

WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?  
WHO ARE PEDOPHILES?  
DON'T YOU THINK CHILDREN INVITE ABUSE  
BY DRESSING "PROVOCATIVELY"?



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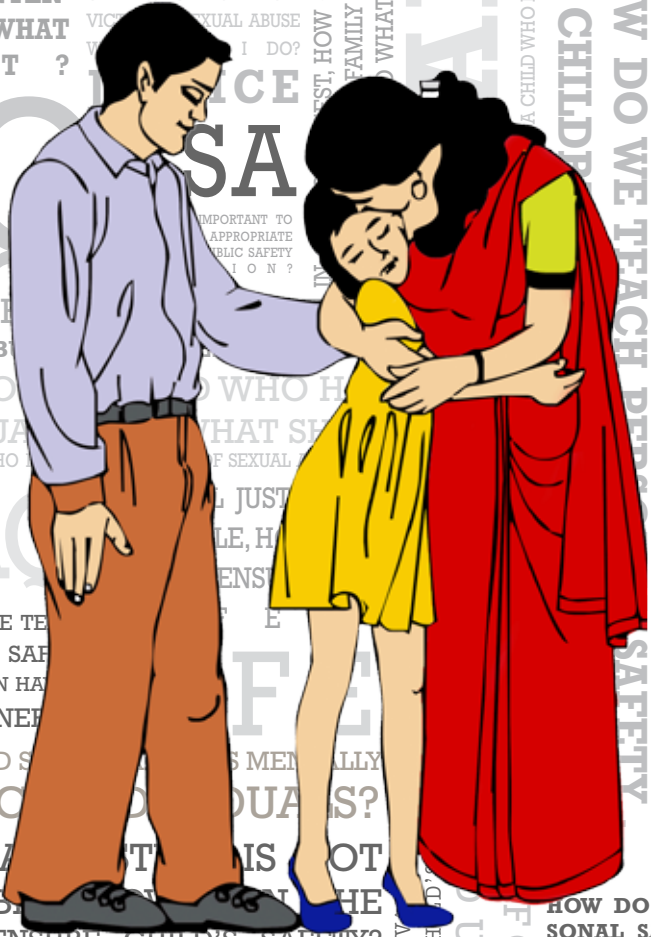
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WHAT IS THE TIME FRAME  
WITHIN WHICH THE ENTIRE  
PROCESS WILL BE OVER?

CONCERNS  
HOW DO WE HANDLE



Understanding CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: Frequently Asked Questions

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# Understanding Child Sexual Abuse: Frequently Asked Questions

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## Introduction

### Question i

### What is Child Sexual Abuse?

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is a form of child abuse where a person uses a child for his/her sexual gratification.

Child Sexual Abuse is committed by someone who is in a position of power and/or authority, and sometimes, even in a position of trust. This is because it is much easier for such a person to take advantage of the child's helplessness and vulnerability.

## Question 1

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### **What is Child Sexual Abuse?**

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is a form of child abuse where a person uses a child for his/her sexual gratification.

Child Sexual Abuse is committed by someone who is in a position of power and/or authority, and sometimes, even in a position of trust. This is because it is much easier for such a person to take advantage of the child's helplessness and vulnerability.

CSA may involve touching and/or fondling a child's private body parts (vagina, breast, penis, testicles, buttocks, anus), forcing the child to touch and/or fondle one's private parts, oral, vaginal or anal penetration or any sort of contact made with the intent of one's sexual gratification. CSA may also involve non-contact abuse such as exposing one's genitalia to a child, using sexually explicit language when talking to a child, showing the child pornography etc.

Child Sexual Abuse is a violation of the child's body as well as of the child's trust.

The violation can have a significant impact on how the child, as a victim, and later on as adult survivor, sees and experiences the world. The effects of

Child Sexual Abuse can be damaging but they need not be permanent.

# 2



## Prevalence and Incidence

### Question i

**Is Child Sexual Abuse more common in developed countries? How is it tackled there?**

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) happens

everywhere. In fact, according to research, India may have more occurrences of CSA than developed countries. In developed countries, more cases get reported because there are mechanisms in place to raise awareness and handle child protection issues and cases. In India, the issue of CSA is never discussed because anything related to sex is considered

taboo. Even adults do not talk about sex or abuse openly. As a result, children are less likely to report any personal concerns to their parents or teachers.

In most developed countries, the term “child protection” is usually used to describe a set of government-run services, designed to protect and provide services to children and young people who are underage. These services typically include education, foster care, adoption services, providing support to at-risk families to help them remain intact and investigation of alleged child abuse. Professionals and communities are informed about the issue of child abuse and trained to prevent and treat cases. Reporting any suspicion or knowledge of child abuse is mandatory, especially for teachers and doctors. “Mandatory Reporting” means that if a report is not made, that person could be legally held responsible. Once a case of child abuse is reported, an investigation is carried out. Children who have undergone sexual abuse have multiple options to avail of counseling and therapeutic treatment to facilitate their journey of healing.

#### Question ii

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**In western countries communication is more open and people are more aware of the stringent laws that do exist against Child Sexual**

## **Abuse, so why is it still rampant there?**

Child Sexual Abuse continues to be rampant in the West for many of the same reasons that it is rampant in India. This is because the context for CSA remains the same in all countries in spite of their outward differences: the insensitive laws make it difficult to prove the crime; victims are often blamed for what happened; families are too ashamed to report; a male perpetrator’s testimony is often believed over the victim’s words; boys are afraid of having to face the stigma attached to homosexuality (in case their abuser is a man) and, of course, the fact that sexuality continues to be a very sensitive topic across the world, thus preventing discussions around Child Sexual Abuse.

#### Question iii

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## **What is the prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse in India?**

As of now, there aren’t any central databases or monitoring systems that bring together available statistics related to CSA in India. But the Ministry of Women and Child Development published the Study on Child Sexual Abuse, in 2007, based on a large scale study conducted all over India. The study took place across 13 states and had a sample group consisting of 12,447 children, 2324 young adults and 2449 stakeholders.



The National Study reported the following:

- 53.22% children reported having faced one or more forms of sexual abuse.
- Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar and Delhi reported the highest percentage of sexual abuse among both boys and girls.
- 21.90% child respondents reported facing severe forms of sexual abuse and 50.76% other forms of sexual abuse.
- 50% abusers are persons known to the child or in a position of trust and responsibility (family member, close relative, friend or neighbour).
- Boys were equally at risk as girls.
- Out of the child respondents, 5.69% reported being sexually assaulted.

#### Question iv

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### **Are male children susceptible?**

Yes, male children are just as susceptible to sexual abuse as female children, if not more. Usually, boys are given more freedom than girls when it comes to accessing public spaces or interacting with different kinds of people. Also girls are often made aware of the dangers of sexual violence whereas such conversations are lacking when interacting with male children. These issues make boys vulnerable to sexual violence in a different way.

