

What do you do when your child has hurt another child?

“One of the biggest things I remember is feeling like a failure as a parent. So for me, understanding that it was less about blame and more about how to help my child learn how to be accountable was helpful. Continue to love your child unconditionally. Know that you are doing your best to be the best parent you can be. Be willing to ask for, and accept, help and support.”

(Mother of 13 year old male)

“[It] never came to mind that it could possibly even happen.”

(Father of 13 year old male)

Information for families in which sexual offending has occurred

You are most likely reading this pamphlet because your child has engaged in sexual behaviour that has hurt another child. You may be experiencing a number of feelings or perhaps you are too numb to feel anything at all. Parents with similar experiences have expressed being in shock when they found out about their child's offending behaviour. Parents often reported feeling shame and stigma as well as a sense of responsibility for their child's behaviour. Many parents also expressed deep concern for the well-being of their own child and for the safety and well-being of the child that was hurt by the sexual offending behaviour.

Information about adolescent sexual offending

A teen who engages in sexual offending behaviour is not as uncommon as you might think.

Sexual offending behaviour can occur for many reasons. Teens might be experiencing difficulties at home, at school, in their neighbourhood, or with their friends. Teens might also be experiencing confusion around boundaries and issues of consent. As a parent, it can be hard to figure out these reasons because teens might not want to talk about them or they might not really know why they hurt another child in a sexual way. It is important to know that most teens who have sexually offended do not continue to engage in this behaviour. This is especially true if teens get the help of a professional to understand the reasons for their behaviour and to develop strategies to stop sexual offending.

What might happen to my child once his/her actions become known to professionals?

Once your child's sexual offending behaviour becomes known, a number of actions may be taken by professionals in various sectors.

Police officers may investigate the sexual offending behaviour, typically by speaking with a number of individuals. Criminal charges may or may not be laid. The decision to charge your child with a criminal offence will depend on various factors. The police will weigh all the evidence and try to determine the best outcome for all individuals who have been affected by the sexual offending behaviour - especially what is in the best interests of the children involved. Criminal justice involvement can be very worrisome for parents. It is important to remember that you can ask questions about the different stages of the criminal justice process (court proceedings, sentencing).

Your child should be provided with guidance and options for mental health services. As part of their services, mental health professionals will conduct an assessment to understand the nature of your child's difficulties and will establish and carry out a treatment plan to address these difficulties.

Professionals from the Children's Aid Society may also conduct an investigation when children under the age of 16 years may be in need of protection. At a later time, child welfare professionals may also be involved in offering families guidance and resources to help children affected by sexual offending behaviour.

As part of treatment, professionals will often not only work with your child, but will also offer you, as parents, support and resources. A risk assessment for your child may also be completed if such an assessment is requested or required. This assessment should provide helpful information for identifying areas that are important to focus on in treatment. Finally, successful treatment of sexual offending behaviour involves collaboration among family members and among various professionals.

What do we need to know about our rights and responsibilities?

It may be very difficult to know what to do when your child has engaged in sexual offending behaviour. It is important that the best interest of your child be a primary consideration in all actions surrounding him or her.

As you interact with various professionals, it is important to remember that you and your child have certain rights and responsibilities. You may review these by consulting the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**. (www.unicef.org/crc/)

This pamphlet was prepared by a research team of criminologists and psychologists from the Interdisciplinary Research Laboratory on the Rights of the Child at the University of Ottawa in collaboration with graduate students, parents affected by youth sexual offending, as well as with social work, mental health, legal, criminal justice and education professionals. While financially supported by The Law Foundation of Ontario, the developers of this pamphlet are solely responsible for all content.

For more information, visit: www.ride.uottawa.ca and click on the 'Resources' tab

Important things to keep in mind

While your child has engaged in sexual offending behaviour, he/she still has the right to express his/her views and be heard. Your child also has the right to be treated with dignity and to have access to education, mental health services, and community activities.

Be mindful of confidentiality limits. Professionals that you come into contact with may have to follow different rules in terms of confidentiality and disclosure of information. It is your right to ask questions around these issues in order to be informed and to know what to expect.

Depending on the age of your child, you may not have access to information that he/she discloses to a professional unless your child discloses the information directly to you.

As your child comes into contact with various professionals, he/she (and if appropriate you as a parent) has the right to be informed of any charges that will be laid. If there will be charges, your child has the right to legal counsel and to a fair hearing.

You have the right to access a lawyer to ensure that your rights and those of your child are respected, and exercising that right prior to the police officers speaking with your child may be beneficial.

“You will feel better over time.”
(Mother of 15 year old male)



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Where can I turn to for help for myself and my family?

Websites

Mental Health Services, Health, and Support	www.ementalhealth.ca
Mothers Offering Mutual Support	www.momsottawa.com
Your Legal Rights	www.yourlegalrights.on.ca

Services

Catholic Family Services	613-233-8478	www.cfsottawa.ca
Centre for Psychological Services and Research (University of Ottawa)	613-562-5289	www.socialsciences.uottawa.ca/psy/cpsr
Centre Psycho-Social-Enfants	613-789-2240	www.centrepyschosocial.ca
Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario	613-737-7600	www.cheo.on.ca
Counselling and Psychotherapy Centre (Saint-Paul University)	613-782-3022	www.ustpaul.ca/en/centre-for-counselling-home_360_697.htm
Family Services of Ottawa	613-725-3601	www.familyservicesottawa.org
Jewish Family Services	613-722-2225	www.jfsottawa.com
John Howard Society of Ottawa	613-789-7418	www.johnhoward.on.ca/Ottawa
Legal Aid Ontario	1-800-668-8258	www.yourlegalrights.on.ca
PLEO Parent Support Group	613-321-3211	www.pleo.on.ca OR pleo.on.ca/?page_id=24
Ottawa Sexual Health Centre	613-234-4641	www.ottawa.ca/en/residents/public-health/sexual-health/sexual-health-centre
Ottawa Victim Services	613-238-2762	www.ovs-svo.com/site/
Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health	613-748-0657	www.wabano.com
Youth Services Bureau : Mental Health Services	613-562-3004	www.ysb.on.ca
Youth Net (Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario)	613-738-3915	www.cheo.on.ca/en/youth-helping-youth

Telephone Help Lines

Child, Youth, and Family Crisis Line for Eastern Ontario	613-260-2360 / 1-877-377-7775
Distress Centre of Ottawa	613-238-3311
Kids Help Phone	1-800-668-6868
Tel-Aide Outaouais	613-741-6433 / 819-775-3223 / 1-800-567-9699