



# Child Sexual Abuse Support Guide

**Sydney:** (02) 8315 8900  
**Newcastle:** (02) 4907 4200  
**Free call:** 1800 650 707  
**[kelsolawyers.com](http://kelsolawyers.com)**



AustraLaw Pty Ltd is registered under the Corporations Act 2001 and trades as Kelso Lawyers

# No child ever deserves to suffer

Child sexual abuse must not be ignored under any circumstances. The suffering and torment that survivors of child sexual abuse experience can last a lifetime, causing psychological and emotional trauma long after the incident occurs.

A lack of support, feelings of guilt and shame, the perception of the legal process - all of these factors often prevent an abuse survivor seeking closure. Kelso Lawyers help those that have suffered abuse as a child make this move and achieve justice.

It is the responsibility of our community to educate ourselves, to understand how and why child sexual abuse occurs, how to identify symptoms, and what we can do to support survivors and ensure future generations are free from these horrendous crimes.

The first step towards ending this abhorrent treatment of children is to make sure our society is empowered with the knowledge and resources to act against child abuse. This is why we've compiled this document.

***Peter Kelso***

**Kelso Lawyers has helped hundreds of survivors of child sexual abuse receive an apology and compensation for their suffering.**

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## 1 Child abuse statistics

The statistics about child sexual abuse in Australia paint a concerning picture of how much our children are at risk.

## 2 Types of child abuse

Child abuse can manifest itself in many different ways. It's important to recognise where and when it can occur, and in what form.

## 3 Causes of child abuse

The exact cause for a person to feel compelled to sexually abuse an innocent child is very complex and not well understood. Research is underway to help determine the root causes of abusive behaviour.

## 4 What are the symptoms of child abuse

Learn some of the common patterns of behaviour that tend to occur in children that have suffered sexual abuse, as well as adults that were abused as children.

## 5 Child abuse prevention

Raising awareness and preparing strategies will help to equip the community in an effort to put an end to child abuse forever.

## 6 How to report child sexual abuse

Knowing how and when to report incidents of child sexual abuse can make all the difference. We help you to understand what to do if you have any concerns or suspicions.

## 7 Child abuse counselling

The healing process is a crucial part of helping survivors to reclaim the life they deserve. We outline where help can be found and how to reach out and end the suffering for good.



# 1 Facts about child abuse

Statistics tell a horrifying story

**Australia's child abuse statistics are sobering – up to 16% of men and up to 36% of women have suffered sexual abuse as a child.**

Studies have found that 1-8% of the adult male population suffered penetrative sexual abuse as a child, and 6-16% of men have suffered non-penetrative sexual abuse.

Around 4-12% of Australian adult women have suffered penetrative sexual abuse as a child, and 13-36% have suffered non-penetrative abuse.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies' statistics of child abuse also show that about 5-10% of adults have experienced physical abuse as a child.

While the Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse is seeking to tackle the risks to children in institutional care, greater awareness and education will help to reduce the incidence of child sexual abuse in the general community. It's a continuing battle.

[Source: Australian Institute of Family Studies.]




## 2 Types of child abuse

### What constitutes abuse?

There are many different types of child abuse. Sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional maltreatment, neglect and exposure to family violence are all forms of child abuse.

Child sexual abuse – also sometimes called child molestation or child sexual assault – may involve fondling a child's genitals or a perpetrator encouraging a child to fondle their genitals; masturbation with the child either as an observer or participant; oral sex; fondling of breasts; vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or other object; voyeurism or exhibitionism. Exposing a child to pornography, or using a child for the purposes of pornography or prostitution is also classified as child sexual abuse.

The online world is providing perpetrators with access to a large number of potential victims. Perpetrators who use instant messaging or other online communication tools to persuade children to engage in sexual activity is a growing danger.





# 3 Causes of child abuse

## Causes of abuse remain elusive

Why do people abuse children?

The causes of child sexual abuse are complex and not well understood. The myth that adults who were sexually abused as children are more likely to offend has been well and truly debunked.

According to the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services: "Sexual abuse is associated with attitudes to women and sex that men learn from a young age as well as unequal power relationships between men and women and adults and children."

The Child Abuse Royal Commission is commissioning a series of research projects investigating various causes of abuse.

Most of these research projects are still underway. One project has spoken to 121 children and young people aged four to 18 years about safety in institutional settings and what need to change to improve safety.



# 4 Symptoms of child abuse

## Reading the signs – what are the key indicators of child abuse?

### Symptoms of sexual abuse in CHILDREN

Physical symptoms of child sexual abuse include anal or vaginal soreness, or a sexually transmitted infection.

More commonly, the signs of child abuse are emotional or behavioural.

Indicators of child abuse include: sexualised behaviour inappropriate to the child's age, social withdrawal and depression, regression to earlier stages of development (such as bedwetting), aggression and self-harming.

### Symptoms in ADULTS abused as children

Adults who have been abused as children may be still dealing with symptoms relating to their abuse much later in life. According to Adults Surviving Child Abuse, adults may have several, sometimes overlapping, mental illnesses related to their childhood abuse.

These include: panic attacks, post-traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia, and personality disorders.

