

The Family Tree and Enough Abuse Campaign

Every year, millions of children and adolescents in the United States are impacted by sexual victimization and exposure to violence. Children's exposure to violence, whether as victims or witnesses, is often associated with long-term physical, psychological and emotional harm. These youth are at a higher risk of becoming part of a cycle of violence.

With the public outrage surrounding child sexual abuse scandals, many are left asking, "What can we do to protect our children?" The time is *now* to educate families and debunk commonly held myths about child sex abuse.

Myth 1 - Sexual predators are portrayed as scary masked men lurking in the shadows. Fact. The disheartening truth is 95% of these predators are a family member or an acquaintance.

Myth 2 - Abusers rely on physical force to exploit children. Fact. Abusers frequently employ persuasive and manipulative tactics referred to as "grooming" — buying gifts or arranging special activities, to keep the child engaged.

Myth 3 - Poor children in urban areas are at greater risk for child sex abuse. Fact. Child sexual abuse affects both girls and boys of all ages, races, ethnicities and economic backgrounds.

At The Family Tree, we are working in partnership with leaders across the State to launch a campaign against child sexual abuse. This campaign starts with a single word – *Enough*. Please take steps now and join this movement, the Enough Abuse Campaign. Here's how:

What Parents/Caregivers Can Do

1. Talk to your children today and frequently hereafter. Encourage your children to talk about any situation or person that may make them feel uncomfortable. Starting at an early age, speak with your children about what is a 'bad touch' vs. a 'good touch'
2. Know those in your family's circle of trust. The vast majority of sexual abuse happens when adults and children are one-on-one. Carefully consider any situation that places your child alone with an adult in an unsupervised situation.
3. Show interest in and closely monitor your child's internet and cell phone use. Establish ground rules early and revisit them as your children get older. Remind them, not everyone is who they seem to be online.
4. Stay alert to possible behavioral changes in your child. These can often be signs that something may have happened. If suspicious, check it out.

What We All Can Do

No single behavior indicates that a child has been sexually abused or exposed to violence, but signs may include

- unusual interest in or avoidance of all things of a sexual nature
- sleep problems or nightmares
- depression or withdrawal from friends or family
- an STD or becomes pregnant, especially if under age 14
- seductiveness or secretiveness
- statements that their bodies are dirty or damaged, or fear that there is something wrong with them in the genital area
- conduct problems
- aspects of sexual molestation in drawings & games

Reporting child abuse is everyone's responsibility in Maryland. **If you or someone you know suspects child abuse, please contact your local law enforcement agency or department of social services or call: 1-800-332-6347.**

To learn more about sexual abuse trauma visit <http://content.a-b-c.com/emailattachments/ddcmhs/DDCMHS-Child-Sexual-Abuse-Fact-Sheet.pdf>