

When Teenage Boys Have Been Sexually Abused

A Guide for Teenagers



"Once I told
someone what
happened, I
knew I wasn't
alone anymore."

Sexual Abuse Information Series 2008

This is one of ten booklets in the Sexual Abuse Information Series:

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A Guide for Parents and Children

SEXUAL ABUSE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN

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WHEN GIRLS HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED

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VISAC (Vancouver Incest and Sexual Abuse Centre) is a program of Family Services of Greater Vancouver. VISAC offers a wide range of services including specialized victim support services, individual and group therapy for children, youth, families, and adults who have experienced childhood sexual abuse and/or trauma.

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When Teenage Boys Have Been Sexually Abused

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Why this booklet?

We often read in the papers about children or teenagers who have been sexually abused. We also read about people who have been charged with sexual abuse, and possibly sent to jail for their crimes. When we think

about an adult sexually abusing a young child, we may wonder if the adult is 'sick' or 'crazy' or 'perverted'.

What we know for sure is that sexual abuse can do children and teenagers a great deal of emotional harm. Society recognizes the harm offenders cause, and that's why there are laws against sexual abuse. If you've been sexually abused it may help your recovery to recognize that the person who abused you has done something wrong. It is not helpful to excuse their behaviour because they were "sick" or "drunk" at the time.

Every day teenage males and young men are *sexually abused, sexually harassed and sexually exploited*. If you're like most teenagers, it may be hard for you to communicate that you've been a victim of sexual abuse. Or you may have been involved in a situation where it was hard to tell whether you were a victim or not. This booklet will help you decide what really happened, and what to do about it.

This booklet will help you by:

- **defining sexual abuse;**
- **defining sexual harassment and sexual exploitation;**
- **outlining the basic laws about sex between teenagers and between teenagers and adults;**
- **describing situations in which teenage boys are at risk of being sexually abused;**
- **describing the effects of sexual abuse; and**
- **telling how you can get help – either for yourself or for a friend.**

You can use this booklet by reading it yourself, reading it with a friend or trusted adult, or giving it to a friend who needs help.

What is sexual abuse?

Sexual abuse is an abuse of power. This means that someone with a lot of power uses this power over someone else in a sexual way. When someone who is older, stronger, or more experienced has forced sexual activity on you, you've been sexually abused.

You've also been sexually abused if an adult or teenager you admire and respect has talked you into sexual activity. Even if they didn't use force, there was still an abuse of power. Even if there was no sexual intercourse or sexual touching, sexual abuse could have occurred. If you've been forced to watch sexual activity or view pornographic video or images/pictures, that's a form of sexual abuse.

It's natural for some people to have more power than others but it is wrong when a person misuses that power.

What is sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment is sexual attention you didn't want and didn't ask for. If a Grade 11 boy, for example, is told by a female teacher that he has 'nice buns' or that she would 'like to have sex' with him, that is harassment. Sometimes we read about employers being charged with sexually harassing an employee. The stories are usually about a male employer and female employee, but it's important to recognize that older females and males also harass teenage boys.

Why do we have laws about sex?

The *Criminal Code* of Canada includes laws about sexual activity to protect people, especially young people, from exploitation and abuse. The laws recognize that some people are able to dominate and use others simply because they have more power. Some people are stronger, bigger, older, smarter or richer than others. Some may have positions of authority and trust, like parents, teachers or coaches. Some have weapons. Laws about sexual behaviour are designed to protect less powerful people from more powerful people.

You can use this booklet by reading it yourself, reading it with a friend or trusted adult, or giving it to a friend who needs help.

It's natural for some people to have more power than others but it is wrong when a person misuses that power.

What laws should I know about?

All forms of sexual activity with a person below the "age of consent" are illegal under Canada's *Criminal Code*. The "age of consent" refers to the age at which the law recognizes the legal capacity of a young person to consent to sexual activity. When you do not consent to sexual activity, regardless of age, that is sexual assault. For example, a person cannot "consent" to sexual activity if they are unconscious or impaired by alcohol or drugs.

The age of consent applies to all forms of sexual activity, ranging from sexual touching such as kissing to sexual intercourse.

What is Canada's age of consent?

The age of consent is 18 years where the sexual activity is "exploitative" – that is, where it involves pornography, prostitution or occurs within a relationship of authority, trust, or dependency (for example, if it involves a babysitter or teacher) or, where the sexual activity is considered to exploit the young person. Whether a relationship exploits a young person in other ways will depend upon a number of factors, including the age of the young person, the age difference between the young person and the adult, how their relationship developed and the degree of control or influence that the adult has over the young person.

