

# CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL MEDICAL CENTER - FACT SHEET

## CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child sexual abuse is defined as sexual activity, which may include sexual touching and fondling, genital to genital contact, exposing children to pornography or adult sexual activity, exploitation of children, rape, attempted rape, and incest. It can be violent or non-violent in nature. Child sexual abuse can take place within the family or outside of the home. Regardless of the type of sexual abuse, the child victim often develops a variety of distressing feelings and thoughts and the long-term emotional and psychological damage can be devastating.

While the 1980's showed an increase in sexual abuse awareness, current statistics suggest that sexual abuse continues to go under-reported. Because there are often no physical signs of sexual abuse, it is extremely important that parents, social workers, and others allow children to feel comfortable enough to disclose abuse. Children will benefit from repeated assurance that they are believed and will be kept safe.

### Indicators of Sexual Abuse May Include:

- New fears of persons or places
- Sexual play beyond what is considered normal
- Unusual interest in or avoidance of all things of sexual nature
- Sleep problems or nightmares
- Depression or withdrawal from friends/family
- Fear that there is something wrong with their genital area
- School refusal/Runaway
- Unusual Aggressiveness
- Suicidal behavior
- Other severe behavior changes

Disclosure of abuse may be a process that occurs over time. Be conscious not to "shut the door" when a child begins to disclose abuse. Instead, ask questions such as, "Can you tell me more about that?" Stress to the child that it is not his/her fault and report to the appropriate Children's Protective Services agency in the city where the child lives. Parents/Guardian's should seek a medical examination for the child right away.

Sexually abused children and their family need professional evaluation and treatment. Such mental health treatment can help reduce the risk of low self-esteem, feelings of guilt, and emotional trauma.

### Preventative Measures:

- Tell children that they can say "NO!" when someone tries to touch their body and do things that make them feel funny. They should then tell a grown up they can trust right away.
- Teach children that respect to adults/authority does not mean that they must participate in activities that make them feel uncomfortable.
- Encourage prevention programs in the local school system.

**Call Children's Hospital Social Services Department with Questions or Concerns**

(513) 636-4711

3333 Burnet Avenue

Cincinnati, OH 45229-3039