

Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse

A HANDBOOK FOR CAREGIVERS



1. Introduction

Child Sexual Abuse is any sexual activity with a child by a person in power (Child or Adult) with the intention of sexual gratification and/or humiliation. It involves either explicit or implied force. This violation can significantly impact how the child, as a victim and later as an adult survivor, perceives and experiences the world. However, both prevention from CSA and healing from its negative impact are possible.

As adults and caregivers, we need to safeguard our children and impart the required knowledge, skills and attitude to stay safe from sexual abuse. Since parents, teachers and caregivers are the best people to teach children about Personal Safety, this handbook is designed to facilitate an understanding of the issue among adults and caregivers and propose simple tips which they can use to participate in their children's safety.

This handbook also aims to equip caregivers with information on how to effectively respond to children if they disclose incidents of sexual abuse. To encourage children to seek help, as caregivers, it is important to create a secure and nurturing environment for children in which they feel comfortable to reach out for help.

Sexual abuse can happen to children of any socioeconomic group, gender, religion or culture. Most children suffer quietly and cannot talk about the abuse. However, we need to talk about it to prevent it and help children heal from its ill effects. There are some steps that you can take as primary caregivers to prevent CSA.

2. Be Aware – Understand the Issue of Child Sexual Abuse

✦ What constitutes CSA:

CSA includes Contact and Non-Contact Sexual Abuse.



a. Contact Sexual Abuse

- Contact abuse is further divided into two types:
 - Penetrative: Peno-vaginal intercourse, anal sex or oral sex.
 - Non-Penetrative: Fondling the child's Private Parts or making the child touch the other person's Private Parts.

b. Non-Contact Sexual Abuse

- Making the child watch other **people** indulge in sexual activities, **showing** their Private Parts to the child or watching the child's Private Parts while they are undressing or bathing or showing them sexual content, offline or online.
- Talking about sex and sexual activities with sexual intent or passing comments of a sexual nature.
- Sexual abuse occurring online, also known as Online Sexual Abuse. For example, cyberbullying, cyberstalking, sextortion and live streaming of Child Sexual Abuse.



✦ How prevalent is CSA:

Statistics show that one in every two children is sexually abused.

- **53.22%** of children reported having faced one or more forms of sexual abuse.



- **50%** of abusers are either known to the child or are in a position of trust and responsibility (family member, close relative, friend or neighbour).
- **52.94%** of boys reported experiencing some form of CSA.
Boys and girls are equally vulnerable.

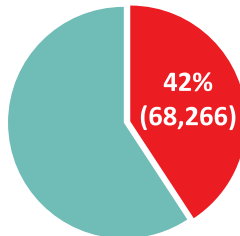


Source: Study of Child Abuse: India, 2007, Ministry of Women and Child Development

- In 2022, a **10%** increase was observed in the reporting of cases of sexual crimes against children from 2021.
- The total number of reported cases of crimes against children is 1,62,449, of which 68,266 are cases of sexual crimes against children. This means that sexual crimes against children comprise **42%** of all crimes against children.

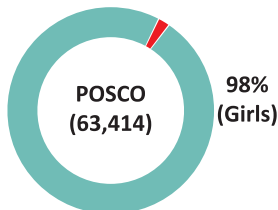
10%  **from 2021**

Total = 1,62,449

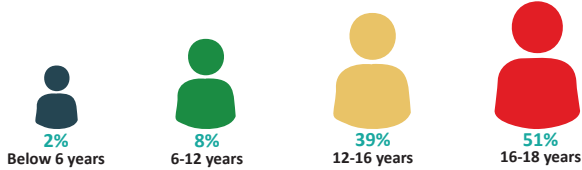


■ Child Sexual Abuse ■ Child Abuse

- A total of 63,414 cases were registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, and **98%** of POCSO victims are girls.



- 4,852 cases of sexual crimes against children were also reported under sections of the Indian Penal Code despite the existing POCSO Act.
- A total of 37,016 child rape cases were recorded, which accounted for **60%** of the total cases of sexual crimes against children.
- A majority of the victims (**49%**) are between 16 and 18 years of age.



- **97%** of the offenders were known to the victim.
- The maximum number of cases of sexual crimes against children was reported in Uttar Pradesh, 9664 (**14%**) followed by Maharashtra, 7,641 (**11%**) and Madhya Pradesh, 6,162 (**10%**).
- The total number of cases of cybercrimes against children is **1360**. Under cybercrime cases, **1171** cases were of publishing or transmitting of material depicting children in a sexually explicit act.