For other types of sexual activity, the age of consent is 16 years. There are three limited exceptions to the "16" year age of consent:

- 12- and 13-year-olds may consent to engage in sexual activity as long as their partner is less than two years older and they are not in an exploitative relationship;
- 14- and 15-year-olds may consent to engage in sexual activity as long as their partner is less than five years older and they are not in an exploitative relationship; and
- 14- and 15-year-olds may consent to engage in sexual activity with a partner who is more than five years older than they are if they are legally married in accordance with provincial or territorial laws.

What are the actual offences against child sexual abuse and exploitation?

Children are protected under the general sexual offences in the *Criminal Code* that protect all Canadians against sexual abuse and exploitation including, for example, against all forms of sexual assault. (Sexual Assault; Sexual Assault with a Weapon, Threats to a Third Party or Causing Bodily Harm; and Aggravated Sexual Assault), voyeurism and obscenity.

Children are also protected by child-specific offences in the *Criminal Code* of Canada. These offences include the following:

Sexual Interference: no one can touch any part of the body of a child under the age of 16 for a sexual purpose.

Invitation to Sexual Touching: no person can invite a child under the age of 16 to touch him/herself or the adult for a sexual purpose.

Sexual Exploitation: a person who is in a position of trust or authority over a young person who is 16 or 17 years old (for example, a teacher, religious leader, baby-sitter or doctor) or who the young person is dependent upon, cannot touch any part of the body of the young person for a sexual purpose or invite that young person to touch him/herself or them, for a sexual purpose.

Incest: no person may have sexual intercourse with their parent, child, brother, sister, grandparent or grandchild.

Child Pornography: no one may make, distribute, transmit, make available, access, sell, advertise, export/import or possess child pornography. Child pornography is broadly defined and includes materials that show someone who is or seems to be under the age of 18 years as being engaged in explicit sexual activity or that shows a sexual organ or anal region of the young person for a sexual purpose.

Luring a Child: no person may use a computer system, such as the Internet, to communicate with a young person for the purpose of committing a sexual or abduction offence against that young person. This offence is sometimes called, "Internet luring".

Exposure: no person may expose their genital organs for a sexual purpose to a young person under the age of 16 years.

Procuring: it is against the law for parents and guardians to procure their child under the age of 18 years to engage in illegal sexual activity and for anyone to procure or obtain the sexual services of a young person under the age of 18 years (i.e., prostitution).

Who is sexually abused?

Every year thousands of children and teenagers are sexually abused in Canada. Many sexual abuse counsellors believe there are as many boys abused as girls, even though girls report sexual abuse more frequently. Some counsellors think this is because some boys are often too proud or macho to admit that they have been sexually abused.

Age makes a difference. Younger boys are more likely to be sexually abused by family members and caretakers. Teenage males are more likely to be sexually abused by friendly authority figures such as teachers, coaches or youth leaders.

The most important thing we can say to teens, is "Talk about it."

Who are the abusers?

Abusers can be older teenage boys or adult men, older teenage girls or adult women; or older adults who pretend to be teenagers on the internet.

The majority of abusers are male, although both teenage girls and boys can be sexually abused by women.

A lot of people think that if a man abuses a boy, or a woman abuses a girl, the abuser must be gay or lesbian. That is most often not the case. Gays and lesbians want to be sexual with other adults, not with teenagers. Abusers are sexual bullies who like to use their power over someone younger, smaller or less powerful than they are, whether they abuse boys, girls or both.

Michel's story

Michel was on the high school soccer team. One day after the team had won a game against another high school, the principal brought the team to his office. He congratulated them on an excellent game, especially Michel who had scored the winning goal. The principal asked him to stay behind for a few minutes after everyone else left.

Then he told Michel that he had a great future as a soccer player, and he talked about how he had played soccer himself when he was in high school.

Michel was feeling proud of himself and didn't suspect what the principal really wanted. The principal gave Michel some whiskey to celebrate. He told Michel he was well-built and that he must have lots of girls chasing him. Then he started rubbing Michel's penis until it was erect. The principal told him they had a special relationship, and that he could come to the office for a drink any time he wanted. Michel was confused when he left the principal's office. When the effects of the whiskey wore off, he felt ashamed: ashamed that he had accepted the whiskey, ashamed that he had an erection when the principal touched him, and ashamed that the principal considered him a friend. After all, some of the kids made rude jokes about the principal. Sometimes they even wrote graffiti about him on the school fence. What if someone found out about him and the principal and wrote graffiti about both of them?

