



TIP SHEET

Child sexual assault: Myths and truths



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Child sexual assault (CSA) is a crime that affects all children of all genders, ages, races, economic classes and minority groups. You can help protect the children in your care by knowing the facts, staying informed about issues related to child protection, and teaching your children about personal safety. Below are some of the more common myths and truths about CSA.

MYTH The parents are at fault for the sexual assault. They should've better protected their child.

TRUTH Parents are often accused of not protecting their child. However, this attitude shifts blame and enables offenders to avoid responsibility for the actions. The offender is always the person who is responsible for a child sexual assault.

MYTH Child sex offenders are mostly strangers.

TRUTH It is estimated that in 70-90% of cases the offender is someone the child knows.

MYTH People who sexually assault their own children are not a danger to other children.

TRUTH Child sex offenders rarely engage in a single offence. A person who offends against their own child/ren may offend against other children.

MYTH Incest and sexual assault only occurs in poor families.

TRUTH Incest and sexual assault can occur in all kinds of families, rich or poor, large or small, well-educated or not well-educated.

MYTH Some children enjoy sexual attention from adults and this will not harm them.

TRUTH Sexual assault has many harmful effects on children. Sexual assault can result in children experiencing fear, confusion, guilt, shame, and sadness.

MYTH The child did not say no, or try to stop the sexual assault, so the child is partly to blame.

TRUTH A common stress response is to freeze, and this may prevent a child from responding or saying 'no.' Adult offenders are always responsible, as children are unable to consent.

MYTH Children and young people lie about sexual assault.

TRUTH 98% of child sexual assault reports by children are found to be true.

MYTH Children can misinterpret and wrongly accuse an adult of sexual assault.

TRUTH Children often disclose long after their assault has started. The offender often uses behaviours such as 'accidental touching' or tickling to defend their behaviour and blame the child. A child's disclosure should always be acknowledged.

MYTH Sexual assault is not harmful, it is the fuss that adults and child protection authorities make that is the problem.

TRUTH In some cases intervention by legal, medical and welfare personnel can be distressing for a child and family; however this shouldn't be used as an excuse by people to not speak out and to allow sexual assault to continue.

MYTH If a child discloses sexual assault and then retracts their statement, they must be lying.

TRUTH Pressure is mounted on a child following disclosure. Consequences of disclosures can include family breakdown, parent distress, and other effects. Retracting a statement may be a child's attempt to return their situation to 'normal'.

NEED SUPPORT OR MORE INFORMATION?
Bravehearts Information and Support Line
FREECALL **1800 272 831**
Mon-Fri 8:30am - 4:30pm AEST

bravehearts.org.au