Source: National Crime Record Bureau statistics in 2022

✂ What is the impact of CSA:

Sexual abuse can impact children at physiological (body), psychological (mind), emotional and social levels. It can also impact their sexual development and behaviour. As an immediate impact of CSA, we may observe children or adolescent experiencing following conflicting emotions:

- Shame
- Guilt
- Sadness
- Anger

- Fear
- Shock
- Confusion

If children or adolescents do not get immediate support or the opportunity to heal, the impact of CSA can continue for a long time, well into their adulthood.



🦋 Long-term impact of CSA can include the following:

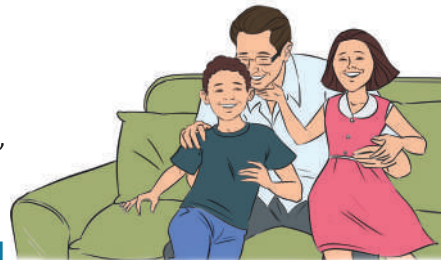
- Depression
- Self-harm behaviours
- Suicidal tendencies
- Anxiety disorders
- Harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances or drug abuse
- Inappropriate or over-sexualised behaviour
- Inability to trust others
- Inaccurate judgments
- Inability to have a healthy sexual relationship
- Trouble in sustaining relationships

3. Understand and Participate in the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse

🦋 Tips for Keeping Children or Adolescents Safe:

These are some tips that will help you have an open conversation with your child or adolescent about Personal Safety and support them.

- **Be aware:** Parents and caretakers who are aware can help protect their child or adolescent from and respond better to incidents of sexual abuse. Know more about technology, bullying and abuse; the signs and symptoms of an abusive situation and ways to prevent, support and seek help. Articulate your discomfort, if any. Seek resources and help to learn more about CSA.



- **Get involved:** Get involved in your child's or adolescent's life as there is no substitute for your attention and supervision. Inculcate respect and empathy in your child or adolescent by modelling the same.
- **Love unconditionally:** Tell your child or adolescent that your love for them is independent of their academic performance or achievements. Do not label your child or adolescent as bad or nasty; always refer to the 'behaviour' as incorrect, not the person.
- **Listen:** Listen to their concerns, understand their feelings and talk about them. This will make them feel that you understand them well and allow them to identify and express their feelings. Encourage them to tell you if they are feeling unsafe or if someone is behaving in a way that scares them. Let them know that they can always ask you and other adults for help.
- **Share:** Share your feelings and pleasant and unpleasant experiences or challenges and how you tackled the difficulties faced by you with your child or adolescent. They will learn to understand and handle difficult situations when you share your feelings and challenges with them.
- **Respect:** Respect your child's or adolescent's feelings regarding touches and hugs. Do not force them to show any form of physical affection or respect to unknown adults or those within the family if they do not like it. Support them by helping them find another way to show respect or affection to family members. This will help your child or adolescent set boundaries. When adults at home respect their boundaries, they learn to stop or refuse uninvited advances in unsafe situations.
- **Answer questions:** Be open to answering your child's or adolescent's questions and comments. Answer in an age-appropriate manner, especially if they are asking about sexuality or puberty. If you do not know the answer, it is ok to tell them that you do not have the answer but will find it out. Do not avoid answering their questions even if you



are uncomfortable because they can sense your discomfort and may avoid asking their doubts in the future.

- **Set ground rules:** Create and set guidelines on the usage of devices with mutual agreement between older children and adults. For younger children, you can establish certain rules to guide them better.
- **Help them become a responsible netizen:** Being a responsible netizen means thinking about how our online activities affect ourselves, people around us and the online community at large. Having regular, respectful conversations with your child or adolescent about using social media responsibly, cyberbullying, sexting and online sexual content is the best way to help your child or adolescent make safe decisions about online behaviour.



- **Teach your child Personal Safety messages as you are their best teacher:** Start young. Speak to your child about online and offline abuse and Personal Safety. Guide them in understanding what is safe and unsafe for them. Just like we teach children from a young age about the rules for crossing the street or being careful with sharp objects,

you can also teach them about Private Parts and Personal Safety Rules to safeguard themselves from sexual abuse. Teaching children or adolescents Personal Safety Rules is essential for their safety.