The reason we believe that boys do not get sexually abused is because sexual abuse of boys tends to be under-recognized, under-reported, and under-treated.

Boys are made to live up to various ideals of “masculinity” and “machismo”.

For example, identifying sexual behaviors as sexual abuse in cases of boys is challenging as they often feel the societal pressure to be proud of early, even if unwanted, sexual activity. Boys are also less likely than girls to report sexual abuse because of a) fear b) the social stigma against homosexual behavior c) the desire to appear self-reliant. d) the concern for loss of independence and e) because boys are taught to keep their feelings to themselves and appear “strong”.

Thus, the myth about the ‘masculine ideal’ who is always in control and can never be a victim and the myth about appropriateness and supposed harmlessness of sexual behavior between adults (especially females) and young boys creates an environment where there is hardly any acceptance and support structures for boys to disclose sexual abuse.

# 3



## Disclosure

### Question i

#### **Why don't children disclose the abuse immediately?**

There are many reasons why children do not reveal the incident of abuse immediately or do not disclose it ever.

a) In certain situations, because of

what children are taught about sex and sexuality, children often do not perceive it as a violation, or as abnormal/unnatural, especially if the sexual abuse is perpetuated in a way that the child perceives as being gentle and loving. In the absence of any understanding of 'safe' and 'unsafe' touch children could equate the sexual abuse as an expression

of love and the abuser as someone who loves and cares for them.

b) In some circumstances, when children identify the violation, they feel confused and afraid to communicate. They also fear that nobody will believe them, as, in most cases, the offender is someone well known and well loved by the family and possibly someone in a position of power as well.

c) The child/youth could be afraid of being blamed for what happened – for being chosen by the offender, for being available to the offender and for complying with the offender.

d) The child could feel shame from being labeled as a victim, for not being able to seek help and report abuse.

e) The child could be afraid of losing the love of parents or even losing the love of the offender (who is often a known person/relative/caregiver).

f) The child may be afraid of the offender's threat to harm the child or her/his family.

In order to keep the abuse to themselves for these reasons, children often convince themselves that what happened was just a dream or an accident or that they imagined it – or they convince themselves that they can cope with what happened because telling would be even worse.

## Question ii

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### **When do children disclose abuse?**

There are several situations which might make a child disclose abuse. For example, when they feel that their abuser might also harm someone else they love, like a friend or a sibling. They might also disclose when they feel like they can't endure the pain and trauma any longer. However, what really allows children to disclose abuse is having an environment that is supportive, trusting and empathetic. Children, usually, only disclose to people who can make them feel safe. They will only trust people who they know will listen to them, help them and not blame them for what happened to them.

# 4



## Impact and Healing

### Question i

#### **What is the impact of CSA on children/adults?**

The consequences of Child Sexual Abuse are diverse and numerous. Being sexually abused, impacts the life-world of children at the physiological, psychological, and

social levels and on sexual behavior patterns.

Physical impact may include pregnancy, tears to vaginal or anal area, sexually transmitted diseases, bleeding or unusual smells from genitals due to infections, repeated urinary infection, pain during bowel movement, involuntary gagging

and psychosomatic illness including gastro-intestinal problems and frequent headaches.

Psychological impact includes unusual or unexplained fear of people or places, nightmares, eating and sleeping disturbances, anxiety, hyper-vigilance, clinging behavior, indifference, frequent daydreaming and dissociation, lack of trust in self and others, regressive behaviors such as thumb sucking, soiling and bedwetting. The most profound impact might lead to include suicide ideation and psychosis (sexual abuse will not cause psychosis, but can trigger it in those who are already prone to the mental disease).

Social impact can include sudden withdrawal, overly pleasing behaviour, increased hostility, aggression and drastic change in academic performance.

Sexual abuse in childhood can cause drastic/visible change in sexual conduct and mannerisms. Some of these may include over dressing, under dressing, sexual anxiety, and repetitive sexual behavior such as excessive masturbation, continuous sexual play or use of sexually abusive language. It is also possible that the trauma of Child Sexual Abuse may create anxiety or confusion around the survivor's sexual identity.

These observed effects of childhood sexual abuse can intrude a person's life in his/her adolescence and also as an

adult if it is not healed and supported. It is difficult to separate the short-term impact from the long-term impact as the former may often be the commencement of a long-term problem. The impact, especially the long term impact depends on multiple factors- relationship of the abuser, nature of sexual abuse (how often, where, how many abusers), the age and sex of the victim, the support system around the victim, and the mental state of the victim at the time of abuse.

Some of the long term impacts can be:

- a) The experience of betrayal of a child over the loss of a trusted figure can manifest itself in isolation and an aversion to intimate relationships and interpersonal dynamics. It can also lead to ambiguous sense of boundaries making them vulnerable to future abuse and re-victimization.
- b) The experience of stigmatization can lead to low self-esteem, guilt, shame, and a consequent tendency to isolate oneself.
- c) The experience of powerlessness can manifest in depression, withdrawal or in antisocial behavior (drugs, alcohol) and delinquency including demonstrating sexually offending behaviours and re-enacting their own abuse.
- d) The experiences of sexualization at an early age can lead to sexually promiscuous behavior or it may lead to aversion to sex because of flashbacks to the molestation experience, difficulty with arousal and orgasm as well as

negative connotations toward their own self and sexuality.

With proper support from the family and professional help, the impact of Child Sexual Abuse can be dealt with and an individual can overcome the negative impact of it.

As a final note, when children who experience sexual abuse are believed and supported by their guardians/trusted adults/loved ones, they could recover very quickly. Indeed, some children and adult survivors, especially those with a strong emotional support system before the abuse, might not show any impact of CSA. Finally, it is essential to remember that while it is important to be aware of the impacts of abuse, it is also important to not assume a connection between a person's behavior/behavioral changes and their experiences of CSA.

#### Question ii

### **How are survivors treated to help overcome the impact of abuse?**

The most important thing that victims need is support, especially from caregivers. The support system should

- a) believe the victim's perspective,
- b) not blame the child/youth,

- c) allow the victim to vent feelings,
- d) support him/her throughout the healing process.

In some cases, the victim can recover on her or his own, especially, if they know that what happened was not their fault and are aware of how they can protect themselves from being abused again. In others, victims might need professional help i.e. counseling. Sometimes, victims might even need psychiatric care, such as medication for sleeping or depression. Children and adults with familial and professional support and resilience can eventually resume to a regular life.

