



# Child Safety Training: Volunteer



# Child Safety Course

## Overview

No organization wants to see sexual abuse of children take place under their care. When it happens, it causes great harm to the victims and the organization. Often, it's recognized and publicized, and receives attention from legislation at both the state and federal levels. Public declarations of abuse by adult survivors, including celebrities and sports figures, increase the media coverage. We, as a society, are awakening to the damage done to the victims when organizations unwittingly permit the child sexual abuse to occur. A report of child sexual abuse perpetrated by a trusted member of your program can result in legal action against the predator, supervisors, and leaders of the organization and, in the worst cases, the program could be forced to close altogether. This training is designed to help you recognize the signs of abuse as well as the characteristics of perpetrators. Our primary motivation is always to protect our children from immediate harm and a lifetime of anguish. By discussing and learning about child sexual abuse, you are taking a proactive stance in keeping children safe.

**Our Child Safety Course consists of 5 lessons covering the following topics:**

- Lesson 1:** Defining Child Sexual Abuse
- Lesson 2:** Victim Behavioral Characteristics
- Lesson 3:** Characteristics of Child Molesters
- Lesson 4:** Making a Difference
- Lesson 5:** Responsibility & Reporting

At the end of the training, a quiz will be presented to measure your understanding of this material. A minimum score of 70 percent is required, but we encourage you to learn as much as possible.

If, for any reason, your training is interrupted, you can click the link to begin again and forward through the lessons to where you left off. Some browsers will even bookmark your session taking you back to the beginning of the lesson where interrupted.

Let's begin.

## Lesson 1

# Defining Child Sexual Abuse

According to the National Sexual Violence Research Center<sup>1</sup>, child sexual abuse definitions vary across disciplines, social systems, research efforts, and laws. There are many forms of child sexual abuse, including but not limited to rape, fondling, sexual assault, exposure, voyeurism, and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Sometimes, child sexual abuse is considered a type of child maltreatment, which also includes physical and psychological abuse as well as forms of neglect.

**The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention<sup>2</sup> identify two general categories of sexual abuse:**

**#1:** physical contact (a sexual act or contact)

**#2:** non-contact (exploitation of sexual interaction)

**Physical contact can include:**

- Any contact or touching a child's private parts for sexual purposes
- Making a child touch someone else's genitals or play sexual games
- The contact of objects or body parts with a child in a sexual manner

**Non-contact sexual abuse can include:**

- Showing pornographic pictures, books, or movies to a child
- Deliberately exposing oneself to a child
- Photographing or videotaping a child in sexual poses
- Encouraging a child to watch or hear sexual acts
- Inappropriately watching a child undress or use the bathroom

With children's exposure to the internet increasing, it's necessary to highlight the risk of non-contact sexual abuse online. Online sexual abuse can be any type of sexual abuse, harassment, or exploitation that takes place through screens. The prevalence of child sexual assault increases more than 50% when including online sexual assault as a form of abuse.

While this training deals primarily with child sexual abuse, it is important to know that there are forms of child abuse other than physical and non-contact sexual abuse. Let's briefly look at Non-Sexual Abuse or Neglect:

- Child abuse is any intentional act by an adult or by another child that harms or threatens to harm a child's physical, mental, or emotional health. Abuse by another child can be an older or stronger individual who exerts his or her position of power.
- Neglect is another form of abuse that occurs when a caregiver fails to provide basic needs like food, water, supervision, medical care, clothing, housing, or educational needs.
- Emotional abuse can occur when words or actions are used that cause extreme emotional pain, often with no visible injury.

**Now, let's review some facts about child sexual abuse to help gain a better idea of the reality of the serious situation:**

- According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, there are more than 588,899 reported victims of child abuse and neglect. The percentages of child victims by sex are 52.5% female and 47.2% male, with unknown sex accounting for 0.3% of victims.
- Roughly 90% of child abuse cases involve someone they know and trust.
- 21% of people who are alleged to commit child abuse are juveniles themselves.
- 1 out of every 424 persons in the U.S. are on the sex offender registry.
- Sexual abuse occurs in all racial, ethnic, or socio-economic classes and is no respecter of any religious denomination or creed.

While these statistics are based on in-depth studies by credible sources, it's difficult to get a 100% accurate view of the true numbers. The public is often not fully aware of the magnitude of the problem because only 16% of child sexual assault is disclosed to authorities directly.

