



# MEDIA RELEASE

## Sexual abuse a secret epidemic

**This Child Protection Week (September 2-9) Kids Help Line has warned that while sexual abuse remains a 'dark secret' we are facing an epidemic among Australian children.**

Kids Help Line General Manager Wendy Protheroe said during 2006 the national counselling service provided 2,782 telephone and online counselling sessions about child abuse, with 40 per cent involving sexual abuse.

According to the Queensland Government, while the exact figures for child sexual abuse are unknown, it is estimated that between one-in-three and one-in-five girls and one-in-six and one-in-ten boys are sexually abused before the age of 18 years.

"It is shocking to think that so many young Australians are being abused in this way," Ms Protheroe said.

"Child abuse is not isolated, it happens in communities everywhere."

Ms Protheroe said although parents and adults spend a great deal of time focusing on 'stranger danger', it is estimated that 90 per cent of sexual abusers are known to their victims.

"While it may involve force, sexual abuse more often includes an intentional manipulative 'grooming' period where the abuser uses coercion, bribes, threats, blame or reframing such as 'you liked it didn't you?' or makes it part of a 'special friendship'," she said.

"Sexual abuse is particularly difficult for children to disclose as they can feel a great deal of shame, guilt, fear and confusion. Children may also not disclose their abuse as they feel the need to protect family members."

Sexual abuse can have significant long-term effects on children's lives as it is a contributing factor towards behavioural and learning difficulties, mental health issues, self injury, and suicidal thoughts and attempts.

"We frequently speak with young men and women who have unresolved trauma from sexual abuse and sexual assault that affects their relationships and contributes to homelessness and mental health issues," Ms Protheroe said.

"The good news is child abuse doesn't have to be a 'life sentence': with counselling, support, love and understanding, children who have been abused are able to lead happy, productive lives."

As part of Child Protection Week, Kids Help Line is urging parents and carers to teach children that their body is their own and that it is not OK for others to touch them in a way that makes them uncomfortable.

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## ***Sexual abuse a secret epidemic cont...***

Sexual abuse includes inappropriate touching, performing sexual acts on children, having children perform sexual acts on themselves or the abuser, exposure to sexual material or children being made to witness actual sexual acts or conversation.

“If a child discloses sexual abuse it is important that they are listened to, believed, acknowledged for their courage and strength and, most importantly of all, given professional help,” Ms Protheroe said.

*Kids Help Line, Australia’s only national children’s counselling service, provides 24 hour counselling services to young people aged 5 to 25 years – free call 1800 55 1800 or online at [www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)*

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