



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.

When Must a Therapist File a Report?

Not everything you share with a therapist can be kept confidential.

What an individual tells his or her therapist is confidential; however, there are limitations to the confidentiality between a therapist and a client. Laws in all 50 states require a therapist to contact authorities if a patient is a danger to themselves, to others, and/or if the therapist suspects that a known child is being abused. These reporting laws, as they are applied in your state, are explained to all adults and to guardians of children who seek professional counseling for any reason. Understanding this limitation to confidentiality is important, and applies to anyone seeking medical care or mental health services.

Therapists need specific information in order to contact authorities.

Most of the time professionals need specific information about a particular child who is at risk or who has been already harmed along with information about who is being abusive in order to take the step of filing a report. In most situations the "victim" must be clearly identified. For example "I'm concerned about my child's sexual behaviors towards other kids," or "I'm having disturbing thoughts about being sexual with a child" are not statements that would typically trigger a report. However if someone says "My 16-yr-old son told me that he touched my sister's 5-yr-old daughter" or "I have touched my son in sexual ways" or "My daughter disclosed to me that her grandfather has been playing sexual games with her" then a therapist may have enough information to file a report.

Each state is a little different. Be informed.

There are slight variations state to state regarding when mental health professionals must file. Please ask your therapist about their policies and review the [statutes](#) for mandated reporters in your state so that you can be informed. In addition, the therapist may not be required to inform a client or their family that a report is being made. You can ask ahead of time about how this would be handled should the therapist consider filing.

If therapists or clients have questions about under what circumstances reports are mandated, contacting the licensing organization for that professional is a good place to start. For example, in some states confidentiality is only broken if abuse is occurring within the family. Understanding these mandates in your state allows you to make informed decisions about your interactions with a therapist and not be caught off-guard by these laws.

Consent forms are signed before therapy begins.

Before beginning therapy, clients or guardians (if the client is a minor) should be asked to read and sign a consent form that explains the circumstances under which your therapist must break confidentiality. If the client is a minor then the information should be clearly explained to the parent or guardian. If at any time you have questions about what is confidential and what is not, try not to be intimidated, and please be sure to get your questions answered.

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