We understand that you may feel uncomfortable while talking about topics like sexual abuse with your child or adolescent. It is natural. However, despite your discomfort, it is important to have these conversations with your child as it will help keep them safe. The next section will help you initiate conversations on Personal Safety with your kids. You can also reach out to us if you need any additional support to initiate these conversations.

4. The Personal Safety Education Programme

- The Personal Safety Education (PSE) programme is a life-skill module that aims to empower children or adolescents by imparting age-appropriate knowledge, attitude and skills to help them identify unsafe situations and touches, refuse assertively and seek help.
- In this programme, children or adolescents are taught Personal Safety messages through stories and discussions about their daily activities and situational examples.

✦ Help children identify safe and unsafe situations and touches:



Safe is when you feel protected, there is no danger around you or when no one is harming or hurting you. When you are safe you might mostly feel happy.

For example,

- Your parent or friend holds your hands.
- You are watching your favourite shows on TV.
- A doctor touches your Private Parts to check it for an infection.
- Someone hugs you and you like it



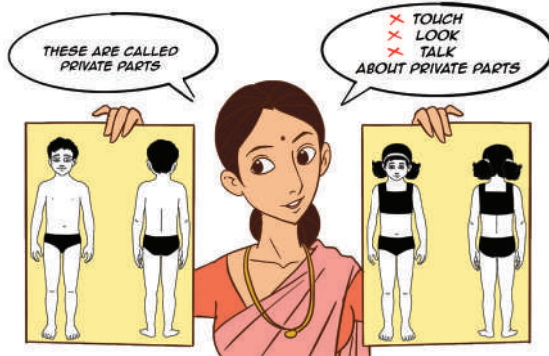
Unsafe is when there may be some danger or someone might be trying to harm or hurt us. When you are unsafe you might mostly feel sad, angry, scared or confused.

For example,

- Someone is hitting you.
- Someone is pushing you down the stairs.
- A friend has sent you a video where Private Parts can be seen.
- While playing the game of ‘Truth or Dare’, you are asked to kiss someone on their mouth.

🦋 Personal Safety Rules/Guidelines for children (Ages 6–11):

- It is unsafe to touch, look at or talk about my Private Parts except to keep my Private Parts clean and healthy.



- Say 'No' and get away.
- Tell a helpful adult.
- Keep telling till you get help.
- It is 'Not Your Fault' when someone makes you unsafe.

🦋 How to teach Personal Safety messages to young children (Ages 6–11):

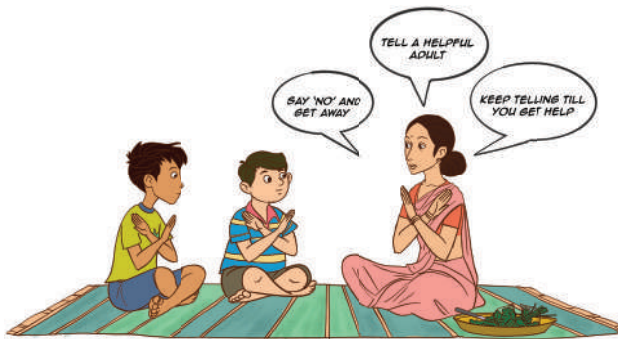
- a. Use situations and concrete examples about their life and daily activities.

For example,

- While bathing young children, teach or reiterate the names of body parts along with their Private Parts and talk about the importance of keeping them clean and healthy.
- If your child ask questions about Private Parts and seem curious, do not get flustered or avoid them. Answer confidently with age-appropriate information.



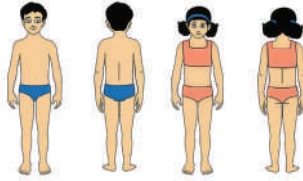
- b. Use 'what if' questions while teaching Personal Safety. This will help your child to relate to the situations they may encounter and give them the confidence to make a decision and act assertively.
- For example, what if...
- ...your friend wants to touch your Private Parts while playing a doctor–doctor game?
 - ...a cousin asks you to join them in hitting on the Private Parts of another cousin and teasing them about it?
 - ...an uncle or an older boy wants to play a secret touching game with you?
- c. Tell your child if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable, they can assertively say 'NO'.



- For example,
- While playing, their friends touch them on their Private Parts, and they are confused about whether it happened by mistake or their friend did it purposely. Teach them to say 'No' as it makes them feel uncomfortable.
- d. Encourage your child to learn to seek help from a helpful adult when they feel scared, confused or unsafe or even if they have an emergency.
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Key Personal Safety Messages for Ages 6–11

Private Parts



Private Parts are those parts of the body that are usually covered with swimming suit or undergarments like underwear, chaddi, sameej or slip.

