

KEEP IT SAFE: Child Sexual Abuse Prevention

Myths about Child Sexual Abuse

Social acceptance of myths silences victims and encourages public denial about the true nature of this silent epidemic. Accurate information is key when confronting and preventing child abuse.

1. Myth: He looks normal and acts normal, so he can't be a child molester.

A common and dangerous public assumption is that a person who looks normal and acts normal cannot be a child molester. Sex offenders know the importance of their public image and can hide their private behaviors from their friends, neighbors, colleagues, and family members. Sex offenders use a number of strategies to gain access to children while hiding their true actions.

2. Myth: Only Men Sexually Abuse Children.

While male perpetrators tend to be the majority of reported cases of abuse, women are also capable of child sexual assault. Reports of female perpetrators are on the rise, and female offenders have been reported in cases of abuse involving both male and female children.

3. Myth: Child molesters target any and all children nearby.

Just because a child is in the proximity of a sex offender, this does not mean that the child will become a target or a victim. Some people believe that if a perpetrator didn't abuse a nearby child, then the children who report abuse must be lying. Sex offenders carefully select and groom their targeted victims. Not every child fits the mold of what a pedophile is looking for. There is a process of obtaining a child's friendship or trust, and in some cases, the parent's friendship or trust, as well. Once trust has been obtained, the child is more vulnerable.

4. Myth: Abused children always tell!

Children often fail to disclose their abuse. This is frequently used as purported evidence that a victim's story isn't true. Children who have been victims of sexual assault often have difficulty in disclosing their abuse. In Texas, 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be a victim of sexual abuse before his/her 18th birthday, but it is estimated that only 1 in 10 will make an outcry of abuse. If a child does make a disclosure, it will generally not be immediate. A number of factors affect a child's ability to tell his or her story, such as: the age of the child, the family relationship to the perpetrator, or continuous sexual abuse over a long period of time. Sex offenders will emotionally victimize a child to prevent the truth from being uncovered. A perpetrator can convince a child that the child is to blame; may threaten physical harm to the victim or someone they care for; or make a child feel that a disclosure would 'ruin' the family.

Children experience fear, embarrassment, guilt, and shame. These feelings are enough to prevent a child from making an allegation of sexual abuse.

5. Myth: The Victim is Always a Girl.

Just as women can be sex offenders, boys may be victims of abuse. Unfortunately, child sexual abuse with male victims is underreported due to social and cultural attitudes. Boys are aware at an early age of the social stigma attached to sexual assault by another male, and fear appearing weak.

6. Myth: Child victims of sexual abuse will have physical signs of the abuse.

Frequently, an absence of physical evidence is often used as support that a perpetrator must be innocent of an alleged sexual assault. The truth is that abnormal genital findings are rare, even in cases where abuse has been factually proven by other forms of evidence. Many acts leave no physical trace. Injuries resulting from sexual abuse tend to heal very quickly, and many times, exams of child victims do not take place on the same day as the alleged act of abuse.

7. Myth: Stranger Danger

85% of all reported cases of child molestation involve a child and a known perpetrator. It is not the stranger in the park carrying out most cases of sexual abuse – it is the people you have in your home. The people most likely to abuse a child are the ones with the most opportunity, most access, and most trust. Abusers can be parents, step-parents, uncles, aunts, step-siblings, babysitters, tutors, and family friends.

8. Myth: Sexual victimization as a child will inevitably result in the child growing up to become a sex offender.

Early childhood sexual victimization does not automatically lead to sexually aggressive behaviors. This is a particularly important fact to understand because a misunderstanding can create a terrible stigma for a child who has been sexually abused. While past sexual victimization can *increase the likelihood* of sexually aggressive behavior, most children who were sexually victimized never perpetrate against others. Research has indicated that if a child discloses an incident of abuse early and is believed and supported by other close people in their lives, they have a much higher likelihood to not become perpetrators as adults.

9. Myth: Child Sexual Abuse is a cultural or socioeconomic problem.

Sexual abuse crosses all socio-economic, neighborhood, race and class barriers. It happens in large and small families; in cities and in rural areas; in wealthy and lower income neighborhoods; and in homes, schools, churches, and businesses.

**For more information visit our website at
www.79-DistrictAttorney-tx.org**

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Behavioral and Physical Signs of Possible Sexual Abuse

1. Symptoms of Anxiety

These include unexplained sleep disturbances (sweats, terrors, nightmares); showing a new or unusual fear of certain people, places, or locations; having unexplained periods of panic or alarm.

2. Abnormal Sexual Behaviors or Symptoms

Behaviors and symptoms include sexual behavior; complaining of pain while using the toilet, or exhibiting symptoms of a sexually transmitted disease such as an offensive odor or an unusual rash; resistance to removal of clothing at appropriate times (bath, bed, toilet, diaper change); symptom indicating evidence of physical trauma to the genital or anal area; engaging in sexual play with friends, toys or pets; initiating sophisticated sexual behaviors, language, or knowledge; asking an unusual amount of questions about human sexuality.

3. Changes in Personality or Mood

Changes include unusually aggressive behavior toward family members, friends, toys, and pets; indicating a sudden reluctance to be alone with a certain person; withdrawing from previously enjoyable activities, like school, or abrupt changes in academic performance.

4. General Behavioral Changes

These can include wetting the bed, experiencing a loss of appetite or other changes in eating habits, including trouble swallowing; developing frequent unexplained health problems; regression to behaviors too young for their stage of development; or engaging in self-destructive/mutilative behaviors.

5. Changes in Beliefs or Discussions

These changes can include refusal to talk about a secret shared with another adult or older child; discussions about a new, older friend; suddenly things of self or body as dirty, bad or repulsive.

REPORT ABUSE

If you suspect that a child has been the victim of abuse, please contact one of the following agencies:

1. Your local law enforcement agency or 911

Listed are local agencies within the 79th JD

Brooks Co. SO	(361)325-3696
Jim Wells Co. SO	(361)668-0341
Alice PD	(361)664-0186
Falfurrias PD	(361)325-5041
Premont PD	(361)348-3231
Orange Grove PD	(361)384-2844
San Diego PD	(361)279-2924

2. Department of Family & Protective Services

Toll-Free Hotline- (800) 252-5400

3. Women's Shelter of South Texas

Toll-Free Hotline- (800) 580-HURT (4878)

Local Hotline- (361)881-8888

4. National Domestic Violence Hotline

Toll-Free- (800)799-SAFE (7233)

You can make the difference in the life of a child. **Learn the Truth** about abuse. **Know the Signs** of child abuse. **Report the Abuse** when suspected.

Courtesy of One with Courage: www.onewithcourage.org

ABOUT THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Carlos Omar Garcia, 79th Judicial District Attorney.

Carlos was born and raised in Alice with extended family ties in Jim Wells, Brooks, and Duval Counties. Carlos began his distinguished prosecutorial career in 1997. Before being elected as District Attorney, Carlos worked an Assistant District Attorney for Kleberg and Kenedy Counties (2008-2012) and the 79th Judicial District Attorney's Office for Brooks & Jim Wells Counties (1997-2008). In addition to his service as a felony prosecutor, Carlos has also served as an Assistant County Attorney for Brooks, Jim Wells, and Kleberg Counties.

In addition to his background as a prosecutor, Carlos is a certified martial arts/self defense instructor, certified NRA *Refuse to Be a Victim* instructor, and NRA Pistol Instructor.

COMPLIMENTS OF



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