



Child Sexual Abuse



AN AWARENESS GUIDE



Vicente Ferrer

Transforma la sociedad en humanidad

Child Sexual Abuse

An Awareness Guide

Welcome to the Child Sexual Abuse Awareness Guide, created by PEaCE (Protecting Environment and Children Everywhere), also known as ECPAT Sri Lanka. This guide has been developed for parents, teachers, journalists, community leaders and youth, as well as anyone working with children, to safeguard their rights. It offers straightforward, practical steps for recognising, preventing and responding to sexual abuse against children. You will find culturally meaningful illustrations alongside clear explanations, enabling you to comprehend each concept and effortlessly share it with your network.

Funded by Fundación Vicente Ferrer under the Combating Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse project, this resource is intended for use in awareness-raising programmes, workshops, community meetings, and educational programmes across Sri Lanka. Whether you are convening a village gathering, leading a classroom discussion, or writing a news report, the tools and examples provided here will enable you to act with confidence and compassion.

This guide is for you, our valued stakeholders. It is published as a freely shareable and printable resource. Please share it widely,

Introduction

Child sexual abuse is one of the most serious violations of a child's dignity, safety, and human rights. It occurs in every society, affecting children across all backgrounds, regardless of gender, age, socioeconomic status, or cultural background. Despite growing awareness, the topic remains heavily stigmatised and often hidden, leaving countless children vulnerable and many survivors without support.

