

# Child sexual abuse: Get the facts

## What is child sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse is any act that exposes a child or young person to, or involves a child or young person in, sexual activities that:

- they do not understand
- they do not or cannot consent to
- are not accepted by the community
- are unlawful.

## Child sexual abuse is preventable

All children have the right to be safe from sexual abuse. There are things we can all do to create safe environments for children and young people and prevent abuse before it occurs.

## Protecting children is every adult's responsibility

You have a responsibility to protect children and young people. Children should not be responsible for their own protection. Start by understanding child sexual abuse, learning how to identify risks and protective factors and knowing what to do if a child or young person is, or is at risk of, being sexually abused.

## Around 1 in 4 (28.5%) Australians have experienced child sexual abuse

Of these Australians, 78% experienced child sexual abuse multiple times.

## Not all perpetrators are the same

There is no typical profile of a person who sexually abuses children and young people. Not all perpetrators have the same traits, behaviours and motivations. Often the only thing that makes them stand out from the general population is their criminal behaviour.

## Child sexual abuse can happen anywhere

Child sexual abuse can occur within families, by other people the child or young person knows or does not know, in organisations and online. Most often though, child sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone the child knows.

## Child sexual abuse has profound impacts on victims and survivors and society as a whole

Child sexual abuse can have profound, long-term impacts across all aspects of a person's life, including their health, education, employment and relationships. Australians who experience childhood maltreatment, including child sexual abuse, are substantially more likely to have a mental health disorder, engage in health risk behaviours and use more health services than those who have not experienced maltreatment.

## Children and young people communicate about abuse in different ways

Only a small number of children and young people will tell someone directly that something is making them uncomfortable, or they have been sexually abused. It is more common for children and young people to tell people indirectly. One of the ways that we can help keep children and young people safe is by understanding how they may behave, talk or change if they have experienced or are at risk of abuse.

## Child sexual abuse is never a child's fault

No matter what happened or how it happened. People who sexually abuse children are solely and fully responsible for their actions.

## It takes immense courage for victims and survivors to disclose or report child sexual abuse

It can take years, even decades, for victims and survivors to tell someone about their abuse, and some never do. Victims and survivors face significant challenges disclosing or reporting child sexual abuse, including institutional and social barriers. Everyone has a responsibility to make sure victims and survivors are believed, protected and supported.

## There are a range of protective factors that can keep children and young people safe

Protective factors can lower the risk of child sexual abuse. Examples include access to trusted adults and peers, understanding of personal safety including body boundaries, and strong community or cultural connections.

## Talking about child sexual abuse can be difficult, but conversations are important

It's normal to be nervous about having conversations. Conversations can be easy and age-appropriate, and they can make a real difference. You don't have to be an expert in the topic. Talking about the things that will keep them safe from harm will only have positive impacts for children and young people.

If you need support or information about reporting child safety concerns, please visit [childsafety.gov.au](https://childsafety.gov.au)