


When Boys Have Been Sexually Abused

A Guide for Young Boys



The most
important thing
is to tell
someone and keep
telling until
you get the help
you need.

Sexual Abuse Information Series 2008

This is one of ten booklets in the Sexual Abuse Information Series:

SEXUAL ABUSE COUNSELLING

A Guide for Parents and Children

SEXUAL ABUSE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN

YOU TELL A Guide for Children and Parents

WHEN GIRLS HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED

A Guide for Young Girls

WHEN BOYS HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED

A Guide for Young Boys

WHEN TEENAGE GIRLS HAVE BEEN

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WHEN TEENAGE BOYS HAVE BEEN

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WHEN MALES HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED

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VISAC (Vancouver Incest and Sexual Abuse Centre) is a program of Family Services of Greater Vancouver. VISAC offers a wide range of services including specialized victim support services, individual and group therapy for children, youth, families, and adults who have experienced childhood sexual abuse and/or trauma.

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This booklet answers these questions:

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Kids Help Phone 1.800.668.6868

A foreword for parents

This is a booklet written for boys who have been sexually abused. Most nine to twelve year olds will be able to read it easily, but younger children may need help. The vocabulary is fairly simple, but some of the ideas are not.

Parents can help by reading and talking about this booklet with their child.

Also, one of the main ideas expressed in this booklet is that children need the help of their parents to recover from the effects of sexual abuse (unless, of course, the parents also happen to be the abusers). One way in which you can help is by reading and talking about this booklet with your son.

What is this booklet about?

If you are a boy and you have been *sexually abused*, this is a special booklet for you.

It will help to:

- Explain what sexual abuse is;
- Help you understand your feelings; and
- Tell you how to get help.

You may not want to read it all at one time, but read as much as you can. Then come back to read more later. If you find some of the words hard to understand, ask an adult or a friend to help you.

If you can talk to your parents or another adult you trust about your feelings, they may be the best people to help you with the reading. It may be a good plan to ask them to read this booklet anyway. They need to understand your feelings too.

As you go through this booklet you will read seven true stories. Eric, Kai, Pierre, Nathan, Justin, Jas and Carlos are all boys who went to a counsellor because they had been sexually abused. These are not their real names, but their stories and their feelings are very real, just as yours are. Maybe some of your feelings are like some of theirs.

What is sexual abuse?

Sexual abuse is when someone touches your private parts (the parts of your body that are covered by a bathing suit), and makes you feel

confused or uncomfortable. It's the kind of touch you feel you have to keep secret. The person who touches you knows that s/he isn't supposed to touch private parts of your body, like your penis or bum, but s/he does it anyway. A word you might hear is incest, which is sexual abuse by a family member.

When someone makes you touch their private parts or shows you pictures of children or adults touching each other's private parts, that is also sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse can be confusing. You may feel bad and good at the same time, and that's really hard to understand.

Suppose your hockey coach says he's going to show you how to make a slap shot. While he's showing you, he puts his hand down your pants and feels your bum. Then you make your shot, and your coach says "Good shot, Jimmy!" You like to hear the praise, but you don't like him touching you that way. Feeling bad and good at the same time is confusing.



Eric's story

Eric was sexually abused by his baseball coach. The coach had talked him into staying behind in the locker room after a game. What the coach wanted was to get into the shower with Eric and rub his bum with soap. Then he gave Eric five dollars and told him to be quiet about it. Eric was afraid to talk to anybody. He was especially afraid that the coach would kick him off the team and tell his parents if he dared to say anything.

Lots of abused children are afraid to tell because the abuser has made a threat. Boys like Eric who have been told to keep quiet often have bad dreams. For a long time Eric had bad dreams and couldn't do his school work. His parents noticed how upset he was and took him to see a counsellor. Eric felt much better after he told his counsellor. He felt less afraid and stopped having the bad dreams. Then he was able to do his school work because he wasn't worried all the time.

Kai's story

Kai had a teenaged babysitter who made him get on top of her and put his penis into her vagina. Kai felt a lot of shame and fear, and asked his mother to get another sitter. She asked questions and he told her what happened. She took him to a counselor and he told his counsellor that the sexual abuse was his idea, not the sitter's, and that he didn't mind being abused. Kai had heard other boys say that any boy who could have sex with a teenaged girl was lucky. So he pretended to his counsellor that he didn't have a problem.

Kai saw his counsellor for a long time before he was able to say how scared and ashamed he really felt.

When boys are sexually abused by older girls, they often have a hard time telling their real feelings.

Who is sexually abused?

Every year thousands of boys and girls in this country are sexually abused. We used to think that only girls were sexually abused. Now we know that it happens to both boys and girls. Some counsellors think that just as many boys as girls are sexually abused, but that it's often harder for boys to admit it has happened to them.



