and adults. If you are uncomfortable with the way an adult is interacting with a child, get involved. For more information, refer to the section *Responding to odd interactions* in this guide.

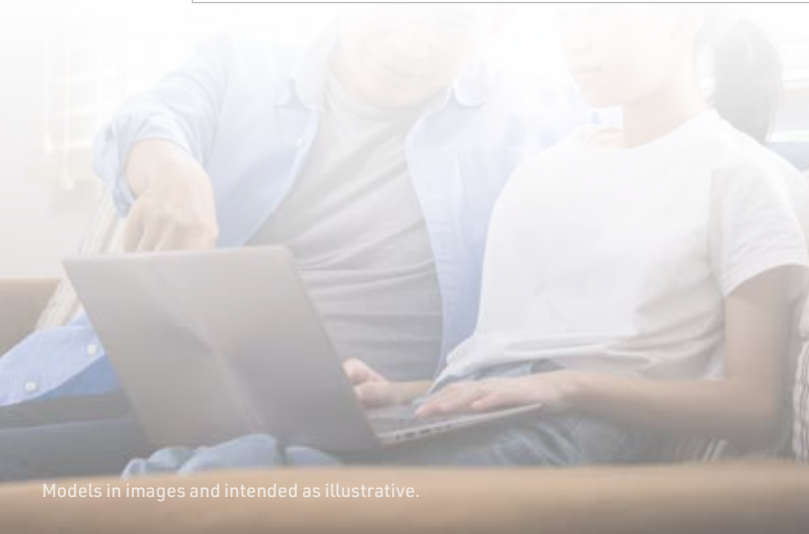
BE EMOTIONALLY AVAILABLE for your child. Let them know that you notice if they are "out of sorts," or not themselves. Ask the question, "Is there anything I can help you with?" Let your child know that you are available when they are ready to talk.



THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING CHILDREN PERSONAL SAFETY

Some offenders will test a child's personal safety awareness and attempt to desensitize a child through boundary breaking behaviour. Inappropriate interactions become more normalized when offenders are successful in breaking boundaries and blurring the lines for a child around what is okay and not okay.

Research shows that offenders are less likely to target children who present a risk of telling. Empowering children with knowledge about personal and online safety can help reduce their risk of victimization. C3P offers personal safety information at kidsintheknow.ca, as well as tips for getting the conversation started about online safety at protectkidsonline.ca.



Models in images and intended as illustrative.

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