



TIP SHEET

Child sexual assault: Myths and truths

Bravehearts
Educate Empower Protect
Our Kids

Child sexual assault (CSA) is a crime that affects children of all genders, ages, races, economic classes and minority groups. You can help protect the children in your care by knowing the facts, staying informed about issues related to child protection, and teaching your children about personal safety. Below are some of the more common myths and truths about CSA.

MYTH The parents are at fault for the sexual assault. They should have better protected their child.

TRUTH Parents are often accused of not protecting their child. However, this attitude shifts blame and enables offenders to avoid responsibility for the actions. The offender is always the person who is responsible for a child sexual assault.

MYTH Child sex offenders are mostly strangers.

TRUTH It is estimated that in 70-90% of cases the offender is someone the child knows.

MYTH People who sexually assault their own children are not a danger to other children.

TRUTH Child sex offenders rarely engage in a single offence. A person who offends against their own child/ren may offend against other children.

MYTH Incest and sexual assault only occurs in poor families.

TRUTH Incest and sexual assault can occur in all types of families, rich or poor, large or small, and across all cultures and religious backgrounds.

MYTH Some children enjoy sexual attention from adults and this will not harm them.

TRUTH Sexual assault has many harmful effects on children. Sexual assault can result in children experiencing fear, confusion, guilt, shame, and sadness.

MYTH The child did not say no, or try to stop the sexual assault, so the child is partly to blame.

TRUTH Children are never to blame. A common stress response is to freeze, and this may prevent a child from responding or saying 'no.' Adult offenders are always responsible, as children are unable to consent.

MYTH Children and young people lie about sexual assault.

TRUTH 98% of child sexual assault reports by children are found to be true.

MYTH Children can misinterpret and wrongly accuse an adult of sexual assault.

TRUTH Children often disclose long after their assault has started. The offender typically uses excuses such as 'accidental touching' or tickling to defend their behaviour and blame the child. A child's disclosure should always be acknowledged and responded to.

MYTH If a child discloses sexual assault and then retracts their statement, they must be lying.

TRUTH Consequences of disclosures can be far reaching and include family breakdown, parent distress, and other effects. The offended often uses these consequences as threats against the child. Retracting a statement may be a child's attempt to return their situation to 'normal'.

If you have any concerns and wish to talk with one of our trained staff, contact the Bravehearts Information and Support Line on 1800 272 831.

NEED SUPPORT OR MORE INFORMATION?
Bravehearts Information and Support Line
FREECALL **1800 272 831**
Mon-Fri 8:30am - 4:30pm AEST

bravehearts.org.au

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