

Child Sexual Abuse/Pedophilia Don't Wait: Everyday Actions to Keep Kids Safe

Vandana S. Thangavel

Abstract

Our personal knowledge of the horrors of child sexual abuse does not necessarily mean that we are any better equipped to teach our children about child safety or to identify the warning signs of sexual abuse in children. In fact, many of us are so worried about "history repeating itself" that our anxiety gets in the way, and we either avoid the subject altogether and keep our fingers crossed – or we become very overprotective and try to wrap our children in so much cotton wool that they are not given the skills to protect themselves. Unfortunately, our laws are failing them and, consequently, ignoring opportunities to prevent child abuse. This article is intended to give you some ideas about how to protect your children from sexual abuse or paedophiles. And also to Acknowledge that pedophiles have a mental disorder, and removing the obstacles to their coming forward and seeking help, is not only the right thing to do, but it would also advance efforts to protect children from harm.

Keywords: Childsexual Abuse; Perpetrators; Pedophiles.

What is Child Sexual Abuse(CSA) ?

"Sexual abuse is when a child or young person is pressurized, forced or tricked into taking part in any kind of sexual activity with an adult or young person."

What is Pedophilia?

Pedophilia or paedophilia is a psychiatric disorder in which an adult or older adolescent experiences a primary or exclusive sexual attraction to prepubescent children.

Pedophilia is termed pedophilic disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*, and the manual defines it as a paraphilia involving intense and recurrent sexual urges towards and fantasies about prepubescent

children that have either been acted upon or which cause the person with the attraction distress or interpersonal difficulty [1].

The International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) defines it as a sexual preference for children of prepubertal or early pubertal age.

Causes

- The causes of pedophilia (and other paraphilias) are not known. There is some evidence that pedophilia may run in families, though it is unclear whether this stems from genetics or learned behavior.
- Behavioral learning models suggest that a child who is the victim or observer of inappropriate sexual behaviors learns to imitate and is later reinforced for the behaviour.

Assistant Professor HOD, Dept. of Mental Health, MKSSS, Sitabai Nargundkar College of Nursing, Hingna, agpur, Maharashtra 441110, India.

Correspondence and Reprint Requests: Vandana S. Thangavel, Assistant Professor & HOD, Dept. of Mental Health, MKSSS, Sitabai Nargundkar College of Nursing, Hingna, Nagpur, Maharashtra 441110, India.
E-mail: vandanaswaran@gmail.com

- These individuals are deprived of normal social sexual contacts and thus seek gratification through less socially acceptable means.
- Physiological models focus on the relationship between hormones, behavior, and the central nervous system with a particular interest in the role of aggression and male sexual hormones.

As mentioned earlier this article is intended to give you some ideas about how to protect your children from sexual abuse and to protect them from paedophilia

- **Child sexual abuse activities can involve many things- such as-**
- Fondling /touching/kissing of genitals or other areas of the body.
- Penetration with penis, digit, or object.
- Exposing genitals or sexual material to a child.
- Talking to a child in appropriately, graphically and explicitly about sex.
- Asking a child to touch their own genitals or another person's
- Non forced sex with an under age child.

Why do you need to know about this? This couldn't happen to your child, right??

Unfortunately, ANY child is at risk of sexual abuse. Hoping... denying.... pretending.... that this can't happen to your child is not lowering your child's risk of being sexually abused, and it does not prepare them to get help quickly and effectively if the worst does happen.

The reality of CSA is a terrifying concept - but its something that every parent needs to face because *knowledge is power*.

Myths about Child Sexual Abuse

There are so many myths around child sexual abuse that it's difficult to know where to start. On the whole, many of us believe these myths....because it's comforting! If we believe that we can identify a paedophile from across the street then we can keep our children away from them.

It is important to identify the myths so that you can reject them as unhelpful and look to the more useful and viable information that really can make a difference. ALL of these statements are incorrect and should be rejected.

- *Myth* : only pretty girls are sexually abused.

