

A NEW NORMAL

UNDERSTAND. PREVENT. HEAL.

Winning the war against child sexual abuse.

MYTH

Only girls are susceptible to sexual abuse.

FACT

More boys (53%) than girls (47%) are abused, according to a study by the Women & Child Development Ministry of India.

Early experiences of touch are extremely important for a child's mental and physical development. Children must never associate touch with a traumatic experience, so it's extremely important to protect them from improper touch.

~ Swati Popat, President, Podar Education Network

Everyone thinks it happens to them--poor kids from poor families. And the abuser is that person in the dark alley. That's not true. It could happen to anyone in their homes. By an uncle or a family friend. There is no 'them' when it comes to CSA.

~ Ashwini Mishra, Creative Director, Nirman Foundation

I've realised that I can either keep my children safe from abuse OR keep the world happy. Never both. And my children's safety wins hands down.

~ Chidambarakumari Ponnambalam, a mother

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Winning the war against child sexual abuse.

PREFACE

47%. That's the number of children in India that haven't ever experienced sexual abuse of any kind according to a report by the Women and Children Development Ministry of India. We think that number is too low. It needs to rise. Fast. Faster. Now.

But how?

In the course of making this book, we spoke to many people—victims, survivors, thrivers, those who had exited all phases of grief, psychologists, NGOs and legal experts. And we realised that it's become too normal and too easy for us to ignore the reality that is CSA. And we're not okay with that. So this book is an attempt to break this pattern of brushing what's inconvenient under the carpet. It's an attempt to create a new normal—in attitude and action. A new normal for our kids; a normal where crimes like sexual abuse don't have a place. Because we believe that when we don't contribute to the solution, we become part of the problem, and does any one of us really want to be part of a problem as repulsive as child sexual abuse? No, no a loud, resounding no.

In this handbook, we attempt to bring to you all the information you will need to keep your child safe and if (we really, really hope not), the need arises, to intervene if you think there are signs of abuse. We also bring you stories of hope. Of parents who have managed to shrug the baggage of stigma because what can possibly be more important than ensuring that their kids are happy, healthy and safe? These stories will show you what a marked difference a parent's attitude can make in a child's journey of going from victim to survivor to thriver to completely exiting the incident altogether. We can only hope the stories inspire you and the people around you to be that parent.

Here's to raising this 47 to a loud, booming, reverberating 100% safe kids in this country.

"I was just four when a hired teenage field hand attempted to molest me. Miraculously, I got away, and I told my dad. My father made three important choices that day: He listened to me, he believed me, and he took action. I was one of the fortunate ones--I had a childhood."

~ Carolyn Byers Ruch

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UNDER- STAND

LEARNING TO BE STRONG

CHIDAMBARAKUMARI PONNAMBALAM



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Well, not everyone knows how paranoid I am about someone abusing my children. Every night as I tuck them to sleep, I whisper a promise to protect them with all my might and wisdom; and then I cry inside because I'm scared that despite all my over-protection, some slimy hand might still slide through those tight fences.

Now, my Implet is very exuberant and outgoing. She readily smiles at strangers, is willing to play with them. How do I tell her to differentiate between good and bad touch without making her distrustful of everyone in her life? And at times, I have asked her to hug family and friends, sometimes against her desire to do so. Some situations tend to be very sticky. Especially when you're visiting India after a year or two and your daughter refuses to go near her uncle or aunt for some reason. What do I do? Do I push her? If I hold her too close, I'm labelled 'too-American' and over-protective; the standard argument is that I grew up and turned out fine, so it's not like my daughter will get cooties just by touching family.

Learning To Be Strong

The one thing I've realised in the three years since I became a mom is that

I can either do right by my kids OR I can work towards getting appreciation from my peers and family. But I will never, ever get both. When it's put like that, doing right by my kids wins hands down. Any day.

To tell them about what really happened in that same town would mean disrupting my family's peace and breaking fences that were mended. I have no strength to do that...not 23 years later.

All I want is to keep those bad apples away from my kids. Where do I draw the line? How do I draw the line without pushing my loved ones away?

I am trying to hold them close yet not suffocate them... with all my adult fears and paranoia. It's not as easy as it sounds. I want them to run around free, chasing butterflies and come to me with aching legs. Yet I constantly worry... that if I'm not close-by, someone will pluck their wings and they will crawl to me with aching hearts instead.

The husband is an awesome *Appa*. He makes us laugh, gives the best bear-hugs and can calm us—mother and her brat—when we are agitated beyond control. My first lesson in parenting was to trust him with our kids; trust him to protect them from a bad word as much as from an unsafe touch. It's not my job alone to keep them safe from prying eyes, we're in this together.

My second lesson, which I'm trying hard to teach myself and the kids, is that our bodies are not objects of shame. I did sing '*Shame shame puppy shame*' initially to my daughter because, let's face it, that's what I was told. That's how I grew up. And maybe that's why, when I was first molested, I didn't shout. Because I was ashamed. Ashamed that it was somehow my fault. There's a difference between shame and privacy but somehow the two are very complexly linked.

I'm learning and trying to teach her that she need not be ashamed. If she sees me naked, I shall not be ashamed and she shall not be reprimanded for the same. But I try to respect her privacy and teach her to respect mine. We are still not there yet, completely. (She asks me to shut the door and wait outside until she's done her business on the potty, but one needs to shout 'n' number of times to stop her from barging into my bathroom. Selective learning!)

But most importantly, I am learning, as her *Amma*, to trust her instincts as much as I do mine.

UNDER- STAND

WHAT ABOUT THE BOYS?

SHAN

Amit Somvanshi/IndiaPhoto/Thinkstock



I first heard about the old man in our housing complex from my daughter's young babysitter. Before that, I had seen him walking around the complex but didn't really know anything about him till our babysitter brought him up. Now, a little bit of background: our housing complex is similar to the hundreds of complexes in Mumbai—a group of buildings aggregated together in a haphazard fashion with a common boundary wall and a common area where the kids played every evening. As you'd expect, there are kids of all ages in the complex, right from infants in their mothers' arms, preteens playing *lukka chhupi* to teenagers knocking a football or a shuttlecock around.

