

to someone who is not helpful or who tells you to forget about the abuse, don't give up. Tell someone else, and keep telling until you get the help you need to feel safe.

Talking to someone can help you—

- Learn that the abuse is not your fault. No one deserves to be abused.
- Get support to be safe.
- Find out that you are not alone. Other people have been through similar things.
- Start the process of feeling better and getting your life back more quickly.
- Build trusting and healthy relationships.
- Feel more hopeful about your life and the future.

Some adults are required by law to report some types of abuse to child protection services or the police. These professionals investigate abuse and find ways to protect youth and, if possible, keep families together. Although an investigation can sometimes be difficult and cause children and families to worry about what will happen to the abuser and to their family, remember that these professionals need to find out the truth so they can stop the abuse and get children and families the help they need to recover and get their lives back on the right track.

It takes courage to ask for help, but if you are abused and you tell someone, things can get better. If you are too nervous or scared to tell someone you know, you can talk to a counselor at the ChildHelp National Child Abuse Hotline by calling 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453).

## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup>D. Finkelhor et al., 2009, "Violence, Abuse, and Crime Exposure in a National Sample of Children and Youth," *Pediatrics* 124(5).

## Resources for Information and Assistance

ChildHelp National Child Abuse Hotline  
Crisis counselors are available to talk  
24 hours/day.  
1-800-4-A-CHILD or 1-800-422-4453  
[www.childhelp.org](http://www.childhelp.org)

National Sexual Assault Hotline  
This 24-hour online hotline provides free and confidential support to survivors of sexual assault and their family and friends.  
[www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)

National Runaway Switchboard  
This confidential 24-hour service helps youth in crisis find local resources.  
1-800-RUNAWAY or 1-800-786-2929  
[www.1800runaway.org](http://www.1800runaway.org)

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## OVC HELP SERIES for Crime Victims

### Child Abuse (For Youth Ages 12 and Older)

## What Is Child Abuse?

*Child abuse* is when an adult—usually a parent, family member, caretaker, or someone else close to the family—hurts a child or teen, makes that youth feel worthless, has sexual contact with him or her, or does not provide adequate food, care, or shelter. Child abuse can happen to all types of kids and in all types of families. And it isn't something that only happens to little kids: 32 percent of 14- to 17-year-olds in the United States have been abused or neglected in their lifetimes, and 28 percent have been sexually victimized.<sup>1</sup>

From time to time, all parents and children have problems, but most parents and adults do not abuse children. There is no single reason why people abuse others. Some adults abuse children because they themselves were abused when they were children. Others just can't handle their feelings in a healthy way; they might be worried about something, like a problem at work or not having enough money to pay their bills, and take it out on their kids. Drinking alcohol or using drugs can also make it hard for some people to control their actions.

No matter what the reason is for the adult's behavior, it's important to know that *child abuse is never the child's fault*.

## How Can I Tell If I'm Being Abused?

It may sound strange, but people who have lived with abuse for many years may not even realize that they are being abused. If you have grown up in a family where abuse occurs almost every day, you may think that hitting, pushing, or constant yelling are normal ways to treat the members of your family and other people. Every family has arguments, but when yelling goes too far or lasts too long or

when disagreements turn physical, that is abuse, and abuse is not normal or healthy.

It may help to understand and recognize that kids may experience one or more of these four kinds of abuse.

- **Physical abuse** is hitting, shaking, burning, pinching, biting, choking, throwing, beating, or other actions that cause physical injury or pain, or leave marks.
- **Sexual abuse** is any kind of sexual contact with a child or youth. It includes direct physical contact, such as when an abuser touches a young person's private parts with his/her hands, body parts, or objects, or when an abuser has a child touch these parts on the abuser's body. Sexual abuse may also involve showing a child or young person pictures or movies of other people without their clothes on, or it may involve taking these types of pictures of the child or young person. Sometimes abusers show or threaten to show these pictures or videos to other people to scare kids into not telling about the abuse.
- **Emotional abuse** involves yelling, name-calling, swearing, or constantly criticizing or humiliating a young person. It also can include denying basic emotional needs such as withholding affection or security from a young person. Emotional abuse often occurs along with physical and sexual abuse.
- **Neglect** occurs when a parent does not provide for a young person's basic needs and safety—necessities such as food, proper clothing, a place to live, or medical care. Leaving kids alone for long periods or kicking them out of the house can also be neglect.

If you have been hurt—physically, sexually, emotionally, or due to neglect—you may be a victim of

abuse. Abuse and neglect can affect the way you view yourself and the rest of the world. You might—

- Feel afraid, anxious, angry, confused, or sad.
- Fear being hurt again.
- Have trouble sleeping, eating, and concentrating.
- Skip school or not do well in school.
- Have lots of headaches or stomachaches.
- Use drugs or alcohol.
- Feel ashamed or even blame yourself for becoming a victim.
- Have trouble with relationships with friends or other people.
- Not know where to turn for help.

If you feel things are not so great in your family, or if things in your life hurt or confuse you, keep reading. You'll see that it's not your fault and that things can get better.

## What Should I Do If I'm Being Abused?

The way to stop abuse is to talk about it. If you or someone you know is being abused, it's important for you to tell someone you trust. Trusting someone after you've been hurt can be hard to do, but there are people who will believe you and want to help you. If there is no one you can trust at home, talk to someone at school, like a teacher, counselor, school nurse, coach, or a friend's mom or dad. You should not keep the abuse a secret, even if the adult abusing you tells you that something bad will happen if you tell.

Sometimes, the people you turn to may not want to believe that you have been abused. If you talk