If you have been sexually abused, you're not the only one. It's much more common than you might think, and it happens to both boys and girls.

Who does the abusing?

Most abusers are men and teenage boys but abusers can be women and teenage girls too. A lot of people think the men who sexually abuse boys do it because they are gay or homosexual. This is not true. Males grow up to be either heterosexual (prefer women) or homosexual/gay (prefer other men) or bisexual (both). We don't quite know why, but we do know it has nothing to do with sexual abuse. Some boys think that if a man has sexually abused them, then they must be gay themselves, or the man wouldn't find them interesting. This idea is not true. Men who do this do it because they are sexually attracted to or 'turned on' by children.

Men who molest boys do it because they want to use their sexual power against someone smaller and weaker. They are sexual bullies. Whether they are gay or not has nothing to do with it. Gay men want to spend their time with other gay men, not with young boys.

Pierre's story

Whenever Pierre visited his uncle on the farm, his uncle would get Pierre to sit on his lap. Then he would slip his hand down Pierre's pants and touch his penis. Pierre didn't like this so he told his mother. His mother stopped him from visiting the farm, but she did not tell the police. Then she told Pierre's father. His father didn't say anything. He just stared at Pierre, and didn't talk to him as much as he used to.

Pierre told his counsellor about his uncle. He had a hard time telling the counsellor about the way his father was behaving. Pierre was afraid his father thought it was his fault. He was also afraid that his father thought he was gay.

The counsellor told Pierre that his uncle was acting that way because he was attracted to children. He also told Pierre that the abuse had nothing to do with homosexuality. The counsellor also spent some time with Pierre's father so he could learn to be more of a help to Pierre.

Boys who are molested by men are often afraid of growing up to be homosexual. Sometimes they are afraid that other boys will find out and call them names. Your sexual orientation is not affected by whether or not you have had homosexual experiences or have been sexually abused. If you are gay, a counsellor will help you understand and accept your sexual identity.

Nathan's story

Nathan had done something dangerous. He was late for school, and decided to put his thumb out for a ride. A well-dressed man in a new car pulled over to give him a ride. Nathan thought he was lucky, but the man drove him to a country road instead. He ordered Nathan out of the car and made him take off his pants. Then he stuck his penis up Nathan's anus. After this the man threatened that he would come back and hurt Nathan if he told anyone. Then he drove him back to the city.

When Nathan got back to his home, he was frightened and he had a very sore bum. He told his parents what happened. They believed him and told him it wasn't his fault and they called the police. As soon as the police had spoken to him and heard about the man with the new car, they took Nathan to the hospital. Nathan's parents were afraid he might have gotten a disease like HIV or AIDS from the man. Their family doctor gave him a check-up and told him his body was okay.

When boys are sexually abused in a painful way like Nathan was, they are often afraid of damage to their bodies. And they are often afraid of sexually transmitted infections like genital herpes or HIV and AIDS. Seeing a doctor as soon as possible after the abuse can help you with your fears.

Was it my fault that I was sexually abused?

No, it wasn't. The person who sexually abused you may have tricked you. He may have pretended that he was lost or that his dog was lost. He may have pretended he was going to show you how to hold a baseball bat. He may have pretended that he wanted to be your friend just so he could sexually touch you. He may have pretended that he was going to teach you about sex.

The person who sexually abused you may have started by showing you something really interesting, like a model train, or a video collection, or a fish tank, or his new truck. Then he abused you when you weren't expecting anything bad to happen.

The person who sexually abused you may have offered you money, or liquor and cigarettes, or a chance to play with some interesting toys. Sometimes boys think the abuse was their fault for accepting a gift, or going to the abuser's house instead of going home on time.

"The counsellor kept reminding me that I wasn't responsible. After a while I knew it was true and felt a lot better."

Sometimes kids go along with the touching because they really want the gift. Then they feel bad after and think it was their fault, but it's not. Adults are supposed to take care of kids, not trick them so they can sexually abuse them.

What do we know about people who sexually abuse children?

- Abusers don't want to get caught, because if they do they might have to go to jail. For this reason, they try to get you to keep the abuse a secret.
- Abusers may threaten you to make you keep the secret. They may tell you that you or your family may be hurt or killed if you tell. When this happens you feel trapped.
- Abusers may try to bribe you with gifts or special privileges to try to get you to go along with the sexual abuse.
- Abusers may look for other children to abuse. Some men who abuse children do it over and over again and don't want to stop. They are called pedophiles.
- Abusers like to make their victims think it was their fault. This way they have power over you. If you have been sexually abused, you get some of your power back when you learn that the abuse wasn't your fault.