Personal Safety Guideline

Personal Safety Guideline 4



KEEP TELLING till you get help.

Personal Safety Guideline 1

It is unsafe to **TOUCH**, **LOOK AT OR TALK** about Private Parts.



It is **NEVER** my fault!

Personal Safety Guideline 3



Tell a **HELPFUL ADULT**.

Personal Safety Guideline 2



Say "**NO**" and **GET AWAY**.

Online Safety

If someone makes you unsafe online by showing or talking about Private Parts then you can say 'No' to that person, unfriend and block them and then talk to a helpful adult about it.



🦋 Personal Safety Action Steps for Adolescents (Ages 12–15):

Sexual abuse can happen by touching, looking at and talking about Private Parts. It is unsafe if someone touches, looks at or talks about your Private Parts except to keep your Private Parts clean and healthy. Following Action Points can be followed in case of an unsafe situation:

- **Refuse assertively and get away.**
- **Tell a helpful adult.**
- **Keep telling till you get help.**
- **It is not your fault when someone makes you unsafe.**

🦋 How to teach Personal Safety messages to adolescents (Ages 12–15):

- To strike or initiate conversations with adolescents (Ages 12–15) on sexual abuse, it is helpful to begin with a discussion on topics that interest them. Topics such as relationships, personal boundaries or consent. For example,
 - You can initiate conversations on safe and unsafe relationships. A relationship in which our boundaries are respected and we feel comfortable and safe, is a safe relationship, whereas a relationship in which a person crosses our boundaries and makes us feel uncomfortable and unsafe, is an unsafe relationship.
- Discuss with adolescents (Ages 12–15) about situations or behaviours that can be unsafe and what they can do to keep themselves safe and protected. For example,
 - ‘What would you do if you felt uncomfortable at a sleepover?’
 - ‘What would you do if you are asked to kiss someone on the mouth in a game of “Truth or Dare”?’
- Another way to initiate conversations on being safe from sexual abuse with your adolescent (Ages 12–15) is by discussing a news report, movie or TV show; school activities or other aspects of their daily life.



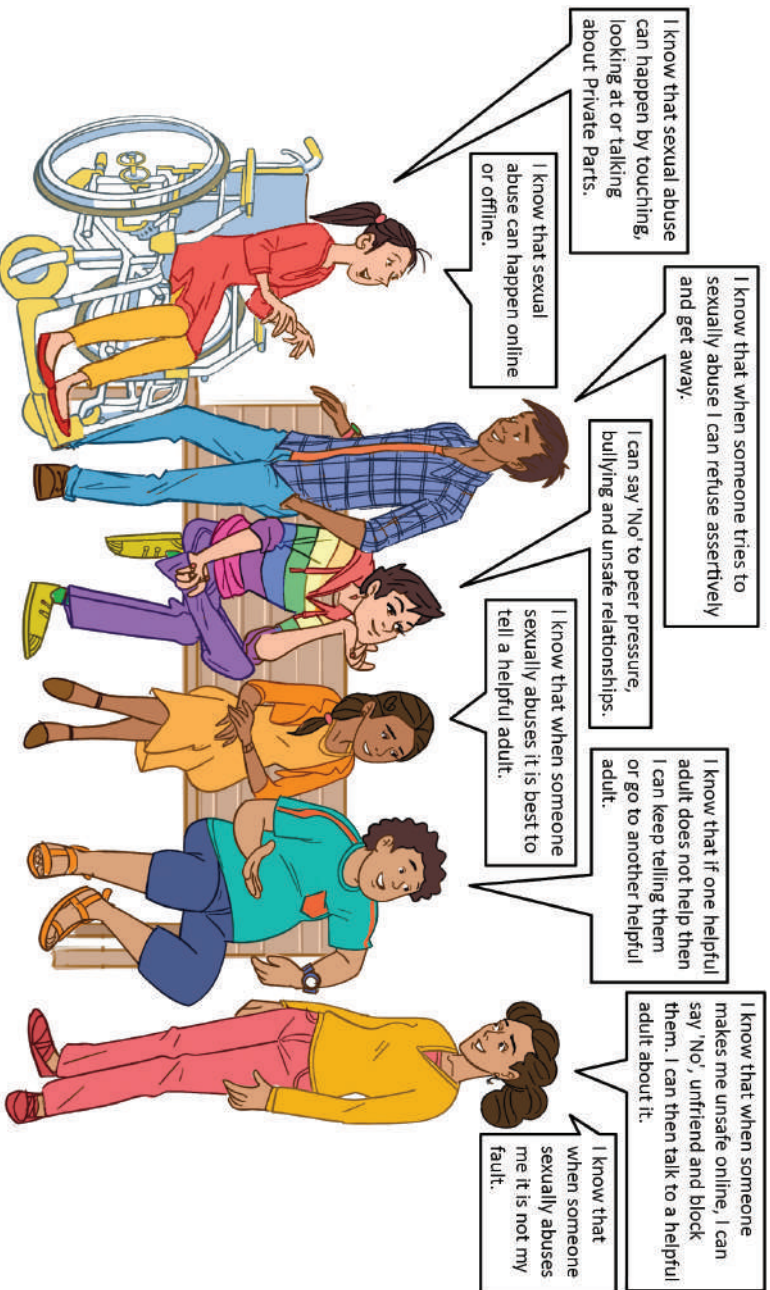
- d. Remember, you do not have to talk about all aspects of sexual abuse at once. Discuss one topic at a time to allow the adolescent (Ages 12–15) to absorb the information given. However, it is important to have these conversations at regular intervals.