If you have been a victim of historic child abuse, seeking justice for events that have occurred in the past can be difficult. If you need legal assistance, Kelso Lawyers can help you to begin the process.



# 5 Child abuse prevention

## Putting a stop to child sexual abuse

Child abuse prevention strategies are all about stopping child sexual abuse before it starts.

Preventing child abuse requires a whole host of community, legal and policy strategies to ensure that no child falls through the cracks.

Raising awareness in children and the community about the risks for child sexual abuse is key to increasing detection and promoting protective behaviours in children and their families.



Understanding the role of the internet in exposing children to the risks of child sexual abuse is also vital. In 2015, the Federal Government appointed a children's e-safety commissioner to improve cyber safety for children.

In 2009, all Australian governments banded together to agree to a plan of action to improve the protection of children over a decade. The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (2009-2020) is a long-term, national approach that aims to protect children from all forms of neglect and abuse, including sexual abuse.

In addition to government and community prevention strategies, the National Framework highlights the role that organisations, businesses and institutions can play in developing procedures and policies to create child-safe organisations.

## **Advocacy organisations, such as Bravehearts, also promote wide-ranging prevention efforts. Bravehearts has a three-tier prevention strategy:**

### **Educate**

All children receive effective personal safety education.

### **Empower**

All adults are trained, aware and motivated.

### **Protect**

All systems of community and government engage effectively.

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# 6 How to report child sexual abuse

## Stepping in – how to report child abuse

Reporting child abuse is a first step in protecting a child from sexual abuse.

You do not need to prove that child sexual abuse is actually occurring to report it – a reasonable suspicion of abuse is all that is needed before reporting abuse.

Some professionals, such as doctors, nurses and teachers, are legally obliged to report suspicions of child sexual abuse, although these laws vary from State to State. This is called mandatory reporting.

If you suspect that a child may be experiencing sexual abuse, you can make a report to the child protection authority in your State.



**If a child is in immediate danger, call the police on 000.**

### **Australian Capital Territory**

[Office for Children, Youth and Family Support.](#)

Phone: 1300 556 729

### **NSW**

[Department of Family and Community Services.](#)

Phone: 132 111 or  
1800 212 936

### **Northern Territory**

[Department of Children and Families](#)

Phone: 1800 700 250.

### **Victoria**

[Department of Human Services](#)

Phone: 13 12 78

### **Queensland**

[Department of Community, Child Safety and Disability Services.](#)

During business hours – contact your regional child safety service. To find out the number for your service, call: 1800 811 810 or see a full list of services here.

After hours and on weekends, call: 1800 177 135 or  
(07) 3235 9999.

### **South Australia**

[Department for Education and Child Development](#)

Phone: 131 478

### **Tasmania**

[Department of Health and Human Services](#)

Phone: 1300 737 639

### **Western Australia**

[Department for Child Protection and Family Support](#)

During business hours, call: (08) 9222 2555; or country free call: 1800 622 258

After hours, please contact Crisis Care on: (08) 9223 1111; country free call: 1800 199 008

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# 7 Child abuse counselling

## Healing journey -- sex abuse counselling plays key role in recovery

Some adult survivors of child sexual abuse have kept their abuse secret their whole lives. As children, many had no trusted adult to protect them or to confide in. If they did tell of their abuse, many victims were not believed, or even punished.

It's often then a big step for abuse survivors to talk to a counsellor about their abuse. Sex abuse counselling can't erase the painful memories of childhood assault, but it can play a powerful role in helping survivors to recover from their experiences and lead happy and meaningful lives.

When you are ready to speak to a counsellor, it is important to look for someone with professional qualifications in psychology, counselling or a similar professional field, preferably with experience in child sexual abuse cases. It's equally important that you feel safe and comfortable with the professional you choose.



Many support services offer counselling and guidance to survivors of child sexual abuse free of charge. Some services can offer only short-term care, but are able to direct child abuse survivors to longer-term care options.

Medicare covers some of the cost of private counselling sessions, but only provides rebates for 10 sessions with a counsellor or psychologist. This restriction has come in for criticism at the Royal Commission, with the head of the Australian Psychological Society calling on the Federal Government to expand the system to provide better support to child sexual abuse victims.

In NSW, Victims Services provides victims of crime with 22 hours of counselling free of charge. However, cases involving child sexual abuse are often considered exceptional and may be eligible for unlimited counselling sessions.

Survivors can apply online and be put in touch with an approved counsellor within a few days. Victims services have [approved counsellors all over Australia](#).

The costs of ongoing counselling can often be negotiated as part of compensation packages.

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# About Kelso Lawyers

Kelso Lawyers are specialists in historical child abuse cases. Founder and director, Peter Kelso was himself physically and emotionally abused as a child while a State ward.

Now a lawyer, Peter has made it his mission to provide compassionate and supportive legal representation to child abuse survivors seeking compensation. You can hear Peter tell his own story of abuse and recovery [on our website](#).

Kelso Lawyers have offices in Sydney and Newcastle, but represent abuse survivors across Australia. Peter is supported by an expert legal team who share his passion for helping survivors to seek justice and compensation from the institutions that abused the children in their care.

***While no amount of money can erase the harm caused by child abuse, a compensation payment can ease the pressure and help to make life more comfortable in the here and now...***

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