

INFORMATION ABOUT INCEST

Incest is sexual contact between persons who are related (e.g., parents and children, uncles/aunts and nieces/nephews, etc.). This usually takes the form of an older family member sexually abusing a child or adolescent.

There are very few reliable statistics about how often incest occurs. It's difficult to know how many people are affected by incest because many incest situations never get reported. There are many reasons that the victim might not report the abuse.

The victim:

- may have been told that what is happening is normal or happens in every family, and doesn't realize that it is a form of abuse
- may not know that help is available or who they can talk to
- may be afraid of what will happen if they tell someone
- May have been threatened
- may care about the abuser and be afraid of what will happen to the abuser if they tell
- may be afraid
- of what will happen to them if they tell
- about how many people will react when they hear about the abuse
- that no one will believe them or that the person they confide in will tell the abuser
- that people will accuse them of having done something wrong

What makes incest different than child sexual abuse?

All forms of child sexual abuse can have negative long-term effects for the victim. Incest is especially damaging because it disrupts the child's primary support system, the family.

- When a child is abused by someone outside the family, the child's family is often able to offer support and a sense of safety.
- When the abuser is someone in the family, the family may not be able to provide support or a sense of safety. Since the children (especially younger children) often have limited resources outside the family, it can be very hard for them to recover from incest
- Incest can damage a child's ability to trust, since the people who were supposed to protect and care for them have abused them.
- Survivors of incest sometimes have difficulty developing trusting relationships
- It can also be very damaging for a child if a non-abusing parent is aware of the abuse and chooses—for whatever reason—not to take action to stop it.

There are many reasons that a non-abusing parent might not stop the abuse.

- The non-abusing parent may feel that they are dependent on the abuser for shelter or income.
- If the non-abusing parent was the victim of incest as a child, they may think that this is normal for families.
- The non-abusing parent may feel that allowing the incest to continue is the only way to keep their partner.
- The non-abusing parent may feel that their child was “asking for it” by behaving in ways that the parent perceives as provocative or seductive.

Unfortunately, many non-abusing parents are aware of the incest and choose not to get their child out of the situation, or worse, to blame their child for what has happened. This makes the long-term effects of incest worse.

Call us.

Day One can help as well as locate programs in your community that assist victims and their families. You can also call the Helpline at 1-800-494-8100.

This information was adapted from materials provided by RAINN, www.rainn.org.