#### Question iii

### **Do you think that the abused child can ever go back to his/her regular life?**

Sexual abuse is one of many terrible things that can happen to children. The problem with sexual abuse is that it is part of the taboo on sex, so children can't talk about it and can't seek help. With support and guidance an abused child can grow from being a victim to a survivor to a thriver, learning from everything in one's life. Many of the child's problems are based on how society perceives the child and how the child should now be treated or labeled.

# 5



## Abusers/Offenders

### Question i

#### Why do people sexually abuse children?

It is difficult to give a simple and straightforward answer to this question. But what is important to understand is that

child sexual abuse is not just about sex, it is also about power and control.

Our society is structured in a way that places certain kinds of people in positions of privilege and power over others. The power and privileges that

people hold in this social structure depend on various factors such as gender, class, caste, ability, mental health, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity etc. Abusers are usually aware of the power they hold over their victims based on these factors. The violence is almost always purposeful and deliberate and the abuse is inflicted to feel a sense of dominance over the victim. It is important to recognize this aspect of power as the root of sexual violence. Child Sexual Abuse is NEVER the fault of the child. It is NEVER caused by the way the child behaves or the way the child presents himself/herself.

It is also possible that some people, who have themselves been abused in childhood, tend to want to regain control by abusing other children. This could be a way to cope with the sense of powerlessness and helplessness that they felt at the time of their abuse.

But, sexually abusive behavior is most often learned behavior. A lot of cultural and social norms often validate and encourage inappropriate behavior. For instance, when we say “boys will be boys”, we are allowing male children to feel entitled to other people’s bodies and we are denying them a chance to learn empathy and respect and to take accountability for their actions.

#### Question ii

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### **Don’t you think children invite abuse by dressing “provocatively”?**

The way someone dresses or behaves has nothing to do with sexual abuse. Sadly, offenders are often excused when we shift the blame on the victim. If provocative dressing were a cause for children getting sexually abused, then children as young as 3 months old would not get abused. The onus of sexual abuse of children is entirely on the abusers alone - only people who have the motivation to have sex with the child will sexually abuse children. We must give children the freedom to choose what they would want to wear with a sound sense of responsibility and freedom and an appropriate sense of dressing for each occasion. We must understand that an abuser will choose those children who are most likely to be blamed by the society for not meeting societal norms and standards.

#### Question iii

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### **Are Child Sexual Abusers mentally ill/sick individuals?**

Very few Child Sexual Abusers are mentally sick individuals. Most abusers have faulty thinking and inappropriate sexual arousal patterns. These sexual



abusers are generally regressed in nature - regression means that a part of their development has not caught up with their age so at times of stress certain behaviors could appear as a younger person's (an example is when an elementary school child will suddenly suck his thumb even though he has not done so for many years, because of some stress or trauma). A lot of sex offenders also lack impulse control and healthy avenues to release stress. For these people sexually abusing children become the pathway to release stress. Very often once they have sex, this relieves their stress, and they promise never to do it again - but then their unfulfilled needs crop up again and their quest for sex with children continues. Stress is a common thing that pushes many people to do something they might know is wrong.

#### Question iv

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### **Who are pedophiles?**

Pedophiles are people who are sexually attracted to children and prefer to have sex only with children. They get no or little sexual pleasure with adults. Pedophiles can be anyone - old or young, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, non-professional or professional, and of any race. Mostly it is seen that pedophiles are males. Pedophiles can have their own preferences such as, children of particular ages or sex.

Early warning signs of offenders include:

a) appearing to be more comfortable with children than adults.  
b) referring to children as seductive or sexy. c) trying to get children alone with him/her, d) rewarding children for specific behaviors, e) singling out particular children for attention. But these are merely indicators and it should not be assumed that individuals with these characteristics are pedophiles. Knowledge of these characteristics coupled with constant vigilance can be used as an alert.

It is important to note that all men or women with the desire for sex with children may not follow through with their desire. Most know it is wrong or do not want to be imprisoned or publicly shamed. Many do not want to hurt children.

And when adults around the child are alert to early warning signs and have the courage to approach adults with these behaviors, they may be able to provide a safe environment for children.

#### Question v

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### **What do you have to say about minors making sexual advances towards minors?**

All people, including children, are sexual beings – psycho-sexual development is as important as physical, cognitive, emotional, spiritual and social development. We generally tend to overlook sexual

development in children. Children who engage in sexual behavior that is based in developmental curiosity are generally embarrassed, giggly, and doing so with other children of their own age. In this case, both the children are involved in the 'sexual play' out of curiosity and one child is not necessarily making advances towards the other. When these children are told to stop, they generally do. When children do not stop, when they coercively make advances towards another child or when they exhibit fear or unusual interest, they could be doing so for several reasons. For example, children might have experienced sexual abuse or are otherwise confused about sex and sexuality because of age-inappropriate sexual messages reaching them.

The child could be in the early stages of being a sex offender. It is important to know how to respond to sexual misbehavior in children and youth. Catching misbehavior and teaching appropriate sexuality at early stages helps in their own appropriate development and also prevents them from becoming sex offenders in the future.

#### Question vi

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### **Is it possible to convince the abuser and counsel them? How far does it really help?**

There are several effective ways to counsel and manage sex offenders.

We are still doing research about what will work in India. It is important that sex offenders get help from everyone (including police authority).

They need to learn to understand and control their sexual urges (sometimes with medication); they need to learn good decision making techniques; they need to stop making excuses and accept responsibility for their behavior; and they need to learn that what they do hurts others (empathy).

The younger the client, the less difficult it is to help them change. We have found that it is easier to work with younger clients and help them change since they are more open to supervision and advice.



## Legal Intervention

### Question i

**Is it mandatory to report a case of child sexual abuse to the police?**

Yes. Section 19 of the recently enacted The Protection of

Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, makes it mandatory to report a case of sexual assault to the police.

A circular issued by the Ministry of Education, Government of Maharashtra also has made it mandatory for schools

to report sexual abuse if any such incident of abuse is brought to their notice. Hence while conducting awareness programmes in schools or in the community, it is advisable to highlight this point so that people become aware of it and become more cautious.

Also before starting a counseling session with a child at an individual level, it is advisable to inform the child about the provision of mandatory reporting so that the child is prepared.

#### Question ii

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### **Once the abuse is reported, what action will the police take?**

If the abuser is known to the child, the abuser will be arrested. Under the new Act, POCSO, medical examination is mandatory regardless of the degree of the abuse. Both the child and the perpetrator may both be sent for medical examination. Police will also collect the clothes worn at the time of the incident as evidence. The child's statement will be recorded. If there are other people in whom the child has confided, their statements will also be recorded. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 prescribes special protective measures while conducting investigations to protect the child during investigations. For instance, the child cannot be called to the police station for

recording the statement. If the abused child is female, only female police officers must take down the statement. The statement of the victim can be taken at the residence of the child or any other place where the child is comfortable. The police officials who visit the child's locality must be dressed in plain clothes. During the investigation and trial, the child's identity will be protected and treated as confidential.