- *Myth*: all molesters look like dirty old men. You can just tell.
- *Myth*: mostly child abusers are strangers.
- *Myth*: only men really rape children.
- *Myth*: My child would tell me if anything like this to happened to them.
- *Myth*: This could never happened to my child.
- *Myth*: Sexual abusers are monsters and just look evil.
- *Myth*: Teaching about child sexual abuse scares children, so its best to keep quite.
- *Myth*: If my child had been abused. I would just know.
- *Myth*: Only homosexual men hurts boys.
- *Myth*: It cant happen in my family.
- *Myth*: Sexual abuse is a family matter and should be dealt with as such.

Few Facts we all Need to Know

- Approximately 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys are sexually abused before the age of 18 and it can affect any child regardless of age, gender, family income, culture, race, religion, physical appearance, sexuality, intellect, disability etc.
- Most sexual abuse (85%) is perpetrated someone within the child's social sphere - for example, a relative, a family friend, a teacher, youth worker, religious leader, neighbour.
- The majority of children never report the abuse, and often this is because they are afraid of their parents' reactions, because they fear getting in trouble, or because they don't know *how* to tell.
- Children from a young as three years old can be taught skills that lower their vulnerability of sexual abuse and which also increase their ability to tell if something does happen. You, as the parent, play the most vital role in educating your child about their safety and about what's right and wrong. Similarly, you have a big role to play in identifying risk factors and signs in order to aid prevention and detection of abuse.

Warning Signs and Risk Factors for Abuse

You can't drive yourself crazy being suspicious of every adult that comes into contact with your child, but since abuse often follows the same pattern, there are some warning signs you should be familiar with. Know what to look for.

No one wants to be suspicious of their own friends and family members. But you don't have to be if you're familiar with the most common red flags of a paedophile:

- Prefers spending most of his or her time with children over peers
- Allows children to do things that their parents don't allow
- Makes fun of children's body parts or describes children with sexual words such as "stud" or "sexy"
- Seems obsessed with the sexual activities of teens and kids
- Asks adult partners to dress or act like a child or teen during sexual activity
- Looks frequently at child pornography
- Masturbates so often that it gets in the way of important day-to-day activities
- Has put themselves in a position of dealing with children (coach, teacher, counselor, etc.), in addition to other troubling signs

Be suspicious if your child is singled out as "special."

It's always flattering when a teacher, coach, or counselor recognizes all the wonderful qualities your child possesses and seems to favor him or her over other kids. But this can be a major warning sign. "Perpetrators groom kids by singling them out and making them feel special,

Look for changes in your child.

Signs that something might be going on:

- Regressive behaviour (acting much younger than they are)
- Increased dependency on non-abusing adults
- Withdrawal and isolation from others
- Increased aggressiveness or hostility
- Sudden fear of the dark
- Frequent nightmares
- Changes in sleep (either insomnia or increased sleeping)

Recognize the signs of Child Sexual Abuse

A child who is being sexually abused may show the following:-

- *Behaviour changes-*
 - ❖ Being excessively clinging or uncharacteristically crying when you try to leave them.
 - ❖ Having difficulty in sleeping, not wanting to go to bed, having night terrors or nightmares, fear of the dark.
 - ❖ Returning to previously immature behaviour i.e. Suckinf thumb, bed wetting, needing teddy, soiling etc.
 - ❖ Problem at school i.e. discipline issues, poor attention, change in working performance etc.
 - ❖ Fear of a specific person or place, isolating themselves.
 - ❖ Being "too perfect" and too well behaved; quiet; desperate to please; over - achieving.
 - ❖ Radical mood swings.
 - ❖ Being evasive when asked questions, or having memory loss.
- *Health issues-*
 - ❖ A change in eating habits i.e. eating too much/ too little; purging; becoming a fussy eater.
 - ❖ Incontinence.
 - ❖ Self- destructive behaviour i.e. head banging, self harm, alcohol use, drugs, genital mutilation.
 - ❖ Genital discomfort, bleeding, irritation, redness, thrush, itching, discharge, odour.
 - ❖ Persistent urinary tract infections.
 - ❖ General ill-health complaints i.e. chronic headache, stomach cramps, sore throat etc.
 - ❖ Depression / anxiety/ suicidal ideation.
- *Inappropriate sexual development/behaviour-*
 - ❖ Excessive genital touching or masturbating in public.
 - ❖ Non age appropriate language i.e. sexually graphic.
 - ❖ Being sexually precocious and sexually suggestive.
 - ❖ Hides secondary sexual characteristics i.e. covers up, wears baggy cloths, straps breasts,
 - ❖ Attempts to be unattractive i.e. stops wearing make up, stops washing, puts on weight.
 - ❖ Fear of undressing or refusal to undress in gym class.
 - ❖ Initiate inappropriate sexual contact with other children.

