



Have questions?

Need resources?

**Get Help Now!**

Call the Stop It Now! Helpline:

**1.888.Prevent**

or visit: <https://www.stopitnow.org/help>

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

## ***The Unique Role of Grandparents in Preventing Child Sexual Abuse***

### **The Facts about Child Sexual Abuse**

Surveys of adults reveal that as many as one in three girls and one in seven boys have been sexually abused before the age of eighteen. And the trauma of sexual abuse can affect the emotional and physical health of those children for the rest of their lives.

Nine out of ten children who are sexually abused already know the person who abuses them. So, we mustn't let feelings of helplessness, fueled by news accounts of horrific crimes perpetrated by strangers, distract us from the many ways we actually can protect our children from more likely risks, closer to home. Fortunately, sexual assaults by strangers, although real, are relatively rare.

The truth is, most often the people who sexually abuse children are close relatives, friends and other trusted caretakers of our children – people we care about who have horribly lost control. As much as half of all sexual abuse of minors is committed by other adolescents and children. Sometimes grandparents have to acknowledge the possibility that their own partner has been sexually inappropriate or abusive toward a child. If we have the courage to face the facts about who abuses children, this knowledge gives us an incredible opportunity to identify risks and to act before a child is harmed.

### **Information Especially for Grandparents**

Because a significant percentage of children are sexually abused by someone in their immediate or extended family, grandparents can play an invaluable part in addressing these sexual behavior concerns. And those grandparents, who have care-giving responsibilities or any level of legal guardianship of young people in their family, are in a particularly good position to take steps to protect the well-being of those children.

Through the Stop It Now! Helpline, grandmothers and grandfathers have identified themselves as individuals likely to speak up in a family situation of child sexual abuse, where before there was only an atmosphere of silence and secrecy. Grandparents from around the nation call the Stop It Now! Helpline to ask important questions, express their concerns and take extraordinary steps to protect their grandchildren.

### **Why Grandparents Need to Speak Up**

Life experience and a position outside the immediate family gives grandparents unique advantages when it comes to facilitating conversations and encouraging action to prevent sexual abuse. Whether a grandchild is suspected of being sexually abused by an adult or another adolescent or child, grandparents can encourage family members to speak up to prevent further abuse and to get help for a family member who may have a sexual behavior problem.

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Here are some ways grandparents can help protect a child:

- Grandparents have a perspective on life and family that allows them to take certain risks on behalf of the wellness of the family as a whole.
- When there is a prior history of sexual abuse within a family, (including a situation where a grandparent has offended in the past), grandparents can draw on their experience to help navigate a current situation of abuse and prevent future harm.
- Grandparents can often recognize warning sign behaviors of sexual abuse in a family's history, signs which might otherwise go unnoticed.
- Grandparents may offer the emotional safety that a child requires to begin exposing a tightly held secret.
- Grandparents can offer emotional support and influence for both abusive and non-abusive adults from within the privacy of the family.
- Grandparents who are one step removed from the conflict may operate relatively free from emotional and financial barriers that often prevent other family members from speaking up.
- A grandparent may be a trusted adult who can offer family members a safe respite from the often frightening dynamics of sexual abuse.
- Grandparents, as "next of kin," can offer temporary or permanent care for a child who may be unsafe in their own home.
- If sexual behavior problems exist between two children in the home, a grandparent may be perceived as someone who will be compassionate towards both children.

For more information and guidance, please visit our Online Help Center, <https://www.StopItNow.org/gethelp>.