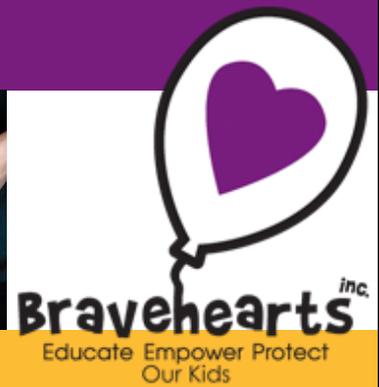


TIP SHEET: Effects of Child Sexual Assault



Child sexual assault can affect children differently depending on a number of factors, and not every child who experiences sexual assault will display trauma symptoms. Below is a list of common effects seen in child victims of sexual assault:

- Reduced school achievement
- Perceive themselves as different from others
- Difficulties understanding and maintaining personal space and boundaries
- Increased self blame for negative events (e.g., they believe everything that goes wrong is their fault)
- Difficulty trusting others
- Nightmares
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Aggression
- Regressive behavior (e.g., bedwetting or soiling after previously being toilet trained)
- Problem Sexual Behaviour (see tip sheet)
- Hyper-vigilance- always on the look out for danger
- Feeling unsafe
- Flashbacks
- Dissociation- “spacing out”, seeming “in their own world”
- Avoidance of anything that reminds them of the assault

The effects may be seen at the time of the assault, following disclosure, and/or for some time after the assault. Research has shown that children, who do not initially show symptoms, may develop them up to 18 months later. So it is important to monitor any changes in the child’s behaviour over time.

Factors that help improve the recovery of a child who has experienced sexual assault include:

- Response of the parent or care giver:
 - Research shows that simply being believed can help children to have better outcomes.
 - It is important for parents to act protectively of their child. This may include reporting the assault, and assisting the child to gain counselling support.
- Attachment relationship with their primary caregiver :
 - The caregiver’s ability to connect with their child, support them in coping with difficult emotions, and help the child cope with other difficulties that they are having (e.g., fear of the dark).
- Having a positive support network - e.g. extended family, school, friends
- The child’s ability to cope with and ‘bounce back’ from negative events

Counselling support

National Office Phone : (07) 5552 3000 | Fax: (07) 5552 3088

Freecall Crisis Line: 1800 272 831

PO Box 575, Arundel BC, QLD 4214

Email: admin@bravehearts.org.au | www.bravehearts.org.au | ABN 41 496 913 890