

## Child Sexual Abuse

by Kim Olver

This is not a topic that is typically sought and read with fervor but if you are a parent or a person who loves any child under the age of 18, then you need to know the staggering statistics of child sexual abuse. Different references provide different statistics but the general consensus among the experts is that one in three girls will be sexually abused before she reaches the age of eighteen and one in six boys will be molested before their 18th birthday.

Do you really believe that with statistics like these your children will be somehow magically immune from the problem? No one wants to believe his or her child is at risk. No one wants to think that anything so ugly could happen in their family but the truth is that most victims are molested by someone they know. According to Advocates for Youth at [www.advocatesforyouth.org/PUBLICATIONS/factsheet/fsabuse1.htm](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/PUBLICATIONS/factsheet/fsabuse1.htm), a study done in three states reveals 96% of reported rape survivors under age 12 knew their attacker.

Child Help statistics at [www.childhelp.org/resources/learning-center/statistics](http://www.childhelp.org/resources/learning-center/statistics) report 30-40% of children are abused by a family member, while another 50% are abused by someone they know and trust outside the family. Forty percent of children are abused by older or bigger children whom they know. (This is confirmed by Advocates for Youth who found that adolescents were the offenders in 50% of reported cases.) That leaves only 10% who are actually abused by a stranger.

Children are typically abused younger than most people think. Over 20% of victims are abused prior to their 8th birthday and 50% who suffer violent attacks, such as sodomy, rape with an object, or forcible fondling are under twelve years-old.

Also, a new statistic is emerging about solicitation on the Internet. Child Help reports that one in five children is sexually solicited while surfing the Internet! How much unsupervised time does your child spend on the Internet? Do you think he or she knows enough to not give out personal details to a perpetrator online? Think again.

Adult perpetrators are very good at manipulating children into revealing information or victimizing them through either bribes or threats. Most parents know to educate their children not to talk to strangers. Parents want to believe that it is some deranged pedophile who catches and molests unsuspecting children. However, that is not the reality according to national statistics.

Another myth that must be dispelled is that sexual abuse only happens to socioeconomically disadvantaged families, one-parent families or families with drug involvement. This simply is not true. Child sexual abuse occurs as much in rural areas, as in urban areas and cuts across all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups. There have been studies that show it is more likely to occur within families who isolate themselves

from others, in families where alcohol abuse is a factor and in families where there has been a generational history of abuse.

Most perpetrators establish a long-term relationship with their victims. There is a grooming process that occurs. It may start with preferential treatment, providing gifts and special privileges to earn a child's trust. The child may not want to lose his or her special status or the relationship with the perpetrator so they go along as unwilling participants. If the child is young enough, he or she may not even know there is anything wrong with the perpetrator's behavior.

There are also times when the perpetrator convinces the child catastrophic events will occur if the child tells. They may have threatened to kill the child or the child's mother if the child tells. They may have threatened to start abusing a younger sibling if the child tells. There are many reasons why your child may never share what is happening.

According to Child Help, 30% of victims never disclose their abuse to anyone, while 75% end up disclosing accidentally. Later, 20% who disclose end up recanting. Children do not make up these stories. Statistics show children only fabricate stories of sexual abuse 1/2% of the time. Believe your child if he or she shares someone has touched him or her inappropriately, even if it is someone you love.

A book that is designed to help parents educate their children about the dangers of child sexual abuse is called, *A Very Touching Book* by Jan Hindman and Tom Novak. Please don't wait until it's too late. Arm your child with information that can protect him or herself.