#### Question iii

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### **What is CWC and when is the child produced before CWC? What role will the CWC play in cases of child sexual abuse?**

The term CWC refers to the Child Welfare Committee. The role of the committee is to investigate whether a child's home environment is safe and if not, to place the child in the protective care of the state, by admitting the child in a children's home. Usually when a sexual offence is reported, after the preliminary investigations, the child will be produced before the CWC. If the parents can ensure the safety of the child, the child will not be placed in a children's home.

#### Question iv

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### **What are the protective measures the court must**

## **adopt while conducting the trial in a case involving child sexual abuse?**

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 and rules framed under it prescribe special child friendly procedures and a special court for conducting the trial in all cases concerning sexual abuse of a child under 18 years of age.

The facility of deposing through video conferencing can also be provided to the child if the child is afraid of deposing in the court. The accused should be shielded from the child's view while deposing. All persons including the judge, the prosecutor and the defense lawyer should not be dressed in formal court attire. The seating arrangement should be different and less intimidating than a formal court. Prior to the matter being called out, the child should be made to wait in a special room along with the support person which should be equipped with toys and refreshments and not be made to wait in the open court room. A separate entrance must be provided from this room into the court room. The child should not be made to stand in the witness box but must be permitted to sit and depose and frequent breaks should be given to the child during deposition. The child should be allowed to drink water or have refreshment during these breaks. In the event that the child is scared or is unable to depose on that

day, the matter should be adjourned, but otherwise examination and cross examination of the child must be done on the same day. A counselor or a support person should be allowed to sit beside the child during deposition. Most importantly direct cross examination of the child must not be permitted. The defense lawyer must give the questions to the judge in writing and the judge must then put them across to the child in a simple and non-intimidating manner. If the child does not understand the language of the court or suffers from any disabilities or learning disorders, a translator or an expert should be provided during deposition.

These protective measures are meant to make the entire process of the trial less traumatic for the child.

### **Question v**

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## **What is the time frame within which the entire process will be over?**

Earlier, the trial used to take around one to two years. But under POCSSO the entire process is expedited. The investigations by the police are completed within three months from the date of lodging the FIR. Thereafter, the special court will take note of the case and will frame the charges under which the accused person will be tried. This is important because the punishment will

be awarded as per the precise charge that will be proved. It takes about a month after completion of investigation for the trial to start.

The trial court (which is a specially designated sessions court), will try and complete the case in about two months from the date on which the charge is framed by the court. Once the trial begins, the child will be called to court once or twice to make her/his statement before the court.

Ideally, in a typical case, the entire process will be completed within one year from the date on which the first complaint was lodged in the police station. However, the law is new and the process is still gradually getting evolved since the systems are not yet in place in most courts. But in most cases which we have followed, the cases in court have been completed within six months from the time the charge is framed by the judge.

#### Question vi

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### **How can we address the concerns around what it means if the defendant is found guilty or not guilty?**

Once the FIR is filed and the charge is framed by the court, the accused will be asked whether he/she wants to plead guilty, i.e., accept the charges against him/her. It is the usual practice that the

accused will not plead guilty, i.e. deny charges, and the trial will start. At the end of the trial, the accused person will either be convicted or acquitted. This will depend on a variety of facts – the gap between the incident and when the child reported about it to elders and when the elders went to the police station and lodged the complaint. The longer the delay, the evidence that is collected will be weak and insufficient to prove the case. In most cases, it is the word of the child alone without any supporting medical or forensic evidence. This makes it difficult to prove the case of child sexual abuse. If the offender is the father or close relative or bread winner, the mother or other female members may not support the prosecution and may not come to give evidence.

We must keep in mind that our conviction rates are very low. In cases of child sexual abuse the conviction rate is only around 10% (far below the general conviction rate which is around 26 %.) So we cannot view acquittal as a clean chit to the accused or to prove that the abuse had not taken place. That will be very demoralizing for the child, who took courage to report the crime rather than suffer in silence. It is necessary to make the child aware of this. Today reporting is mandatory. But that does not mean that every case will result in conviction. But once the case is reported to the police and the accused has to face trial, the entire process itself will cause stigma to the accused person and he may not

repeat the same crime again. Also the child who has reported the crime will be bolder and the family members also will be more aware.

An acquittal does not mean that the child was not speaking the truth. It only means that the prosecution (the police and the prosecutor) were not able to produce sufficient evidence before the court. A child cannot be held responsible for this and the child cannot be made to feel guilty for either reporting the crime or for not securing the conviction. The child may need further counseling in order to deal with the trauma that an acquittal may cause the child.

#### Question vii

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### **If the family relocates during the trial or decides to withdraw the case is it possible? Will the offender be let off scot-free in such circumstances?**

Once an FIR is lodged and the investigation is complete, if the police find that there is sufficient evidence, the papers will be sent to the prosecutor and the trial will start. It is not possible to retrace or 'withdraw the case', since it is a criminal complaint and the prosecution is done by the state and not by the individual victim. The victim and her/his relatives are only witnesses in a criminal trial.

They don't initiate the proceedings or conduct the trial. The only way a child or her/his family deals with this is to 'turn hostile' in court and not support the prosecution. This means, that the parent or the child change their story while stating the facts before the judge, from what they had initially told the police. This will cause discrepancy and the judge may find it difficult to convict. There are also instances of the victim refusing to recognize the accused in court before the judge. The victim may also say that the accused person is not the one who had abused him / her and that the police have caught a wrong person. Another way of withdrawing from the case is for the parent to come to court and state before the judge that their child / ward does not wish to come before the court and record the statement.

If the victim and his/her family do not support the prosecution during the trial, it will not be possible for the judge to convict the accused. It is essential that the victim must identify the accused in court. Only under the most exceptional circumstances and when there are other eye witnesses to the incidence who are willing to come to court and state before the judge what they have originally told the judge, will the judge be able to convict even when the victim or his/her relatives did not come to court to depose or when they turn 'hostile' in court. In all other cases, the accused will be acquitted if the victim has not identified

the accused in court.

Question viii

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**If legal justice is not available, how can the family ensure child's safety?**

A child that has been subjected to sexual abuse needs a lot of care and very tender handling. The child should be told in advance that it is our duty to give our best for the case but that the issue of conviction and acquittal is not within our hands. It is important that the child knows that the acquittal takes place only because the prosecution has not been able to prove the entire case with supportive (corroborative) evidence. It is necessary that everyone must cooperate and that all stake holders – the police, the prosecutor, the judge etc performs their role with concern and sensitivity.