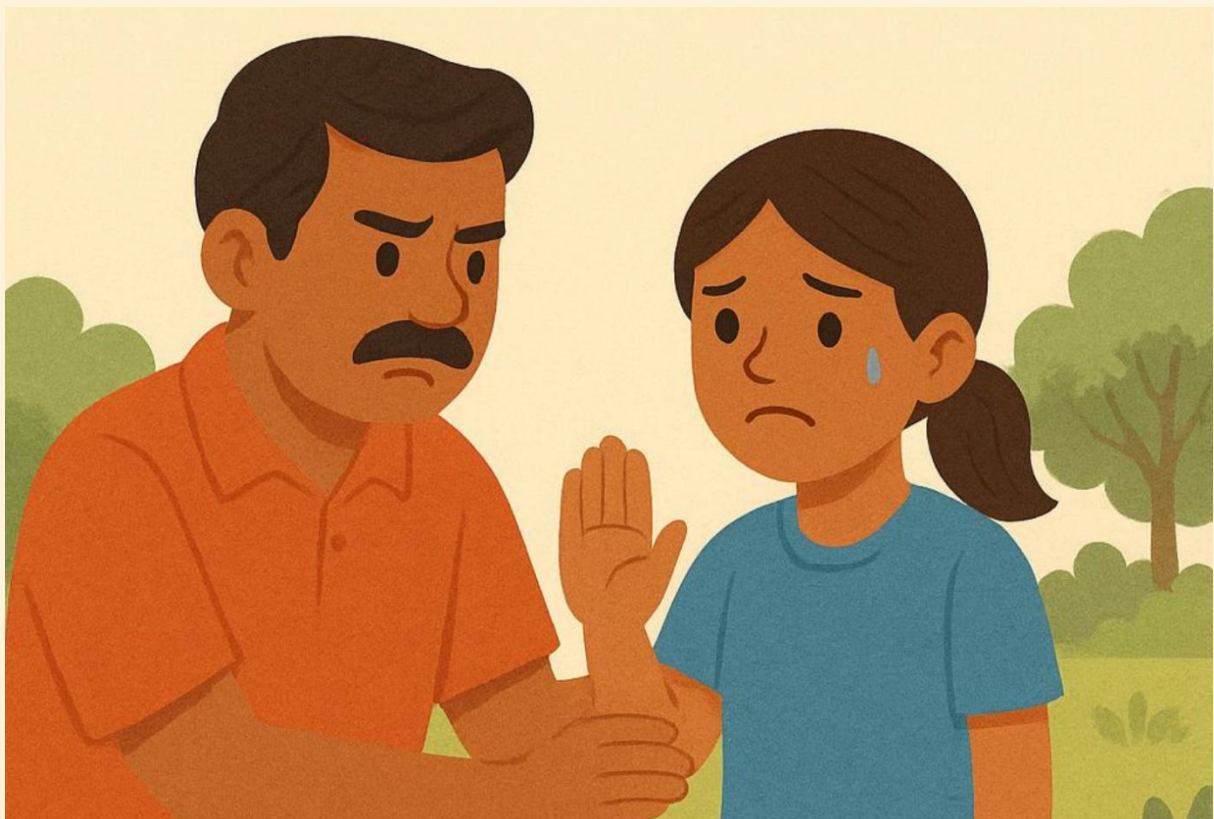


This guide has been developed to educate parents, teachers, caregivers, and community members about the realities of child sexual abuse. It aims to dispel myths, raise awareness, and equip readers with the knowledge to recognise, prevent and respond to abuse. The content draws on research, survivor experiences, and practical insights to present a clear and accessible overview of the issue.

At the end of this guide, you will find a list of organisations that uphold the children's rights. We urge you to seek support and work together to create a safe world for children.

Understanding Child Sexual Abuse

- Child sexual abuse involves engaging a child in sexual acts. It can include touching or non-touching acts.
- Sexual abuse is committed by both men and women. Perpetrators may be adults, teenagers or other children.
- Sexual abuse can have severe physical, emotional and psychological effects on a child, both in the short and long term.



What is Child Sexual Abuse?

Child sexual abuse occurs when a child is involved in sexual activity that they cannot fully understand or consent to. It includes acts where a child is tricked, coerced, manipulated, or forced into sexual behaviour. This may involve physical contact, such as touching or penetration, but can also include non-contact activities like exposing a child to sexual content, indecent exposure, or online exploitation.

Importantly, child sexual abuse does not always involve violence or force. It can occur in situations where a child is vulnerable or dependent, such as when they are asleep, intoxicated, or manipulated through affection, threats, or bribery. Abuse often involves a power imbalance, mainly when an adult or older youth exploits a child's trust or reliance.



What is Child Sexual Abuse - It involves acts committed against a child. It includes any sexual activity imposed on a child who lacks the capacity to consent due to age, understanding, or development.

Why is Child Sexual Abuse Wrong?

Child sexual abuse is a profound violation of a child's rights and integrity. Children are physically, emotionally, socially, and cognitively unprepared for sexual experiences. Their minds and bodies are not developed for such contact, especially with adults. Every child has the right to bodily independence, to decide who may touch them, when and how. Abuse strips them of this right.

Some abusers convince themselves that the child "enjoys" the attention or that it's harmless, but research shows otherwise. The consequences of abuse are serious and often long-lasting.



Effects of Child Sexual Abuse

Survivors of child sexual abuse may experience:

- Depression and anxiety
- Guilt, shame, and self-blame
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), including flashbacks and nightmares
- Low self-esteem and self-hatred
- Sexual confusion or difficulties with intimacy
- Risky behaviours (e.g., substance use, unsafe sex)
- Difficulty forming trusting relationships
- Learning problems or school avoidance
- Suicidal thoughts or self-harm
- Vulnerable to further exploitation in adulthood, including trafficking, prostitution, and abusive relationships.

The effects of child sexual abuse can include an inability to trust others; persistent feelings of being damaged or worthless; withdrawal; or “acting out” behaviours such as aggression, impulsivity, delinquency and anger.



Who Commits Child Sexual Abuse?

In most cases, the abuser is someone the child knows and trusts, often a relative, family friend, a teacher, or authority figure, a friend or a neighbour. Abusers can be men, women, or even other children. While most perpetrators are adult males, female abusers and youth offenders also exist.



Many abusers struggle with emotional immaturity, distorted views about sexuality, or past trauma. Some were victims of abuse themselves, though most survivors do not go on to abuse others.

Abusers often rationalize their actions, saying the child initiated it or that it was meant to be pleasurable. Such justifications do not reduce the harm or the responsibility. Abuse continues until it is stopped by outside intervention.

