

# BEYOND THE BIRDS & BEES

Handling Child Sexual  
Development and Sexual Abuse

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A GUIDE FROM

CENTRAL OKANAGAN

**ELIZABETH FRY  
SOCIETY**

Empowering Change



## What I need from you... from a survivor

### Start by Believing.

**Listen** and encourage me to tell you only what I am comfortable with talking about. Focus on my feelings and reactions rather than on the “story” of what happened.

**Restore my power.** The abuser didn't give me a choice. From now on, I need you to help me make decisions by giving me options and respecting my choices.

I need your **support**, but if you try to “rescue” me, give me advice, or take over, you are taking away my power.

**Understand** that I might feel: shock, fear, disbelief, numb, anger, and/or shame these are all normal and valid reactions to the violence

Help me understand that **it wasn't my fault**. What I did or didn't do isn't the problem. The abuser's behavior and action were wrong.

**Respect my dignity.** Please don't tell to others about my experience without my permission.

**Take care** of yourself and understand that your reactions to what happened to me may differ from mine.

**Give me the time I need  
to recover at my own pace.**

**PG**

## PARENTAL GUIDANCE SUGGESTED

**As a parent, it is your responsibility to respond to your child's sexual development and questions by modeling and teaching positive boundaries.**

As your child grows, it is important to know what to expect in her/his development, whether it is physical, emotional, educational, spiritual, or sexual.

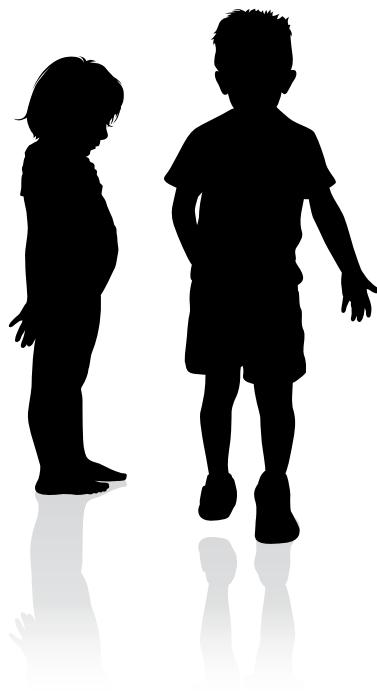
Providing children and caregivers with accurate, age-appropriate information is an important consideration for parents and communities to make sure children grow up safe, healthy, and secure in their bodies.

This pamphlet provides an overview of children's sexual development and information about childhood sexual abuse and where to go for help if your child discloses abuse.



## WHAT DOES HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT LOOK LIKE IN CHILDREN?

- Looking at his/her own and other's bodies to gain information and understanding.
- Touching her/his own (and sometimes other's) bodies to gain information and understanding (e.g., playing doctor).
- Engaging in play to exploring gender roles and behaviors (e.g. playing house).
- Engaging in curious, exploratory play with children of similar age, size, and development.
- Sexual exploration and play is balanced with curiosity and exploration of other aspects of life.
- Sexual exploration and play is usually accompanied with a sense of silliness, lightheartedness, and sometimes embarrassment (not anger, fear, or anxiety).
- Sexual exploration and play is voluntary and does not involve coercion, threat, aggression.



# HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT: GENERAL GUIDELINES BY AGE

## BIRTH TO AGE 2

- Learn about love and trust through loving relationships with parents and caregivers.
- Explore bodies, including private parts and secondary sex characteristics.
- Might have erections or experience vaginal lubrication.
- Experience genital pleasure.
- Begin to learn expected behaviours.
- Begin to notice differences between the bodies of boys and girls; children and adults.

## AGES 3 TO 5 / PRESCHOOLERS:

- Become very curious about bodies, and the differences between boys and girls.
- Might play house or doctor or other forms of body exploration (or “sex play”) with friends.
- Learn that they are either male or female.
- Learn about male and female roles by observing others.
- Enjoy learning about and talking about body parts and functions.
- Find adult bathroom activities very interesting.
- Might ask questions about pregnancy and birth such as, “Where did I come from?”
- Might learn words related to sex and try using them, or mimic sexual behavior.
- Might masturbate.

## AGES 6 TO 8 / CHILDREN:

- Begin to have strong friendships with children of the same sex.
- Are affected by stories they hear in the media (e.g., AIDS or abuse).
- Have definite ideas about male and female roles.
- Have a basic sexual orientation and identity.
- Want to be like their peers; for example, boys might feel pressured to choose the type of toys and activities that other boys choose.
- Might engage in name-calling and teasing.
- Might continue with sex play.
- Might masturbate.



