

# WHAT DOES INCEST LOOK LIKE IN MODERN FAMILIES?



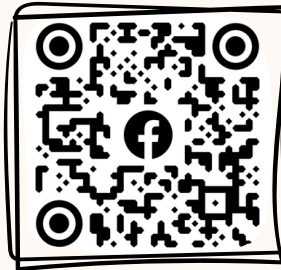
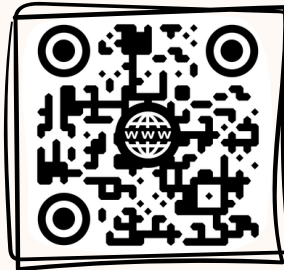
FAMILIES IN WHICH INCEST OCCURS OFTEN APPEAR NO DIFFERENT FROM OTHER FAMILIES.

Secrecy, isolation, and psychological stress are common aspects of family life. Children in these families commonly feel guilty and/or responsible for the abuse they experience, not understanding that it comes from the choices made by adult abusers.

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## SEXUAL ABUSE WITHIN THE FAMILY

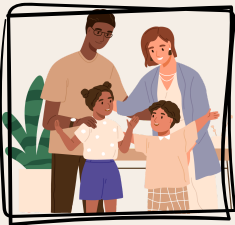
UNDERSTANDING INCEST



# WHAT IS INCEST?

Incest is any sexual contact between a child or adolescent and a person which is closely related. The abusive activity may happen once or many times over a period of years.

## WHO COMMITS INCEST?



Perpetrators of incest may be step-parents or live-in partners of parents. Incest perpetrators may also include siblings, cousins, mothers, aunts, uncles, or grandparents.

Abusers come from all races, religious groups, income levels, professions, and age groups. They may have a good reputation in their communities and seem “normal” to any other family member. In reality, abusers may be emotionally distressed, isolated, and emotionally immature. They often have false or distorted ideas about sexuality and often believe that their behavior is not abusive. Some abusers feel that they have the right to control the family. This may lead them to behave in a forceful manner. Other abusers get power over others by appearing helpless and needy, pressuring their victims to take care of their needs and feel sorry for them.

A non-abusive parent in the family typically gives their children the feeling that they are unable to influence what happens in the family (including abuse). This parent may be overworked, ill much of the time, depressed, economically dependent, and/or cut off from social contact outside of the family unit.

## WHAT PROBLEMS MIGHT INCEST CREATE FOR CHILDREN?

YOUNG CHILDREN MAY EXHIBIT ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING PROBLEMS:

- Nightmares and other sleep disturbances
- Reverting to bed-wetting, clinging, or whining
- Sexual knowledge, behavior, or language unusual for their age
- Withdrawal from other people
- Frequent genital or bowel movement problems
- Unexplained gagging
- Agitation, hyperactivity, instability
- Aggressiveness
- Loss of appetite

OLDER CHILDREN MAY EXHIBIT ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING PROBLEMS

- Depression
- Withdrawal
- Poor self-image
- Substance abuse
- Running away from home or fear of going home
- Repeated physical complaints such as infections, cramping, or abdominal pain
- Muscle aches
- Dizziness, gagging, and severe headaches
- Self-destructive or mutilation behaviors
- Skipping school
- Change in school performance
- Seductive or promiscuous behaviors and/or prostitution



## HOW DO ABUSED CHILDREN REACT TO THE ABUSE?

INCEST CREATES MUCH MENTAL AND PHYSICAL STRESS FOR VICTIMIZED CHILDREN. THEY ARE FORCED TO DEVELOP UNUSUAL METHODS OF MAINTAINING A SMALL SENSE OF SECURITY AND CONTROL DURING ABUSIVE SITUATIONS, INCLUDING:

- Separating themselves from the experience by blanking out, or by being somewhere else in their minds during the abuse.
- Making certain parts of their bodies numb or deadened to pain, or creating pain to distract them from the pain of the abuse (biting their lips or holding their breath)
- Using alcohol or drugs to numb themselves to emotional and physical pain during or after the abuse.
- Pretending to be asleep during the abuse and making their bodies go limp
- **Some children may respond sexually to the abuse as a way of getting relief from the fear and tension created. This may cause feelings of guilt and confusion later on.**

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SUSPECT THAT A CHILD IS BEING VICTIMIZED BY INCEST?

Anyone who suspects that a child is being abused in any way should report those suspicions to the Department of Human Services or local law enforcement agencies.

**The statewide child abuse hotline telephone number is:**

**(800) 482-5964**

**YOU CAN HELP BREAK THE SILENCE!**