Types of Child Sex Abusers



Situational Offenders

They do not have a primary sexual interest in children but offend under specific circumstances, such as stress, substance use, or loss of adult intimacy. Offences are often opportunistic.



Preferential Offenders

Have long-standing, exclusive sexual interest in children. They see children as their ideal partners, often lack adult intimacy and may be socially isolated.



Fixated Offenders (paedophiles)

They hold a primary sexual attraction to children (what clinical psychiatry terms "paedophilic disorder"). They plan and groom extensively, seeking out child victims.

The Role of Alcohol and Drugs



Substance use can lower inhibitions and impair judgment, making some individuals more likely to act on abusive impulses. In many cases of incest or opportunistic abuse, alcohol is a contributing factor. However, substance use does not excuse the abuse.

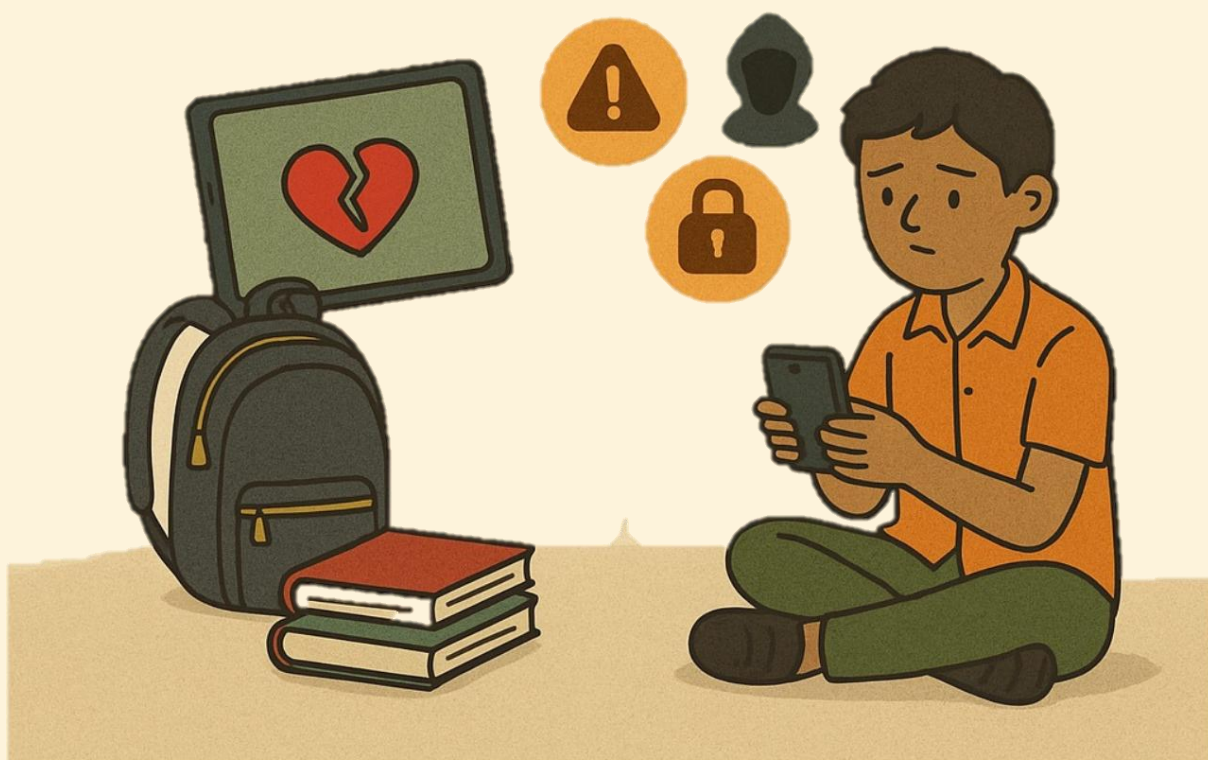
Violent Sexual Abuse (Child Rape)



Some perpetrators use force or threats rather than manipulation. Their motives may include:

- **Anger:** Expressing rage by harming others
- **Power:** Asserting dominance and control
- **Sadism:** Deriving pleasure from inflicting pain (rare but dangerous)