### **AGES 9 TO 12 / 'TWEENS':**

- Experience the beginning of puberty.
- Become more modest and want privacy.
- Continue to value same-sex friendships.
- Might experience increased sexual feelings and fantasies.
- Develop crushes on friends, older teens, teachers, rock stars, etc.
- Romantic feelings might be directed towards the same sex and/or the opposite sex.
- Might take part in sexual exploration with peers.
- Might masturbate to orgasm.
- Might confront decisions about sex and drugs.

### **AGES 13 TO 18 / TEENAGERS:**

- Experience the end of puberty.
- Place great value on independence.
- Experience increased sexual feelings and desire physical closeness with a partner.
- Might face peer pressure to be sexually active whether or not they feel ready.
- Might exchange close friendships in favour of romantic relationships.
- Might make choices which lead to pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections.
- Might encounter violence in relationships (i.e., sexual harassment or date rape).

# ASHLEY'S STORY



Ashley's abuser betrayed her trust and took away her sense of safety in the world.

Through the Sexual Assault Counselling Centre at E.F. Ashley regained her trust and dignity.

She learned that she didn't do anything wrong.

She learned that she isn't alone.

She now has strength and hope for the future.





When I first visited The Elizabeth Fry Society I she was scared. Arriving early I waited to see my counsellor.

As time went by, the more scared I became.

Then a little girl came out of her appointment. While her mom spoke with the counsellor, she waited in reception and played with the toys.

The little girl looked up at me, and made eye contact. I realized that this little girl was here for the same reason that I was. At that moment I knew I was not alone. For the first time in a long time, I smiled – at my new friend.

I had confidence that my counsellor believed me and understood my specific needs. We developed a relationship of mutual trust and respect. My counsellor helped me to understand why I was feeling so many different and sometimes confusing emotions about the abuse.

My abuser didn't give me a choice, and so my counsellor helped to restore power by respecting my decisions and giving me the time that I needed to recover at my own pace. It is a great comfort for me to know that the Elizabeth Fry Society will be there for me when I need them.

Person depicted is a model for illustrative purposes only.

# WHAT IS SEXUAL ABUSE?

## A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

### CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Childhood sexual abuse happens to approximately 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 4 boys.

If your child, or a child in your care, tells you about sexual abuse:

- **Believe her/him.** It is rare that a child will tell you about sexual abuse that did not happen.
- Thank the child for trusting you and telling you what happened.
- Remain calm.
- Ask open-ended questions to allow the child to express what happened in her/his own words.
- Ensure the child's safety. If the alleged perpetrator has access to the child, create a plan that will prevent any further contact.
- Report the disclosure to the Ministry of Children and Families and/or to the RCMP.
- Seek support for the child and yourself.

The Central Okanagan Elizabeth Fry Society can provide parent and caregiver support as well as specialized counselling services.

Call us today to find out more: 250 763-4613

## **SEXUALLY ABUSIVE ACTS**

Any behavior towards a child (under 19) that violates the child's sexual integrity, which may include:

- Touching of a child's genitals by an adult.
- An adult telling the child to touch the adult's or another's genitals.
- Exposure of the genitals, including photographing/filming the child's genitals or photographing/filming the child in a sexual position.
- An adult masturbating in front of a child.
- Rubbing (masturbating) against a child.
- Oral sex performed on a child or telling a child to perform oral sex.
- Any type of penetration of a child's vagina or anus, however slight, by a penis, finger, tongue or other object.
- Exposing a child to pornography or using a child in pornography.
- Talking to, taunting or teasing a child in a sexual way.
- The inappropriate exposure or subjection of a child to sexual contact, activity or behaviour.
- Any kind of sexual act directed toward a child by an adult or by an older or more powerful child.
- Any sexual act which involves a threat or violence against the child or another person.

## **RESPONSES TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

Although some children may not exhibit signs of being sexually abused, it is important that we are aware, and can recognize the physical, emotional or behavioural signs that may occur:

- Sleeping problems, which could include night sweating, nightmares, or changed sleep patterns.
- Masturbating excessively.
- Sore or swollen genital or anus area, bleeding from genital area or anus, or vaginal discharge.
- Genital infections.
- Pain when urinating or having a bowel movement.
- Exhibiting sexual behaviors that are not age appropriate, including acting out with toys, friends or siblings.
- Fear of being with a certain person or in a certain place.
- Eating problems, including loss of appetite.
- Excessively bathing or not bathing at all.
- Aggressive behaviour, mood changes, anxiety, self destructive behavior.
- Showing signs that it is painful to walk or sit.
- Losing interest in the activities that they have always enjoyed.
- Sudden negative change in school performance.
- Displaying anxiety when being undressed or changed.
- Suddenly regressing to more infantile behaviors, such as bedwetting.