## Lesson 2

# Victim Behavioral Characteristics

Learning the behavioral characteristics of young victims is important in recognizing some of the warning signs and symptoms of child sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse can take place within a family, by a parent, step- parent, sibling or other relative; or outside the home, for example, by a friend, neighbor, or child care person.

The vast majority of people who work with children do so entirely for noble reasons. But in our training, be aware that the traits that may seem admirable to the community may also hide darker intentions. Our goal is to be able to recognize the difference.

## Profile of Potential Victims

This list of risk factor traits is not meant to be all-inclusive, but is given as a list of examples that abusers often look for in victims.

- Most victims are under 14 years of age
- These children may be very friendly or shy or may exhibit isolation
- Many come from single parent/broken homes
- Parents may have alcohol and/or drug dependency or mental illness
- Parents may be emotionally unavailable, causing the child to seek guidance from other adults
- Parents may be physically absent due to work or divorce
- There may be a stepfather or mother's boyfriend living at home
- There may be pornography in the home or an excessive permissiveness, along with inadequate parental supervision

## Physical Signs or Behaviors

Physical signs or behaviors may indicate a child is being sexually abused. Of course, some signs may be more obvious than others. All such physical signs should be investigated immediately.

- A child with torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- A child contracting a sexually-transmitted disease or experiencing pain, swelling, bleeding, discharge, or itching in the genital area
- Pregnancy is a physical sign of sexual abuse in a female child
- Frequent or unexplained sore throats, stomachaches, headaches or urinary tract infections

Other signs are more subtle and difficult to recognize. Regressive behaviors that are not age appropriate such as thumb sucking, bed wetting, or fear of the dark can be a sign of sexual abuse.

Also, certain behaviors can be warning signs of mental distress caused by sexual abuse of a child. A disclosure of abuse by a victim is the most obvious sign of distress and only rarely are abuse disclosures by children not true.

Here are some other indications that a child may have been sexually abused:

- A child who avoids undressing or wears extra layers of clothing
- Not wanting to be left alone with previously trusted care-givers
- Exhibiting an unusual change in bathing or grooming practices
- A sudden drop in grades or lack of interest in school activities they were previously interested in
- Exhibiting adult-like sexual behavior and knowledge
- Role playing sexual activities with toys or other children
- Considering their body or self as dirty or repulsive
- Using new words for private body parts or drawing sexually-related images
- Having no desire to spend time with an adult or older peer who was previously known and well-liked
- Having nightmares, night terrors, exhibiting unusual aggression or is unable to control bowels
- Refusing to talk about secrets
- Sudden mood swings and a drastic change in eating habits
- Talking about a new adult friend and receiving frequent gifts from them

Child care-givers should be on the alert for signs of child abuse. While one sign of abuse may actually be innocent and signify another challenging life event such as the death of a family member or pet or parents going through a divorce, multiple or severe signs should always be investigated.

Discussing these warning signs with your supervisor is the indicated first step where there are multiple or severe signs of physical or mental distress.

## **Effects on the Victim**

It is important to understand just how much of an impact sexual abuse has on a child. The effects of child sexual abuse will be both short and long-term. Childhood victims withdraw and may become morose in the short-term. Later in life, victims can become plagued by mental distress that can become quite severe.

***Abusing a child sexually is not just a physical violation;  
it is a violation of their trust.***

(RAINN, 2020)

Effects on the victim as a child may include the following:

- Prolonged sexual abuse usually causes the child to develop low self-esteem and an abnormal or distorted view of sex.
- The child may become distrustful of adults and can become suicidal.
- Children who are sexually abused have an increased risk of depression, suicide and drug problems.
- Abused children are 53% more likely to be arrested as juveniles, and 38% more likely to be arrested for a violent crime.
- By the time victims reach grade school, they are more prone to being easily distracted, lacking in self-control, and not well-liked by peers.