Online Child Sexual Abuse



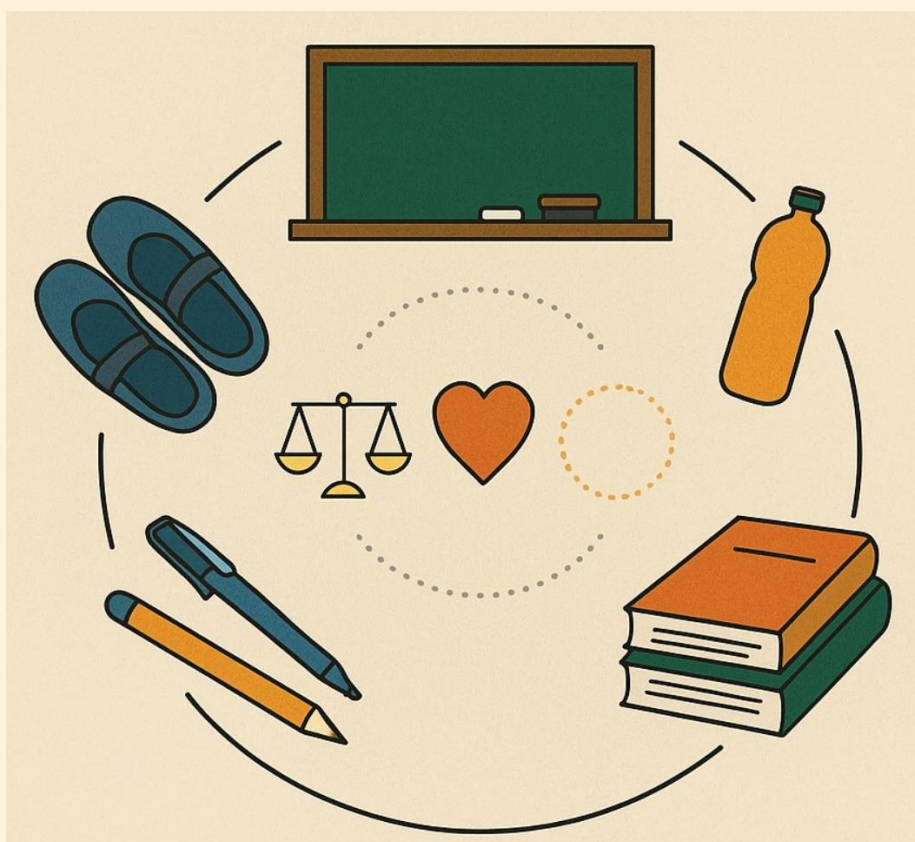
With increased internet access, children face risks from online predators. Abusers may pose as peers, groom children through chat or social media, and coerce them into sharing explicit content. This may lead to bullying, sextortion, trafficking, or livestreamed abuse.

Abusers often exchange child sexual abuse materials online and share tactics to avoid detection. In some regions, family members have exploited children via webcams for profit.

Preventive Steps:

- Talk openly with children about internet safety
- Monitor their online activity and apps
- Use parental controls and filters
- Teach them never to share explicit photos or videos
- Report abuse using platform tools or to the authorities

Child-on-Child Sexual Abuse



Children can also commit sexual abuse, often beginning in adolescence or earlier. Seven common profiles include:

- **Naive Experimenters** – Curious, unaware of harm
- **Under-socialised Exploiters** – Isolated, seeking control
- **Pseudo-socialised Exploiters** – Appear well-adjusted, abuse for pleasure
- **Sexually Aggressive Youth** – History of violence or family dysfunction
- **Sexual Compulsives** – Driven by anxiety or obsession
- **Disturbed Impulsive** – Mentally or emotionally unstable
- **Group-influenced Abusers** – Act under peer pressure or for group approval