## **Engaging with CSA: Creating Awareness and Working towards Prevention**

### **Question i**

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**Considering that there is discomfort around talking about CSA as a taboo subject how would you go about bringing awareness?**

Education is the key. Efforts are being made to sensitize, support and develop the required knowledge, attitude and skill amongst parents and teachers and other relevant stakeholders in order to help them create a safety and support net around the child. These stakeholders are addressed in order to make them understand that each person has a role

to play in the keeping children safe. For example, parents are told about how they play a pivotal role in keeping children safe by opening up channels of communication with children on issues of private body parts and safe and unsafe touches.

Simple steps like teaching the child the names of private body parts while introducing them with other body parts like hand, legs, face etc. can be immensely productive in creating a matter of fact attitude towards private body parts and ease and comfort to talk about them in case children have been sexually abused.

In a similar fashion, teaching children touching rules like, “it is never alright for someone to touch, look at, or talk about your Private Body Parts except to keep you clean and healthy”, “It is never alright for someone to ask you to touch, look or talk about their Private Body Parts”, “In case, someone breaks the touching rule, say ‘No’ and run”, “Tell someone you trust to get the help you need” etc. Thus, by talking about these issues that are otherwise pushed into silence Arpan intends to bring about awareness.

#### Question ii

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### **In spite of escalating figures, why is the outreach of Child Sexual Abuse prevention programmes quite limited?**

The programmes are limited in their outreach because there are limited organizations who are working towards this. At the same time, schools institutions are not open to “Life Skill” modules pertaining to Personal Safety Skills , given the sensitivity of the issue of CSA and the silence around it. Another significant challenge is that all parents are not supportive of the programme as they wrongly feel that any information about private body parts and personal safety will rob the children of their innocence.

Note: For more information on Personal Safety Education programme please refer to section on Personal Safety Education.



## Intervening in Cases of Child Sexual Abuse

### Question i

**If I come across a child who has been a victim of sexual abuse what should I do?**

It is very important that, as an adult, you give the child a safe environment in which the child can disclose the abuse.

1. Encourage the child to talk about what he or she has experienced, but be careful not to suggest events to him/her that may not have happened - children often want to please the adult and will agree to whatever the adult has suggested.
2. Remain calm. Guard against displaying emotions that would

influence the child's sharing of the information - such as anger (the child may feel you are angry at her/him) or sadness (the child may recant because she/he doesn't want you to be sad because of her/him).

3. Please do not insist on the child repeating the story or probe in a way which becomes threatening/triggering to the child.
4. Please affirm to the child that it is brave of him/her to come and share and you will try and help him/her.
5. In case of ongoing abuse, the first step is to ensure that the abuse stops immediately. In such a situation you might need to involve the child's parents/teachers/caregivers.
6. Please be honest with the child and let the child know that you will keep your talk confidential and inform only those whom you need to in order to keep the him/her safe.
7. Reassure the child that he/ she did nothing wrong.
8. Seek healing assistance for the child by involving a counsellor to support him/her.
9. Arrange for a medical examination for the child if the child has undergone contact sexual abuse. Select a medical provider who has experience in examining children, identifying sexual and physical trauma and is sensitive towards the child.
10. In case the child/the family intends to file an FIR, please seek legal assistance from an experienced legal expert.
11. It is always important to keep in

mind that the child's interests and needs have to be kept a priority throughout the whole process of healing and justice.

#### Question ii

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### **In case of incest, how can one, who is not a family member intervene and to what extent?**

In case of incest, intervening by a non-family member can happen in the following ways:

1. You can get in touch with the non-offending family member and bring him/her into confidence. You must remember that it is very difficult to suspect one's spouse or loved one of being an abuser. Therefore, you need to be understanding and patient with the non-offending family member. Most non-offending parents/guardians will support the child so long as they feel supported themselves.
2. One may also seek help from organization/s working on Child Sexual Abuse in order to stop the ongoing abuse and ensure the safety of the child. There are a few organizations working in different parts of the country that provide services ranging from help lines to legal aid
3. The non-family member can also involve Child Welfare Committee

(CWC) in this process. The CWC has the sole authority to deal with matters concerning children in need of care and protection; namely treatment, rehabilitation as well as restoration and social re-integration. However, once the CWC is involved it becomes the sole authority to decide about the future course of action, including the decision to shift the child from the home and declaring the family as 'unfit' to provide care and protection to the child. Thus, contacting the CWC is a decision that must be made after sufficient deliberation.

# 9



## Information on Personal Safety Education

### Question 1

**What is Personal Safety Education? Who can impart this? How can it be done and from what age?**

Personal Safety Education needs to be

an on-going conversation about values, attitudes and rights of children regarding keeping themselves safe. Parents/ caretakers are children's best teachers and companions and are most suited to impart Personal Safety Education to children. However, schools can also take up Personal Safety Education with children given how all parents do not

have the comfort to deliver messages on this issue and teachers have access to a large number of children. Arpan conducts Personal Safety Education programmes in schools and also trains teachers/ counselors to incorporate the module in their “Life Skill” programme.

Personal Safety Education focuses on teaching children that they are special and have a wonderful body. They have a right to be safe and protected. In order to keep themselves safe they must know the “Personal Safety Rules” and names of private body parts. They must learn to identify safe and unsafe situations and touches through feelings, assertively say “No” to the person violating the child and tell a trusted adult.

- 18 Months - 3 years: Teach children the proper names for all the private body parts (for e.g., penis, testicles, buttock, and anus for boys; vagina, chest, buttocks, anus for girls) while you are introducing body parts for e.g. hand, leg etc.
- 3-5 years: Teach your child that parts of the wonderful body covered by undergarments/swimsuit are their private body parts. Teach children the rules about keeping their private body parts safe:

**Rule Number 1:** “It is never alright for someone to touch, look at or talk about my private body parts except to keep them clean and healthy. Also, it is never okay for someone to ask me to touch,

look at or talk about their private body parts.”

**Rule Number 2:** “If someone tries to break this rule, I will say “NO” and Run/ Get Away”. This rule will help children build awareness of their feeling and through feelings help them identify safe and unsafe situation. It is also important to build a support system around the child so that the child can reach out to an adult and seek help for

**Rule Number 3:** “Tell someone and keep telling until I get the help I need”.

- *5-8 Years:* Continue the dialogue on personal safety which you have already initiated. Give plenty of examples of safe and unsafe situations both at home and outside. Play the ‘what if’ game with children to make them understand a particular situation and take appropriate action. (For example, what if the man who sells sweets wants you to go somewhere with him and keep it a secret, what would you do?) Make children understand that a familiar person may also create an unsafe situation. Broaden their support system to include teachers or other caregivers away from home.
- *8-12 years:* Reiterate the messages of personal safety. Talk about Personal Safety “guidelines” rather than “rules”. Rationalize with

children rather than dictating ‘Dos’ and ‘Don’ts’. Create examples and situations pertaining to their context. Address their anxieties and concerns around peer touching, bullying and self exploration.

