

SPREADING AWARENESS ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE – AN ARPAN ENDEAVOUR

“Every sentient being has the right to live with dignity. Preventing child sexual abuse is protecting that dignity and curing the victims is bringing that dignity back.”

- Pooja Taparia, Founder, Arpan

Every child is vulnerable to abuse, be it physical, verbal, emotional or sexual.

Shockingly, EVERY SECOND boy and girl is sexually abused!

The first ever National Study on Child Abuse in April 2007, covering 13 states in India was released by the Ministry for Women and Child Development. It showed these stark reality figures:

- More than 53% children report facing one or more forms of sexual abuse
- 50% of sexual offenders were known to the victim or were in positions of trust (family member, close relative, friend or neighbour).
- 5-12 years age group faced higher levels of abuse, largely unreported
- Boys were equally at risk as girls.

Sadly, most children quietly suffer, and don't talk about Child Sexual Abuse, But WE need to talk about it, so that WE can PREVENT IT and CURE IT.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE ~ A Definition

Child sexual abuse is ANY SEXUAL ACT directed at a minor



- Sexual touch or fondle
- Sexually explicit talk or hint
- Exposure to sexual activity or pornography
- Rape or attempted rape

Child Sexual Abuse affects the child negatively, causing many ill effects, such as:

- Shame, guilt & anger
- Constant illnesses
- Social withdrawal
- Fear, shock and confusion
- Future exploitative relationships
- Inappropriate sexualised behaviour

Aware Parents and Children Can Help Prevent Child Sexual Abuse.

Recognizing an abusive situation is a skill for both parents and children which can help them stay away from such situations. Understanding the concept of ‘*Safe Touch - Unsafe Touch*’ is the first building block to this.

SAFE TOUCH	UNSAFE TOUCH
Anything that makes us feel good and leaves us happy and comfortable	Anything that makes us feel bad, confused and leaves us uneasy, excited or uncomfortable
	
Holding hands with friends, sharing meals, warm hug from loving parents	Touches involving our special parts that are private to us, touches that are told to be kept secret

Just like you teach your child safety rules about crossing the road, you should also teach them about *Safe and Unsafe Touch* and methods to take care of themselves.

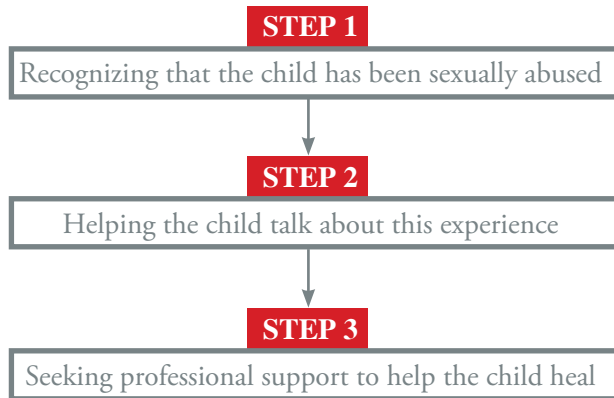
Emphasise that they should say “NO” to any action/touch that causes discomfort or unease to the child. You must teach them:

- It is NEVER all right for someone to touch the child’s private body parts except to keep them clean and healthy.
It is never alright for someone older or bigger to ask the child to touch their private body parts.
- If this happens and they feel confused they should be taught to say “NO” and get AWAY.
- They should TELL a trusted adult and KEEP TELLING until they get the help they need.

Give this information in an age appropriate manner.

Aware Parents Can Better Help A Sexually Abused Child.

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, our children become victims of sexual abuse. We need to help our children through this by the following:



>> Step 1: *Recognizing that the child has been sexually abused.*

Most children don't report abuse, so parents need to understand abuse based on children's behavioural changes.

No 'one' behaviour alone determines that a child has been sexually abused; it could be a combination of many. Some of the behavioural changes that children elicit after undergoing sexual abuse are as follows:

- Social Withdrawal
- Repeated urinary infections
- Hostility or aggression
- Unexplained pain or swelling in genital area
- Passive or overly pleasing behaviour
- Hints, indirect comments about the abuse
- Drop in academic performance
- Use of abusive sexual language
- Eating disorders, anxiety, depression
- Sexualized behaviour
- Suicide attempts
- Sexual activity at an early age

IMPORTANT: These behavioural changes MAY be indicative of sexual abuse, but are NOT necessarily a result of sexual abuse, there could be other factors as well.

>> **Step 2: *Helping the child talk about abuse***

Talking about the trauma of sexual abuse is the first step to recovering from it.

Before encouraging the child to talk however, it is important to first understand why they don't talk about sexual abuse themselves, and what enables them to talk about it sometimes later.