This will help the adolescent (Ages 12–15) connect to previous conversations and not forget what was discussed.

- e. Having an open and honest conversation with adolescents (Ages 12–15) will reassure them that they can always talk to you and that you will listen to them no matter what.
-

Key Personal Safety Messages for Ages 12–15

What Do I Know About My Safety?



Personal Safety Action Steps for Adolescents (Ages 16–18):

Sexual abuse can happen with children or adolescents by touching, looking at and talking about their Private Parts or other parts of the body with sexual intent. Sexual abuse can happen both online and offline. In case someone sexually abuses, the following Action Points can be followed:

- **Refuse assertively and get away.**
- **Tell a helpful adult.**
- **Keep telling till you get help.**
- **It is not your fault when someone makes you unsafe.**

How to teach Personal Safety messages to adolescents (Ages 16–18):

- a. The most effective strategy to begin conversations about sexual abuse with your adolescent (Ages 16-18) is to focus on topics like gaming, relationships or social media platforms. You will be able to gauge their understanding on the topic of sexual abuse and relationships through it.
- b. Discuss 'relationship' and 'consent' with them. Use examples from movies and series to help them identify which behaviours are characteristics of a safe relationship. For example,
 - If someone forces you to do something you do not want to, like bunking class, smoking or doing drugs then it is called peer-pressure. You do not have to do it.
 - If your peers force you or someone forces you to be in a romantic relationship then you can say 'No' to it.
 - If your romantic partner forces you to kiss on the mouth or touches your Private Parts without consent, it is unsafe.
- c. Talk to them about the law, POCSO – Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act. Help them understand that the law has been created to support them. Include in the discussion how it can have implications on them if they indulge in inappropriate behaviours.
- d. Help them understand that, in any situation, they need to keep their own safety as their topmost priority.
- e. Moreover, let them know that even if they think that they have grown up, they can still come and talk to you. You will listen to them and help them.

Key Personal Safety Messages for Ages 16–18



🦋 Communicate about Online Safety with Your Child and Adolescents:



- a. Talking to children and adolescents about key messages for online safety is also a key part of Personal Safety programme. Teach your child that while the internet is beneficial, it can be unsafe, and therefore, it is important to keep themselves safe online.

For example,

- Help them understand that sharing personal information like their name, age or location can be unsafe.
- b. Encourage your child or adolescent to inform you when they feel unsafe online.
- c. Talk to your child or adolescent about being respectful and empathetic online to keep themselves and others safe.

🦋 Set Ground Rules:

- a. Create and set guidelines on internet usage with a mutual agreement, especially in the case of adolescents.
- b. Set a fixed time when they can use the internet.
- c. Place the system in a space where you can be aware of their online activities.
- d. Supervise your child's or adolescent's online presence and activities.



