



# silentlambs

www.silentlambs.org 877-WTABUSE

## The Silent Problem

Children become silentlambs when they do not tell anyone about sexual abuse because they:

- are too young to put what has happened into words
- were threatened or bribed by the abuser to keep the abuse a secret
- feel confused by the attention and feelings accompanying the abuse
- are afraid no one will believe them
- blame themselves or believe the abuse is punishment for being "bad"
- feel too ashamed or embarrassed to tell
- worry about getting into trouble or getting a loved one into trouble

**Silence enables sexual abuse to continue. Silence protects sexual offenders and hurts children who are being abused. Sexual abuse is an extremely difficult and damaging experience. Today, there are many resources to help victims and their families. Children no longer need to suffer as silentlambs.**

## Signs of Sexual Abuse

Because most children cannot or do not tell about being sexually abused, it is up to concerned adults to recognize signs of abuse. Physical evidence of abuse is rare. Therefore, we must look for behavior signs. Unfortunately, there is no one behavior alone that definitely determines a child has been sexually abused. The following are general behavior changes that may occur in children who have been sexually abused:

- Physical complaints
- Fear or dislike of certain people or places
- Sleep disturbances
- Headaches
- School problems
- Withdrawal from family, friends, or usual activities
- Excessive bathing or poor hygiene
- Return to younger, more babyish behavior
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Discipline problems
- Running away
- Eating disorders
- Passive or overly pleasing behavior
- Delinquent acts
- Low self-esteem
- Self-destructive behavior
- Hostility or aggression

- Drug or alcohol problems
- Suicide attempts

## *Specific Symptoms*

Children who have been sexually abused frequently have specific symptoms:

- Copying adult sexual behavior
- Persistent sexual play with other children, themselves, toys or pets
- Displaying sexual knowledge, through language or behavior, that is beyond what is normal for their age
- Unexplained pain, swelling, bleeding or irritation of the mouth, genital or anal area; urinary infections; sexually transmitted diseases
- Hints, indirect comments or statements about the abuse