Why They Don't Talk

- “Mummy and Daddy won't believe me!”
- “I don't even know how to say what happened, I just feel weird about it”
- “Uncle didn't really mean to be bad to me or did he?”
- “My teacher might fail me if I tell mommy”
- “I am scared, Uncle told me not to tell anyone, it's a secret.”
- Age of the child.

Why They Talk, Eventually

- Awareness and understanding of the abuse.
- Discussion with an understanding parent or other adult with whom they are comfortable.
- Inability to bear the abuse anymore.
- Physical illnesses following sexual abuse.
- Secure adult relationships that provide confidence to deal with prior trauma
- Revelation during therapy for any other reason
- Desire to prevent abuse of other children

Remember, disclosure is difficult for children. It may be days, months, years or even never, for a victim to be able to talk about sexual abuse.

Be patient and supportive.

**WHEN CHILDREN FINALLY DO TALK ABOUT ABUSE,
IT'S VERY IMPORTANT TO HANDLE IT CAREFULLY.**

Rule # 1: Remember that the child is not at fault.

Rule # 2: Make sure the child understands Rule # 1.

Other rules in handling disclosure...

- Keep calm
- Believe the child
- Listen to the child
- Answer the child's questions honestly
- Respect the child's privacy
- Give positive messages: "I know you could not help it"
or "I am proud of you for telling"
- Report the abuse
- Arrange a medical exam
- Get professional help

*It is of utmost importance to keep open communication channels
and have a good constant rapport with the child.*

DON'T

- Blame the child
- Panic or overreact
- Pressure the child to talk
- Confront offender in child's presence
- Make the child repeat the story

>> **Step 3:** *Seeking professional support to help the child heal*

Sexually abused children often feel guilt, anger, sadness, shame and confusion.

Child sexual abuse is NOT the child's fault – but the child doesn't understand that.

This is where professional counselling helps the child.

- Makes the child realise that the abuse is NOT his/her fault
- Encourages the child to feel good about himself/herself
- Develops the child's self esteem and re-builds his/her self confidence
- Creates a social support structure for the child to fall back upon
- Minimises focus on the traumatic past abuse, and enables the child to move on and heal
- Comes to terms with the consequences about the abuser when reported and action is taken

The family also needs counselling on handling the child's emotions and tackling sexual abuse.

Abuse is an incident in the child's life and they need to think beyond that and move on with life.

Professional counselling's ultimate aim is to make the child understand that.

“Fifty years from now it will not matter what kind of car you drove, what kind of house you lived in, how much you had in your bank account, or what your clothes looked like. But the world may be a little better because you were important in the life of a child.” *Anonymous* **6**

Arpan can provide professional help and support in dealing with all stages of support for Child Sexual Abuse, ranging from counselling to legal steps.

Pushpa Venkatraman, Counsellor, Arpan, M.A. in Psychology has had more than 18 years of experience in the field of child sexual exploitation. She has worked with NGOs like Prerana and (FACSE) Forum Against Child Sexual Exploitation and dealt with several cases of Child Sexual Abuse. She has conducted numerous prevention and training programs on Child Sexual Abuse, and will be glad to guide you based on her experience.

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Arpan's main focus is on spreading Child Sexual Abuse Awareness.

It also works towards:

- Fulfilling low budget needs of NGOs like orphanages and old age homes
- Teaching and playing with children in orphanages, showing them fun and educational movies
- Volunteering at other NGO events
- Supporting educational and medical activities
- Supporting relief activities during natural calamities

For further information on Arpan and its activities, please visit www.arpan.org.in

You can also contact

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Understanding, Preventing and Coping with Child Sexual Abuse

A Short Recap

Child sexual abuse is ANY SEXUAL ACT directed at a minor.

Aware parents and children can help prevent child sexual abuse.

STEP 1

Understanding and differentiating between Safe and Unsafe Touch is key to this.

STEP 2

Teaching the child the difference between Safe Touch and Unsafe Touch early on.

STEP 3

Empowering the child to say NO, to Unsafe Touch.

Sexual Abuse affects children negatively, yet most children don't report it.

Thus, parents need to discern behavioural changes indicative of it.

Maintain a record of the child's behaviour and physical problems.

**It is very important to remember and remind the child that
Sexual Abuse is NOT the child's fault.**

Children will talk about sexual abuse only in an understanding and comfortable environment. It is important to create such an environment for the child, but you must also understand that the child may still not talk and not to push the child in such a case.

Parents need to be compassionate, patient and encouraging.

Child Sexual Abuse is a sensitive issue for both the child and the family to deal with. It requires professional counselling for both, especially the child to cope with it, move on, and live beyond the shadow of the trauma of sexual abuse with the dignity the child has a right to.

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For more information on Child Sexual Abuse visit www.arpan.org.in