Justin's story

Justin came from a home where there were lots of problems. His mother drank a lot, and she had several boyfriends. One of her boyfriends used drugs. If Justin's mother was passed out from drinking, he would make Justin take some of his drugs. Then he would sexually abuse Justin in a number of different ways.

Justin felt very, very angry. He also felt trapped because he told his mother, but she wouldn't make her boyfriend leave. One day he couldn't stand it any more, so he told his teacher. His teacher told a social worker and the social worker took him out of his home right

away. Then Justin went to live in a foster home. Justin didn't like living with strangers at first. But it was better than being trapped and sexually abused by his mother's boyfriend.

Justin's foster parents had a lot of trouble with him at first. As soon as Justin felt a little bit safe, he started to show his angry feelings. He picked fights with other children at school, set small fires in his new bedroom and even threatened another boy to make him do what he wanted. All this made him feel more in control but it also got him into more trouble, and it didn't help.

Justin told his counsellor everything right away. But he also gave the counsellor a hard time. Over time with the support of his counsellor Justin learned how to manage his angry feelings. Then he stopped trying to hurt other children. Today Justin has some good friends and is happier in his foster home.

Why is sexual abuse a bad thing?

When you have been sexually abused, you might feel that your mind is taken over by thoughts and feelings about what happened. It can be

really hard to enjoy your friends and your family. It may be hard for you to do your school work or to sleep properly at night. You may feel that there's no room in your mind for other things.

Here are how some boys are affected by sexual abuse:

Anger. You might be feeling all the mad feelings that you had to keep inside when you were being abused. You might feel mad at your mom or family because they didn't know about the abuse or didn't protect you. You might feel angry because your family is upset about the abuse. You might

feel angry because you have to talk to social workers and/or police, or because you're going to court. Anger is good because it tells us something is bothering us, but when we can't talk about it the anger comes out in ways that cause more problems. It's OK to feel angry but it's important to let your feelings out without hurting someone.



Fear. You might be afraid of the person who abused you. You might be afraid it will happen again. You might be afraid to trust people or afraid you'll be blamed for the abuse. You might be afraid there's something wrong with your body because of the abuse. No matter what you're afraid of, once you tell someone, you won't be alone and you'll start to feel safe again.

Betrayal. If the person who is supposed to take care of you hurts you, you may feel betrayed or let down by them. Because of these feelings you might find it hard to trust others.

Sadness. You might feel sad and want everything to be the way it was before the abuse happened. You might feel sad and alone and think no one understands how you feel. You might also miss the person who abused you.

Shame. You might feel bad about yourself, and different from other kids because of the abuse. When you think there's something wrong with you and that's what made the abuse happen, you're feeling ashamed. Try to remember you didn't make the abuse happen. The abuser did. It wasn't your fault.

You might think that all you have to do is forget about what happened. But this doesn't usually work. You might even try to forget about it by taking drugs or running away.

Sexual abuse is a bad thing, but it doesn't have to ruin your life. You can get help. Even if the abuse went on for a long time, you will start to feel better. If the abuser was someone in your family it may be harder and take longer for you and your family to feel safe again. With support from family, friends and community you can feel like a kid again.

Jas' story

Jas had been sexually abused by his step-father. The step-father used to go to Jas's bedroom and pretend to read him a story every night. What the step-father really wanted was to make Jas touch his penis. Jas didn't like this and told his mother. Then they told the police. But

Some boys think they aren't really manly if they talk about their feelings. But then they learn that talking about feelings takes a lot of courage.

when he came to see the counsellor, he didn't want to talk about it any more. After many visits, Jas agreed to write about his abuse on a piece of paper. Then the counsellor found out that Jas's uncle had told him he was a wimp and that he should just forget about the abuse. The counsellor then told Jas how important it was to talk about it. After Jas told his counsellor the whole story, he felt much better. And he didn't feel like a wimp at all. He felt brave.

Some boys think they aren't really manly if they talk about their feelings. With time, they learn that talking about feelings takes a lot of courage, like Jas did.

How do I get help?

If you have been sexually abused, it is important to get help. The best way to get help is by telling someone what has happened to you. The person you tell may be able to help make the abuse stop.

You want to be sure that the person you're going to tell can help you or will want to help you. If you don't tell, the abuse could happen again. If you are still being sexually abused, you need to make it stop. And to make it stop you may need help from someone older and stronger than you are.

Boys often think they can make bad things stop without getting help. Someone may have told you, "Just say no" or "If anyone tries to touch you, just yell or bash them one": That is foolish advice. The abuser is probably bigger and older than you are. You need a helper. Don't worry about looking foolish if you go for help. It might be the most important thing you've ever done.

