

SECTION 4: Myths and Facts about Childhood Abuse

MYTH

Children make up stories or lie about sexual abuse



While children do make up stories, they seldom lie about sexual abuse. Also, children who have not been abused do not usually have explicit knowledge of intimate sexual behavior. Statistics indicate that most reports of child sexual abuse are true.

Children are most likely to be abused by a stranger



Four out of five cases of child abuse occur by someone known to the child. Statistically, 80% to 85% of the child abuse in the United States is perpetrated by a familiar individual to the victim. The perpetrator is often related to the child. Less than 20% of abusers are strangers.

Sex abuse only happens in poor, uneducated socioeconomic groups



Abuse cuts across all boundaries -- socioeconomic status, race, geographic area, gender, and educational level -- equally.

Myths and Facts About Childhood Abuse

(continued)

MYTH

All offenders are male, all victims are female.



FACT

While the majority of offenders are male, female offenders are not rare. The majority of reported victims are female, but evidence shows increasing reports of male victims. Girls and boys are both seriously at risk for incest and abuse.

Occurrences of abuse and incest are rare in the United States



Incest is more common than most people dare to believe. Clinicians and researchers estimate that one million or more children under the age of 18 are currently involved in incestuous relationships. A national study in 1986 indicated that 35% of all children under age 18 had been abused.

A discussion of abuse will just frighten children



It is important for children to receive information about assault for their own protection. Inaccurate or no information is more damaging to children. All parents and children in the BBBS program are trained on how to prevent abuse.