

## Child Sexual Abuse Myths and Facts

**Myth:** Child sexual abuse is a rare experience.

**Fact:** Child sexual abuse is not rare. Retrospective research indicates that **as many as 1 out of 4 girls and 1 out of 6 boys will experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 18.**<sup>1</sup>

However, because child sexual abuse is by its very nature secretive, many of these cases are never reported.

**Myth:** A child is most likely to be sexually abused by a stranger.

**Fact:** **Children are most often sexually abused by someone they know and trust.** Approximately three quarters of reported cases of child sexual abuse are committed by family members or other individuals who are considered part of the victim's "circle of trust."<sup>2</sup>

**Myth:** Preschoolers do not need to know about child sexual abuse and would be frightened if educated about it.

**Fact:** Numerous educational programs are available to teach young children about body safety skills and the difference between "okay" and "not okay" touches. These **programs can help children develop basic safety skills in a way that is helpful rather than frightening.** For more information on educating young children, see *Let's talk about taking care of you: An educational book about body safety for young children*, available at [www.hope4families.com/Lets\\_Talk\\_Book\\_Information.html](http://www.hope4families.com/Lets_Talk_Book_Information.html).

**Myth:** Children who are sexually abused will never recover.

**Fact:** Many children are quite resilient, and with a combination of effective counseling and support from their parents or caregivers, **children can and do recover from such experiences.**

**Myth:** Child sexual abuse is always perpetrated by adults.

**Fact:** **Twenty-three percent of reported cases of child sexual abuse are perpetrated by individuals under the age of 18.**<sup>3</sup> While some degree of sexual curiosity and exploration is to be expected between children of about the same age, when one child coerces another to engage in adult-like sexual activities, the behavior is unhealthy and abusive. Both the abuser and the victim can benefit from counseling.

**Myth:** Talking about sexual abuse with a child who has suffered such an experience will only make it worse.

**Fact:** Although children often choose not to talk about their abuse, **there is no evidence that encouraging children to talk about sexual abuse will make them feel worse.** On the contrary, treatment from a mental health professional can minimize the physical, emotional, and social problems of these children by allowing them to process their feelings and fears related to the abuse.