Coming back to this particular 'uncle', he was seen every evening walking around the complex carrying his infant grandson in his arms—the very picture of a loving, doting grandfather. After a while, probably due to his age and the burden of lifting a young child, he would sit on a chair near the kids' play area and watch them, an indulgent smile on his face, intermittently talking to his grandson in his arms. Sometimes he would call out to the playing kids and talk to them. Sometimes he would shout encouragement in their sporting endeavours. Sometimes he would ask the girls to come closer and play with the cute baby grandson in his lap, as young girls want to.

So, apparently this old man was very fond of the young girls who play together in the complex. A little too fond, according to the babysitter. He would call them, run his fingers through their hair, caress their cheeks, put an arm around them... All pretty innocent gestures; except that the hand would remain in their hair just a tad too long, the pat would last just a little bit longer than was necessary and the arm around the waist would squeeze just a little harder than the girls were comfortable with. Added to that were some inappropriate comments. Once he said to the babysitter when she wore shorts, "*Aaj tum bahut sexy dikh rahi ho*" (You are looking very sexy today). She was so shocked that she never wore shorts in the playground again.

The thing is, she didn't tell me all this at the time it happened.

What About The Boys?

My mind was in a whirl. There were other children to consider, not just mine. On the other hand, there was no basis for direct action because he had not done anything illegal. There had been no molestation as such, just a lingering feeling of discomfort.

I learnt about it a few months later, when I mentioned that I'd taken a picture of a cute boy who was being carried around by his grandfather. Her immediate reaction was, "*Bhaiya woh achha admi nahin hai. Ajeeb hai.*" (He is not a nice man. He is weird.). When I asked her why, she recounted the incidents to me. My immediate concern was my daughter, of course, and I asked her if he had ever tried to get close to Tee (our nickname for her). He had not, to our relief, either because she was too young, or because Tee was too indifferent to an old man sitting in a chair to walk up and talk to him. Plus, the babysitter had ensured that she never let Tee get close to that man.

I reiterated to the babysitter that while the man had not done anything bad yet, it made perfect sense for her to not just keep Tee away from him under ALL circumstances, but ensure that all girls in the complex—maids, kids, babysitters, everyone—be careful around him. I was also curious if it was just her overactive imagination that had made her feel that way; but interestingly, she claimed that the other girl too felt uncomfortable when this man was near them. Fortunately, and most gratifyingly, they had actually discussed it amongst themselves and decided to collectively boycott the man! I don't know whether it was education, the knowledge of good and bad touch that had been drummed into them, or an innate sense of self-preservation, but whatever the reason, the kids had felt empowered enough to take preventive action on their own!

Thanks to their polite but firm dismissal, the old man soon realised that not a single kid seemed to be interested in talking to him anymore. In fact, most of them would just move away from the immediate area when he arrived. Nowadays, he stays alone and walks his toddler grandson, but no longer tries to befriend other children.

Sometimes I wonder if I overreacted. Was the babysitter lying or overreacting? Were the kids overly imaginative? The answer to all these questions is, yes, it's a possibility. But how can one know for sure? And how can one take the chance? In the absence of any obvious illegal act, there was nothing official we could do. But it would be equally irresponsible and stupid to ignore or brush aside a child's feeling when they are creeped out by someone around them. All in all, I thought we reached a satisfactory solution. But still, when I see him in the complex now, I shudder involuntarily. Every time.

Even though my daughter and the girls in the complex are safe, one thought still bothers me: while it seemed that the old man wanted to be close to girls, what would I have done if he was talking to the boys instead, given that he had his grandson with him all the time? And what if his next grandchild is a girl?

UNDER- STAND **ACCIDENTS NO MORE**

spwidoff/iStock/Thinkstock



Warning: If you've been a victim of sexual abuse, some parts of the interview and the movie might remind you of your own triggers. Reader discretion is advised.

Nobody wants to say the words out loud, but if you're really listening, almost everyone has a story to tell about a child who's been sexually abused. If it didn't happen in your own family, it happened to a friend, or a friend's brother, sister, cousin... The stories are endless, but there's a common thread tying almost all cases of child sexual abuse—the silence that we've all learnt to live with and will continue to live with until someone or something shocks us out of our stupor. *5 O'Clock Accidents* is one such movie. It's one of the few movies we've seen that talks about patterns in the abuser's behaviour that act as triggers for the abused child to behave in a certain way. We caught up with Ashwini Mishra, Creative Director at Nirman Foundation, an organisation that works towards educating people on social issues through short films and PSAs, and got him to talk about his experiences with victim mentality, stereotypes about victims and abusers, victim-shaming and "milder" forms of abuse while filming *5 O'Clock Accidents*.

Considering the sensitive nature of the subject, what were the biggest challenges, if any, in getting people to talk to you?

Getting people to talk about their experiences was a challenge, sure; but the bigger challenge was having people come up to me after watching the film, and talking about their abuse. That was very overwhelming.

Tell us about the film.

Through our film, we explore triggers as a major issue. Triggers are things that might cause a flashback or bring back memories of abuse—it could be a certain smell, or colour; it could be anything. I know of a case, where a seemingly innocent thing like strawberry cake is a trigger for the person (before abuse, the perpetrator would always bribe the child with cake).

Accidents No More

Lastly, people have this idea in their head of what a victim of CSA is like—that he or she would be a downright depressed being, with no joy, etc.

But, there is no one way of how a survivor is 'supposed to be' like.

Is there any significance to the name 5 O'Clock Accidents?

The film is named so, because 5 o'clock is a trigger for the protagonist. He is a typical, playful child, but every time 5 o'clock approaches, he becomes agitated. Even in his nightmares, he sees a clock reading 5 o'clock. Because that is the time when he is abused. So he constantly tries getting into accidents to avoid meeting his abuser.

There are many stereotypes that the film addresses, like having a boy child as the protagonist, instead of a girl child. Was that a conscious decision?

