



On Talking to Our Children: Responding to Allegations of Sexual Violence in the Muslim Community

What is child sexual abuse?

Any sexual activity between an adult and child including:

- Rape or attempted rape
- Touching a child's body or making a child touch someone else's body
- Sexual contact with a child
- Someone watching or photographing a child in sexual situations
- Someone exposing his or her own body to a child
- Someone exposing a child to pornographic material
- Talking to a child in a sexual way

How often does it occur?

Child sexual abuse is more common than we think it is. The likelihood of you knowing a child who has been sexually abused is high. According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN):

- **44% of sexual assault and rape victims are under the age of 18.**
- **93% of juvenile sexual assault victims know their attacker.**
- **34.4% of attackers are family members.**

Who can be a perpetrator?

Attackers who target children generally appear to be a friendly neighbor or acquaintance. They often do not appear to have predatory characteristics; instead **they go out of their way to appear trustworthy, gain trust by offering gifts and sweets, and seek out settings where they can gain easy access to children**, such as youth centers, schools, playgrounds, and the child's home.

What signs can I look out for?

Every survivor of child sexual abuse responds differently, but here are a few things to look out for:

Signs of physical injury or illness | Unhappiness | Withdrawal | Regression | Changes at school | Aggression | Destructive behavior or high-risk sexual behavior | Trouble sleeping/ nightmares | Changes in eating patterns



What are the consequences of child sexual abuse?

Children who are victims of sexual abuse carry physical, emotional, psychological and social consequences with them throughout their lifetime.

- Many survivors often suffer from low self-esteem, guilt, and shame, and lack the ability to trust anyone or build relationships easily.
- Sexual abuse survivors have a higher rate of excessive drug and alcohol use, attempted suicide, depression, and eating disorders.
- Approximately 40% of sex offenders report sexual abuse as children.

What are the consequences for not having conversations about child sexual abuse?

These conversations are not easy to initiate. However, there are many benefits to having these conversations with your children early on. The risks involved in not having these conversations include:

- Children being misinformed about their rights.
- Children being influenced to believe such sexual activity is acceptable.
- Letting the cycle continue.

Why do children often not disclose?

It is crucial to understand why children do not disclose and to learn how to identify signs of sexual abuse. Common barriers to disclosing are:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stigma - shame, embarrassment and self-blame• Fear that the abuse will worsen or that others will find out• Loss of trust• Familiarity with the perpetrator and/or love and respect for the perpetrator• May not identify as a victim and therefore minimize the experience• May not trust the system• May be unaware of the resources• Often do not have the vocabulary to talk about the abuse and are often not educated about their bodies• Lack of open discussion and access to sex education• Spread of misinformation and unhealthy attitudes toward gender and sex | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of understanding what constitutes a healthy relationship• Shame surrounding a taboo topic• Fear of breaking up or destroying family• Modesty and belief in privacy• Denial• Religious tradition, which may encourage to cover up another's sin• Fear of being blamed for assault |
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What do I need to do if my child tells me they've been abused?

In order to help your child through a healing process, it is very important to react responsibly.

- 1 Remain calm and don't overreact
- 2 Listen non-judgmentally
- 3 Affirm their experiences by using phrases like: **"It's not your fault. I believe you. You have options."**
- 4 Silence is okay.
- 5 Do not project or assume - let them tell you details when ready.
- 6 Be mindful of word choices and questions.
- 7 Validate their feelings. **"It is normal to feel..."**
- 8 Acknowledge the sexual violation without forcing acceptance on the survivor to be labeled a "rape victim".
- 9 Deal with explicit language (especially if child is an adolescent).
- 10 Provide resources and offer support.
- 11 Report immediately to law enforcement and prepare the child for the next steps.
- 12 It is important for you to determine whether you are a mandated reporter: each state has different guidelines, but typically, medical personnel, clergy, social workers, teachers and administrators, and law enforcement officers are required to report abuse of a minor to Department of Children and Family Services.

How can I have this conversation in a way that is age-appropriate?

Many parents often struggle with having this conversation with young children because they are uncomfortable with teaching their kids about sex, especially when they are very young. It is imperative to have these conversations throughout childhood, not just when they reach puberty. Here are some tips:

Infants and Toddlers



- Teach them the difference between “my body, your body.”
 - Use correct terms for body parts
 - I am a girl/boy
 - Teach them how to say “no” and respect their wishes
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Preschoolers (3-5)

This group will have a lot of **questions**. Welcome them and answer them calmly.



- Use a lot of **books and videos** to assist in your discussions.
 - Share the **ONLY instances where their private parts can be seen and/or touched**. Explain that no one should physically hurt them, especially in their private parts. Discuss who can see and touch them, such as doctors or dentists (the mouth is private too), with a parent present.
 - Help them **identify adults** they can reach out to if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable.
 - Talk to your child about the difference between a **secret** worth honoring and a secret that is unsafe to keep.
 - Be mindful of your **body language and tone**.
 - Teach them the difference between **shame** and **modesty**. While our faith values call for keeping certain body parts private and maintaining modesty, they should not feel shame around their bodies or bodily processes.
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Ages 6-8



- Be more forthcoming and detailed in the information you offer, without blame or shame.
- Teach them about puberty by age 8.
- Talk about and practice setting boundaries.
- Remind them about unsafe secrets.

Puberty (9-12)



- These years are full of many physical, emotional and social changes and are crucial to creating a safe space for your child as he/she navigates through an often confusing time.
- Give accurate and more in-depth information on their bodies, sexuality and relationships.
- Help them practice decision-making.
- Discuss family values.
- Respect their privacy.
- Talk about what they see in the media and teach them to think critically of the messaging they are receiving.
- Discuss what a healthy and an unhealthy relationship looks like (both in friendships and in intimate relationships).
- As our kids become more social and independent, they may have friends confide in them. Teach them how to be a resource for their friends and how to identify the instances when they should reach out to an adult.

Resources to use for these discussions

Books, for children ages 3 and up

- **Your Body Belongs to You**, by Cornelia Spelman
- **Some Parts are Not for Sharing**, by Julie K. Frederico
- **Do You Have a Secret? (Let's talk about it)** by Jennifer Moore-Millanos
- **I Can Play it Safe** by Alison Feigh
- **I Can be Safe: A First Look at Safety** by Pat Thomas
- **Uncle Willy's Tickles: A Child's Right to Say No** by Marcie Aboff

Books, for children ages 7 and up

- **Reena's Bollywood Dream: A Story about Sexual Abuse** by Jewel Kats
- **Some Secrets Should Never be Kept**, by Jayneen Sanders
- **Tornado Warning: A Memoir of Teen Dating Violence and its Effect on Women** by Ellin Stebbins Waldal

Videos

- **Komal**, a film by Childline (available on YouTube)

Online Resources

- Rainn.org
- www.calgarycasa.com
- www.heartwomenandgirls.org