

## Myths About Sexual Abuse

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Sexual abuse is never an easy incident for any parent, teacher, friend or leader to hear about from a child. It is shocking and often leaves the person hearing the report initially stunned. Watching families struggle with the impact of abuse, they express feelings of anger, helplessness, guilt, and shame. In the midst of these powerful emotions, it becomes easy to buy into some myths about sexual abuse. This is so because one is grappling with the reality of what has happened and trying to find relief from the pain. Below are a few of the myths accompanied by the truth.

*Myth: Sexual abusers are usually strangers to their victims.*

At least half, if not more so, offenders are known by their victims. Sexual abusers can be primary care givers, other relatives, neighbors, teachers, friends of the family and even parents.”

*Myth: Sexual abuse of children is usually violent, and physical trauma is the greatest harm resulting from this kind of abuse.*

Violent attacks and forced penetration of the victim occur in less than 5% of the reported cases. The abuser often finds it easy to trick a child into sexual contact. Bribes and affection are the most effective tools of the sexual abuser. Psychological and emotional harm is the most devastating effect of sexual abuse.

*Myth: Children make up stories about being sexually abused.*

It is very rare that a child lies about sexual abuse. Their abusers have often told the children that no one will believe their story. Therefore, children need support and comfort when they disclose what has happened to them. They need to be reassured that they are believed and that someone will help them.

*Myth: Some children act seductively and want to have sexual relations with adults.*

Children NEVER ask to be sexually abused. While some children may be looking for affection or responding to it, the responsibility rests with the offender for the abuse, NOT the victim. This also applies to cases where the abuser is someone the child knows or even loves.

*Myth: Children never get over the harm of sexual abuse.*

In cases where violent physical harm did not occur and where the offender does not have a close relationship with the victim, children recover faster than adult victims. The most important factor in children’s recover is how appropriately the adults who surround them handle the incident.

With this in mind, here is what children need:

- to be believed
- assurance that what happened was not their fault
- assurance of on-going support
- assurance they did the right thing in telling
- assurance that it is okay to talk about the abuse in a supportive environment
- assurance that you will not tell about what happened to anyone who doesn't need to know, and that they will be informed about who needs to be told
- people who will respond to them in a calm, sensitive way
- adults who will provide for their safety

If you or a loved one is facing this type of situation, please be reassured that God is faithful. He is faithful to heal, comfort, lead, and strengthen you as you gently walk through the healing process. If the Lord was upset enough to look foolish clearing the temple in Bible days, He is just as upset that you, His present dwelling place, was offended in this manner. The Lord will not leave a stone unturned in providing healing for your child, for you, or any of your loved ones.

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