5. Understand Ways to Intervene and Help a Child or Adolescent who has been Sexually Abused

Sometimes, despite our efforts, our children and adolescents become victims of sexual abuse. We need to help our children overcome the abuse. To help them, we can do the following:

Step 1: Recognise that the child or adolescent has been sexually abused

Step 2: Help the child or adolescent talk about the experience

Step 3: Seek professional support to help the child or adolescent heal

Step 1: Recognise that the child or adolescent has been sexually abused

The first step towards helping a child or adolescent who has experienced sexual abuse is recognising what they have gone through. More often than not, children and adolescents find it difficult to talk about their experiences of sexual abuse. However, parents and caretakers can identify sexual abuse based on the child's or adolescent's behavioural changes. No 'one' behaviour alone determines that a child or adolescent has been sexually abused. These are some indicators that can help us identify sexual abuse:

- Repeated urinary infections
- Unexplained pain or swelling in the genital area
- Excessive increase or decrease in food intake or sudden weight loss or weight gain
- Sudden fear of a place, person or colour
- A sudden drop or over-achievement in academic performance
- Hints or indirect comments provided by the child or adolescent about the abuse
- Talking about the event all the time or denying that it happened
- Hostility or increasingly aggressive behaviours
- Engaging in risky behaviours and refusing to follow rules
- Wanting to be alone; not wanting to spend time even with friends
- Experiencing frequent nightmares



Important: These behavioural changes and physical concerns MAY be indicative of sexual abuse but are NOT necessarily a result of sexual abuse.

Apart from these, below are some sure indicators of a child or adolescent being sexually abused:

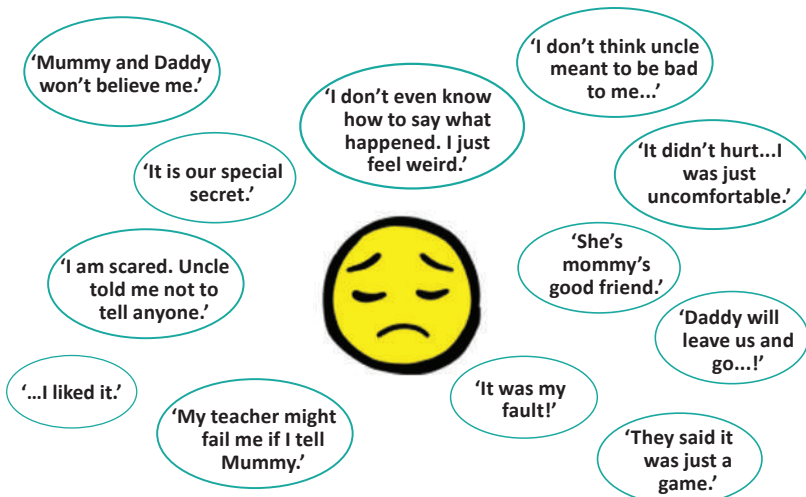
- Pregnancy
- Sexually Transmitted Infections
- If the child tells you

Step 2: Helping the child or adolescent talk about the abuse

To help the child or adolescent disclose incidents of sexual abuse, it is important to first understand why they do not talk about sexual abuse and what enables them to talk about it and seek help.

🦋 Why is it difficult for children or adolescents to talk:

Abusers use many techniques to maintain control over children or adolescents to prevent them from sharing about the abuse. These could be in the form of threats, coercion or certain belief systems. The impact of such control may manifest in the following thought patterns in the child or adolescent:



🦋 What makes children or adolescents talk eventually:

- Awareness and understanding of the abuse through programmes like the Personal Safety Education programme
- Revelation during counselling, therapy or a Personal Safety Education session
- Discussions with an understanding caregiver or an adult with whom they are comfortable
- Inability to bear the abuse anymore
- Physical illnesses following sexual abuse
- Desire to prevent the abuse of other children or adolescents

REMEMBER: THE CHILD OR ADOLESCENT IS NOT AT FAULT.



Create an understanding and a safe environment to help the child or adolescent talk about the abuse. When children finally talk about abuse, it is vital to respond effectively.

Some guidelines to handle disclosure effectively are as follows:

Do's

- Keep calm.
- Believe the child or adolescent.
- Listen to the child or adolescent.
- Answer the child's or adolescent's questions honestly.

Don't's

- Blame the child or adolescent.
- Panic or overreact.
- Pressurise the child or adolescent to talk.

