



RISK FACTORS & CONSEQUENCES

BY DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Under what circumstances does child sexual abuse occur?

In most instances of child sexual abuse, abusers do not actively seek out opportunities to abuse children in the beginning (Smallbone & Wortley, 2001). It is more common for abusers to take advantage of opportunities in their everyday lives (Smallbone, 2006). Contact child sexual abuse can occur in a variety of spaces. Understanding the spaces in which our children are most vulnerable can help us better minimize opportunities and prevent child sexual abuse.

When surveying 100 adult male child sexual abusers, researchers found that first sexual contact occurred:

- most commonly between 3 PM to 9 PM,
- often inside a home,
- with another person close by in the home in 2 out of 3 cases,
- by someone outside of their family when they're older and later in the day in comparison to younger victims (McKillop et al., 2015).

When looking at peer-on-peer sexual assault, incidents occurred most commonly at schools (44%) (Young et al., 2009).

While some abuse can happen in plain sight, the majority of abuse occurs in isolation.

- Victims of abuse were unsupervised in more than 70% of cases (Ginige et al., 2018).
- Abusers commonly isolate children into one-on-one situations by taking them to isolated areas (Leclerc & Cale, 2015; Smallbone & Wortley, 2001).








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Can child sexual abuse occur online?

Yes, unfortunately, children are vulnerable to abuse even online. Online child sexual abuse exploitation occurs when technology or the internet is used to help facilitate the sexual abuse of a child which may include producing or sharing child sexual abuse material, grooming to meet face-to-face for sexual purposes, or engaging in communication that is sexual in nature online.

- More than 29 million reports of suspected child sexual exploitation are received by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). That's 564,461 reports per week (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 2021). 
- Approximately 1 in 5 youth experience unwanted online exposure to sexually explicit material (Madigan et al., 2018). 
- 1 in 9 youth experience online sexual exploitation (Madigan et al., 2018). 
- 1 out of 4 minors experienced online sexual grooming via long, intimate, conversations in online chatrooms (Greene-Colozzi et al., 2020).
- Approximately 2 out 5 youths who engage in an intimate online relationship with an adult stranger met the adult in person. 2 out of 3 victims reported physical sexual intercourse (Greene-Colozzi et al., 2020).
- Children with a history of CSA have 4x the chance of experiencing child sexual exploitation in adolescence (Laird et al., 2020).

What is grooming and manipulation?

Grooming and manipulation is a deliberate process by which offenders gradually groom or manipulate a child by setting up opportunities for abuse through gradual boundary violations and by gaining the trust of the child and those closest to them before sexual abuse occurs.

Identifying grooming can be difficult but there are several red flag behaviors that can be considered manipulative behaviors used by abusers. Victims of CSA often experience a higher number of sexual grooming behaviors than those who do not (Jeglic et al., 2023).

Jeglic et al.'s (2023) Red Flag Child Sexual Grooming Behaviors: Level of Concern Guide can be found on the following page.



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High Risk: at least 7x more likely to occur in cases of CSAA

- Increases sexualized touching of the child over time
- Engages in seemingly innocent or non-sexual touching of the child
- Uses accidental touching or distraction while touching the child
- Exposes their naked body to the child
- Watches the child undressing or while naked
- Shows child pornography magazines, images, or videos
- Tells the child about past sexual experiences
- Separates or isolates the child from their peers and family

Moderate Risk: at least 3 - 7x more likely to occur in cases of CSAA

- Asks the child questions about the child's sexual experiences and relationships
- Uses inappropriate sexual language or tells dirty jokes around the child
- Teaches the child sexual education
- Provides the child with drugs or alcohol
- Gets close to the child's family to gain access to the child
- The child lacks adult supervision
- The child is not close to their parents, or their parents are not resources for them
- Gives the child rewards or privileges (community members only)