"Care is an Absolute. Prevention is the ideal"

WHAT CAN YOU DO??(preventive aspects)

Teach your children the proper names for parts of the body:

Even as adults, many of us get embarrassed about naming areas of our body - and more often than not, we may refer to our genitals as out "private parts" or "down there"

- Safe touch/ unsafe touch- the number one fundamental rule is to teach children that their body belongs to them. They has a right to decide what they do with their body, and who touches their body, and how someone touches their body, they need to be afforded the same right as we are. *Talk to them about "what is GOOD touch?"*
- ✧ Good touch is touch that feels safe- or touch that makes us feel warm and make us smile. Its touch that make us feel cared for. Tyr to explain to children that some good touch actually hurts i.e. cleaning a cut- but that its good because its making them better.
- ✧ Bad touch is touch which hurts their body of feelings. For example, if someone kicks you or pushes you.
- Resepct their wishes- and let them know that no one, not even you, has the right to touch them without their say so. Ask your child before touching them. ie. "would you like me to help you with you shoes?" don't just assume its okay. Ask them for good night kiss- don't demand one ! Don't make them kiss any relative they don't want to and teach them to say politely "I don't feel like kissing right now".
- Think beyond "stranger danger."
Instructing your child to never talk to strangers is good advice. But the truth is, 80 to 90 percent of abuse is committed not by strangers but by someone the child knows well— and possibly loves.
- Don't keep secrets.
Sex abusers almost always manipulate the children they molest through secrets. They'll tell kids, "This is our secret. You can't tell your mom because she'll be very mad at you." Remind your child frequently that no adult should ever ask her to keep secrets. And that includes you. "If you keep a secret with your child, it confuses the message that it's not okay for other grown-ups to do,"

- Believe your child.

Establish a relationship of faith and trust with your kids. If you're constantly questioning what they say, they may be more reluctant to tell you if something has happened to them. When you're talking about inappropriate touching, let them know — explicitly — that you will believe them and that you will *never* be mad.

- Saying "NO!"

From an early age, children are taught allegiance to adults and to "*Do as you're told!*", and certainly very young children can find it difficult to differentiate between rules they have to follow, and rules they don't have to follow.

Teach your child that they have the right to say NO! As the majority of child abuse is based on coercion rather than force, teaching your child to say NO! strongly and forcefully really can make a big difference in many situations. Make it clear to children that they have the right to say "no" to anyone who wants to touch their vagina, penis, breasts, buttocks - or anywhere that is normally covered. Make it clear that they have the right to say "NO!" loudly even if this is an adult and that they will not get into trouble. Tell children to trust their feelings and if something doesn't feel okay - then say "NO!".

There may be times when someone may need to touch their body - i.e. a doctor during an examination - but make it clear that this is only okay if you are with them and if you say it is okay directly to them. You can explain that this is safe touch because it is to do with health.

Teach your Children about "bad" Secrets

"no one keeps a secret so well as a child" (Victor Hugo)

The majority of abusers teach their victims to keep what's happening to them a secret.

Teach your child that any secret which makes them feel uneasy is a bad secret and its okay to break it. Any secret that makes them feel bad or sad or frightened is a bad secret and its okay to break it. Tell your child that any secret that they can't tell you is a bad secret and its okay to break it. Be consistent! Children do not have to keep any promise that makes them feel bad inside.

Teach your child the difference between a secret and a surprise: A surprise is something you will be allowed to tell at a later stage; a secret is something you're asked to never tell.

- Watch out for warning signs in adult.

"Monsters Do not Wear an Ugly Mask. They Wear a Shield of Trust."

Children display signs that all is not well, but there are signs which are displayed from the abusers themselves. Try to remember that abusers typically do not look how you expect an abuser to look. Contrary to this they do not look like monsters. Rather abusers are good at gaining trust.....that's how they operate....and therefore they seem to be the nicest person...the most helpful...the most thoughtful...the most loving.