- Respect the child's or adolescent's privacy by not telling everyone.
 - Do not promise to keep it a secret; instead, explain why you have to report it and to whom.
 - Give positive messages: 'It is not your fault', 'I am with you' or 'I am proud of you for telling me'.
 - Get professional help from counsellors or doctors after taking the child or adolescent into confidence.
- Question too much or too aggressively.
 - Make the child or adolescent repeat the story.
 - Confront the offender in the child's presence.
 - Ask the child or adolescent to forget or adjust.

REMEMBER: DISCLOSURE IS DIFFICULT FOR CHILDREN OR ADOLESCENTS.

It may be days, months, years or sometimes even never for a victim or survivor to be able to talk about sexual abuse. Be patient and supportive.

Step 3: Seeking professional support to help the child or adolescent heal



CSA is NOT the child's or adolescent's fault, but it can either have a short-term or long-term impact on the child or adolescent. Counsellors and therapists are professionals with skills who help facilitate healing from the impact of CSA.

Following are some ways in which therapists reduce the impact of CSA:

- Make them realise that the abuse is NOT their fault.
- Reduce their shame and guilt.
- Help them feel accepted, safe and secure.
- Re-build their self-esteem and confidence.
- Minimise their focus on the traumatic past, and help them heal and move on.

- Help them come to terms with the consequences of what the abuser will face once the reporting is done and legal action has been taken.

The child's or adolescent's family may also need counselling to cope with the situation and help the child or adolescent heal. Arpan provides professional counselling support to anyone who has experienced CSA.

You can reach our counsellors at support@arpan.org.in or call on 1800 267 2444

6. Know about the Law Related to Child Sexual Abuse

PROTECTION OF CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL OFFENCES (POCSO) (AMENDED) ACT, 2019

- The Act came into existence in the year 2012 and was amended in 2019.
- The Act defines any individual under the age of 18 years as a child.
- The Act is gender-neutral.
- This Act is the first to list aspects of contact (touch) as well as non-contact (non-touch) behaviours (for example, obscenely photographing a child) under the domain of sexual offences.
- The burden of proof is shifted onto the accused.
- Penal provisions vary for various offences covered in the Act.
- It is an exhaustive Act, and to know more about it, you can visit: <https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/POCSO-ModelGuidelines.pdf>



About Us

Arpan is a globally recognised, award-winning non-profit organisation working towards the elimination of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in India. Based in Mumbai, with a team of over 150 dedicated professionals, Arpan is India's largest non-profit organisation providing CSA prevention and intervention services for both children and adults.



As a critical stakeholder for state and non-state actors, Arpan is a leading voice in CSA prevention and intervention in India, using advocacy and research to push for policy and systemic change at the local, state and national levels.

Arpan's key project focuses on Personal Safety Education (PSE) in schools, teaching children and adolescents (ages 4 to 18) about personal safety so they can identify and seek help in unsafe situations. Arpan also trains and empowers teachers and parents with the knowledge, attitude and skills to prevent and address CSA. Since 2007, Arpan has impacted over 19.2 million children and adults and has received eight national and two international awards for its exemplary work.

🦋 Our Vision: A World Free of Child Sexual Abuse.

🦋 Our Mission: To prevent Child Sexual Abuse and heal those affected by it.

🦋 You too can help by:

1. Talking about the Issue

- Talk to your friends and family about CSA. Learn more about CSA at www.arpan.org.in.
- Conduct Personal Safety lessons with children both online and offline.
- If you have experienced CSA or know of someone who has, reach out to us at support@arpan.org.in.

2. Volunteering

- We need individuals with varied skills and resources to help our work grow.
- Tell people about Arpan and the work we do.
- Help us get access to networks like schools, clubs, residential societies, NGOs or any platform to talk about CSA and create awareness.
- Help us continue the good work by raising funds.

3. Donating:

- Sponsor teaching @Rs. 4,524 × ___ no. of children Personal Safety skills offline
- Sponsor teaching @Rs. 786 × ___ no. of children Personal Safety skills online
- Sponsor teaching @Rs. 2,836 × ___ no. of adults skills to teach children Personal Safety

4. Ways to Donate:

- You could send a cheque in the name of 'Arpan' to our office.
- For bank transfer details, contact us at finance@arpan.org.in
- For online donation visit <https://www.arpan.org.in/donate-online/>You will be sent a receipt and the 80G tax exemption certificate.

🦋 For more information, contact us at:

Email: info@arpan.org.in

Website: www.arpan.org.in

Online Courses: www.arpanelearn.com

Phone: 1800 267 2444

Location: Mumbai, India



Our supporters include:



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