If you decide to go for help, think very carefully before you decide who to tell. Is the person you've chosen really going to help you? If you tell your mother, will she believe you? Or will she just scold you for getting into trouble? If you tell your father, will he help or just make a big noise and tell you to forget about it?

In most cases, your parents are the best people to tell, and they will try to help you. But if your mother or father is the abuser, then you will have to tell someone else you trust.

"I thought it would be really hard to talk to someone, but my counsellor understands how I feel."

Here are some other people you can tell:

A grandparent

An aunt or uncle

A teacher or school counsellor

A social worker

A police officer

A brother or sister, but only if you're sure they'll tell an adult.

You can also call the Kids Help Phone at 1-800-668-6868

If the first person you tell doesn't help you, keep trying. Tell someone else you trust. Telling is the most important thing to do. If you don't, the abuse may continue. If the abuse happened a long time ago, and has stopped, you still have a secret. This secret almost always makes you feel bad. So it's still important to tell someone.

Carlos' story

Carlos went to a school where the principal would invite the boys on the school soccer team into his office. He always told them how well they were playing. One day he invited Carlos into his office without the other boys. He gave Carlos a pat on the back for playing a good game, then he slipped his hand into Carlos' pants and started to rub his penis. Carlos knew that what his principal was doing was wrong, so he told his father when he got home that night. His father went straight to the police and the principal was charged with sexual abuse. It turned out that the principal had been abusing other boys too. The principal lost his job, and had to go to court.

A social worker also became involved and helped connect Carlos with a counsellor. Carlos told his counsellor he was glad when the principal went to jail, but the counsellor didn't think he looked all that glad. Then the counsellor found out that Carlos really missed his principal.

If children like the person who has sexually abused them, they may miss that person as well as feel mad at him. The sad feeling is called grief. It took Carlos a long time to get over his grief but with the help of his counsellor he felt better.

How will I feel after I tell?

At first you will feel better. This is because you have the secret off your chest, and you will feel brave. It takes a lot of courage to tell a secret you feel guilty about. Some people may say, "We're glad you told." But later you might feel sorry you told.

There are some things you might find difficult:

- The police will want to interview you, and ask you a lot of questions.
- You may have to go to the hospital or to your family doctor for a medical examination. The doctor will want to make sure that your body is okay.
- Some of your family may be glad that you told, but some of them may not. If the abuser was a favourite uncle, one of your brothers or sisters may be mad at you for telling.
- The abuser may have been someone you admired, like a coach. You may feel sad if you are not going to see him any more.
- You may go to court to tell the judge and the lawyers what happened.
- Your family may want you to see a counsellor.

When you get the help you need
you will start to feel better about
yourself and the situation.

What will the counsellor do?

The counsellor can help you talk about your feelings. When you have been sexually abused, you may have a lot of feelings that are hard to understand. The counsellor can help you sort them out and make sense out of them. The counsellor may ask you to talk about the abuse, or ask

you to draw pictures to show how you feel. Your counsellor will understand how boys often feel when they have been sexually abused.

The counsellor will talk with your parents and help them understand how you are feeling. The counsellor will tell them how they can help you the most and will try to understand their feelings as well.

If you go to court, the counselor may involve a victim support worker to help you by working with the police and the Crown Prosecutor. The prosecutor is the lawyer for the state who is on your side if you go to court.

How do boys usually feel about sexual abuse?

The boys you read about, Jas, Eric, Kai, Nathan, Pierre, Carlos and Justin all had *different stories* and *different feelings*. They were afraid of different things such as getting sick, being called names, and being hurt by the abuser. Carlos suffered from grief, and Justin was so angry that he hurt other people.

The boys started to feel better when they could tell the counsellor about feeling afraid and lonely and sad, and about feeling angry, and being tricked and cheated and trapped. After a while they learned how to be kids again. They felt a lot better when they realized they could talk to the counsellor about things that were important to them – and not just about the sexual abuse.

Later the counsellor asked the boys to meet as a group so they could talk to one another about what it was like for them to be sexually abused. That way they could help each other and not feel so lonely. One important thing they found out was that they all felt guilty. They all felt that it was partly their fault for being sexually abused.

The counsellor kept reminding them that they *were not responsible*. After a while they knew that was true, and then they felt a lot better.



What do sexually abused boys need most?

If you have been sexually abused, you need help:

- to get understanding and support from parents.
- from trained counsellors.
- from other people like social workers, teachers, police and other family members.

When you get the help you need you will start to feel better about yourself and the situation.

For information on internet safety go to www.CyberTip.ca and www.safecanada.ca

Additional resources are available at your community resource centre, your local library or the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence.

"I didn't want to talk to my mom because I knew she'd get upset, so I told my teacher. Now I talk to a counsellor and I feel a lot better."