



CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

MYTHS



MYTH: Sexual abuse is a problem of the uneducated, rural population.

BUSTED: Child sexual abuse is a universal problem with children from all walks of life being targeted. Developed nations are also struggling to put an end to children being sexually victimized. In India, a child is sexually abused every 15 minutes according to a government report (BBC report, 2017).

MYTH: Stay home, stay safe!

BUSTED: Sexual abuse can (and does) occur anywhere children are, including schools, religious places, community centers and even at home. During the COVID-19 lockdown the government broadcasted the message of 'Stay home, stay safe.' In most cases, victims are abused at home in one on one situations.

MYTH: Sexual abuse is always coerced or forced on to the child.

BUSTED: Child sexual abuse is when an older person (adult, older sibling, peer, etc.) engages in sexual activity with a child or a teenager. Contrary to popular belief, the child is not always coerced or forced. Abusers manipulate the child into touching, fondling genitalia or lure them online to share photos, show them sexually explicit material. The child may not even realise that they have been victimized.

MYTH: Child sexual abuse is an isolated incident where a vulnerable child is taken advantage of.

BUSTED: "Grooming" is a long, patient process of moving the child towards sexual activity. It can last up to days, weeks, months or even years. In most cases, children and their family members are deceived into trusting the offender. They gradually breakdown boundaries by engaging in seemingly harmless

behaviours and then maintain control by luring them with gifts, special attention or even threats to ensure secrecy.

MYTH: You can tell by looking at a person that their intentions are bad.

BUSTED: We want to believe that we can 'see' what a good person looks like. However, offenders do their best to appear "normal" in both appearance, and behaviour to build a trusting relationship with the child and the family. Research shows that the offender in 90% of cases, is someone the child knows and trusts. Sakshi (1998) conducted a study of 350 school going girls where 63% of them were victimised by family members- activities such as oral sex, masturbation, rape, etc. It is high time we shed this mentality that has been enabling abusers to continue victimising young children.

MYTH: Parents need to take care of their daughters since they are the victims of sexual abuse.

BUSTED: In India, boys are equally vulnerable to being sexually abused. A government study (2007) conducted by the Ministry of Women and Child Development found that 53% of boys had been victimised before their 18th birthday. So, all children need our care and protection. Unfortunately, boys are not taught about personal safety and the notions of toxic masculinity work against them making it difficult to express their concerns. Also, safeguarding children is a collective responsibility and not just a priority for parents. Each one of us can play our part by educating ourselves on the issue and empowering the young with body safety messages.

MYTH: Child sexual abuse is inevitable, and nothing can be done to avoid it.

BUSTED: Each one of us can play our part in preventing child sexual abuse. The first and most important step is awareness and acceptance. Educating ourselves on the issue, arming our children with knowledge on body safety, helping them build a grown-up safety network, open dialogue on taboo topics are effective strategies to prevent, spot and stop any boundary violations in our own home. As concerned community members we can also take measures in our respective fields. For example, a youth serving organization can conduct awareness workshops to educate staff, comply with POCSO guidelines and adopt a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum to raise an informed generation. Furthering policy and laws that safeguard the rights of children can also be instrumental in destigmatizing child sexual abuse.

MYTH: Adults can help children only if they disclose abuse.

BUSTED: Vigilance is the first line of defense in preventing abuse. Parents may think that these things could never happen to their child. Denial is your enemy. Adults are responsible to identify signs of abuse or distress and take action. Listen to your instincts, help the child assert healthy body boundaries, call out suspicious behaviour, intervene when a child seems uncomfortable, watch out for warning signs the child may exhibit. This gives a loud and clear message that the safe adults in the child's life are aware and will believe the child. The

possibility of getting caught is the biggest deterrent for abusers.

MYTH: Educating children on such issues will unnecessarily scare them.

BUSTED: Growing up, we teach children to not touch a hot stove or look both ways before crossing the road. Similarly, arming children with knowledge on body safety and safe vs. unsafe touch are necessary. It will provide them with emotional vocabulary to identify unsafe or uncomfortable situations and the language to flag them to a safe adult. Fear mongering tactics will only create anxiety and push the child away from the very people who need to protect them.

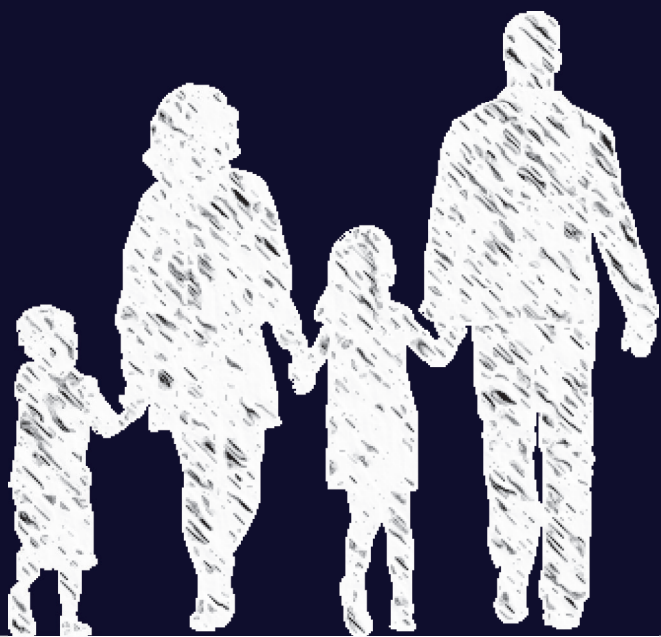
MYTH: Children will tell an adult if they are victimized.

BUSTED: Most children never tell. A study showed that only 3% of children disclosed abuse. Children often face threats, feel guilty and ashamed as the abuser makes them believe it was equally the child's fault, receives bribes or special attention and fear of disrupting the family pushes them further into silence. Sometimes, the developmental barriers such as lack of language to express themselves and confusion about the act especially in the case of incest make it difficult for the child to identify abuse. Adults need to make telling safe by proactively creating an open and supportive environment by initiating dialogue and removing the barriers that make disclosing difficult.



Circles of Safety (CoS) sensitises the community on prevention of child sexual abuse through education. We seek to cultivate a change in culture in which adults are no longer uncomfortable or afraid when discussing sexuality and related topics, but instead, acknowledge that no topic is too taboo or cumbersome when the safety of our children is at stake.

www.circlesofsafety.com



Take the first step towards preventing Child Sexual Abuse

- Ask for a private consultation
- Organise a workshop for adults
- Implement the Circles of Safety student curriculum for 1-12 graders