

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPORTING ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

## FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

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Educating the public about child sexual abuse and its impact on individuals and communities is the key to prevention. Darkness to Light has assembled the following recommendations for covering child sexual abuse to educate, change misconceptions, destigmatize, and avoid misinformation or sensationalism.

### IMPORTANT POINTS FOR COVERING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

- One in 10 children will be sexually abused before age 18.\*
- 90% of child sexual abuse victims know their abuser.\*
- One in seven incidents of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by juveniles and typically occurs on schooldays.\*
- Of children who are sexually abused, 20% are abused before the age of eight.\*
- A history of child sexual abuse increases the chance of dropping out of school.\*
- Only 4-8% of child sexual abuse reports are fabricated.\*
- Use of alcohol and drugs at an early age can be a sign of trauma such as child sexual abuse.\*
- Child sexual abuse happens daily and often in low-profile settings.
- Perpetrators often groom victims and sometimes the victim's family.

\* Find statistics at [www.D2L.org/statistics](http://www.D2L.org/statistics)

#### DO'S

##### When reporting on child sexual abuse

- Do inform the audience without sensationalizing the event. (e.g., "Local Teacher Arrested on Suspicions of Sexually Abusing Student")
- Do use the most precise, accurate, and unambiguous language that is appropriate to the allegation. (e.g., "Teacher Raped Student")
- Do stick to the facts of the story and share the statistics of child sexual abuse.
- Do ask authorities and leaders what systems they have in place to prevent child sexual abuse.
- Do help to reduce the stigma around this topic by keeping the issue in the news. Continue exploring stories of abuse and investigating deeply entrenched institutions such as churches and youth-serving organizations.
- Do push for solutions. Reach out to experts in your community.
- Do include at least one survivor's perspective in your story. Speak to abuse prevention advocates who can provide perspective about survivors who may not be able to speak for themselves due to legal concerns. [Contact Darkness to Light](#) for assistance.
- Do understand that news stories involving children deserve special consideration.
- Do conclude stories by mentioning resources for victims as well as prevention education; link to [Darkness to Light](#) or other child abuse prevention organizations.

#### DON'TS

##### When reporting on child sexual abuse

- Don't forget there are 42 million sexual abuse survivors in the United States - how you report and cover stories may affect them.
- Don't use sensational headlines. (e.g., "Local Teacher Arrested for Frolicking with Young Girl")
- Don't blame the victim or exonerate the perpetrator. (e.g., "Sources State Girl Enjoyed Relationship with Older Man")
- Don't include photos or videos of grieving family.
- Don't use vague or imprecise language. (e.g., "Student and Teacher Affair," or "Student and Teacher were in a Long-Term Relationship")
- Don't lose sight of the long-term consequences that survivors face.
- Don't re-traumatize children and families by pushing for interviews.

## WORDS MATTER

### *Pedophile or Perpetrator?*

Not everyone who sexually abuses children is a pedophile. Child sexual abuse is perpetrated by a wide range of individuals with diverse motivations. Many perpetrators are youths themselves. It is impossible to identify specific characteristics that are common to all those who molest children. Therefore, by placing the focus narrowly on pedophiles, adults may miss opportunities to protect children from situational perpetrators.

### *Victim or Survivor?*

According to Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN), both terms are applicable. RAINN uses the term “victim” when referring to someone who has recently been affected by sexual violence, when discussing a particular crime, or when referring to aspects of the criminal justice system. The term “survivor” is often used to refer to someone who has gone through the recovery process, or when discussing the short or long-term effects of sexual violence.

### *Abuse or Assault?*

Abuse applies when the victim is 18 years old and under. Assault is appropriate for victims over 18.

## CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IS A COMPLEX ISSUE THAT AFFECTS EVERYONE

Whether you realize it or not, child sexual abuse affects all of us. The impact is devastating for survivors, but also affects those close to them, as well as the surrounding community. It is the root cause of many social and health issues and impacts all of us in one way or another. [Visit www.D2L.org](http://www.D2L.org) for details on the economic, social, and health impacts of child sexual abuse.

## REACT RESPONSIBLY TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Disclosure, discovery, and suspicions of sexual abuse provide opportunities to intervene on behalf of a child. Darkness to Light [offers tips](#) on how to react responsibly.



**DARKNESS TO LIGHT**<sup>®</sup>  
END CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

**FOR MORE INFORMATION OR ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS,  
CONTACT DARKNESS TO LIGHT:  
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