

Helping You: A Handout for Children

This handout is for you. We wrote it because we want to help children and their families understand about sexual abuse. We want you to know that you are not alone. What happened to you has happened to other kids too.

Who comes to our program?

The Harborview Center is a place for people to come who have been sexually abused.

What is sexual abuse of a child?

Sexual abuse is when a grown up or teenager has any kind of sexual contact with a young kid.

Is it wrong to do these things with a child?

Sexual abuse is against the law, like stealing. Someone who sexually abuses a child is called an offender. What the offender did was commit a serious crime.

Sometimes the person who sexually abuses is a stranger, but usually it is someone you know – like a babysitter, neighbor, friend-of-the-family, or the boyfriend or girlfriend of your parent. Sometimes the offender is a relative, like an aunt or uncle, grandparent, or even your parent or stepparent. It is still wrong and a crime when the offender is someone you know.

It is not your fault.

When sexual abuse happens, children can be confused or scared. It isn't easy to say no to an older person. Sometimes it's hard to think of the words "no" or "stop". Sometimes even when you try to stop the offender, it doesn't matter and the abuse still happens. Sometimes children don't know what to do. It is not your fault.

What offenders say to children.

Some offenders try to trick children. They say things like:

"What I'm doing is okay. It's sex education."

"I'm doing this to help you, so you won't have problems when you get older."

Some offenders try to confuse children or make them feel guilty:

"I'm doing this because you want me to."

"I'm doing this because I love you."

"I need this. Do it to make me feel better."

Some offenders threaten children:

"I'll hurt or kill you if you don't do this."

"If you don't do this, you'll get in trouble."

"If you don't do this, I'll do it to someone else."

Some offenders will give a child things the child really wants, like money or toys or special treats. Or they might start with touches like hugs, and then move on to touching private parts. Sometimes an offender will make a game out of the touching. Sometimes offenders don't say anything – they just do it. They just start touching you or having you touch them.

No child deserves to be sexually abused. No teenager or adult should have sexual contact with a child. A person who sexually abuses children is doing something very wrong and has a very serious problem.

Did someone say this to you?

Lots of times the offender will try to make the child keep quiet about what has happened. Here are some of the things that offenders say to kids to keep them from telling anyone:

“You’ll get in trouble if you tell.”
“This is our secret.”
“Just forget what happened.”
“This is nobody’s business.”
“If you tell, no one will believe you.”
“I will say that you are lying.”

Sound familiar? Sometimes the offender won’t even have to say any of these things, you just feel that something bad would happen if you told.

Were you afraid to tell?

Lots of children are afraid to tell someone about what happened. Maybe they are afraid of what happened, or maybe they are embarrassed. They may also be afraid of what will happen if they talk about it. Some children never tell.

We know that talking about it can make you upset. You have taken a brave step by telling about what happened to you.

Helping understand what is happening.

Sometimes people in your family may be confused or upset about what happened to you. This can be a hard time for your family too. Sometimes family members don’t believe sexual abuse happened. Grown-ups can be just as confused, afraid, and upset as children. They may need to talk. Our counselors can help your family understand what happened. We can help you and your family talk with each other about what happened so that you can feel better.

Talking to us.

Our counselors have helped many other children. They will let you talk about anything. They will talk with you about:

- What happened or is happening now.
- How you feel about yourself.
- How you feel about the offender.
- How you feel about you parents.
- Things you are afraid of.
- What is going to happen to you, to the offender, and to your family.

Feelings children have.

Children who have been sexually abused often have worries and feelings they don’t like and don’t understand. Some of the different worries and feelings kids have are:

“It was all my fault.”
“I did something wrong.”
“I caused a lot of problems.”
“I feel different from other kids my age.”
“I’m really mad.”
“I’m really scared and I don’t know what to do.”
“I’m really sad.”
“I made more trouble by telling.”

It is normal to have these feelings even though they can be upsetting. Keep in mind, no one can tell you what you are supposed to feel. Feelings are personal and cannot be wrong. Everybody is different.

Problems children have.

When children have been sexually abused, some feelings and worries can cause problems. Here are some of the problems you may have:

- Can’t go to sleep.

- Nightmares.
- Wetting the bed.
- Don't feel like eating.
- Can't stop feeling upset.
- Crying easily or just crying a lot.
- Always wanting to be around an adult who has not hurt you.
- Feeling afraid of the offender.
- Feeling afraid of people.
- Can't concentrate.
- Can't stop thinking about what happened.

Have you had any of these problems? Would you like to talk to someone about these problems?

Helping you get better.

If you need someone to talk to, our counselors can help. They are good listeners and good problem solvers. They have talked to a lot of other children. They can help you feel better and help you solve problems.

Helping with feelings and problems is sort of like helping someone who has broken bones or is sick. Sometimes they get better fast. Sometimes it takes a longer time. You may feel better fast or you may take a long time to be better. Just remember that feelings can get better, and we really want to help.

If the person who sexually abused you lives at your home, he or she may need to leave. If you cannot be safe at home, you may need to stay with other friends or family, or in a foster home. It is very important for you to be safe *and* feel safe.

We can also help you:

- Talk to the police or caseworker.
- Understand what the court is all about.
- Talk to the court people.
- Work on problems at school.
- Work on other problems.

There may be other things you want to talk about or that you want help with. You can write them here:

Things I want to talk about:

Things I want help with:

Helping you.

It is important to remember that we are here to help you. We are on your side. Other people are too. You probably know some of the people who are on your side now. Who are they?

Your parents? Your friends? A teacher? The police?

My name is _____, and I will be your counselor. I'm ready to listen and answer your questions. If you want, you can call me. My phone number is (206) 521-1800.