- *12-18 years:* Broaden the dialogue and the communication channels that you have initiated with your children to respond to their questions and apprehensions regarding personal boundaries, sexual exploration and safety. Prepare the child for the emotional and physical changes that the child will embark on due to puberty. Acknowledge and affirm children’s feelings. Support children to handle peer pressure and finding their own identity. Listen to children more often than telling them.

#### Question ii

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### **Why is it important to have age appropriate content in Public Safety Education?**

- Birth to 2 years old: Children are curious about their bodies from an early age. Babies as young as three to five months start touching their private parts. These are normal and natural as these touches feel calming to children. Children do not associate the same feeling and derive sexual pleasure as adults do. However, if the infant is completely

preoccupied with touching private body parts and it is not balanced with other activities then it should be probed. At around 2 years of age, children start developing gender identity of being male and female. This understanding starts with identifying differences in private body parts but moves beyond it as the child grows up.

- 2-5 years old: Children, at this stage, become curious about each others’ body. Their exploration with their own bodies also continues and children might like to be naked. Children at this age show little inhibitions. These are normal behaviours pertaining to psycho-sexual development as long as children are not preoccupied, touching other children coercively or possessing/exhibiting sexual knowledge/behaviour beyond their age. Parents/caregivers have to respond appropriately without astonishment, anger or inducing shame/embarrassment to the children.
- 6-10 years old: During these years, children have crystallized their understanding of being boy and girl both biologically and socially. Children begin to develop inhibitions and shyness about their body, they no longer run around naked or let others watch them bathe. By the end of this phase, both boys and girls might show signs of early sexual



development. If not supported with adequate information given in a matter – of fact way children become embarrassed/unable to handle the biological changes and confused about multiple and often contradictory messages that they receive from varied sources. Children at this stage develop an understanding of private body parts and they pick up clues around appropriate behavior in public.

- 11-18 years old children at this age are in their puberty and their psycho-sexual development becomes evident as they start showing secondary sexual characters like facial hair, body hair in boys and breasts, pubic hair in girls. It is also the phase when girls start menstruating and boys experience voice change. Boys are also more likely to have nocturnal emission, more commonly known as wet-dreams. As mentioned earlier if not well supported with adequate information and understanding this becomes challenging for children as they feel embarrassed and confused to deal with the bodily changes and the accompanying feelings. Parents/caregivers might find challenging to address these issues if they have not opened up channels of communication right from infancy. In such cases the parents might seek help from professionals to support the children with

their questions, apprehensions and confusion. Hormones are also raging, children have a less ability to control motivations and make good choices – their brains are still developing. Teenagers will make a lot of mistakes, this is a part of their learning.

#### Question iii

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### **The Science lessons in CBSE/ ICSE syllabi talk about private body parts in an elaborate and exhaustive manner. Then why do we need to make our children undergo Personal Safety Education (PSE) programme?**

Firstly, Science lessons are simply about imparting biological information and are only taught to children in higher grades, whereas, the PSE programme is about protecting oneself and can be taught to children as young as three years. The PSE programme is a “Life Skill” module that not only provides adequate, age appropriate information to children but also inculcates in them a sense of empathy, self worth and ownership over their bodies while also equipping them with skills to keep themselves safe. Secondly, the PSE module also involves the guardians of the child in the learning process. During the PSE lessons, the children are given assignments that

parents are encouraged to be a part of. The assignments are given in a way that they provide children the space to voice questions, apprehensions confusions and thoughts and encourage children to seek help whenever necessary. This process of interaction between the children and the guardians provides a non threatening means to the guardians to talk to children about issues that they would otherwise feel uncomfortable about.

#### Question iv

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### **When children are taught about Personal Safety will they be resistant to safe touches too?**

In a properly taught Personal Safety Education programme, children are provided with a lot of examples of safe touches as well as unsafe touches, so that they can differentiate between the two. It is also emphasized that safe touches are healthy and wanted for children. In spite of this, some children might initially use newly learnt vocabulary a lot and misunderstand a few situations. But parents/caregivers need to be patient with children and use this as an opportunity to engage in conversations with them. Over a period of time this anxiety will subside. Teachers/trainers of Personal Safety Education programme also need to talk to these children and tell them that they needn't be scared of all kinds of

touches and assure them that they are empowered with required knowledge and skill to be able to respond assertively when needed.

#### Question v

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### **How can children with varied levels of comprehension absorb information given in Personal safety Education classes?**

Personal Safety Education is carried out using different methodologies and is not primarily a lecture based module. Each module is age appropriate and designed for differing developmental levels. Personal Safety Lessons use various activities like songs, puppet shows, role plays and worksheets. This makes the module interactive and provides space for children to process the information and use skills which have been taught to them. In addition, after the lessons are completed, children are attended by the trainers on a one-to-one basis to clarify their doubts, confusion and also reiterate the important messages. These interactions along with an evaluation of homework sheets also help trainers to assess the comprehension level of the children and also refer children with special needs to school/external counselors. In order for children to retain the messages it is crucial that schools continue with the PSE module every year and parents also reiterate these

messages with children at a regular interval.

#### Question vi

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### **How practical is it to talk to children from low socio-economic classes who often witness sexual acts between adults or are exposed to sexually explicit behavior and messages due to their living condition?**

Careful understanding of the children's background and their lived reality is very crucial before imparting Personal Safety Education Program. This will help us to understand the context of the children and deliver adequate messages around appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. It is also vital in this context to address the situation with both parents/ caregivers and children so that while parents can take an additional effort to maintain privacy, children can also be made to understand that it is normal for adults to express their feelings in a particular way (sexual) with other adults. Children who observe sexual behavior are often confused or act sexually in a child-like manner from what they see. Personal safety gives children an age-appropriate context for what they see, gives them the opportunity to have their questions answered in a serious manner, and provides them with age-appropriate

correct behaviors.

#### Question vii

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### **How do we teach Personal Safety to children having special needs?**

There are many different populations characterized as "special" or "disabled" or "handicapped" or "challenged". Each group has its own unique needs and vulnerabilities. In general, children who are mentally/physically challenged may be more vulnerable to sexual abuse because they are more in need of greater care by adults (who are potential offenders). All children need the same information on keeping themselves safe. But for children with special needs, some aspects of the content and the means through which information has to be provided differs depending on their specific challenges.

Along with empowering the children, it is also crucial to empower parents and caretakers because handicapped children may be less able to protect themselves in certain situations. The aim is to strengthen and expand the support channels and improve communication between the children and their caretakers.