Then Michel wondered if the principal was gay. Did the fact that he got an erection mean that Michel was gay too? Michel decided he had to keep the story from his father. Only yesterday he had heard his father making jokes about homosexuals. What if his father thought he was homosexual and made jokes about him? And anyway he couldn't go against the principal. Who would believe him?

If you have been sexually abused, you're not alone. It's much more common than you might think, and it happens to both boys and girls.



Michel kept the secret for almost two years. But then the principal was charged with sexual abuse. It turned out that he had been sexually abusing a number of other students, and not just Michel. Michel was relieved, because he was finally able to tell a counsellor his own story, but when the principal went to jail, Michel felt sad as well. After all, the principal had been really supportive to the soccer team.

Michel was really confused. He couldn't understand how he could be so mad at the principal and so sad about losing him at the same time.

Sexual abusers are men or older teenagers who are sexually attracted to young boys. They are often in positions of trust like camp counsellors, teachers and ministers. They are frequently married, and may be father or stepfather to some of the boys they are abusing. They are attracted to young teenage boys for the same reason they are attracted to younger children. They are sexually turned on by youth and by the fact that they can exercise power over their victims.

Many young men who are sexually abused by older males have the same confused feelings that Michel did. If you have been abused, you may be confused about your sexual identity especially if you were turned on sexually during the abuse as Michel was. Often our bodies respond automatically to touch even if we didn't want to be touched. You may not report the abuse because you have some positive feelings about the abuser. You might be afraid of the power of the abuser. Then if the abuser goes to jail as the principal did, you may feel grief from losing someone who had played an important part in your life. You may be afraid someone will make fun of you, just as Michel was afraid his father would make fun of him if he found out.

Jerry's story

When Jerry was 15 his father died and his mother took in boarders to help pay the bills. When Susan, who was 20, moved in as a boarder, she was new to town, looking for a job and she was lonely.

She invited Jerry to come into her bedroom at night, and they were soon having sexual intercourse. This was Jerry's first sexual experience, and he felt quite proud of himself.

Susan became more and more demanding, and Jerry started to feel trapped. He was falling behind in his schoolwork, and wanted more time to play video games with his friends. When he told Susan he wanted more time to himself, she was angry and threatened to tell his mother. Jerry was already afraid his mother would find out, so he kept going to Susan's bedroom.

Then Susan met a man her own age. As soon as she started that relationship she told Jerry that she couldn't be bothered spending any more time with a 'kid'.

Jerry was humiliated, and could hardly believe that she could be so cold to him all of a sudden. It shook his confidence, and for a long time Jerry was afraid to have a girlfriend. Even when he became an adult, he had difficulty keeping a girlfriend because he really didn't trust any women.

Sexual abuse by females is often not reported or even seen as abusive. As a teenage boy, you're under strong social and peer pressure to 'score' sexually. You're often taught to believe that a sexual experience with an older female is a great way to learn about sex. You may have been taught that a 'real man' never passes up a sexual opportunity.

It would have been better for Jerry if he had been able to talk to a counsellor after the abuse had ended. But Jerry refused to admit he'd been sexually or emotionally abused. He felt that he wouldn't be a 'real man' if he had to admit that. And a lot of his friends believed that having sex with an adult woman was something to be proud of.

Many people
know what it
feels like to
be abused and
can understand
when you're
honest with
your feelings.

Many teenage boys have attitudes like Jerry's. These attitudes make it hard for you to admit you feel victimized or exploited by an older female. But if you can't express these feelings now, it may have an impact on your future relationships.

"The counsellor kept reminding me that I wasn't responsible. After a while I knew it was true and I felt a lot better."

Richard's story

Richard was in Grade 10 and working in a fastfood outlet so he could have money to buy clothes and to go out with his girlfriend. One day an older man in a Mercedes stopped by and told Richard that he was too smart to be working there, and that he could easily find him a job with big money after graduation. Then he told Richard that he got his own start in life by having a 'sugar-daddy' to help him, and to return the favour he would happily be a 'sugar-daddy' to Richard. Richard liked the man's clothes and car, and wanted to find out how he could be successful without working too hard.

The man invited Richard to a party where he met several other boys around his own age, some he recognized from school. He also met an older man who owned the apartment. Richard took a quick look around and saw that these people were rich. The two men were witty and they talked about art and poetry a lot. They had lots of liquor and they also brought out some cocaine.