The public has this silly notion about CSA—that the victim is always a girl child. Maybe it's our country's homophobia in play when people believe that abuse cannot happen between man and boy. But, that's a ridiculous idea. It happens to boys too, and it's dangerous to assume otherwise. So, in our film, we've tried breaking that mould and shown the victim as a young boy. You know, after one screening of the film, a mother of a little girl came up to me and said, "Thank god, the film had a little boy, and not a girl. Otherwise I would not have been able to see it." It's unbelievable—this mentality of people that it's relatively less awful when it happens to a boy!

Are there any other typecasts you've tried to do away with through the film?

There is a big myth with CSA (and also where rape of adults is concerned) that the perpetrator is usually the creepy man standing across the dark alley—an outsider. That's not true. It's most likely a family member. So, this is one major myth we tried to address in the film. The perpetrator is the child's tuition teacher—someone who is not only known, but also trusted by the family.

Another stereotype we've tried to break is the assumed profile of the abuser. People always imagine that the abuser is from the lower economic class. But it could be anyone. It could be the very guy who belongs to the same class of society as you, is well-mannered, talks in good language, and doesn't look 'strange'. Rape culture is not limited by class. Moreover, in the film, even the profiles of the family and the victim go against the typical ideas people have. The family is not a dysfunctional one (as is usually assumed). The parents are very loving, and care for the child. The idea is to make people understand that this happens in the most ordinary families, not just 'special' ones.

Accidents No More

People have this crappy belief that if the abuse involves a 15 or 16 year olds, then it's not out-and-out pedophilia. This idea that a certain kind of child is 'fair game' is complete bull****!
And the most ridiculous myth of all same sex abuse makes the victim homosexual. That myth is not even worth a comment.

In fact, in the film, you won't even realise the child is a victim. He plays, smiles, does the usual kid's stuff—the signs of abuse are very indirect. He is shown to be strong in the video—this is to give the audience strong role models.

Have you ever been on the receiving end of biases or been told that you're over-hyping the subject while working on CSA awareness?

Fortunately I have not faced any such bias. But, I have seen a tendency in people, especially some victims, to try and minimise the effect of abuse. They'll say things like "I don't want to go on about it; it happened a long time ago."

They preempt it (before anybody else can say anything), saying, "Look I'm not making a big deal out of it." They usually do this, because somebody must have told them that they are talking "too much" about it, and are using it to get famous, etc. Even if nobody tells them, they internalise it. It's no wonder, given that society and pop culture are unwittingly sending signals to kids by the way they treat other rape / CSA survivors. But, it's more than okay to talk about it, even if it's been a long time since the incident.

How does our society deal with this issue?

Society may not blame the victim in so many words, but may make the child feel like it's their fault. The child usually starts thinking: "It didn't happen to my brother or sister or to anybody else, it just happened to me. Maybe I must have done something wrong." This victim-blaming and shaming game compels the injured party to keep mum and try not to make a 'big deal' out of it.

Is there is a tendency to not deal seriously with 'milder' forms of abuse.

Yes, that's very true. Victims think: "It happened only that one time." Or, "I was only touched; it was nothing as serious as rape." THAT is one time more than it should have happened. And there should not be such a sanction for what we perceive to be as 'milder abuse'. Abuse is abuse is abuse. There is nothing as 'just a little abuse'. 'This' happened to you. Period. It does not matter what 'this' defines. There is no quota—that only if 'this much' happens, I shall speak up or get help. There is no doubt that rape is terrible, but that does not mean that we take other forms of sexual abuse lightly. Sometimes, 'milder' forms of abuse like groping or fondling, could be more difficult to deal with, since they might not be taken seriously by the family.

Any last words...

There is a very poignant dialogue in the movie Monsoon Wedding—*"Hume apne bachon ko apne aap se bhi bachana hai."* (We have to protect our children from ourselves, too.) It's true, isn't it?

UNDER- STAND

BRAVE CHIU

ARPAN



Ryan McVay/Lifesize/Thinkstock

Teaching kids to tell you about everything that makes them sad, happy, angry, confused or unsafe can be a tough task, especially since you don't want to alarm the kids and make them wary of everyone around them. Here's a story you can use to teach them about body safety without alarming them.

Once upon a time, there was a big forest with many trees. The banyan tree was the biggest tree in this forest. Many birds lived peacefully on this tree. A sparrow lived on the same tree with her baby, Chiu. A few branches higher also lived a lazy crow. Chiu was a cute chick, who loved to play. She always obeyed her mother and helped her with chores in the nest. But, when her mother went searching for food, Chiu would get bored staying in the nest alone.

One day, there was a loud thunder and big black clouds covered the forest. All birds returned home early as big drops of rain started falling from the sky. The birds looked for leaves and straws to protect their nests from the heavy rain. The lazy crow had never built a nest for himself, so he did not know what to do to himself from the heavy rain. So the lazy crow sat on the tree—wet, cold and shivering—in the rain.

Brave Chiu

As soon as mama sparrow left, Chiu and the crow began their regular hide and seek game. After some time when Chiu grew tired and wanted to sit for a while, Uncle Crow told Chiu that his new friends had taught him a new game. Chiu was eager to learn the new game: **The Secret Game.**

Chiu's mama saw the crow and pitied him. She called the crow to her nest and gave him some leaves so that he could remain dry and warm. Chiu's mother saw that the crow was very hungry too, and so she gave him fruits to eat too. The crow thanked Chiu's mother for being kind and helpful. He also promised her that as soon as the rain stopped he would return to his nest, but Chiu's mother offered for him to stay with them till the rainy season ended.

The next morning, the crow woke up with flu. Chiu's mother asked the crow to rest. The crow took his blanket and went back to bed. Later when the rain stopped, Chiu's mother went to collect some fruits. As mama sparrow left home, the crow removed his blanket and started walking around Chiu's nest. The crow noticed that little Chiu was sitting by himself in the nest and so was getting bored.

The crow asked Chiu if she would like to come and play with him. Chiu was very happy, she chirped loudly and flapped her wings. Each day mama was away at work collection food for the day, the crow played with Chiu. The crow took good care of Chiu, and soon they became best friends.