- **Stranger – danger**

All though the vast majority of risks to your child don't come from stranger, it is vital that you teach your children about stranger danger. Some remarkably simple techniques can help your child to keep themselves safe.

Help your child to identify a stranger. When you are out and about- ask your child "are they a stranger? Make it clear that just because you may know the person's face, they could still be a stranger (i.e. a lady who works in the shop).

Tell your child never to talk with strangers unless they are with an adult they trust and never to go anywhere with a stranger.

If a stranger approaches them and asks them to go somewhere with them- teach your child to MAKE A FUSS. Tell them to make a noise run away to somewhere where there are a lot of people, scream etc. tell someone as soon as possible!

YELL , RUN, TELL !!!

- Internet activity- it's a very scary statistic, but 1 in 5 children have been sexually solicited on the internet, and 1 in 2 have been exposed to sexually explicit material on the internet. Children of today are generally very computer literate, often more so than we are and although the internet can be a valuable resource, it can also be a dangerous hunting ground for paedophiles to make contact with children and teens.
- Keep the computer in a shared family area and be around to monitor use.
- Bookmark approved sites for young children and tell them to stick to these areas.
- Spend time teaching your child how to use the internet.
- Tell children NEVER to give out any personal information online, name, address, age, phone number, school location or photograph.

If the Worst should Happen?

Let me get one thing clear. No matter what a wonderful parent you are, and no matter how well you have prepared your child for the risk of abuse- and equipped them in terms of child safety – sometimes child sexual abuse happens anyway. You cannot be with your children ALL THE TIME. It's impossible. All you can do is lessen the risks- and, if the worst should happen, be in a position where you are able to identify the abuse as quickly as possible as the longer the abuse continues, the worse the potential consequences for the physical and mental wellbeing of the victim. Similarly, the way that you react and deal with your child's abuse, can have an enormous impact upon their recovery.

What should be Done if we Suspect Anyone?

As hard as it may be, try to stay calm. Children look to their parents to know what to do, and if they are freaking out, this is likely to increase their fear and uncertainty also.

If you suspect – no matter how vague your suspicion- GET HELP. Don't try to deal with this all by yourself because dealing with this in secrecy only exacerbates feelings of shame in your child. Of course, treat it with the sensitivity it deserves, but involve the experts right from the start.

- *Report it:* the first step, even before you talk to your child, is to report your suspicions to your local child protection team- and let them investigate it. Your job at this time is to be the loving parent....letting them know that you still love them, that they are special, that you are not angry etc.
- *Listen to your child and to what they say they need:* at this time trust your child to know how they want you to help. Don't try to steam roller them in to disclosing all of the gory details to you unless they want to- and be sensitive to the fact that some children may prefer to talk to another trusted family member or a mental health professional. This is not a rejection of you. Make it clear that you are there to listen whenever or however they need.
- *Reassure your child:* your child may have a lot of fears about what would happen if anyone found out about the abuse. Their abuser may have told them that no one would believe them, or that they would get in trouble or that mummy wouldn't love them anymore. Make it clear from the beginning that you believe them. Make it clear that no matter what happened, this was not their fault. Reassure

them that they have done that right thing telling, and that you are very proud of them for being so brave. Let them know that you love them and always will.

- *Do not confront the perpetrator (abuser):* No matter how much you may want to, do not confront the perpetrator. Leave this on professionals. Your energy, at this time has to go into making your child feel safe and loved. Confronting abuser could also be dangerous for you because desperate people will do desperate things and lastly you could inadvertently warn them about any evidence against them.

Summary

Child sexual abuse is a serious social problem that affects the quality of life and life chances of uncounted millions of survivors. Child sexual abuse hurts all

who are victimized, but some survivors cope with, adapt to, and overcome its affect because they have people in their lives who understand the true nature of child sexual abuse and who provide them with the information and support they need to recover.

References

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedophilia>.
2. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/conditions/pedophilia>.
3. <http://www.stopitnow.org/ohc-content/tip-sheet-4>.
4. <http://www.parenting.com/article/tips-child-sex-abuse-prevention>.
5. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/conditions/pedophilia>.