



Understanding the Reality of Childhood Sexual Abuse Statistics

By Michelle Derrig

The sexual abuse of children in Australia is a very real social concern, with 12 percent of females and 4.5 percent of males in Australia reporting having been sexually abused before the age of 15 years.*

Whilst these statistics sound shocking – the sad truth is that they represent just the tip of the iceberg, as we know so much abuse goes unreported. In fact, Bravehearts tell us that 1 in 5 people will experience some sort of sexual harm before the age of 18 – *statistically that's 5 kids in every Aussie primary school class of 25 children.*

Unfortunately, most parents aren't aware of these statistics and even when they do know, they simply don't think that the statistics apply to their family.

Yet the truth is **that childhood sexual assault cuts across all demographics of society** – so it doesn't matter what cultural background you come from, what your socioeconomic status is, or what area you reside in – your child is still at risk.



And whilst most parents ensure that they teach their child about stranger danger, what they don't realise is that when it comes to childhood sexual abuse an **overwhelming 90% of victims will be abused by someone they know***.

Even more difficult to comprehend, is that **in approximately half of these cases the child will actually be abused by a family member*** (either a parent, step-parent, grandparent, aunty, uncle, sibling or cousin). Whilst the other half will be abused by a

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neighbour, friend or an acquaintance otherwise known to them.

Another misconception when it comes to childhood sexual abuse **is thinking that your child is only at risk of abuse by another adult.** Yet again – the statistics reflect a very different reality, with Bravehearts quoting that somewhere between 30 to 60% of childhood abuse is perpetrated by another child or young person. This means that abuse often occurs outside the typical environment you imagine – for instance it could be on a playdate, or at swimming lessons, or whilst your kids are playing in the park – all situations where you are most likely just a few metres away from your child.

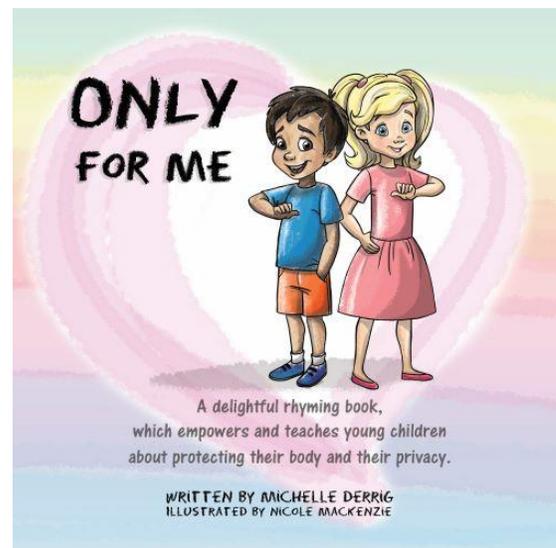
Understandably, these statistics are very overwhelming and the natural reaction for parents is to want to add another layer of cotton wool and hold on to your kids just that bit tighter. **But we also know that we can't be with our kids at every moment of every day and that it's healthy for them to experience a measured amount of freedom, independence and autonomy.**

So, what is the answer? My advice is that while you need to be vigilant in supervising your children and aware of who they are spending time with, the most important thing to do, is to empower your child with the

knowledge that their body is private and that they have a right to protect their privacy.

I recommend that these types of conversations need to take place from at least 3 years of age as statistics also indicate that the most vulnerable age for children to be exposed to sexual assault, appears to be between the ages of 3 and 8 years of age**. So, essentially, if our children are at risk at this young age, then they need to be empowered from this age. Another benefit of having conversations from this young age is that talking about body safety will become a normal and natural part of your relationship.

Now that we understand the reality of childhood sexual abuse statistics the next step in the process is to understand what specific information we should impart to our child. Please refer my next article 03: Introducing Body Safety.



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