One day Uncle Crow observed that at the end of the day Chiu's mother would return home very tired. Uncle Crow told mama sparrow that he would go out to collect fruits for the family from the next day. Soon Chiu's mother started trusting the crow.

A few days later, mama sparrow had to visit the doctor and so she requested Uncle Crow to look after Chiu while she was away. Uncle Crow agreed and stayed back to look after Chiu. Mama sparrow also instructed Chiu to stay at home and behave well.

As soon as mama sparrow left, Chiu and the crow began their regular hide and seek game. After some time when Chiu grew tired and wanted to sit for a while, Uncle Crow told Chiu that his new friends had taught him a new game. Chiu was eager to learn the new game: The Secret Game.

Uncle Crow told Chiu, "I will ask you to do something, and if you do it then I will give you a prize. And if you ask me to do something and I do it, you also have to give me a prize." Chiu chirped loudly and flapped her wings in excitement. Then Uncle Crow asked Chiu to fly to highest branch of the tree and come back. On the count of three, Chiu happily flew to the highest branch of the tree and came back in full speed. Since she had successfully completed her task, she asked Uncle Crow to reward her with a fresh red cherry that he was carrying with him. So Uncle Crow gave her a fresh red cherry in prize.

Brave Chiu

"What will I tell mama?" thought Chiu. She knew that her mama respected Uncle Crow because of his age. Chiu feared her mother would not believe that the Uncle Crow touched Chiu in ways she didn't like.

Then it was Chiu's turn. Little Chiu asked Uncle, "How much is 2+2?" Crow said "4." Chiu did not have anything to give as prize to Uncle Crow. Uncle Crow realised that Chiu was sad and so, as reward, Uncle Crow patted Chiu's back instead. When mama returned home, Chiu told her about the game and showed her the prizes uncle had given her. Chiu said, "I like Uncle Crow so much." Chiu's mother was happy to see her daughter's excitement.

The next day, Chiu's mother once again went out. Uncle Crow came and they started their Secret Game again. This time Uncle Crow did not have a prize so he said, "I will give you a kiss on your cheek." Chiu agreed, but when Uncle Crow kissed Chiu on the cheek, she did not like it. She was confused and did not know what to say.

She thought, "I like Uncle Crow. He is very friendly, takes good care of me, and gives me gifts too. I think he loves me. Why would he do anything bad to me? So what if he gave a kiss on my cheek?"

Next time, when Chiu won Uncle Crow gave her a pat on her back; and when Uncle Crow won he kissed her on her cheek. This time Uncle Crow told Chiu, "This is our Secret Game. Do not tell anybody about it."

This scared Chiu. She couldn't understand why she should not tell mother about the game. She was unable to understand why she didn't like it when Uncle Crow patted or kissed her during the game.

As time passed, Uncle Crow would touch her private body parts while playing. This made Chiu very shy, angry and confused. Chiu was upset and did not like Uncle Crow touching her in this manner; but she felt helpless as she didn't know what to say to him.

That evening she decided to tell her mother how she felt about the game that Uncle Crow had taught her, but soon Chiu felt confused again. "What will I tell mama?" thought Chiu. She knew that her mama respected Uncle Crow because of his age. Chiu feared her mother would not believe that the Uncle Crow touched Chiu in ways she didn't like.

Days went by and Chiu kept thinking about that incident. After that whenever Uncle Crow visited the nest, Chiu would come up with excuses to avoid being around him so that he would not touch her.

One day Chiu's mother asked Uncle Crow to take care of Chiu while she was away. Chiu was scared, but she decided to be brave. She decided that if Uncle Crow asked her to play the game this time; she would say "No" to him and fly away.

This time Uncle Crow gifted Chiu with loads of flowers and fruits, but Chiu refused to accept them. Uncle Crow then asked her to play the secret game.

Brave Chiu

Mama immediately hugged Chiu. She told Chiu, "Yes, it is true that I trusted Crow and thought he would take care of you, but I completely believe you. I am glad that you have shared this incident with me. I will help you."

Chiu firmly refused from playing the game and flew away from there. Chiu settled on the highest branch of the tree as she knew the Crow as too old to come searching for her all the way up. Chiu was shivering with fear and excitement. She was proud that she was able to protect herself from bad Uncle Crow. Perched high up among the branches Chiu realised that in order to solve this problem permanently she would have to tell her mother about the threat she sensed from Uncle Crow.

In the evening, Chiu's mother returned home with some of Chiu's favourite fruits. Mama offered them to Chiu, but Chiu refused to eat them saying that she was not hungry. Chiu's mother grew worried. She asked Chiu why she was refusing to eat her favourite fruits. Chiu sat next to her mother and grew silent. Chiu told mama that Uncle Crow was a bad crow and would touch her often. Chiu started crying and said that she did not like Uncle Crow anymore.

Mama was puzzled as Chiu had earlier told mama that she liked being with Uncle Crow. Mama asked Chiu to tell her everything. Chiu told her mother about the secret game, the prizes, the place where Uncle Crow would touch her and how she felt. Chiu started crying bitterly. Chiu's mother was shocked because she had trusted the Crow. Chiu said, "I know you don't believe a word of what I said, but it is true. Uncle Crow is bad." Mama immediately hugged Chiu. She told Chiu, "Yes, it is true that I trusted Uncle Crow and thought he would take care of you, but I completely believe you. I am glad that you have shared this incident with me. I will help you."

Mama assured Chiu that Chiu was innocent and it was all Uncle Crow's fault. "You don't need to feel guilty about it, Chiu. It's never your fault, my dear," said mama to Chiu. Chiu felt better because she realised that her mother listened to her, trusted her, believed her and was willing to help her. It was at that moment that all of Chiu's fear, confusion, and anger vanished and she fell asleep in the comfort of her mother's arms.

Mama wanted to teach the bad crow a lesson so that not only would he stop scaring Chiu, but would also not scare the other baby birds.