The host came over to Richard, and asked him if he had ever "really explored his sexuality" and if his parents "respected his need for independence". Richard was excited by the liquor, the drugs and his host's conversation. The host invited Richard into his bedroom to see some art prints. In the bedroom he pulled Richard's pants down and performed oral sex on him.

The next day after the party, Richard realized he had been set up and felt ashamed, but he kept going to the parties. He talked himself into believing that the sex parties were really okay because the party organizers were rich and cultured, and because other boys his own age were there too.

Gradually the other parts of Richard's life started to fall apart. His grades dropped, he was fired from his job for being late and tired all the time, and he stopped talking to his parents. His grandmother sensed that something was wrong and talked to him about it. Richard had always been able to tell her things he couldn't tell his parents, so he told her about the sex parties. His grandmother went to the police who raided one of the parties and arrested the organizers.

Sexual abusers who are mainly attracted to older teenage boys are attracted not just for the sex, but also because they need to have admirers. They try to impress their younger victims with how intelligent or talented or rich they are. They may want to be guides or mentors to their victims, and even help them begin a career.

People commonly believe that teenage boys should be able to look after themselves sexually, and if they're sexually abused, it's probably their own fault. In fact, many older teenage males are sexually abused by older men through no fault of their own.

Like Michel, Richard sometimes thought that his experiences with a male adult would turn him into a homosexual. He became sexually aggressive with his girlfriend to prove to her (and himself) that he wasn't gay. Richard's grandmother and his girlfriend urged him to go to a counsellor to help him deal with the sexual insecurity he felt.

Many teens will tell a grandparent, or aunt, or uncle because they may have more time to listen.



Jas's Story

Jas really liked spending time with his dad, they did sports together and fishing trips. When he was 12 his father started to sexually abuse him. He felt confused because he loved his dad, but he wanted the

abuse to stop. In grade 8 during a sex education class, the teacher talked about sexual abuse and how important it was to tell. After the class, Jas told the teacher about his dad. The teacher reported the abuse. When his father had to move out of the home his mom and sister were very upset and he felt guilty and sad for quite a while. At times, he wished he hadn't told. When the abuser is someone in the family like a father or father-figure, the betrayal is even greater and makes it hard to learn to trust. In Jas' case, he even wondered if he might turn out to be like his dad.

Through individual and family counselling Jas and his mom and sister were able to talk about the abuse and to feel closer. He came to understand that his dad made a choice and was responsible for the abuse, and that Jas could make different choices in his life.

Why are teenagers targets for sexual abusers?

In your teens you go through a lot of physical and emotional changes and you have a lot of needs.

Sexual abusers take advantage of your needs in several ways:

- Experienced adults can exploit a male teenager's need to have mentors or successful adults who can be role-models. An adult who is an artist, for example, can easily exploit your dream to become an artist.

- In your teens you want to experience 'rites of passage', to move from adolescence into manhood. Having sexual experiences is probably the most powerful of the rites of passage. Both male and female abusers exploit your need to learn about sex.
- As you mature, you need the love and approval of a male parent just as much as you did when you were younger. When fathers are busy or even absent altogether someone else may fill this gap and take advantage of you.
- Abusers play on your need to have someone acknowledge your sexuality, and your need to feel in charge of it. The host at the party Richard attended, for example, told him that he was experiencing sexual independence. Richard believed him.
- Abusers often offer you drugs and alcohol. This plays on your need to try new things.

Why should I tell?

- Telling someone means you're not carrying the load all by yourself. You'll have people who care about you and are willing to help.
- Telling someone is the only way to make sure you get counselling support. You'll need this counselling to help overcome the fears and guilty feelings you'll experience even after the abuse has ended.
- If you were sexually abused when you were younger, you may have an urge to sexually touch children. This may give you a feeling of power over another person, just as your offender once had power over you. To get help you must tell someone what you have been thinking about doing to younger children, and also admit that someone sexually abused you. This is the best way to stop yourself from hurting others.
- You run the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections such as genital herpes or HIV and AIDS if the abuser has forced you into high-risk sexual activity.



Telling someone means you're not carrying the load all by yourself.

What might keep me from telling?

- You may be embarrassed. You may think you've been stupid, or that others will think you're stupid. Intelligence has nothing to do with it. Abusers can convince even the smartest people. The abuser is older than you, and probably has a lot of experience in seducing younger people.
- If you are being sexually abused along with other teenagers, you may feel pressure to stay quiet and keep doing what they're doing. The others may even pressure you because if you drop out of the group, it makes them look bad.
- You may believe that by telling the police, social workers or your parents, that you're 'ratting' on the abuser(s) and on other teenagers who are part of a group. The answer to that idea is that anyone who is endangering your mental and physical health doesn't deserve your protection.

