



Survivors of childhood sexual abuse

Childhood sexual abuse is any act of a sexual nature imposed on a child. This can include online abuse, forcing a child to participate in or watch pornography, and any sexual act including touch. In Australia, these are crimes. They are never the fault of the child.

Boys, girls and non-binary children are all at similar risk of experiencing childhood sexual abuse. The large majority of children who experience sexual abuse know the perpetrator.

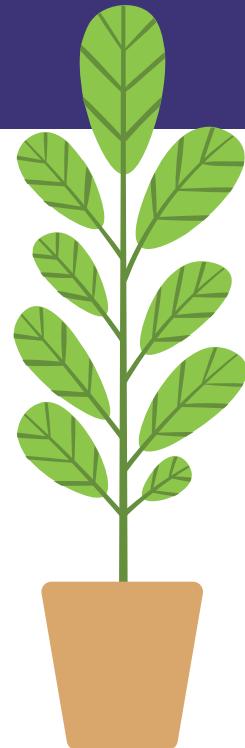
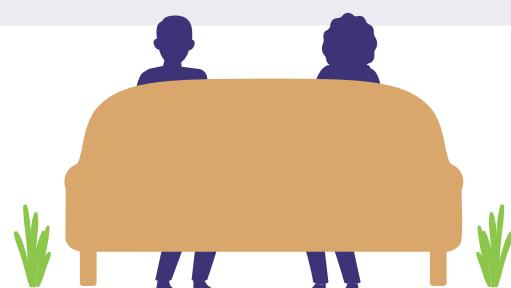
Impacts

The impacts of childhood abuse can be profound and last well into adulthood. For adult survivors of child sexual abuse, impacts can include:

- ▶ Feelings of worthlessness and anger
- ▶ Strong feelings of shame and self-blame
- ▶ Difficulties with affection and intimate relationships
- ▶ Struggles to form trusting relationships with others
- ▶ Ongoing suicidal thoughts and behaviour
- ▶ Increased drug and alcohol use
- ▶ Decrease in school and work attendance which can impact on educational achievements and employment outcomes later in life
- ▶ Long-term difficulties with concentration levels
- ▶ Long-term sleep disturbance, including nightmares and insomnia
- ▶ Long-term health implications
- ▶ Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health issues, including anxiety and depression
- ▶ Difficulties with sex and desire
- ▶ Fears of becoming a perpetrator (research indicates that more than 70 per cent of perpetrators did not experience childhood sexual abuse)
- ▶ Worry and fear about becoming and being a parent.

Child abuse is a traumatic experience. People react in different ways and there is no right or wrong way to react. Most people recover from their experiences and lead happy and fulfilling lives. Some people recover with support from friends and family, while others attend counselling to help to deal with the memories and impacts of the abuse.

Choose not to let shame rule your life. By sharing your story with someone supportive, shame can't survive.



Disclosing abuse

Many adults who experienced child sexual abuse look back and question why they didn't tell anyone about the abuse at the time or why they didn't stop it from happening. They often blame themselves for the abuse.

The reality is that people who perpetrate sexual abuse often build the trust of the child, and sometimes the child's caregivers, over time in order to carry out the abuse. They use tactics such as isolating or threatening the child so they don't tell anyone what is happening.

Sometimes a child isn't aware that what is happening is wrong. Others are prevented from speaking up because of overwhelming feelings of shame or guilt, not wanting to get others in trouble, or not wanting to upset others, such as their parents or caregivers.

It is unfair and unreasonable to expect children to stop child abuse from happening. These acts are purely the responsibility of the perpetrator.



Important points to remember

- Nothing you did, or did not do, led to the abuse.
The abuse was something that was done to you by a person who had power over you.
- You are not alone. There are people and services available to support you.
- Remind yourself of all the things you did do to survive the abuse you experienced – sometimes people think that saying or doing nothing allowed the abuse to happen when, in fact, this silence was often the very thing that kept them from experiencing more violence and abuse.
- The abuse does not define who you are: a partner, parent, sibling, colleague, coach, friend, group member or other.

Resources

- ▶ **A Care Package** with lots of information and tips about coping and recovery can be viewed or downloaded from the SARC website.
- ▶ **A Supporter's Guide** providing information to parents, family and friends on how to support someone who is recovering from sexual trauma can also be viewed or downloaded from the SARC website.

Things that can help

- Learn more about abuse and its impacts to help you make sense of things.
- Create safety around you – in your relationships, within yourself and the places you go.
- Connect with others who understand and who share your values in life.
- Take charge of your life and change the things you have control over, for the better.
- Remind yourself of your strengths and feel hope for the future.
- Consider accessing counselling, either in person, or starting with a telephone support service.

*It is possible to recover
and to find enjoyment
in life and hope for
the future.*



Support and counselling options

- ▶ **Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC)**
(08) 6458 1828 or Freecall 1800 199 888
- ▶ **1800RESPECT**
Freecall 1800 737 732
- ▶ **Lifeline Australia**
13 11 14
- ▶ **Beyond Blue**
Freecall 1300 224 636
- ▶ **Crisis Care**
(08) 9223 1111; 1800 199 008
- ▶ **The Samaritans Help Line**
Freecall 135 247
- ▶ **Mental Health Emergency Response Line (MHERL)**
1300 555 788 (Perth); 1800 676 822 (Peel)
- ▶ **Rurallink mental health support for people living in rural WA**
1800 552 002

The **Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC)** is a free 24-hour emergency service providing medical and counselling services for people who have experienced a recent (within 14 days) sexual assault. Counselling for any sexual assault/abuse experienced recently or in the past is also available to people of all genders aged 13 years and above. Call SARC on **(08) 6458 1828** or Freecall **1800 199 888**.