The next morning, Chiu's mother called all the birds and told them about the crow's behaviour. All the birds were shocked and decided to take action. They called the crow and warned him. They told him that if he even attempted to harm any of the chicks, they would throw him out of the forest. That morning the crow saw that all the birds were angry at him for misbehaving with Chiu. He begged them for forgiveness. He promised all the birds that from now on he would never do any such thing. The crow left the tree the next morning and was never seen by the birds. Chiu and her mother lived happily ever after.

PREVENT

MYTHS ABOUT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Amit Somvanshi/IndiaPhoto/Thinkstock

Only strangers abuse children.

Kids can and are being abused by relatives, neighbours and in many cases their own father. According to a research, in more than 50% of the cases of abuse, the abuser is a known person who enjoys the family's trust and has easy access to the child.

Only men sexually abuse children.

While in most cases, it's usually men who are abusers, there have been instances of women sexually abusing children.

Child sexual abuse happens only in poor or problem families.

Child sexual abuse cuts across classes, caste, religious and educational barriers and occurs irrespective of what the background of the abuser and the child is.

When children say they have been abused, it is often a figment of their imagination.

Most of the time, children are unable to disclose or talk about abuse. In rare instances, when they do talk, it is not their imagination; children need to be believed and supported if they talk about any sexual touching or if they express any reservations about interacting with particular adults.

Only beautiful or sexually precocious children are abused.

All kinds of children are easy targets because of the power the abuser has over the child. This power comes more from the inability of children to speak up or stop abuse than the physical appearance of the child.

Only girls are abused sexually.

According to research by the Women and Child Development Ministry of India, more than 53% of Indian kids suffer some form of sexual abuse. **Of this, 53% of the victims were boys and 47% were girls.**

PREVENT

WHY ARE KIDS SUSCEPTIBLE?



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CHILDREN ARE EASY TARGETS BECAUSE...

- Young children thrive on touch and seek it from everyone. It is one of their most important senses in the early years and so naturally, they show and accept love using this sense the most.
- Early experiences of touching and being touched are incredibly important—not only for moulding later tactile sensitivity, motor skills and understanding of the physical world, but also for health and emotional well-being of kids. If your child associates touch with a traumatic experience then it will impact overall development. So it is important to keep them away from all kinds of bad touch.
- They do not understand what bad touch is, unless explained to recognise and talk about it.
- They lack the communication or vocabulary to share what they experienced unless efforts are made to empower them with that knowledge.
- Many parents think that kids are imagining this behaviour and thus tend to ignore the child's attempts to talk about it.
- The abuser is usually someone you trust and he is confident that you will not suspect him and it will be his word against that of a young child.
- Abusers know that most parents are afraid of the social stigma and will be reluctant to take strict legal action or even talk about the abuse, so they can simply move on to the next child in case they are found out.

PREVENT

UNDERSTANDING UNUSUAL BEHAVIOUR IN CHILDREN



iStockphoto/Thinkstock

When two children are playing doctor-doctor or are curious about their genitals

Since young kids don't yet know the rules of modesty or morality, they're not consciously breaking them while playing doctor-doctor. Their curiosity about a playmate's genitals is as natural and innocent as their curiosity about their own, and motivated more by scientific than sexual interest. So parents must deal with this kind of behaviour in a matter-of-fact manner rather than thinking of it as sexually deviant behaviour. If you find yourself in this situation, don't ever punish, ridicule, scold, or embarrass the child for acting on a very natural impulse. It can confuse and demean them. Besides, it can also make the forbidden activity all the more intriguing.

Never tell a child that genitals are bad and so we shouldn't play with them

Such a statement by an adult can instil unhealthy feelings in a child about his/her private parts. These attitudes will be carried through adolescence and into adulthood. Such feelings may make the child accept bad things being done to his/her private parts by others instead of informing their parents about it.

If you find your child looking at or touching his/her genitals or playing doctor-doctor with themselves...

First, find out who or if anyone plays doctor-doctor with themselves or touches his private parts. Second, train your child that there are better games to play and if anyone touches their private parts, even if it is as a part of a game, they should say no and immediately come and tell you about it.

If you find that another child has kissed your child on the lips

There is a new trend among parents: kissing their kids on their lips. But here is a word of caution against it for 2 reasons: a) when you teach your child that kissing on the lips is an acceptable way to show affection, they are likely to accept it from all adults. Better to teach them then that only mummy and daddy can kiss you there. b) At a young age, they are susceptible to a lot of infections and the mouth has the most bacteria. Adults should refrain from kissing kids on their lips for health reasons as well.

PREVENT

GOOD AND BAD TOUCH

Always keep very young children under your watchful eyes. If you're keeping them in day-care, ensure that the centre has strict rules about touching, cleaning, appointment of staff and safety.

1. Instead of using the term sex education, it would help if everyone referred to it as body intelligence. Sex is understood as the act between man and woman and is a taboo subject in many homes and religions. If you're trying to educate your family and friend circle, teaching them to talk to their kids about body intelligence will be a lot easier than making them accept the idea of sex education.
2. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, food and water are a human being's first and basic needs, followed by safety and security. So it becomes the duty of parents and schools (right from kindergarten) to ensure that kids are safe and know about safety—both in relation to their own bodies as well as respecting that of others. That is why the term body intelligence.
3. Just like we teach kids to be safe on the roads we also need to teach them about body safety. Parents need to take the initiative with or without the topic included in the school curriculum.
4. Most nursery rhymes, lullabies and songs teach kids about their body parts, this is a good routine to involve kids in. It makes children aware of their bodies and also helps them name the parts and identify its uses. 'My body', as a concept, also builds self-esteem and gives them a sense of ownership and control. Make such rhymes and songs a part of your daily routine with your child.
5. Always keep very young children under your watchful eyes. If you're keeping them in day-care, ensure that the centre has strict rules about touching, cleaning, appointment of staff and safety. Do a thorough check before hiring domestic help at home as well.
6. Once children have developed vocabulary skills, you can start talking to them about good and bad touch. Keep it simple: lips, chest, genitals and bottom—no one can touch yours and you will not touch others'. Only mummy and the person who is allowed to give them a bath can touch them there. If anyone touches them, loudly shout **"NO"** and immediately go to mummy or the teacher and tell them what happened.

