



# Stop It Now!®

Together We Can Prevent the Sexual Abuse of Children

## PREVENTION TOOLS

Have questions?

Need resources?

**Get Help Now!**

Online Help Center  
<http://GetHelp.StopItNow.org>

**Stop It Now!**® prevents the sexual abuse of children by mobilizing adults, families and communities to take actions that protect children before they are harmed.

### *What Happens After a Report Is Filed?*

Usually the identity of the person who filed the report remains confidential. Typically CPS and/or police do not share information with anybody about the progress of an investigation – even with a protective parent. This can feel frustrating, especially if the process is moving slowly.

#### Reports are reviewed for investigation

Once a report of child abuse has been made, the protective authorities (either child protective services or the police), decide whether or not to follow up the report. When a report is “screened in,” it means that protective authorities will follow up with an investigation. When it is “screened out,” it means that the report will not be investigated.

#### Reports can be “screened out”

When a report is “screened out,” no action is taken, or the report is transferred to a more appropriate agency. Usually, a report is “screened out” when:

- There’s not enough evidence on which to base an investigation
- CPS or police judge the information to be inaccurate or false
- The information in the report doesn’t meet definitions for child abuse or neglect used by the protective authorities

#### When reports are “screened in”

When the protective authorities decide that the report may indicate child abuse, they must investigate the suspected abuse within a time period specified by state law, typically within 24 or 48 hours or up to 5 days, depending on the state. Sometimes there is a “preliminary” investigation to gather more information to determine whether or not they will proceed with a full investigation. However, when it is judged that there is no immediate danger to a child, CPS is allowed more time before they begin an investigation.

#### Who participates in the investigation?

Investigations may be managed by child protective services, by the police, or by both. Where criminal acts may have taken place, only the police can make arrests. The team of professionals involved in investigations can include a protective services worker, a doctor, therapist, social worker and law enforcement officials. Interviews may be held with the child, a non-offending parent, and the person suspected of sexually abusing. Sometime interviews are also held with the child’s brothers and sisters, and anyone else who may have knowledge about possible danger to the child such as neighbors, teachers, child care providers, doctors and therapists. As part of the investigation, the child is sometimes given a physical exam for the purpose of collecting evidence or attending to medical needs. Legally admissible confessions or disclosures often must be made directly to an investigator or professional.

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### The child interview

Interviews of the child should be held in locations where children feel safe. Generally, a child is not interviewed in their home; however, they may be interviewed at their school or therapist's office. If there is a Child Advocacy Center (CAC) in your community, you may be referred there for interviews and/or medical exams. CAC's are centers especially designed to provide a child-friendly environment where the professionals who see the children have been trained in child interviewing and assessment.

### When the investigation substantiates that abuse has taken place

If the investigation indicates that a child has been sexually abused, interventions are taken to protect the child from immediate harm. Police are also involved when criminal acts have taken place. Once the child is out of immediate danger, CPS decides what kind of follow-up actions are needed to keep the child safe. Follow-up actions might include ongoing supervision by the Department of Social Services, services for the whole family, as well as for the abused child, including counseling and support programs.

Often parents are frightened that children will be removed from the home. Remember that removing a child is always the very last resort that is considered. This is only done when it is confirmed that a child is not safe in their home due to the protective adult's inability to prevent harm or adequately care for the child.

### When abuse is not substantiated

After an investigation has been conducted, a case is considered unsubstantiated if the protective authorities determine that no abuse has taken place, or if there was not enough evidence to prove the suspected abuse took place. It can be extremely upsetting and disappointing when a parent believes their child is being abused but can't get protection for the child from the system because of a lack of evidence.