For example, in the case of deaf children, the need to communicate through bodily contact may sometimes put them at more risk. When teaching them Personal

Safety, we convey our messages to them through visual/non verbal means and focus on the specific situations that make them more/differently vulnerable. Similarly, for children who use wheel-chairs to move, the focus is put on teaching them different ways of getting help since it may not always be possible to physically get away from the unsafe situation. With disabled children, it is also important to emphasize on how wonderful, unique and special their bodies are, because society is always telling them otherwise!

#### Question viii

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### **Will children be able to use the information and skills learned during personal safety classes when they face any unsafe situation in real life?**

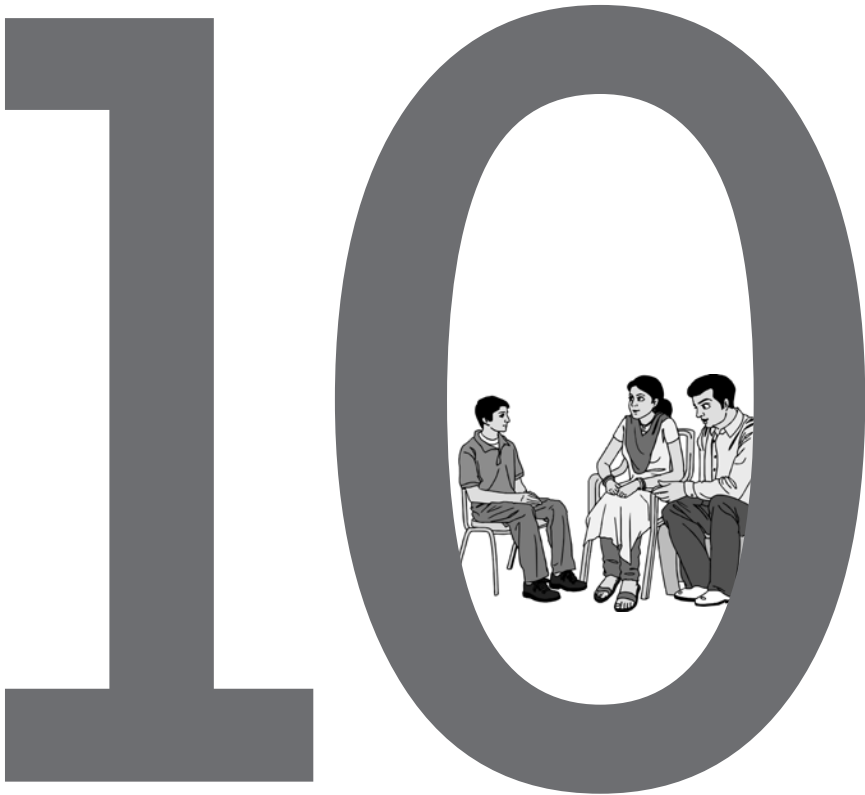
Personal Safety Education is a life skill module.

Life skill programmes empower children with adaptive and positive behavior to deal with demands and challenges of everyday life.

As a life skill module, PSE empowers children to make informed decisions, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively and identify safe and

healthy relationships and behaviours. This imparting of information and skill building is age-appropriate and is supported by practice sessions and processing exercises. These are attempts to ensure that children not only learn about Personal Safety but are able to use these skills if they are faced with unsafe situations.

In our experience, children have been able to assertively say 'No' to attempted abuse, and get away from the situation and seek help from trusted adults post Personal Safety Education classes. Children become better equipped to handle real life situations using these knowledge and skills if these messages are reiterated and the same skills are being honed by the caregivers. Children, when faced with abuse by a bigger person or by someone they love, trust, fear or respect, often feel that they have no option except to give in to the abuse. After all, children are taught to respect and obey without questioning! In addition, many children do not have the self-esteem to practice what they learn in personal safety classes. In PSE, these are some of the issues we address. We make them understand that they are unique and special individuals who have complete control over their own bodies and have every right to keep themselves and their bodies safe. We constantly emphasize on the fact that when someone breaks the touching rule, it is NEVER the fault of the victim.



## Concerns and Apprehension

### Question i

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**How can parents talk about sensitive concepts like sexual abuse which is the core of Personal Safety?**

Parenting is not an easy task. Parents

do take up the challenges and support children in realizing their full potential and in keeping themselves safe. Communicating with children about their personal safety is a critical step in ensuring that they are safe and equipped to identify and respond to unsafe situations. It is natural for parents to feel embarrassed/uncomfortable

because of the way society addresses these issues and the environment in which they have grown up. Personal Safety Education introduces appropriate vocabulary to help avoid embarrassment and continue conversations as children grow. For example, the touching rule (it is never all right for someone to touch, look at, talk about your private body parts except to keep you clean and healthy) is a simple yet holistic guideline to help children recognize unsafe situations- be it being touched inappropriately by a stranger or being shown pornography by an uncle.

In order to handle their discomfort, parents might take help of available resources (listed in our website), talk to their fellow family members or seek professional help for e.g., pediatricians/ gynecologists/counselors. It is also important for parents to reflect on their own discomfort and work on it.

#### Question ii

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**Sometimes young children are observed touching their private parts, could this be a sign of CSA or a natural reflection of a person's sexuality?**

Every action needs to be adjudged within its framework. Before you, as a caregiver, respond to this situation you should be

aware of why, how and when a child is touching his private body parts. While a child's unnatural interest in his/her genitalia may be an indicator of the Child Sexual Abuse, it is important to know that children touch themselves for several reasons, from curiosity to absent-mindedness to comfort. Children most often engage in sexual behavior that is based in developmental curiosity. This is normal and these children generally stop when they are told to do so or outgrow it naturally.

However, as a caregiver it is critical that you respond to the situation appropriately without being harsh, embarrassed or drawing too much attention to it. For example, reminding children of the Personal Safety Rule could be sufficient. When touching their private body parts become a preoccupation for children to the extent that it starts to impact their other daily activities, you might have to probe further to find the cause for such a behavior. It could be that they might have experienced sexual abuse themselves or it could just be that they are confused about sex and sexuality. In these situations, children need to be handled gently and referred for therapeutic support if the inappropriate behavior continues.

Question iii

**How do we handle curiosity/ exploration etc. of children while playing with other children?**

Children have the right to have their questions and concerns responded to in a timely and respectful manner – this means that adults should give age-appropriate information when asked for and answer their questions seriously (that is, don't laugh at the child because of their questions or interests). However, parents and teachers need to give the information in a way that the child can understand. The vocabulary and context of the Personal Safety Lessons helps facilitate this – the vocabulary of private body parts and simple safety rules. As guardians/teachers we can be more vigilant and loving and gently converse with children about their actions. At the same time, children need to be equipped with skills that will help them acknowledge, understand and respect their own feelings, as well as those of others.