PREVENT

GOOD AND BAD TOUCH

7. When teaching children about these four parts, don't just say the names of the private part, point to it so the child knows what you are referring to. This is for the simple reason that the abuser may say, "I am not touching your 'wee-wee', I am touching around it."

8. Teach them to always wear their underwear unless they are going to the washroom. They should shut the washroom door and not allow anyone inside with them. Never allow anyone to remove their clothes or touch them.

9. Have a bedtime routine, where you talk to your child about his/her day. Listen keenly for any words or topics that may need your attention. Keep it casual, but keep reminding them to never play a 'secret' game with anyone. Ask them to tell you everything that makes them sad or happy; and even if they sometimes say things that upset you, make sure you don't react with anger.

10. Observe your kids when they indulge in role-play or play with friends. Children are born imitators so whatever an adult is 'doing' to them, they will use it in their play and do it to each other or to their dolls etc.

11. During bath-times, keep checking for redness or pain in their genital area. Never ignore anything that might seem unusual.

PREVENT

KNOW YOUR LAWS

From 2008 to 2012, overall rates of victimisation declined by 3.3%, from 9.5 to 9.2 per 1000 children in the population. This resulted in an estimated 30,000 fewer victims in 2012 (686,000) compared with 2008 (716,000)

India is a unique country, in that it has countless child-protection laws and organisations that aim to protect children and guarantee them rights to a decent life; and yet, surprisingly, when it came to sexual crimes, till May 2012, there was no separate law for children who had been victims of such abuse. This changed when, on 22nd May 2012, the Lok Sabha cleared **The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act**. Prior to this, sexual offences against children were tried under different sections of the IPC, which did not distinguish between adult and children victims. **Amongst other positives, POCSO, as the act is now popularly called, is a gender-neutral act, which recognises the fact that boys are also subjected to sexual assault.**

POCSO, which defines a child as any person below the age of 18 years, provides for severe punishment for child sexual offenders, depending on the gravity of the crime. It also lays out, in detail, what it means by sexual assault—which ranges from penetrative sexual assault to sexual harassment and child pornography. Moreover, the bill states, very clearly, that an offense will be treated as “aggravated” when it is committed by a person in a position of trust or authority, such as a public servant, a member of security forces, a police officer, a relative, etc.

In this section, we discuss everything you need to know about how to report sexual assault and other rights that you and your child have.

PREVENT

KNOW YOUR LAWS

Reporting Offences

If you know of a crime that has been committed or is likely to be committed, remember these things while reporting it:

1. Provide all the information you have to a Special Juvenile Police Unit or the local police
2. Once you report the crime, it has to be ascribed and entry number, recorded in writing and the recorded information has to be read out to the informant (in this case, you).
3. In case a child is reporting the crime, it has to be recorded in simple language so that the child understands what is being recorded.
4. In case the information being recorded is in a language that the informant does not understand, an interpreter or translator must be provided to the informant.
5. If the child in question needs protection, once the reasons for the need for protection are recorded in writing, the local police or the Special Juvenile Police Unit must make immediate arrangements to give the child protection—which may include admitting the child into a shelter or hospital—within 24 hours of the report being filed.
6. Once the report has been filed, the Child Welfare Committee and the Special or Session Court (in case a Special Court has not been designated) must be informed within 24 hours. The police must also inform them about the child's need for protection, the reasons for it and the steps taken in this regard.
7. A person who files the complaint cannot be held liable in a civil or criminal case for giving information in good faith for the purpose of preventing a crime or reporting it in case it has already been committed.

PREVENT

KNOW YOUR LAWS

The police officer must ensure that the identity of the child is protected from the media, unless otherwise directed by the Special Court in the interest of the child.

Rules of conduct while recording a child's statement:

1. A child's statement must, as far as possible, be recorded by a woman officer not below the rank of sub-inspector.
2. It should be recorded at the child's place of residence or at the place of his/her choice in the presence of the child's parents or any other person that he/she trusts.
3. The police officer, while recording the statement, must not be in uniform.
4. Wherever necessary, a translator or interpreter must be used by the police officer for accurate recording of facts.
5. In case the child is physically or mentally disabled and unable to communicate directly with the officer recording his/her statement, the officer must seek assistance from a special educator or expert who specialises in that manner of communication to record the statement.
6. As far as possible, a child's statement must also be recorded in audio-video format.
7. The investigating police officer must ensure that the child never comes in contact with the accused in any way.
8. A child cannot be detained in the police station in the night for any reason.
9. The police officer must ensure that the identity of the child is protected from the media, unless otherwise directed by the Special Court in the interest of the child.

PREVENT

KNOW YOUR LAWS

POCSO not only incriminates the person or people who actually commit a crime, but also the people who aid and abet the crime. A person is said to abet a crime when he/she instigates any person to commit a crime or conspires with a person/group of people to commit the crime or intentionally aids someone in committing a crime.

Medical examination of a child:

Regardless of whether a First Information Report or complaint has been registered under POCSO, the medical examination of any child against whom a child has been committed must follow the following procedure:

1. In case the victim is a girl child, the medical examination must be conducted by a woman doctor only.
2. The medical examination must be conducted in the presence of the child's parent or a person the child trusts.
3. In case the child's parents or a person he/she trusts cannot be present, for any reason, during the medical examination, it must be conducted in the presence of a woman nominated by the head of the medical institution.

Punishment for failure to report or record a case:

1. Any person who does not report an offence or fails to record it, is liable for punishment with imprisonment for up to six months, a fine, or both.
2. Any person who does not report an offence regarding a subordinate or charge while they are in-charge of any company or institution (including schools) is liable for punishment with imprisonment for up to six months, a fine, or both.

Punishment for false complaint or information:

1. Any person who makes a false complaint or provides false information against a person, solely with the intention to humiliate, extort or threaten him/her, is liable for punishment with imprisonment for up to six months, a fine, or both.
2. If a false complaint has been made or false information has been provided by a child, no punishment shall be imposed on such child.
3. Any person who makes a false complaint or provides false information against a child, knowing it to be false, is considered as someone who has victimised the child and is liable for punishment with imprisonment for up to one year, a fine, or both. or institution (including schools) is liable for punishment with imprisonment for up to six months, a fine, or both.