## AGE OF CONSENT IN CANADA

The age of consent for sexual activity was raised from 14 to 16 in 2008. However, the age of consent is 18 years where the sexual activity “exploits” the young person (e.g. prostitution or pornography). Sexual activity can also be considered exploitative based on the nature and circumstances of the relationship. A child is unable to give consent in a relationship of authority, trust or dependency.

The Criminal Code provides “close in age” or “peer group” exceptions. For example, a 14 or 15 year old can consent to sexual activity with a partner as long as the partner is less than five years older. There is also a “close-in-age” exception for 12 and 13 year olds that states the other party has to be less than two years older. These exceptions only apply if the relationship isn’t one of trust, authority or dependency.

## COUNSELLING AND HELP

### COUNSELLING FOR YOUR CHILD CAN:

- Help to decrease trauma-related symptoms the child/youth is experiencing, such as: nightmares, anxiety/fear, depression/sadness, trouble concentrating, withdrawal from friends and activities.
- Reduce the likelihood of long-term consequences of the trauma.
- Assist you and other caregivers of the child to support the victim in a positive and meaningful way.
- Provide knowledge and skills to the child to reduce the likelihood that she/he will be victimized in the future.
- Assist you and the child to develop an understanding of healthy sexuality.
- Provide an opportunity for your child to speak to someone about their experience and their feelings

## COUNSELLORS HELP YOUNG PEOPLE:

- Define the problem
- Think about what's important
- Figure out what to do next
- Express their feelings and needs
- Tap into their own strengths and resources

**Counselling is really just a conversation between two people.**

- Examine unhelpful habits, coping methods, self-defeating beliefs, values and attitudes
- Gather all the relevant facts
- Consider different points of view
- Understand how their behaviour and emotional reactions affect those around them and vice-versa
- Understand how their experiences (ie abuse) have impacted them
- Move forward in their lives after experiences of trauma

Remember, the experience may have been traumatic for the child and for yourself, but help is available.

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

### EMERGENCY

911

### CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE

250.310.1234

### LOCAL POLICE (KELOWNA)

250.762.3300

### YOUTH AGAINST VIOLENCE

1.800.680.4264

### KIDS HELP PHONE

1.800.668.6868

### VICTIMLINK

1.800.563.0808

### CENTRAL OKANAGAN

ELIZABETH FRY SOCIETY

250.763.4613

If you or someone you care about has experienced abuse the Central Okanagan Elizabeth Fry Society offers a safe and confidential environment where you can receive counselling, information and support.

## Sexual Assault Counselling Centre

We believe that with support, children, youth, and family members can recover from the effects of abuse. We provide professional counselling to children and youth who have experienced abuse and to their families to assist in the recovery from abuse-related trauma.

Children and youth have access to safe and confidential play and art therapy provided by professional children's trauma therapists.

Because we are working to restore power in a situation where the survivor has had choice taken away, those accessing the counselling services must be voluntarily attending. If your child or teen does not want to attend counselling, we encourage you to support your child to heal at his or her own pace. Program services are available to parents and caregivers regardless of whether the child or youth is accessing counselling.

## Victim Services

The Specialized Victim Assistance Program at the Elizabeth Fry Society provides one-to-one support to adults and children who have experienced abuse or violence. The services are guided by the principals of the right of survivors to make choices based on their own understanding of their options, needs, and goals.

We assist with safety planning, access to financial assistance and counselling, ensuring that survivors are aware of their rights and options, and we provide support and guidance throughout the entire criminal justice process. Specialized tailored child-focused service and court preparation is provided to children.

If you or someone you care about has been  
affected by sexual assault or abuse, call us.

We will stand beside you.

CENTRAL OKANAGAN  
**ELIZABETH FRY  
SOCIETY**  
Empowering Change

104-347 Leon Avenue,  
Kelowna BC V1Y 8C7  
(250) 763 4613

Fax: (250) 763 4272

[contact@empoweringchange.net](mailto:contact@empoweringchange.net)