Some of the effects that may not be apparent until the child matures to adulthood include:

- Lasting impacts on mental stability and the ability to have healthy and happy relationships with family and members of the opposite sex.
- Some children may convince themselves it did not happen or regress the memory completely. Unfortunately, it is possible the victim will never fully realize throughout life that they had been victimized when young, leading to an unhealthy mental state.
- Many adults who were childhood victims are reluctant to seek treatment for their earlier sexual abuse.
- In the most severe circumstances, an abuse victim may become an abuser themselves. This type of victim has rationalized the normalcy of the abuse they have suffered and may see nothing wrong in the behavior in sexually abusing others.

## **What about the Victim's Family?**

It is not uncommon for family members to experience rage, helplessness, or depression. They may express a desire to seek revenge. They are often very vocal about how sex offenders should be treated by the legal system. In some cases, their view of crime and suitable punishment is forever altered.

Spouses may unfairly begin to blame one another, perhaps because they are unable to direct their feelings to the real guilty party.

Some adult family members may experience outright denial, refusing to admit that one of their children could have been so easily victimized.

## Lesson 3

# Characteristics of Child Molesters

First of all, realize that molesters' motivations are never innocent. Children develop bonds and trust with strangers much more quickly than parents may be aware. Recognizing the behaviors of potential perpetrators will help you to take action in preventing child sexual abuse in your program.

## Classes of child molesters

A child molester may be classified into one or more of three sub-groups.

### 1 Pedophiles

The first group comprises pedophiles. A pedophile is attracted to children sexually and receives gratification by their actions. They often seduce children with attention and gifts, a pattern called "grooming".

### 2 Sexual Aggressors

A second group contains sexual aggressors who desire to exercise power over the victim for some deep-seated psychological reasons. While this group is a minority, they are particularly dangerous because they are literally child rapists whose violence can make the damage to the victim more lasting or perhaps even fatal.

### 3 Profiteers

The third group is people who profit from child pornography or child prostitution. While this group may also include members of the above, the primary motivation is financial. It is important to realize that there are a significant number of offenders that do not fit any one simple profile.

New technology, such as AI, increases the threat of child pornography and since 2023, cases of perpetrators using AI to create child sexual abuse material has been rising. The Internet Watch Foundation's 2023 report revealed more than 20,000 AI-generated child sexual abuse material, and the number continues to grow.

## How do predators choose their victims?

A preferential offender generally has an age, sex, or body type of choice. They will choose recreational activities and work situations which place them near children within that age or sex of preference.

Many child molesters are very sensitive to the needs and desires of children. They may tend to choose children who feel “different” or “set apart” such as children who are shy, loners, from single parent homes, or needy.

Once a molester singles out a child as a potential victim, they will spend extra time and attention with that child exploring boundaries and gaining the child’s trust. This behavior is called “grooming”.

## What are grooming behaviors?

Grooming is the process by which molesters often seduce children with attention and gifts.

In the beginning, the molester will groom the child they intend to victimize, showing special favor, friendship, buying gifts and even love. Later, the molester will use this friendship or relationship against the child to push sexual boundaries, desensitizing the child to sexual objects and touching. Even if this behavior seems innocent or at least not directly indicative of guilt, the molester is preparing the child for sexual behavior.

More grooming behaviors sexual predators engage in, including the following:

- The predator may participate in kid activities and try to volunteer for unsupervised activities with one or more children.
- Many times, the abuser is well-liked and may work hard to win the trust of the child’s “gatekeepers”, such as parents, ministers, and coaches.
- Many times, the predator buys gifts for their victim such as toys or video games or perhaps forbidden items like liquor, beer, cigarettes or inappropriate pictures or videos.
- The predator may engage in electronic communications with their victim, continuing the pattern of desensitizing them to their sexual aggression.
- During nap time or when “babysitting”, the predator may fall asleep with the child or even go to sleep in the child’s bed. They will excuse this behavior as “comforting” the child when upset.
- When they believe they are not being supervised, they may exhibit inappropriate behavior with children. To avoid supervision, they might try to take the child to a remote area or otherwise look for opportunities to be alone with the child.
- In playtime or sporting environments, the abuser may engage in inappropriate rough-housing, butt slapping, or touching, and then treat it as a game or normal part of sports activity which are never acceptable behaviors.

A molester's reasons for grooming a child are never innocent. Any one of the behaviors we have been discussing alone may not indicate that a child is being groomed for sexual abuse. But some of these behaviors are inappropriate and should never occur. When one or more of these behaviors are seen, a problem may exist.