PREVENT

KINDS OF SEXUAL OFFENCES

1. Penetrative Sexual Assault

When the aggressor penetrates or makes someone penetrate or put his mouth to a child's vagina, mouth, urethra or anus through his penis, an object or another part of the body. It is also penetrative assault if he manipulates any part of the child's body to cause penetration.

Punishment: Not less than 7 years, extendable to imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine.

2. Aggravated Penetrative Sexual Assault

When the aggressor is in a position of authority (member of the armed forces, jail staff, remand home, staff of a place of custody or care, or a relative) and abuses the child within the premises at which he is appointed.

Punishment: Not less than 10 years but which may extend to imprisonment for life and shall also be liable to fine.

3. Sexual Assault

When someone touches a child's vagina, penis, anus or breast or makes a child touch their own or someone else's vagina, penis, anus or breast with sexual intent, even if it does not involve penetration.

Punishment: Imprisonment which shall not be less than three years but which may extend to five years, and shall also be liable to fine.

4. Aggravated Sexual Assault

Like in the case of aggravated penetrative sexual assault, when the aggressor is in a position of authority and sexually abuses a child but there is no penetration.

Punishment: Imprisonment for not less than five years but which may extend to seven years, and shall also be liable to fine.

5. Sexual Harassment.

When someone shows or makes the child show parts of his body with sexual intent; or exposes the child to words, gestures, or pornographic material. Basically, when any person does anything to a child that can be construed as sexual, even if it is without any kind of touch.

Punishment: Imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine.

PREVENT

THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS

It's not for nothing that a school is considered a child's second home. In the case of abuse, a school is often caught between the dilemma of dealing with parents who are afraid of the stigma and public attention that cases like these attract and doing what they're obligated to do by law—reporting the crime.

In this section, we discuss the role that a school plays in helping and encouraging parents to file complaints and protect the society at large, and children in specific, from sexual predators.

When a parent approaches the school with the doubt of abuse:

1. Take down all the details as told by the parent. Do not be on the defensive even if it is a trusted member of the staff that is being implicated. Listen carefully and note down all the details like who did it, when did he/she do it, what happened, what exactly did the child say, when did the child bring it to the parents' notice. It is important to write down details like the dates, time, people, places, etc. They will help the school conduct their own investigations to uncover the truth.
2. Always read out the details to the parents once you've noted them down to check for any omissions, discrepancies or misunderstandings. It is also important that the parent is aware and agrees with whatever has been written down.
3. If the parent has named another child as the abuser, explain to the parent that usually, in the case of young kids, the intention was not to abuse but to explore their curiosity about the human body. Most often, such cases can be solved by speaking to both sets of parents and counselling the child who committed the 'abusive' act.

The Role Of Schools

When a parent approaches the school with the doubt of abuse:

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4. If the parent has named an older child as the abuser, the school needs to find out, through counselling and investigations whether the older child committed the act with a sexual intent or as an act of curiosity. Even if the action was inspired by curiosity, in the case of older children, stricter action must be taken so that the child understands that what he/she did was very wrong. In the act was sexual in nature, depending on the age of the child, a police complaint must be filed or he/she must be sent for intensive counselling and behavioural therapy.

5. Never disclose the name of the children involved because he/she will immediately be ostracised by friends and classmates and may end up taking an emotionally charged decisions like suicide or running away from home.

6. If the parent has named a staff member as the abuser, proper inquiry needs to be undertaken to verify the accuracy or the claim against the the staff member. If initial investigations point to the staff member as a sexual offender, it is the school's duty to help the parent file a police complaint.

7. Medical report may not be necessary if there is no penetration.

8. If a parent chooses not to file a police complaint, take it in writing from them, fire the staff member and submit the details to the police. You may keep the name of the child anonymous as the parent does not want to file a complaint. It is also the school's duty to inform the parent that not reporting a crime is a punishable offence, as mentioned earlier.

9. If the child who has been abused is unable to talk about what happened due to young age or some other inability, use puppet shows or dolls to reenact a scenario and help them talk about it.

10. Letting them draw a particular scenario also helps. So, for example if a parent says that their child has been abused in the school bus, but they don't know who did it, motivate the child to draw his/her school bus experience. After the child has drawn, sit and talk to the child about the drawing and document it on the drawing.

Case study:

A mother once approached the school when she saw red marks around her two-year-old daughter's vagina and thought that she was being abused in the school bus because that was the only time she was not under her own or the teacher's watch. On investigating, the school found that there was no male attendant on the bus and all the other kids were under the age of 4. Besides, CCTV footage of the bus did not support the mother's suspicions. So the school made the child draw, and while talking about the drawing to the child the school found out that there was a watchman that looked after the child while she was playing in the garden and it was he who had abused the child.

The Role Of Schools

PREVENT

Reporting a case of abuse:

Once the complaint has been filed, take the parents' permission and call for a meeting to inform the other parents that an incident has occurred and the school is taking it seriously. Hiding factual information from other parents only leads to more speculation and gossip.

1. Meet the parent in presence of another staff member and ask the parent to write down the details of the complaint.
2. If the parents are unwilling or unable to write, ask them to speak and you or someone from your office must write down what is being said verbatim and then take the parents' signature on it.
3. Reassure the parents that you will conduct an enquiry to look into the matter.
4. Never take the side of the staff—even if he/she is an old employee and is well-known to you. Saying things like, "I know him/her well, he/she has kids too" etc. amounts to abetment according to POCSO.
5. If the parents want to go to the police, do not stop them. Instead, brief them about the proper procedures that will need to be followed while lodging a complaint. Go with them and help file the complaint.
6. While filing a complaint at the police station and for all further procedures of the police, ensure that the child's statement is recorded in compliance with POCSO's recording procedures detailed earlier.
7. Often, after filing the complaint, parents tend to feel that the case became public and the school should have warned them about the possible media repercussions; handle this gently. By law, the media can never disclose the name of the child, the school or any photographs unless specifically directed by the courts. While this rule is often flouted—especially with respect to keeping the school's name a secret, the victim's name is almost never disclosed.
8. Once the complaint has been filed, take the parents' permission and call for a meeting to inform the other parents that an incident has occurred and the school is taking it seriously. Hiding factual information from other parents only leads to more speculation and gossip.
9. Immediately call a meeting of the concerned department staff and appraise them about the situation and instruct them to be vigilant and discreet.