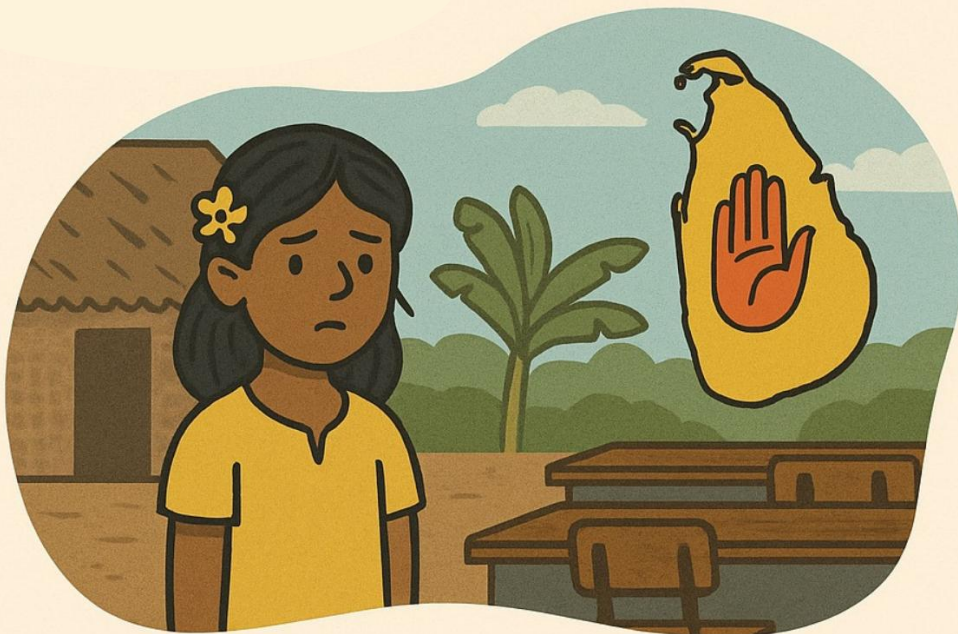
Intervention and therapy are critical to prevent further harm and support healthy development

Who is at Risk?

Child sexual abuse can happen to any child, regardless of background. However, certain factors increase vulnerability:

- Living without a biological parent, especially a father
- Being in households with limited supervision
- Experiencing family conflict or neglect
- Having low self-esteem or emotional needs
- Living with a stepfather (higher risk for girls)
- Coming from impoverished or abusive homes (higher risk for boys)

Children in unstable or marginalized environments are more susceptible to grooming and abuse.



Why Don't Children Report Abuse?

Many children remain silent because:

- They don't understand it is abuse
- They are taught to obey adults
- They fear punishment or being blamed
- They worry about family consequences
- They are threatened by the abuser
- They receive gifts or affection and feel conflicted
- They feel ashamed or blame themselves

Children may try to disclose but are often dismissed or disbelieved. It's crucial that adults take disclosures seriously and offer safe spaces for children to speak.



Recognizing Signs of Abuse

Signs of child sexual abuse are often behavioural rather than physical

- Withdrawal or aggression
- Nightmares or bedwetting
- Fear of certain people
- Unexplained pain or bleeding
- Advanced sexual knowledge
- Depression or self-harm
- Truancy or running away
- Eating or sleep disturbances

One of the strongest indicators is overt sexual behaviour inappropriate for the child's age.