When children grow up, they want to belong to a group of friends. Peer pressure often becomes uncomfortable or even dangerous (drugs, alcohol, sex). At times children might even comply with unsafe situations in order to gain peer approval. Guardians can support their children and make them feel confident about the fact that they have the right to

refuse if anyone touches them in a way that makes them feel angry, sad and/ or confused and makes them feel like they are caught in an uncomfortable and unsafe situation. However, it is the norm for teenagers to break rules as they want to try on new rules and responsibilities. This means that often children agree to engage in sexual interactions with one another (thus breaking the touching rules).

It is important for parents to create boundaries for teenagers through appropriate and positive disciplining and help them understand and learn from their experiences.

Instead, if they continue beating or verbally harassing the children, that could lead the child away from parental support and into continued inappropriate behavior.

Question iv

**How do we respond to a situation when children have accidentally witnessed parents having sexual intercourse?**

If children happen to witness parents having sexual intercourse accidentally, it is not sexual abuse. However, parents need to make an effort to have privacy

while having sex. It is critical that the matter should be addressed with the children and an open dialogue needs to be initiated. At any cost the matter should not be sidelined or avoided and neither should children be lied to. Age appropriate factual information should be imparted respectfully to children or else they will get contradictory messages. There is also a probability that the child may procure information from other sources which in most cases might be scary myths rather than actual facts. If children have received Personal Safety Education from early years and the parents already have well established communication channels with their children then it becomes easier for both the children and parents to handle these situations.

#### Question v

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### **How do we reply when children ask us how babies are formed / born or questions regarding mating of dogs?**

Children are curious and ask a lot of questions; they are growing and are exposed to so many new things every day. When children raise questions, we need to give them honest responses in an age appropriate manner. There is no one way to answer these questions as every child is different and may understand

things differently. At these times, it is important not to be angry with the child or feel embarrassed or prevent the child from asking such questions or to ignore the question. Parents can look up for resources that can make them more comfortable to answer children in a factual way and in a language that they understand. Parents can also let their children know if they do not have answer to their question at that time. However, then it becomes the parent's responsibility to find out the answer and let the child know. The parents should neither treat this as an excuse to avoid the question nor should they wait for the children to ask it for the second time. In the efforts to educate the child appropriately parents/caregivers need to overcome their discomfort. If needed, one can seek professional help from a family doctor/gynecologist/ pediatrician/ counsellor as they will be in a position to impart relevant information to the child. However, for first hand advice on questions related to having babies, Personal Safety vocabulary helps.

#### Question vi

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### **How do parents respond when children ask questions like why are they not allowed to enter the room while one of the parent are changing? Why is the other parent allowed to enter the room at**



## that time?

Parents can respond to younger children by reminding them of the touching rule. However, older children might not be satisfied with this response and they might want to know why mother is allowed to enter the room while father is changing and vice versa. Sex is about private parts but also about privacy. Sex and privacy have a lot to do with relationships and people behave differently in different relationships. For example, you can hold the hand of a friend, hug your parents, maybe kiss your girlfriend, verbally greet your neighbor, but only wave to the shop keeper. This is the same for the difference between husband-wife and parent-child. For example, you could, draw their attention to the difference in relationship that parents share with children and parents share between each other: “Does your mummy take care of you? Does she take care of your friends or neighbours in the same way”? [Expected Response- No] “The way she looks after your dad does she do the same thing for you as well? There are certain things that she does only for you and few things that she does only for dad, or other people in the family. Similarly how your father takes care of you is different from how he looks after other people. Your parents love each other differently. So all of us have different responsibilities towards different people and we express our love towards them differently. Were you allowed to go out and play alone when you were 3-4 yrs

old? [Expected Response – No] But today you are; similarly when you grow up, you will be allowed to do a lot of things which you cannot do now or cannot understand now. Your parents are adults they have different ways of behaving with each other and taking care of each other”.

## Glossary

1. **Psycho-somatic Illnesses** - disorders having physical symptoms but originating from mental or emotional causes
2. **Ideation** - The forming of an idea
3. **Psychosis** - any form of severe mental disorder in which the individual's contact with reality becomes highly distorted.

## Acknowledgements

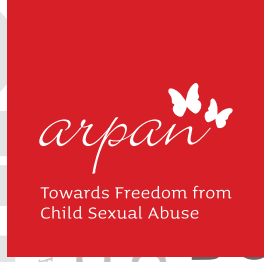
We are deeply grateful to Majlis Legal Centre for their invaluable inputs.

WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?  
WHO ARE PEDOPHILES?  
DON'T YOU THINK CHILDREN INVITE ABUSE  
BY DRESSING "PROVOCATIVELY"?

IN CASE OF INCEST, HOW  
CAN ONE, WHO IS NOT A  
FAMILY MEMBER INTER-  
VENE AND TO WHAT  
E X T E N T ?

JUSTICE  
IF I COME ACROSS A  
CHILD WHO HAS BEEN A  
VICTIM OF SEXUAL ABUSE  
WHAT SHOULD I DO?  
JUSTICE  
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO  
HAVE AGE APPROPRIATE  
CONTENT IN PUBLIC SAFETY  
E D U C A T I O N ?  
IN CASE OF INCEST, HOW CAN ONE,  
WHO IS NOT A FAMILY MEMBER  
INTERVENE AND TO WHAT EXTENT?

FAQ  
ABUSE WHAT SHOULD I DO?  
WHY DO PEOPLE SEXUALLY ABUSE CHILDREN?  
ARE CHILDREN  
IF I COME  
VICTIM  
IF I COME



WHY DO PEOPLE SEXUALLY ABUSE CHILDREN?

WHAT IS THE TIME FRAME  
WITHIN WHICH THE ENTIRE  
PROCESS WILL BE OVER?

Arpan is a registered organization based in Mumbai with an aim to prevent the occurrence of Child Sexual Abuse and heal those who have been affected by it. This booklet is Arpan's attempt at putting together the concerns and queries that are frequently put forward by parents, teachers and other caregivers during Arpan's awareness and training sessions. This booklet hopes to equip care givers with the knowledge and vocabulary needed to understand the issue of Child Sexual Abuse, while simultaneously giving them necessary information pertaining to legal interventions, personal safety education, handling disclosures, impact of abuse and the subsequent healing process in a concise and comprehensive manner.

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WHAT IS THE TIME FRAME  
WITHIN WHICH THE ENTIRE  
PROCESS WILL BE OVER?

OTHER CHILDREN?  
IF I COME ACROSS A CHILD WHO HAS BEEN A  
VICTIM OF SEXUAL ABUSE WHAT SHOULD I DO?  
HOW DO WE TEACH PERSONAL SAFETY TO CHILDREN HAVING SPECIAL NEEDS?

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