



Child Sexual Assault: Indicators & Effects

Children and adolescents who have been sexually assaulted can suffer a range of psychological and behavioural problems, from mild to severe, in both the short and long term. These effects vary depending upon the circumstances of the abuse and the child's developmental stage.

Common Indicators in Children

- Unusual or new fears, sometimes around touch
- Difficulty concentrating or with memory
- Eating or sleeping changes
- Fear of being alone with a particular person
- Sexual themes in artwork, stories, play etc.
- Showing a knowledge of sexual behaviour beyond their years
- Bedwetting or soiling after being toilet trained
- "Acting out" behaviours (aggression, destructive behaviours, truanting behaviour)
- "Acting in" behaviours (withdrawal from friends, depression)
- Vaginal, penile or anal soreness, discharge or bleeding
- Problems with friends and schoolwork
- Vague symptoms of illness such as headache or tummy ache
- Self-harm (cutting, risky behaviour)
- Zoning out or not listening

Facts:

♥ Young people of all cultures, ethnic backgrounds and ages may be sexually assaulted

♥ Child sexual assault occurs in all kinds of families

No matter what it is important to pay attention to changes in your loved ones, and take them seriously if they disclose any unusual behaviours.

Short term effects may include:

- Increased illness, body aches or other physical complaints
- Poor attendance or performance at school
- Difficulty concentrating or memory loss
- Mood changes
- Regressive behaviours
- Sleeping and eating disorders
- Lack of self-esteem
- Nightmares
- Self-harm or suicidal thoughts
- Self-hatred or reduced self esteem
- Promiscuous behaviour
- Aggression
- Zoning out or not listening

Long term effects may include:

- The development of violent behaviour
- The development of criminal behaviour
- Suicidal ideation
- Post-traumatic stress
- Sexual difficulties
- Inability to form lasting relationships
- Identity difficulties
- Marital problems
- Poor parenting skills
- Alcohol and substance misuse

It is really important to understand that the impacts and effects of child sexual assault can be minimised. Children, young people and adults who are supported and believed when they speak out are less likely to endure long terms negative impacts.

Many survivors are able to live perfectly happy, functional and secure lives.