



Test your Knowledge about Myths and Facts related to Child Trauma
True or False:

- Children do not tell about abuse because they are not hurt by it or because they enjoy it.
- A child who has been abused would be frightened of any future contact with the person who abused them.
- Children seldom lie about something as important as abuse.
- Young children can easily be misled to falsely claim abuse.
- When a child discloses abuse and then recants that disclosure, the original disclosure was a lie.
- Children who have really been abused will present with significant emotion when disclosing their abuse.
- Disclosure of abuse during a separation, divorce or custody battle is most often the result of coaching by a parent
- If the child does not resist the sexual advances of the offender; he/she must share responsibility for the sexual abuse.
- There would be some physical indications or evidence if the child was really sexually abused.
- Children who have been sexually abused will exhibit behavioral and/or emotional problems and these problems will last a lifetime.
- It is better to not talk about the abuse and just let the child forget what happened.
- The most important factor in how child victims manage their experiences is the quality of the treatment they receive.
- Children who have been sexually abused by an adult of the same sex are significantly at risk for homosexual behaviors.

Myth: Children do not tell about abuse because they are not hurt by it or because they enjoy it.

Fact: There are a number of reasons why children do not tell or delay their telling about sexual abuse. Children are often threatened not to tell, and are afraid of being harmed by the person who abused them if they tell. When children are bribed or coerced, they may feel responsible for the abuse and be afraid that they will be blamed or get in trouble if they tell. Some sexual abuse programs instruct children to say no and tell which may cause them to feel guilty if they were too scared to tell when it happened. Some children are told by trusted adults that what is happening is okay or are too young to understand that what has happened is abuse.

Myth: A child who has been abused would be frightened of any future contact with the person who abused them.

Fact: People who sexually abuse children want to continue to have access to the child so they can continue to abuse them. For this reason, offenders are usually very nice to the child and present the abuse in a loving way. Offenders of abuse "groom" the child by paying special attention to them. The offender may define the relationship as "special" and "our secret." The child may like the person and the special attention. Parents who abuse their child may have been positive in other areas of the child's life. Some touching is pleasurable and may have felt good to the child. Some children respond positively to offenders to protect themselves. Children are most often abused by members of the family and usually love the abuser. When physical abuse is common within a family, the child may not know that it is wrong or is afraid of the physical consequence of telling.

Myth: Children seldom lie about something as important as abuse.

Fact: Young children tend to lie to protect themselves. Older children may lie to "survive" their family or the "system." Lies are most often related to denying abuse or minimizing the abusive experience vs. falsely reporting abuse. It is very rare for a child to make a false report of abuse.

Myth: Young children can easily be misled to falsely claim abuse.

Fact: Seldom are non-abused children coached or misled to falsely claim child abuse. It is more likely that accurate reports from a child may be misinterpreted as abuse and then reported as abuse. One purpose of objective, neutral forensic interviewing is to rule out abuse when it did not happen. Very young children are more suggestible than older children and adults. This fact needs to be considered in any assessment of abuse. Children five and over do not appear to be any more suggestible than older children or adults.

Myth: When a child discloses abuse and then recants that disclosure, the original disclosure was a lie.

Fact: When disclosure results in the child being blamed, shamed, punished, or not believed, the child can be expected to recant in an effort to control the reaction to their disclosure. Child victims may also recant to take care of others in their family or to try to undo any negative consequences of their disclosure.

Myth: Children who have really been abused will present with significant emotion when disclosing their abuse.

Fact: There are many factors that may impact the emotion or lack of affect exhibited by child victims. Children who have had to repeat their report multiple times may present as if they have memorized the story. Children who have dissociated themselves from the event in order to protect themselves emotionally

may report as an observer. Children who are too young to understand that what has happened to them is abuse may report as if they are telling about an every day event.

Myth: Disclosure of abuse during a separation, divorce or custody battle is most often the result of coaching by a parent.

Fact: Disclosures of child abuse during marital or custody conflict must be carefully evaluated, just as with all reports of abuse. Failure to assess any allegation of abuse objectively puts children at risk. There are a number of factors that contribute to children's reports as their parents are separating or fighting for custody. The child may believe that if a parent is able to leave a marriage or seek custody, that the parent would be able and willing to protect the child from abuse. Children also report telling about abuse when they are fearful of having to live alone or visit with an abusive parent.

Myth: If the child does not resist the sexual advances of the offender, he/she must share responsibility for the sexual abuse.

Fact: Attributing any responsibility to the child is inappropriate. We teach our children to obey adults and to do what they are told. In sexual abuse cases, the child usually knows the offender and trusts him or her. Offenders easily convince children that the sexual abuse is okay. If the abuse begins at an early age, the child may not know that it is wrong. The closeness and special attention given to the child in some cases may be desirable. Adolescents may be flattered by the adult attention. It is the adult's responsibility to set the standards of behavior for their children.

Myth: If the child does not resist the sexual advances of the offender, he/she must share responsibility for the sexual abuse.

Fact: Attributing any responsibility to the child is inappropriate. We teach our children to obey adults and to do what they are told. In sexual abuse cases, the child usually knows the offender and trusts him or her. Offenders easily convince children that the sexual abuse is okay. If the abuse begins at an early age, the child may not know that it is wrong. The closeness and special attention given to the child in some cases may be desirable. Adolescents may be flattered by the adult attention. It is the adult's responsibility to set the standards of behavior for their children.

Myth: There would be some physical indications or evidence if the child was really sexually abused.

Fact: In some cases, there is real injury which leaves scars, or there is evidence of sexually transmitted infection. But in most cases, redness or bruises that might have been present right after the abuse have disappeared by the time the child discloses. Rarely is there any permanent physical evidence of sexual abuse. Sexual abuse perpetrators try not to hurt the child because they want to have on-going access to the child. They groom the child to accept the sexual touching. In addition, children may report that someone has put something (penis, finger, and object) inside them when in fact, the intrusion may not have been penetration. Children do not know the concept of intercourse and may interpret the placing of the penis or finger against the vaginal opening or against the anus as "putting it in".

Myth: Children who have been sexually abused will exhibit behavioral and/or emotional problems and these problems will last a lifetime.

Fact: Although approximately 20% of children who have been sexually abused do not exhibit any negative consequences of their experience at the time of their disclosure, research suggests that many children experience significant problems as a result of their victimization. These problems are related to school performance, physical health, relationships and social, psychological and emotional problems. These problems may contribute to marital, mental health and substance abuse problems during adulthood. A

child victim is a normal child who has experienced an abnormal event. With a supportive response, protection and treatment, the child can do well

Myth: It is better to not talk about the abuse and just let the child forget what happened.

Fact: Not talking about abuse may be more comfortable for the adults, but may leave children feeling ashamed or believing that they have to keep all of their feelings inside. As with any problem, it is helpful to talk about what happened. Talk is also the most important tool in helping children understand what has happened and to feel okay about themselves.

Myth: The most important factor in how child victims manage their experiences is the quality of the treatment they receive.

Fact: The most important factor in how child victims manage their experiences is the presence of a believing, supportive and protective adult caregiver.

Myth: Children who have been sexually abused by an adult of the same sex are significantly at risk for homosexual behaviors.

Fact: Children who are sexually abused may act out what they have experienced, but such abuse does not automatically lead to a homosexual orientation. However, boys who are abused by older males are often more reluctant to tell as they may believe that such abuse means that they are homosexual. They may also be afraid that, if they tell, others will believe that they are homosexual.