

## **Catholic Mutual...CARES for Kids**

### **Child Abuse: Fact or Fiction**

Standing up to child abuse is a difficult, but a worthwhile mission. Millions of children suffer from maltreatment and abuse every year, yet many individuals feel like they are immune to these risks. Below are the common myths regarding child abuse or maltreatment and their corresponding truth.

#### **MYTH: Child Abuse is Rare**

**TRUTH:** Child Protective Services (CPS) reports a vast under-estimation in the true occurrence of child abuse and neglect. This is because most child victims delay or never disclose the abuse. However, every year, there are approximately 4 million reports of neglect and 7 million reports for abuse. Sadly, only around 3 million of these children receive intervention and response services from the state. These tragic statistics do not discriminate against socioeconomic status, education, ethnicity, or religion. Abuse knows no boundary.

#### **MYTH: Discussing Abuse with Children is Dangerous**

**TRUTH:** It is potentially more dangerous to not have these types of discussions with your child. When a child is unaware of the differences between good and bad types of touch or inappropriate behaviors, including that they have the permission to say NO to touch they do not want, they might not know to tell an adult. Having age-appropriate discussions with your child can help prevent abuse, as they would feel more comfortable bringing the situation to your attention.

#### **MYTH: Children Lie about Abuse**

**TRUTH:** When children do disclose abuse, false allegations are statistically uncommon and occur less than 10% of the time. It is important to listen whenever a child decides to disclose abuse, whether it is past or present.

#### **MYTH: Strangers Are More Likely to Abuse**

**TRUTH:** Over 90% of all victims were abused/neglected by a known individual. This could include a parent(s), foster parent, other relative, neighbor, family friend, or daycare provider. The perpetrator could be anyone (male/female, rich/poor, etc.), as there is no creepy old man that pulls up in a rusty van trying to sell candy like

what is portrayed in movies or TV shows. It will more than likely be an individual the child knows and trusts, where the perpetrator has groomed the victim.

### **MYTH: Sexual Abuse is the Most Common Type of Abuse**

**TRUTH:** There are multiple forms of abuse including physical, sexual, emotional, and neglect. Most child abuse reports were due to neglect or maltreatment. When a child decides to disclose the abuse, it is important to record the complete story of the child. In some cases, there will be no evidence, like emotional neglect or emotional abuse. Even in other cases, medical evidence is only produced in less than 5% of child sexual abuse cases.

### **MYTH: Abuse is not Damaging to a Child**

**TRUTH:** Child abuse/neglect victims have lasting consequences due to their adverse childhood experiences. They are more likely to engage in sexual risk-taking behaviors, putting them at a higher risk for sexually transmitted diseases and teen pregnancy. Later in life, these individuals could also develop one or more psychological disorders (depression, anxiety, eating disorder, addiction). Children who have experienced abuse/neglect are also 9 times more likely to become involved in criminal activity. This can be seen in our prisons, where 14% of all men and 36% of all women currently in jail were abused as children. This is twice the frequency as seen in the general population.

Child abuse is an increasing concern across the country. Using facts over myths to educate both the community and youth will allow for improved support for victims. Hopefully, this will allow for intervention before abuse or neglect would even take place. However, if you suspect abuse or neglect is taking place, you can call the Child National Abuse Hotline at 800-422-4453 to talk with a crisis counselor.

### **References**

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