Enhanced Risk: at least 2 to 3 times more likely to occur in cases of CSAA

- Does activities alone with the child that excludes other adults
- Gives the child a lot of attention
- Spends a lot of time with the child or communicates with the child often
- Shows the child's love and affection
- Tells the child they love them or that they are special
- Shows the child favoritism or tells the child they have a "special relationship"
- The child lacks confidence or has low self-esteem
- The child feels unwanted or unloved by others
- The child feels lonely or isolated from others
- The child has psychological or behavioral troubles
- The child feels needy
- Gives the child compliments (family member only)
- Seems charming, nice, or likable (family member only)
- Takes the child on overnight stays or outings (non-family and community member only)
- Gives the child rewards or privileges (non-family member only)
- Engages in childlike activities with the child (community member only)



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What increases a child's risk for sexual abuse?

While no child is immune from abuse, there are several risk factors identified through the research that heightens a child's risk of abuse. It is important to note that while the following factors may increase the risk of abuse, it does not mean that the child is going to be abused. There are protective factors that can mediate the following risk factors. These factors are helpful to understand and help focus prevention programs.

- Prior victimization of a child and/or their family members (Assink et al., 2019). Child maltreatment is 3x more likely in families that have parents with a history of maltreatment in their own childhood (Assink et al., 2018).
- Parental problems such as partner violence, relationship issues, substance abuse, mental or physical health struggles, and low levels of education pose a risk for CSA (Assink et al., 2019).
- A non-nuclear family structure or problems within the family (Assink et al., 2019).
- Parenting problems including low quality parent-child relationship (Assink et al., 2019).
- Children with mental or physical health conditions (Assink et al., 2019).
- Children using drugs or substance use (Assink et al., 2019).
- Children engaging in violent behaviors (Assink et al., 2019).
- Children with low social skills (Assink et al., 2019).
- Children with frequent internet use (Assink et al., 2019).
- Men, who in their childhood did not conform to gender norms, have a 20% increased risk (19% greater odds) of CSA (Xu & Zheng, 2015)

How does transgenerational abuse impact a child's risk for abuse?

Transgenerational abuse is the experience of generations in a family facing the effects of abuse. Unfortunately, children that live in families with a history of abuse are a high risk to experience abuse themselves. In fact, children with parents who have experienced child maltreatment are almost 3 times more likely to experience it themselves (Assink et al., 2018).  Oftentimes, victims of abuse find themselves in a familial cycle of abuse and trauma due to cycles of silence.





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What are protective factors that can help prevent or mitigate the effects of CSAA?

Protective factors or positive childhood experiences can aid children in having healthy development and mitigate the effects of child sexual abuse and other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (Bethell et al., 2019). By allowing children the ability to form secure and supportive connections and relationships, develop self-worth, and feel a sense of belonging they can become more resilient and protected from harm.

Protective factors can include:

- Feeling comfortable discussing emotions and feelings with family,
- Having a supportive family through difficult times,
- Enjoyment in participating in community activities and traditions,
- Feeling a sense of belonging at school,
- Having a supportive friend(s),
- Having a safe adult who has a genuine interest in them,
- Feeling safe and protected by an adult in their home (Bethell et al., 2019).





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What are the immediate consequences of child sexual abuse?

The most common and most immediate consequence of child sexual abuse is typically emotional and mental health issues. This can include:

- Depression, anxiety, and anger (Norton-Baker et al., 2019; Yüce et al., 2015);
- Suicidal ideation and attempts (Mainali et al., 2023);
- Dissociation (Trickett et al., 2011);
- Attention problems (Strathearn et al., 2020);
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (Strathearn et al., 2020).

