

FACT SHEET — *This fact sheet is for parents, carers, educators and community members.*

When your child has been sexually assaulted by another child or young person

Approximately 30-50% of people who sexually assault a child are themselves under the age of 18. The young person who abuses is usually someone known to the child. This can include a brother, sister or other close family member. It's estimated that sexual assault by a brother or sister is about five times more common than abuse by a parent or carer. Despite these facts there's a tendency to dismiss or minimize the emotional trauma of such abuse on the abused child and the impact on the family.

The facts

- Sexual assault experienced by a child is serious and harmful, no matter what the age of the person who abused them.
- There's a difference between sexual assault and sexual curiosity between consenting children;
- The young person who carried out the abuse made a deliberate decision to commit such acts;
- If the young person who has sexually assaulted a child promises not to do it again or shows remorse, this does not guarantee they won't do it again;
- Similar to when an adult sexually assaults a child, the abuse of power and authority, secrecy, manipulation and isolation also occur when the abuser is a young person;
- The child who has been abused may feel shame, guilt and a sense of responsibility. This is especially confusing when the person who has abused them is also a relatively young person.

How to help your child recover from sexual abuse

The amount of support and care a child receives, from their primary carers, is an important factor in recovery.

A child who has been sexually assaulted needs:

- to be believed and supported;
- acknowledgement that they made the right decision to tell;
- safety and protection from the risk of further abuse and harassment;
- to know that what happened to them is serious and will not be ignored;
- acknowledgement of their feelings (whatever they may be);
- to know they're not responsible for the abuse;
- understanding that they may have both positive and negative feelings about the abuser;
- to know that they're not responsible for deciding what happens to the abuser after they have told; and support and counselling from a sexual assault counsellor.

About the young person who has sexually abused a child

The young person may refuse to acknowledge the truth, minimize what's happened or blame the child. Or they may admit what they have done and ask for help. They may show anger, distress, confusion or no emotions at all. They also need support from their family members and appropriate intervention to address and change their sexually abusive behaviour.

How a parent or carer might feel

Parents and caregivers will find they experience a range of emotions, such as:

- shocked and confused about how this could have happened;
- confronted and divided in their loyalties if the offender is the abused child's brother or sister;
- unsure about what is best for both of their children; and
- how they can help as a parent or carer.

Unhelpful responses to a child sexually assaulted by another child or young person:

"I can't believe a child is capable of doing this. They haven't got the strength." "Perhaps they were only playing, and things got a bit out of hand."

"It couldn't have been that bad — it is was only a child who did this." "Now that he knows it's wrong, I'm sure it won't happen again."

"There's nothing that can be done about it anyway because he's only a child."

Seek professional advice.

The following organizations will help you keep the child safe. You may be asked for information such as your contact details and how the child talked with you.

Child Protection Crisis Line

13 12 78 24 hours

7 days a week Toll free within Victoria

Victoria Police Sexual Offences Child Investigation Team

03 5444 6752 24 hours

Centre Against Sexual Assault Central Victoria (CASACV)

03 5441 0430 (BH)

1800 806 292 (AF)