The Role Of Schools

PREVENT

In case both the abused and the person suspected are children:

1. Ensure that you speak to each child in the presence of another staff.
2. Call both the parents for a meeting.
3. Interview and brief both parents separately.
4. Do not let them handle it directly, as it is possible that they may get into a verbal or physical fight.
5. Ensure that you document all meetings.
6. Do not ask any teacher to conduct an inquiry unless someone senior is not present.
7. Ensure that neither child's reputation is maligned due to gossip.

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HEAL

WHEN YOU DOUBT THERE IS ABUSE

Disbelief-shock-anger-guilt-depression is the most common chain of reactions when a parent doubts or finds out that their child has been sexually abused. Here are some things to keep in mind:

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1. No matter how you find out that your child may be suffering abuse—whether it was through his/her talks, you saw something during play or noticed redness in the genital area—the important thing is that you act on it. Do not let the fear of what you might find out brush it aside as overreaction or an irrational fear.
2. Talk and find out more from your child. Ask probing questions like so when you play with uncle, where does he tickle and touch you, etc.
3. Never make the child feel guilty or dirty about it, but do teach your child to say no because, “Mummy and daddy don’t like you playing with uncle in this way so mummy and daddy will talk to uncle about it, but till then if uncle meets you, say you don’t want to play.”
4. Sit as a couple and family to discuss the way ahead. It is not wise to ‘let it go’, take action against the offender. Many times, parents are worried that if it is the domestic help and they make a police complaint, he might come back to take revenge. But fear is a two-sided sword—if you take action, at least you have made others aware about the person and also made the person aware that action can be taken against him.
5. If you don’t report it, the chain of abuse continues. He may move on to his next victim in the next house he works at or share how he got away with the next guy who comes to work at yours. Report it right away.
6. Seek help of the school and teacher, they can watch the child and report any change in behaviour and help counsel you and the child. If you suspect it is someone from the school, all the more reason to approach the school and seek their intervention.
7. If the school denies it or tries to cover up by saying that their staff could not have done it; be firm. It is the school’s duty to look into any such complains. The law is very strict on this issue.

HEAL

DEALING WITH THE TRAUMA OF ABUSE

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In the immediate aftermath of trauma, a child usually attempts to reorganise, reevaluate and restore their pre-traumatic world. Most of what they say and do is characterised by these efforts to restore order. Unfortunately, children are often unable to understand or explain their trauma. Young children are especially vulnerable to making false assumptions and believing that they are somehow to blame for what happened. Children will seek answers and comfort from the parents and adults around them. It is at this time that you cannot afford to feel helpless in this role. Even if you don't have all the answers, you can help your child deal with the trauma in a way that doesn't leave lifelong scars.

But when a child is abused, it's not just he/she that is traumatized, the parents too go through their own private hell. Even if the parents' most pressing concern is the well-being of the child, one must realise that sometimes, parents too need help in coming to terms with the abuse. In this section, we discuss how to help your child and yourself exit from the victim stage of abuse.

- 1.** Talk about the event. Children do not benefit from 'putting it out of their minds'. Not addressing what happened only makes the process of recovery longer and more painful. If you're not sure when or how to bring it up, let your child lead. Don't bring up the topic on your own but if your child does, make sure you answer questions, offer love and support and keep repeating that what happened was not their fault in any way.
- 2.** Do not get tired of repeating the same answers. Kids, especially the younger ones, might keep asking the same questions over and over again because what happened can be confusing to them. Repeating questions may be his/her coping mechanism.
- 3.** Talk to the others. Sometimes, telling the key people around your child about what happened might help them understand what he/she is going through and treat him/her with care and concern. This is particularly true in the case of caregivers and teachers.

Dealing With The Trauma Of Abuse

HEAL

4. Don't be afraid to seek help. While some changes in the child's behaviour are normal over an extended period of time, the persistence of extreme symptoms of trauma beyond 3 months may be a cause for concern. If they persist for 6 months or longer and come in the way of normal functioning, definitely seek help from a professional. If the child is already in therapy, talk to the therapist about this.

5. Provide a consistent, predictable pattern to their days. Structure your child's day in a manner that he/she has a consistent time for meals, school, homework, quiet time, playtime, dinner, etc. It is very important for children to know that their caretakers are 'in control', especially in the aftermath of abuse. It is frightening for abused children to feel that the people caring for them are disorganised, confused and anxious.

6. Be nurturing and affectionate, but not too much. For children who have been abused, physical intimacy is often associated with confusion, pain, fear and abandonment. While providing hugs and kisses, and showing physical affection is very important, especially for younger kids, do not distress them by overdoing it. A good way to go about this is to be physically affectionate when the child seeks it. If your child touches you, return in kind. But don't interrupt his/her play by suddenly holding them. Do not command them to give you a hug or a kiss. It reinforces their negative association between physical intimacy and power.

7. Watch out for signs of reenactment of the abuse (in play or drawing), avoidance (withdrawal, day-dreaming) or hyper-reactivity (anxiety, insomnia, impulsiveness). While most kids who have been abused might show a combination of these symptoms in the immediate post-traumatic period, they should fade away with time.

8. Give the child some sense of control. Most abused children feel that they have no control over their world. So give them some element of control (choice of activities, etc.) in their daily living and interaction with adults. It will make them feel more safe, comfortable and confident over time.

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HEAL

HELPLINES

Teach young kids about body safety to win the battle against child sexual abuse - 3,50,000 kids educated, join our mission — www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWT-9MuJDRk

Call 1098 to reach **ChildLine**'s all-India 24-hour-helpline for children in need. Share this number with your kids too, in case they can't access you in an emergency.

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