



A Unique Approach to Primary Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse

The Problem of Child Sexual Abuse

- About 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 13 boys in the United States experience child sexual abuse.¹
- In over 70% of child sexual abuse cases, the child is harmed by another child or teen.²
- The impact of sexual abuse continues in adulthood; adults who were sexually victimized as children experience higher rates of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, heart disease, toxic stress and other long-term negative health impacts.³
- Child sexual abuse cuts across social and economic classes, and all racial, ethnic, and cultural identities.⁴
- Nearly 90% of sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone known to the child or child's family.⁴
- Less than 40% of victims of child sexual abuse disclose the abuse as a child.^{5,6}

We Believe

- Child sexual abuse is preventable. It is not inevitable.
- Every child deserves to live safely in their home and community, free from sexual harm.
- Adults must be accountable and responsible for preventing child sexual abuse and keeping children safe in all domains. Children should be continually taught age-appropriate lessons safety, but children should not shoulder the primary burden of sexual violence prevention.
- Every adult and child deserve respect, compassion, and safety. This must also include people who have caused sexual harm.
- Labeling people who sexually harm children with words such as “monster” or “predator” is a barrier to effective prevention. Most often, children are harmed by their loved ones. If we rely on stereotypes, we miss opportunities to respond to early warning signs in the people we love.
- Sexual abuse thrives in isolation and secrecy. Talking about sexual wellness and sexual abuse means that you are “askable” and someone who others can talk with openly about abuse and safety planning.
- Healthy relationship education is foundational to primary prevention and builds protective factors around children. Young people deserve help, guidance, and accurate information early to make sense of their own sexual interests and behaviors.
- Changing attitudes and raising awareness tied to specific action is critical to shifting our society response to include prevention.
- To prevent child sexual abuse, we must acknowledge and address the intersections of racism, poverty, mental and physical health disparities, and other oppressions. These inequities can amplify risk factors and deeply impact reporting and disproportionate responses to harm.

¹ Fast Facts: Preventing Child Sexual Abuse. CDC. (2022). www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childsexualabuse/fastfact.html.

² Gewirtz-Meydan, A., & Finkelhor, D. (2020). Sexual abuse and assault in a large national sample of children and adolescents. *Child maltreatment*, 25(2), 203-214.

³ Fast Facts: Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences. CDC. (2023). www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/fastfact.html.

⁴ Finkelhor, D. (2012). *Characteristics of crimes against juveniles*. Durham, NH: Crimes against Children Research Center.

⁵ Broman-Fulks, J. J., Ruggiero, K. J., Hanson, R. F., Smith, D. W., Resnick, H. S., Kilpatrick, D. G., & Saunders, B. E. (2007). Sexual assault disclosure in relation to adolescent mental health: Results from the National Survey of Adolescents. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, 36, 260 – 266.

⁶ Smith, D. W., Letourneau, E. J., Saunders, B. E., Kilpatrick, D. G., Resnick, H. S., & Best, C. L. (2000). Delay in disclosure of childhood rape: Results from a national survey. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 24, 273 – 287.

Our Unique Approach: Preventing Perpetration

Stop It Now! centers its work where most child sexual abuse occurs within the intimate spheres of family, friends and community. Prevention requires engagement of everyone in each of these areas. Stop It Now! creates space for people who may see something happening and are not sure what to do, who may have concerns about their own thoughts and feelings, who are parents of children engaging in problematic sexual behaviors, and who experienced sexual abuse as children and are now adults noticing something in their family or community. We encourage every person to step forward, speak up, and work together to break cycles of abuse.

We are the only organization in the United States to offer help to families, bystanders, people who have experienced sexual harm, and anyone who is concerned about someone who may be at risk to cause sexual harm. We have been a model for similar programs globally. Through research, programming, and over 35,000 conversations on our Helpline, we have learned about each person's role in prevention:

- People who had been convicted and incarcerated told us that there were many warning signs in their behavior and that, if they had known about resources, perhaps they would not have abused a child.
- Adults at risk have shared that they do not want to harm children. They want to live healthy, safe, and fulfilling lives.
- Adult family members and bystanders want to know what to do to prevent child sexual abuse and seek accurate information, practical resources, and access to support.
- Communities will respond to a public health framing that moves away from "stranger danger" and recognizes the complexities of addressing abuse where it most often occurs at home.

Our perpetration prevention approach engages adults in planning for safety before a child is ever harmed. Fundamentally, we achieve this by preparing adults to have confident, comfortable, and calm conversations. We teach parents how to intervene safely and effectively when a child or an adult shows warning signs of harmful behaviors. We offer training to organizations to ensure that they have policies to protect children and establish clear codes of conduct. We also reach individuals who may be at risk to sexually harm a child and offer them a chance to keep themselves and the people they love safe through support and services.

And we are continually listening to our callers to create the information and resources they identify as most needed. For example, in response to a growing number of questions from teens, we recently created a groundbreaking program to reach youth about safe and healthy relationship and sexual behaviors.

Our Contribution

Stop it Now! adds a critical perspective to child sexual abuse prevention by focusing on perpetration prevention; we work directly with adults and families who know someone at risk of harming a child. In addition to this work – and often informed by it – we engage adults in awareness, intervention programs, and help for children. We do this difficult work through:

- **Helpline:** Free and confidential helpline, available through email, chat, text, or phone. (1-888-PREVENT) available live 12pm-6pm Monday-Friday.
- **whatsok.org:** Resource and helpline for youth to ask about sexual thoughts and behaviors.
- **Circles of Safety:** Sexual abuse prevention and safety training for youth-serving organizations and caregiving adults.
- **Prevention Tools:** Website with tip sheets, guidebooks, and a resource library: stopitnow.org. Providing education to help adults become proactive and protective.
- **Advice Column:** Real-life questions about child sexual abuse prevention answered by the Stop It Now! Help Services staff, stopitnow.org/help-guidance/advice-column.
- **Public Policy:** Stop it Now! participates in and leads national collaborations to promote effective prevention planning and public policy, including funding perpetration prevention strategies.