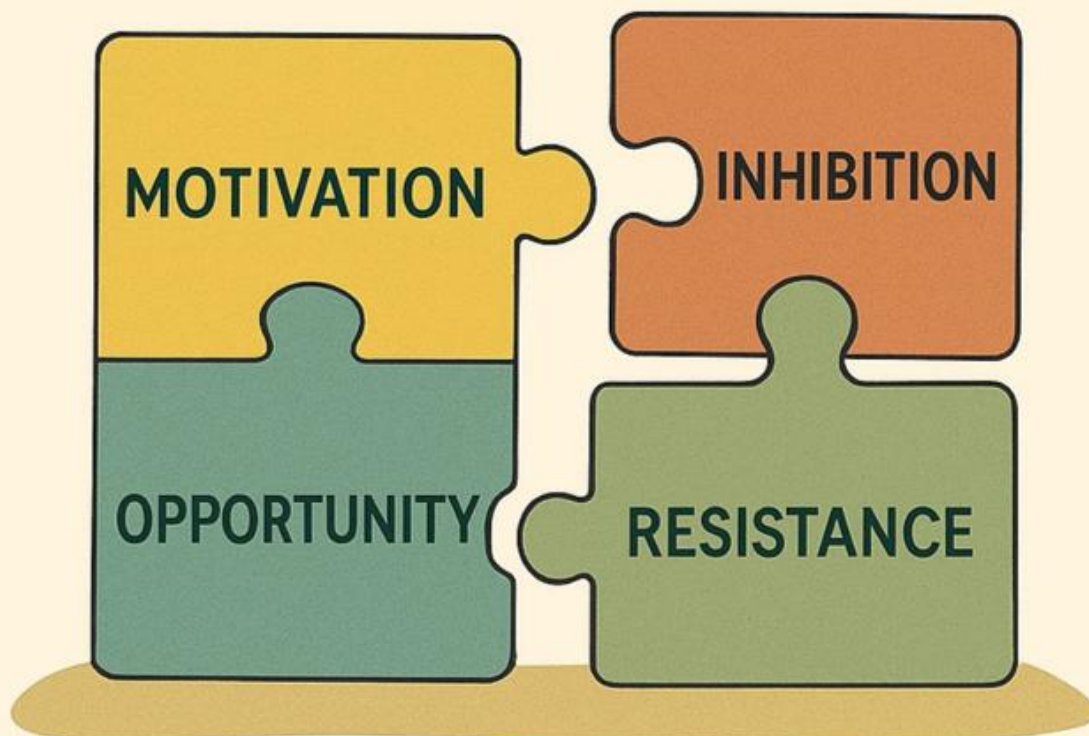


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Four Conditions That Enable Abuse

1. **Motivation:** The abuser has a sexual interest in children
2. **Overcoming Inhibition:** Abuser lowers moral barriers (often using alcohol, drugs, or porn)
3. **Opportunity:** Access to the child alone
4. **Overcoming Resistance:** Manipulation, threats, or bribery used to control the child

Remove any one condition and abuse is less likely to occur.



Prevention



- **Public Awareness:** Promote understanding that abuse is wrong and damaging
- **Support for At-risk Individuals:** Offer confidential help to potential abusers before harm occurs
- **Strong Laws and Enforcement:** Criminalize child sexual abuse and ensure proper punishment
- **Safe Environments:** Minimize unsupervised access to children in schools, homes, and institutions
- **Education:** Teach children body safety, consent, and how to say “no” to inappropriate touch
- **Parental Involvement:** Know who your child spends time with; listen to their concerns

Societal Factors

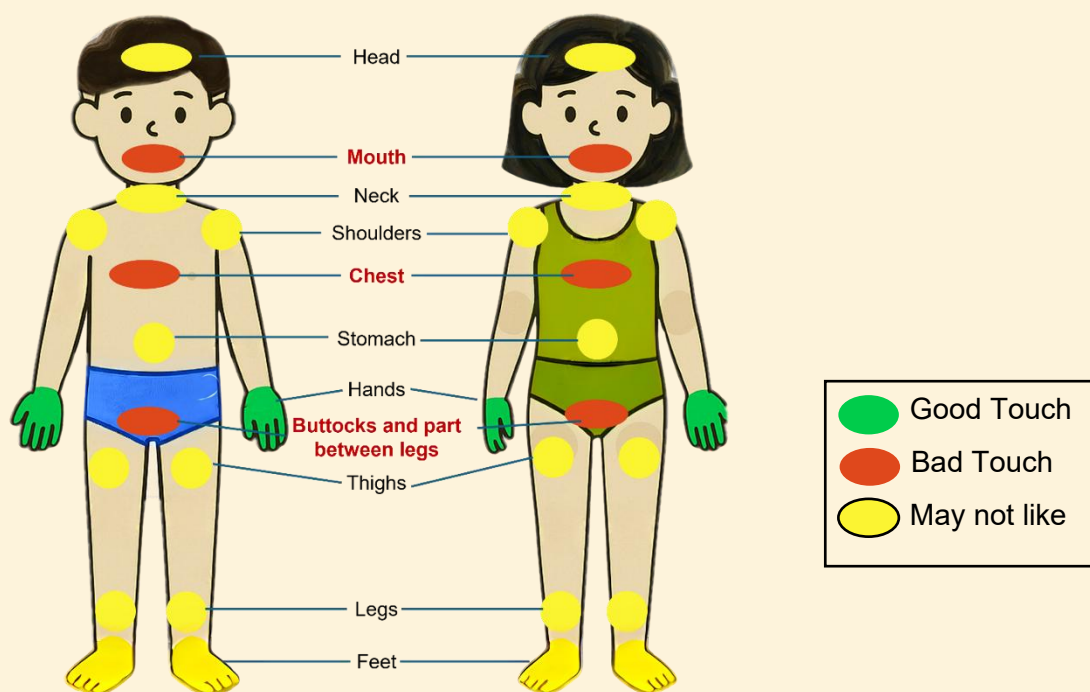
Child sexual abuse thrives in:

- Patriarchal societies with rigid power hierarchies
- Cultures with weak child protection laws
- Communities with widespread inequality and conflict
- Situations of poverty, displacement, or disaster
- Environments lacking sex education or awareness of children's rights

Changing social attitudes and improving systems of justice, education, and community support are vital.



Good Touch vs. Bad Touch



Good Touch

- A hug from your mom or dad when you're sad or celebrating something
- A high-five or handshake from your teacher when you do well in class
- Holding hands to cross the street safely
- A gentle pat on the back to say "well done"
- A doctor examines you in the presence of your mother for health reasons.

Bad Touch

- Touching or rubbing your chest, genitals, or buttocks
- Forcing you to touch someone else's private parts
- Trying to peek under your clothes or make you play "hide and seek" in a way that exposes you
- Any touch that makes you feel frightened, embarrassed, or ashamed

See - Report - Stop

Teach children to follow the instructions below when they feel uncomfortable about someone's actions...



Say “No!” loudly and firmly.

Use a strong, clear voice to let the person know that their behaviour is unacceptable and to attract attention from anyone nearby.

“Go” quickly to a safe place with others.

Move directly to an area where you feel secure, such as near teachers, friends, or any group of adults, so you are not alone.

“Tell” a trusted adult.

Find someone you know cares about you, a parent, teacher, coach, or neighbour and explain precisely what occurred so they can assist you.

Report Child Abuse

National Child Protection Authority



1929

CALL TO REPORT ABUSE:

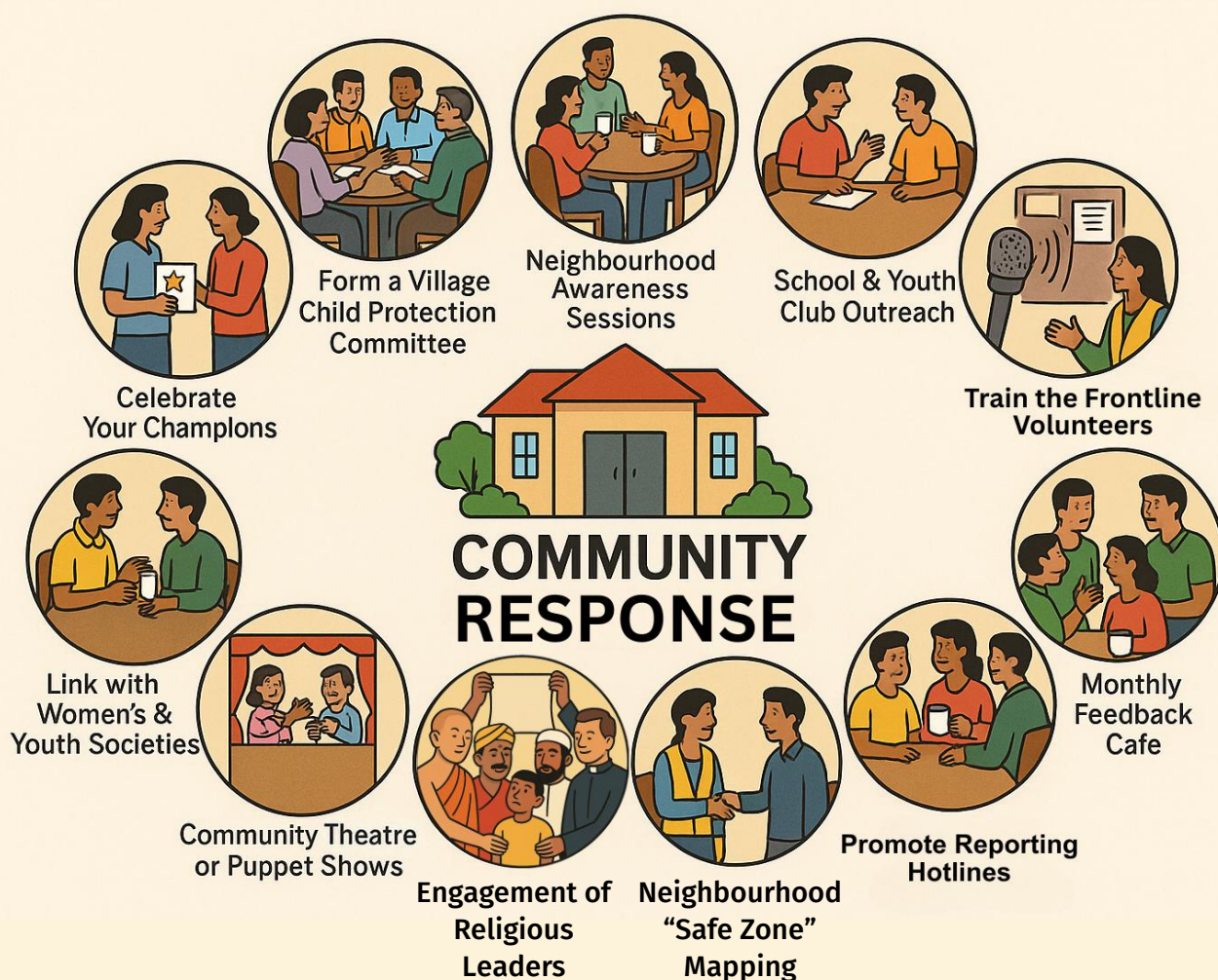
Children and Women's Bureau



109

CALL TO REPORT ABUSE:

Community Response



Children are everyone's business because it takes a whole neighbourhood to keep children safe. When neighbours, teachers, shopkeepers, religious leaders and friends all watch out for a child's well-being, they can spot warning signs early, report concerns and offer help before harm happens. By looking after one another's children, sharing information, and acting together, the community becomes a protective circle that makes it much harder for abuse to go unnoticed or unchallenged. When we all take responsibility, we send a clear message that every child deserves care, respect, and protection.

Prevent Child Sexual Abuse



Teach Body Boundaries



Encourage Open Communication



Supervise & Know Their Friends



Use "Safe" & "Unsafe" Lists



Trust Their Instincts



Report Immediately

Teach Body Boundaries: Explain to children, which parts of their body are private and that no one should touch them there without permission.

Encourage Open Communication: Let children know they can always talk to you about anything that makes them feel uncomfortable or scared.

Supervise & Know Their Friends: Keep an eye on who your child spends time with and where they go, both online and offline.

Use "Safe" & "Unsafe" Lists: Help children practice identifying safe adults and places (e.g., school, police officer) versus situations that feel "**wrong**" or "**weird**."

Trust Their Instincts: Remind children that if something doesn't feel right, no matter who it is, they have the right to say "**NO**" and leave.

Report Immediately: If a child shares concerns or you notice warning signs, report to the proper authorities (e.g., NCPA hotline: 1929 or Children and Women's Bureau: 109) without delay.

Children are our greatest treasure.

Protecting them from sexual abuse is the shared duty of parents, teachers, caregivers, communities and governments alike. Every child deserves to grow up safe, respected, and loved. Together, let's build a world where that promise becomes reality.

