

**RAPE
CRISIS
SCOTLAND**



Child Sexual Abuse

Rape Crisis Scotland

The **Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline** offers initial and crisis support and information on the phone and by email for anyone aged 13 or over who has been affected by sexual violence, no matter when or how it happened.

It is free and confidential.

The **helpline** supports survivors of stalking and can also put you in touch with local Rape Crisis Centres or other services for ongoing support. There is a minicom for deaf or hard of hearing people and we can arrange for language interpreters if your first language is not English.

08088 01 03 02

What is Child Sexual Abuse?

Child sexual abuse is any form of unwanted sexual behaviour with a child under 16. This can take many forms including sexual intercourse, oral sex, masturbation, sexual touching, explicit sexual talk, showing pornography and prostituting young people.

Any sexual behaviour that the young person does not agree to and feel comfortable with is unacceptable.

The extent of Child Sexual Abuse

It is difficult to know exactly how many people have been sexually abused, as it is often hidden and secret, but it is far more common than most people realise. Figures from some studies have shown that 1 in 2 girls will experience some form of sexual abuse (from flashing to rape) by the time they are 18¹. 1 in 6 boys have experienced sexual abuse by the time they are 16².

It is important to remember that you are not alone.

¹ *An exploratory Study of the Prevalence of Sexual Abuse in a sample of 16-21 year olds, 1991*
Child Abuse Studies Unit, University of North London

² *Sexual Abuse in a national survey of adult men and women: Prevalence, characteristics and risk factors, 1990*
Child Abuse & Neglect, D Finkelhor, G Hotaling, I A Lewis & C Smith

Why children don't tell

Many young people are abused by people they know, trust and/or are their carers. Abusers often go to great lengths to ensure they have access to a child, that the child trusts them, and then when the abuse starts the child is kept silent. This process, often called grooming, can also apply to the whole family.

Children don't tell because:

- They may have been threatened with violence or further abuse either against themselves or others they care about
- They may think that no one will believe them
- They may think that it is their fault
- They may think that it is happening because they are bad or deserved it
- They may not understand what is happening to them or not have the words or means to tell anyone
- They may fear being taken away or having others in the family taken away
- They may like some positive aspects of the contact with the abuser and be fearful of losing this
- They may want to protect their family or even the abuser

Feelings of fear, isolation and confusion can make it difficult to know what to do or who to trust and for some these feelings stay well into adulthood

No matter what the circumstances, no child is to blame for being sexually abused.

Possible effects of abuse

Everyone is different and no two people will be affected in the same way. Some common effects include:

- Finding it difficult to trust people and form positive close relationships
- Having low self esteem, self worth and confidence
- Having a range of powerful emotions including sad, angry, ashamed, guilty, self blaming and suicidal
- Feeling anxious, unsafe and panicky
- Experiencing flashbacks, nightmares and unwanted thoughts of the abuse
- Having difficulty sleeping
- Feeling different, dirty or not deserving of good things or happiness in life

These effects can impact on your sense of self, your relationships with others and your daily routines. There are useful techniques that can be helpful in dealing with some of these effects, such as flashbacks and panic attacks. Speak to someone on our helpline or look on our website for further information.

Often the messages you may have been given as a child can stay with you. You may have been told negative things repeatedly until you started to believe them. It can take time to change these thoughts about yourself, but you can do it.

It is important to remember that you have survived this far, and that to get here has taken courage and strength. Survivors can and do go on to heal. At times this may feel far away, but it is possible and you are worth it. You deserve to have a life free from abuse, and to feel good about yourself.

Coping and feeling safe

We all cope with our feelings, thoughts and memories in different ways. Some of these can be helpful and others can cause further problems in our lives. Some common ways of coping include:

- Talking to people
- Writing a diary, letters or poetry
- Using drugs or alcohol
- Self harming
- Withdrawing from others
- Eating difficulties
- Cleaning

What do you do to cope with your feelings?

Are there coping strategies you find helpful?

Why not make a list of everything you do that helps?

It could be watching TV, listening to music, having a bath or going for a walk... whatever works to keep you safe.

There may be times when you don't feel safe, when you are struggling to cope with different aspects of life and your thoughts may turn to suicide. It is important if this happens that you get the support you need. Your safety and well being is very important. When you feel like this it can be helpful to make a safety plan including your safe ways of coping and the supports that are there for you. Let someone else know how you are feeling.

Supports

We all need supports. People we can talk to and trust where we feel valued and listened to. It is important that the people in our life treat us with respect. If you are in a situation where you are still unsafe it will be difficult to do any healing about what has happened in the past.

Make a list of who you have in your support network.

That may mean someone you can talk to about what's happening, or it could be someone who you can have a laugh with or catch up for a cup of coffee.

What do you notice about the list?

Do you feel you would like some more support?

Many survivors of sexual abuse find talking to someone a useful part of the healing process. There are a range of supports which you may find helpful, some offer face to face support, others by letter or phone. It is important you know that there are people who will listen to you, support and believe you.

If you or someone you know has been affected by any form of sexual violence no matter when it happened please call the free and confidential

Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline on

08088 01 03 02

or contact our email support service on

support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk

Trained female support workers are there to offer support and information, and can let you know about support in your area.

Local Rape Crisis Centres

Aberdeen:

01224 620 772

Argyll & Bute:

women **0800 121 46 85**

men **0800 032 0399**

Central Scotland:

01786 471 771

Dumfries & Galloway:

01387 253 113

Dundee:

01382 201 291

East Ayrshire:

01563 541 769

Edinburgh:

0131 556 9437

Fife:

01592 642 336

Glasgow:

0141 552 3200

Lanarkshire:

01698 527 003

Perth & Kinross:

01738 630 965

Scottish Borders:

0800 054 2445

Western Isles:

01851 709 965