

Child sexual assault

A fact sheet for parents, carers, educators and community members

What is child sexual assault?

Child sexual assault – or sexual abuse – is any sexual act or sexual threat imposed on a child or adolescent.

It is child sexual assault if the abuser:

- exposes themselves to a child
- shows pornography to a child
- touches a child in an inappropriate way
- encourages a child to touch them in a sexual way
- has sexual intercourse with a child or young person under 16 years, or 18 years if they are in a supervisory role.

Child sexual assault is an **abuse of power and authority** held by the abuser. It is never the fault of the child.

How does child sexual assault happen?

Often the abuser is someone the child knows and trusts. Abusers take advantage of a child or adolescent's dependency or lack of understanding about what's happening.

Positions of trust and authority offer abusers opportunities to manipulate children's trust and yours. They use a range of tactics including bribes, threats, force and deception to coerce children and adolescents into participating and remaining silent about it. They may also try to gain the trust and friendship of parents and carers to obtain access to children.

How to provide support

A child or adolescent who has been sexually abused needs:

- to be believed and supported
- acknowledgement that they've made the right decision to tell
- safety and protection from the risk of further abuse and harassment
- to know that what happened to them is serious and will not be ignored
- acknowledgement of their feelings (whatever they may be)
- to know they're not responsible for the abuse
- understanding that they may have both positive and negative feelings about the abuser
- to know that they're not responsible for deciding what happens to the abuser after they have told
- support and counselling from a sexual assault counsellor.

Where to seek professional advice

Report child sexual assault or concerns about sexual abuse

- Child Protection Crisis Line: 13 12 78 (24 hours)
- Victoria Police Sexual Offences Child Investigation Team: <https://www.police.vic.gov.au/sexual-offences-and-child-abuse-investigation-teams>

Counselling and support for children, adolescents and adults who care for them

- Sexual Assault Crisis Line (Victoria): 1800 806 292
- Find your local specialist sexual assault service in Victoria: sasvic.org.au/our-members
- Kids Helpline (Australia-wide): 1800 551 800 (24 hours)