

["The Scope of Child Sexual Abuse Definition and Fact Sheet" | Stop It Now](#)

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Understanding how to prevent child sexual abuse begins with understanding what child sex abuse is. When parents, caregivers, treatment providers, child protection professionals and all adults in a position to protect a child keep informed about the facts related to sex abuse, then stepping up to take a protective action becomes easier and better defined.

Defining Child Sexual Abuse

If you are not exactly sure what sexual abuse is, you're not alone. To help identify abuse, identifying behaviors that are abusive can help determine what sex abuse is. Sex abuse does include both **Touching and Non-Touching** Behaviors

All sexual touching between an adult and a child is sexual abuse. Sexual touching between children can also be sexual abuse when there is a significant age difference (often defined as 3 or more years) between the children or if the children are very different developmentally or size-wise. Sexual abuse does not have to involve penetration, force, pain, or even touching. If an adult engages in any sexual behavior (looking, showing, or touching) with a child to meet the adult's interest or sexual needs, it is sexual abuse. This includes the manufacture, distribution and viewing of child pornography.

Child Pornography

The U.S. Department of Justice defines child pornography as any visual depiction of sexually explicit conduct involving a minor (persons less than 18 years old). Images of child pornography are also referred to as child sexual abuse images. Notably, the legal definition of sexually explicit conduct does not require that an image depict a child engaging in sexual activity. A picture of a naked child may constitute illegal child pornography if it is sufficiently sexually suggestive. Additionally, the age of consent for sexual activity in a given state is irrelevant; any depiction of a minor less than 18 years of age engaging in sexually explicit conduct is illegal.[\[i\]](#)

Federal law prohibits the production, distribution, importation, reception, or possession of any image of child pornography. A violation of federal child pornography laws is a serious crime, and convicted offenders face fines severe statutory penalties

What can we learn about child sexual abuse from statistics?

Statistics are a way to communicate the seriousness and demonstrate how widespread sexual abuse is. Since secrecy and silence are fuel for sexual abuse to continue, it's important that adults recognize how often sexual abuse happens. It is not an isolated incident. It does not happen only in impoverished areas or between specific types of people. It can happen anywhere, anytime to any child or teenager.

Overall, it is difficult to gather statistics about the prevalence of sex abuse due to the lack of victim disclosure. It is difficult to measure what is kept secret. Additionally, different research resources use different data collection methods; often targeting specific age groups (i.e. teens) or subsets (those abused by a caregiver). And finally, to compound the difficulty in getting accurate statistics, there is no ongoing comprehensive national effort to document all CSA incidents in the US.[\[ii\]](#)

For these reasons, we have collected only what we consider the most widely requested statistics. There are many other well researched statistic collections, such as [Darkness2Light's comprehensive listing](#)(link

is external), as well as [CSOM's \(Center for Sex Offender Management\) fact sheet on sex offenders](#)(link is external).

The Survivors:

Children and teens in all racial, religious, ethnic, gender and age groups, and at all socio-economic levels are sexually abused. While there are risk factors that may increase the possibility of sexual abuse, sex abuse is found in all types of families, communities and cultures.

The impact of sexual abuse does not end when the abuse ends. Survivors of sexual abuse are at significantly greater risks for severe and chronic mental health issues, including alcoholism, depression, anxiety, PTSD and high risk behaviors.

- One in 10 children will experience contact sexual abuse in the U.S. before age 18[[iii](#)]
- More than 50% of sex abuse survivors were sexually abused before the age of 12.[[iv](#)]
- One in 25 children (10-17) will receive an online sexual solicitation[[v](#)]
- Of substantiated reports of child maltreatment in the US, 9% were unique survivors of sexual abuse[[vi](#)]
- The average age for a minor to enter the sex trade is 12 – 14.[[vii](#)]
- Globally, prevalence rates show that a range of 7-36% of women and 3-29% of men experience sexual abuse in childhood.[[viii](#)]
- More than one-third (35.2%) of the women who reported a completed rape before the age of 18 also experienced a completed rape as an adult, Thus, the percentage of women who were raped as children or adolescents and also raped as adults was more than two times higher than the percentage among women without an early rape history. [[ix](#)]
- 42.2% girls experiencing their first completed rape did so before the age of 18 (29.9% between 11-17 years old and 12.3% at or before age 10) [[x](#)]
- Over one-quarter of male victims of completed rape experienced their first rape at or before the age of 10. [[xiii](#)]
- Children with disabilities are 2.9 times more likely than children without disabilities to be sexually abused.[[xi](#)]
- Children with intellectual and mental health disabilities appear to be the most at risk, with 4.6 times the risk of sexual abuse as their peers without disabilities.[[xii](#)]
- At least 31% of girls and 7% of boys involved in the juvenile justice system have been sexually abused.[[xiii](#)]

The Situation:

- In as many as 93 percent of child sexual cases, the child knows the person that commits the abuse. [[xiv](#)]
- *Males made up almost 88% of perpetrators* [[xv](#)]
- 60% of children who are sexually abused do not disclose[[xvi](#)] [[xvii](#)] [[xviii](#)]
- Up to 50% of child sexual abuse cases are perpetrated by someone younger than 18 years old[[xix](#)]
- *12 – 24% of sex offenders are known re-offenders* [[xx](#)]
- Most are acquaintances but as many as 47% are family or extended family.[[xxi](#)]
- *Juveniles make up 20% of those arrested for sex offenses* [[xxii](#)]
- The 5-year sexual recidivism rate for high-risk sex offenders is 22% from the time of release, and decreases for this risk level to 4.2% for those who have remained offense-free in the community

for 10 years. The recidivism rates of the low-risk offenders are consistently low (1%-5%) for all time periods. [xxiii]

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