Children who have been sexually abused also often demonstrate over-sexualized behavior that is different from normal sexual development and engage in risky sexual behaviors:

- Male child sexual abuse victims are more likely to engage in riskier sexual behaviors to cope and to gain the approval of their peers and partners. Males also engaged in risky sexual behavior more than females. (Wekerle et al., 2017);
- Unprotected sexual intercourse (Oshri et al., 2012; Senn & Carey, 2010);
- Early sexual relations (Strathearn et al., 2020; Trickett et al., 2011);
- Increased number of sexual partners (Abajobir et al., 2018; Fergusson et al., 2013; Van Roode et al., 2009);
- Teen pregnancy (Noll et al., 2009; Yampolsky et al., 2010).

Illegal and substance misuse is found among teenagers with a history of CSA including:

- Alcohol use (Fergusson et al., 2008; Sartor et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2014);
- Cannabis (Hayatbakhsh et al., 2009; Duncan et al., 2008);
- Early nicotine (Al Mamun et al., 2007).

CSaA can also impact the child's performance in school from underperforming to overperforming. A study of sexually abused girls showed:

- 39% displayed academic difficulties,
- 24% repeated a grade,
- 15% were enrolled in a remedial class,
- 48% reported below-average grades,
- and over 37% displayed cognitive ability below 25% (Daignault & Hebert, 2009).

Youth who experience CSAA reported greater severity and risk for other types of abuse including physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect (Wekerle et al., 2017).



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What are the long term consequences of child sexual abuse?

Substance Use

- The use of these substances in adolescence often leads to the development of substance dependence (Ullman, 2009; Douglas et al., 2010) as well as associated health complications, such as altered brain development, chronic psychosis disorders, and lung cancer (Volkow et al., 2014).
- CSAA victims are 1.7 more likely to substance misuse (Hailes et al., 2019; Tonmyr & Shields, 2017).

Mental health impacts

- CSAA victims are 3x more likely to experience conversion disorder,
- CSAA victims are 2.9x more likely to experience borderline personality disorder,
- CSAA victims are 2.7x more likely to experience anxiety,
- CSAA victims are 2.7x more likely to experience depression,
- CSAA victims are 2.3x more likely to experience PTSD (Hailes et al., 2019).

Obesity & eating disorders

- CSAA victims are 2.2 to experience eating disorders,
- CSAA victims are 1.4x more likely to experience obesity (Hailes et al., 2019).

Sexual Risk Behaviors

- CSAA victims are 1.2x more likely to have unprotected sex,
- CSAA victims are 1.5x more likely to be a sex worker,
- CSAA victims are 1.6x more likely to have multiple partners (Hailes et al., 2019).

as mentioned in
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"For individuals that were exposed to harm, what were the long-term impacts? And it's all kinds of health impacts, you know, **460% more likely to develop depression, 1,220% more likely to commit suicide** if they've experienced at least four aces, you know, or attempt suicide."

- Chris Newlin



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What are the long term consequences of child sexual abuse and assault?

Relationship Issues

- Trust issues,
- Fear of intimacy,
- Unstable relationships,
- Divorce,
- Difficulty parenting (Testa et al., 2005; Zvara et al., 2016).

Physical Health Problems

Adults who experience CSAA are 1.35 to 2.12 times more likely to report health problems such as:

- poorer overall health,
- pain/fibromyalgia,
- gastrointestinal symptoms,
- gynecological symptoms,
- cardiopulmonary symptoms (Irish et al., 2010).
- HIV (Hailes et al., 2019)

Sexual Dysfunction

- Difficulty with arousal and desire (Pulverman et al., 2018).
- Low risk perception for danger (Lalor & McElvaney, 2010).

Sexual Revictimization

- 50% of CSAA victims experience revictimization (Papalia et al., 2021)
- Sexual abuse was the strongest predictor of human trafficking: the odds of human trafficking were 2.52 times greater for girls who experienced sexual abuse, and there was an 8.21 times greater risk for boys who had histories of sexual abuse. (Reid et al., 2017)

Economic Impact

Economic impact of CSAA is approximately \$9.3 billion with the lifetime cost (Letourneau et al., 2018). Incarcerating child sexual abusers topped \$5.4 billion (Letourneau et al., 2023)



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