## **Common Characteristics and Behaviors of Male Molesters**

Almost 95% of convicted sexual offenders are male. According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020<sup>3</sup>, convicted male offenders have some common characteristics. A male molester needs power and control over his environment and people. A male molester may also:

- Move his residence more frequently than most people
- He may seem overqualified for the job or be willing to accept less than what his education and experience would warrant
- He may be willing to take the job as a voluntary position with no pay at all to gain access to children
- He may choose hobbies or activities that are appealing to children or allow him to be in the presence of children
- Many molesters are interested in photography or videotaping and they may play on the child's vanity to take pictures or video of an increasingly sexual nature
- He is not usually a "team player" and may seem to be an outcast or a rebel
- He may be easily frustrated and moved to outbursts of anger

## **Common Characteristics and Behaviors of Female Molesters**

Now let's turn to the common characteristics of female child sexual abusers. At least 5% of perpetrators are known to be women. These female abusers prey on both male and female victims.

- A female sexual offender may be unemployed or underemployed
- She may have had marginal or poor performance in school
- Female sexual predators may have been raised in a strict home with little attention or tenderness from her father
- Or, it could have been a very religious home with a hypercritical or abusive father
- In extreme cases, she was sexually abused as a child herself
- She will lie to other adults to avoid conflict and may appear socially isolated, or a "loner"
- She is more likely to seduce than to coerce her victims, especially boys
- The female offender may also blame the child or claim that the child initiated the sexual behavior

Be on the lookout for unusual or unnecessary electronic communications between the female offender and her victims. Since many of her prey may be adolescent boys, she will look to impress them with her gadgets and technology.

## Lesson 4

# Make a Difference

The first step in any program's efforts to prevent child sexual abuse is to form a planning committee. They will be responsible for creating the organization's policies and procedures, so be sure you have familiarized yourself with them. Be aware that your organization will likely want to follow best practices in screening volunteers. No one should be excused from screening, even long serving volunteers or those seen as valuable assets in the community. Such screening procedures could include any and all of the following:

- A written application and interview
- A comprehensive background check
- Checking your references
- Checking your online social media profile

## Warn Children

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, children should be warned. In their publication *"Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Within Youth-serving Organizations: Getting Started on Policies and Procedures"*,<sup>12</sup> they spell out that children should be informed about child sexual abuse, including what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior. The information they provide is mainly about self-protection. It also specifies children should be encouraged to report an incident of sexual abuse and how they should do so within the organization. It is important not to rely on merely warning children about "stranger danger".

## Avoid False Allegations

Set limits in your physical and relational interactions. It is your responsibility to keep your boundaries very clear by avoiding discussions about details of your personal life.

Always avoid inappropriate or sexual word choices, unobserved one-on-one interactions, and keep children and students away from your personal space at home.

Never invite children under your care into your bedroom or bed, at home or away on sponsored activities.

Although it may seem innocent or hip, do not engage in electronic communications with the youth or students with whom you work. Any report of such contact on your part can be misrepresented regardless of your intent or the content of the messages. And even messages that don't involve direct sexual contact are prosecutable.

## **Avoid unmonitored or unsupervised situations**

No one in the organization should be exempt from observation and supervision. This includes long term trusted staff. The best way to prevent child sexual abuse is to make certain there is never an opportunity for it to occur. If your responsibilities require time alone with a child, stay in the areas designated for the specific activity, leave doors open whenever possible, and stay in plain sight of other personnel or volunteers.

Avoid opportunities for youth and adult staff to be nude and in proximity, such as after-activity showers or after swimming.

## **Watch for inappropriate physical contact or grooming behaviors**

Acceptable forms of physical contact include hugs from the sides, high fives, or pats on the upper back. With smaller children, holding a hand is usually appropriate, especially in the context of keeping contact with the child to prevent an unsafe action.

Inappropriate rough-housing, butt slapping, or touching is not acceptable. Physical discipline or corporal punishment is also never appropriate.

Be on the lookout for any cases where a child seems to be the "mystery recipient" of gifts or cash with an unexplained source or any other similar "grooming" type behaviors by an adult or other youth member.

## Lesson 5

# Reporting

Over time, legislation has become more and more restrictive in the area of responsibility and reporting. The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)<sup>13</sup> requires each State to have provisions or procedures for requiring certain individuals to report known or suspected instances of child abuse and neglect.