How can I break free?

If you are being sexually abused by an adult or an older teenager and are feeling trapped, the first step is to tell someone and get help. If the abuser tricked you into believing that you were exercising free choice, you may have trouble admitting you were tricked.

Admitting you have been sexually abused takes courage. But your sense of self-esteem, both now and as an adult, depends on this vital first step.

Who should I tell?

When a crime has been committed, tell the police. One possible difficulty is that adults don't always believe teenagers. If the officer who interviews you understands the problem, and has other information about the abuser, the interview could go really well. If the officer is less understanding, it could be harder, but you have to take that chance.

Your parents should be the best people to tell, but that depends on how well you get along with them. If you think one or both of them will understand and help, tell them. If you feel you can't count on them, tell another adult you trust. Whoever you tell must report the abuse to the police, so your parents will find out sooner or later.

If you have a special friend you can count on – either a boy or a girl – consider telling that person. You might feel embarrassed, and your friend may be shocked at first. But if he or she really cares about you, that friend could be your best help. Many people know what it feels like to be abused and can empathize with you if you're honest about your feelings.

Consider telling one of the other important people in your life – a teacher, a relative, or a counsellor. Once you've told the truth, it means you're not alone anymore. If you stick with the lie – that you're not really being sexually abused – you really are stuck. Telling the truth can make you feel lighter. It gives you the power to move ahead, make changes and move forward with your life.

Should I go for counselling?

Yes, you should. Telling the police or your parents that you have been sexually abused is an important step, but it's only the beginning. When you've been sexually abused as a teenager, you may have a lot to sort out. The best person to help you is a counsellor trained in abuse and trauma. If there are no fully trained counsellors in your community, you should consider going to whatever adult has the best helping skills. This may be a social worker, a minister, or a lay counsellor. Lay counsellors are adults who don't have a university degree, but do have some training and experience in counselling.

What can a counsellor do?

A trained counsellor will be able to help you with these common fears:

- That other people will think you're a wimp. Many teenage boys who have been sexually abused think they have to do something to prove their masculinity, like continually 'making it' with girls or getting into fights. A counsellor will help you feel more comfortable with yourself.

"I thought we'd just talk about the abuse, but my counsellor and I talk about things that matter to me – it feels good."

- That you will become 'gay' or homosexual. If you have been sexually abused by a man, you may have the idea that this will make you homosexual. However, your sexual orientation is not affected by whether or not you have had homosexual experiences or have been sexually abused. If you are gay, a counsellor will help you understand and accept your sexual identity.

A counsellor will help you feel more comfortable with yourself.

- That you have contracted HIV or AIDS or other sexually transmitted infections as a result of having been sexually abused. A counsellor will help you deal with your fears.
- That as a sexual abuse victim you are likely to become a sex offender yourself. Many sex offenders have been sexually abused, either as teenagers or as young children. However, most sexual abuse victims – male or female – do not become abusers. The more you can talk about your own sexual abuse in counselling and understand what happened to you, the less likely you are to abuse others.
- That everyone knows about the abuse, that people are talking about you, and that people are secretly rejecting you. A counsellor will understand these fears which often come up shortly before or after you report the abuse.
- That the offender will try to get revenge after he gets out of jail. If you are worried about that, share your concerns with family and/or the police who can help protect you.
- That reporting the abuse was a bad thing to do especially when the abuser was someone you admired and respected. You may also be sad because you've learned the hard way that people are sometimes not what they seem.

Experienced counsellors will understand your fears and they can help you overcome them. Counsellors can help you with drug and alcohol problems which can interfere with your recovery. They can also help you prepare for court if the abuser is going on trial.

Most importantly, the counsellor can support you in taking responsibility for your recovery, starting with reporting the abuse. The counsellor can also help you remember that the abuse itself was the abuser's fault and not yours.

Will I ever recover from sexual abuse?

The answer is absolutely "Yes!" There are thousands of men today who were sexually abused as young children or teenagers, and are leading productive, happy lives as adults. The two things that helped the most were having family support and good counselling.

Your memories, thoughts and feelings about the sexual abuse may stay with you as an adult, but counselling will help you feel more in control of your life. You will learn more about yourself and your strengths in overcoming difficult experiences.

Additional resources are available at your community resource centre, your local library or the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence.

