



Sexual Assault Response Services

of Southern Maine

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Help for Parents/Guardians Coping with the Incest of a Child

Typical reactions of parents/guardians who learn that their child is a victim of incest:

- Numbness: feeling no emotions at all
- Distance: separation from the people and events around you
- Anger: at the child for participating, at the offender for violating the child and betraying the partner, at yourself for not protecting your child
- Disbelief: wondering how this could be possible
- Jealousy: about the sexual relationship between the child and offender
- Revenge: wanting to get even
- Repulsion: toward the offender, especially sexually, and may include feelings of nausea
- Denial: not believing the child, resisting information and evidence in an effort to protect yourself from the pain of the truth
- Hatred & betrayal: by the lies and secrecy surrounding the incest
- Sexual inadequacy and rejection: feeling at fault for not being sexually attractive enough
- Financial and economic fears: separation from the offender may mean loss of your partner's income
- Desire to protect offender: especially if he's been remorseful
- Guilt and self blame
- Religious concerns:
 1. Betrayal: What kind of God would have let this happen?
 2. Guilt: What kind of person am I to have let this happen?
 3. Forgiveness: How can I ever let go of the power (pain & anger) the offense has over my life?
 4. Grief: How can I see beyond the pain of this moment to believe that life will ever be all right again?

Steps parents/guardians need to take to help their child.

- Believe the child, accept the child's information:
 1. Assure the child it was good they told you
 2. Assure the child of your protection
- Find support: seek counseling at a sexual assault center and referrals to appropriate therapists
- Report the incest to the Department of Human Services (DHS). Incest is any sexual activity perpetrated against a child by threat, force, intimidation or manipulation when the perpetrator is a person the child perceives as a member of the family. Incest should be reported:
 1. In order to stop the incest and protect the child from further abuse
 2. To protect other children
 3. To make a clear statement to the child, the offender and others that a crime against a child has occurred and that the offender will be held responsible
- Confront the offender (optional)
- Trust yourself

Help, Hope, and Healing

Special Issues:

Male children who are victims may be reluctant to discuss their experience. They may have questions about their own sexual identity because typically heterosexual males sexually assault boys. It is helpful to have a counselor trained to work with male victims.

Parental rights in the Legal Process:

Information: The right to ask how things are being handled and when events will occur.

Files: You have the right to see your DHS case file. For the protection of your child and the file, only a judge can grant an order permitting anyone, even the non-offending parent, to see the file. Speak to your caseworker to initiate this process.

Confidentiality: You have the right to expect the lives of you and your child to be kept private (except where information is needed for hearings and trial). However, the offender's name may be released when court decisions are rendered.

Investigation: The right to know when an investigation has been conducted and on what grounds DHS recommends your child be placed in protective custody.

Contact: You have the right of contact with your child in foster care during the time they are in foster care. The child may call home to talk with members or DHS caseworkers may arrange visits.

Reference: The Mother's Book – How to Survive the Incest of Your Child, by Carolyn M. Byerly