Almost all jurisdictions require child care-givers to report suspicion or incidents of child sexual abuse. In approximately 18 states, any person who suspects child abuse or neglect is required to report.

You cannot simply rely on children to report the abuse. ***Estimates show that fewer than 15% of all confirmed cases of child sexual abuse are ever reported.***

### Why is the number of reported cases so low?

- Children are often afraid to report sexual abuse out of fear they will not be believed, or even that they will be blamed for what happened.
- Often the victim loves and protects the predator. Some children feel “special” about the abuse.
- They may feel they are somewhat at fault or that people will believe they are at fault. Victims will also sometimes exhibit “Stockholm Syndrome” where they sympathize with their abuser.
- They may believe the predator when he or she claims it was only one incident and “will never happen again.”
- Witnesses may not trust their own instincts or falsely believe that no real harm was done.
- Children rarely report they are being abused.
- In some cases, the child may have participated in other activities they wish to keep secret such as drinking alcohol, smoking or other types of adult behavior.
- The perpetrator may also have played on the victim’s fears and feelings of guilt and convinced the child they should not tell anyone.

Even more disturbing, the perpetrator may try to convince the child his or her own arousal is evidence the child enjoyed it and should not report it because they will be blamed for such feelings. It is important for care-givers to always keep in mind that human bodies of any age will respond to sexual touch in predictable ways. A physiological response in a child’s body is never the fault of the child.

## Know Your Organization's Policies

Guidelines about interactions between individuals should spell out clearly what will not be tolerated. Be sure you understand the behaviors that have been outlined to be appropriate, inappropriate, and potentially harmful to youth.

Always act on infractions of your organization's policies. The committee charged with defining policies and procedures should spell out that it is not the role of anyone within the organization to evaluate or investigate an allegation or suspicion of child sexual abuse. This is the appropriate role for child advocacy groups, child protective services, and law enforcement as defined by state law. Do not make exceptions based on a perception the intent was not harmful. It should be explicitly stated that, at a minimum, the head of your organization is professionally and legally accountable for ensuring that all cases of abuse are reported to the proper authorities.

## What to Do if You Suspect Abuse

While it is not advised to conduct your own investigation, depending on circumstances, it may be appropriate to ask a few clarifying questions of the youth or the person making the allegation. This may prevent making a report when none is required.

Report to the authorities any time there is a reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect. This includes abuse by another volunteer or employee, a youth in the organization or even someone outside the organization. Records of child sexual abuse should be kept indefinitely.

You should be aware that any direct interference in the evaluation or investigation could actually harm the youth or the legal investigation, jeopardizing the strength of a potential case.

Do not rely solely on waiting for children to come forward and report inappropriate sexual contact from adults. The pressure on the child to keep the secret may be immense. Be sensitive to the fact that the exposure of the abuse may be almost as traumatic to the child as the abuse itself.

Never promise to keep it secret when a child reports sexual abuse to you. In most states, any adult who becomes aware that a child may have suffered abuse is required by law to report the abuse to law enforcement officials.

If you suspect that a child is being abused, tell your supervisor. Your supervisor can either escalate the incident, perform further investigation or ask that it be done, and call and report the abuse to your state agency. If necessary, you can always call the national child abuse hotline yourself at **1-800-422- 4453**. Even if you are not certain child sexual abuse occurred, you may call without fear of repercussions when the report is made in good faith. Another thing to keep in mind: *If your youth program involves travel with children to another state, you should learn what the reporting requirements are for the state where the group will be visiting. The laws of the state where the incident of abuse occurs will apply.*

# Conclusion

As we have learned in Preventing Child Sexual Abuse training, you have an important and very effective role in ensuring the children under the temporary care of your organization are protected. All of the horrible negative effects we have studied, all of the impacts to children, families, and the organization—all of them can be avoided if you take that role seriously and ensure the principles and practices you have learned are put into practice. You and your organization can make a very real and positive difference in the lives of the children who participate!

To ensure your understanding of this training, take the final exam. Once you start the exam, answer all questions to the best of your ability. Feel free to review the training content and take notes to help you retain this vital information.

After you successfully pass the exam, you will have an option to download and save or print your “Certificate of Completion.”

**Thank you for participating and good luck!**

