

An Overlooked Trauma: Sibling Sexual Abuse

Sibling sexual abuse is an overwhelming topic to think about. But it happens.

Sexual abuse by an older brother or sister is just as damaging for a child as sexual abuse at the hands of an adult offender. In some cases, sibling incest and molestation can be worse since the siblings live together and have a trusting relationship.

Often this abuse goes undetected and unreported by parents. Sometimes, parents may discount what occurs as “kids being kids.” But the damage from such abuse is anything but playful as it can be extensive and lifelong.

Not all abuse involves sex between the siblings. For example, an older sibling may expose a younger sibling to pornography or force a sibling to engage in sexual acts with another child.

Children who have witnessed or been sexually abused are at higher risk of sexually acting out themselves. A child with access to porn may want to imitate what he or she sees.



If you suspect sibling sexual abuse, signs and symptoms to look for in your child or children include:

- ◆ Fears a particular room or place
- ◆ Asks many questions about sex
- ◆ Pretends to have intercourse
- ◆ Fears bedtime, has nightmares or wets the bed
- ◆ Unusual behavior for a child that age
- ◆ Forces other children to play doctor
- ◆ Frequently rubs genitals instead of playing
- ◆ Displays unusual bathroom habits

Sibling sexual abuse is a secret that must be uncovered. Learn to recognize the signs to help both siblings get the help needed to heal.



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800-Children (800-244-5373) Parent Helpline