

Incest is defined as any sexual contact between a child/adolescent and a person who is closely related or perceived to be related, including step-parents, live-in partners of parents and foster families. The person initiating contact is usually a parent or step-parent, sibling, cousin, mother, uncle, aunt, or grandparent. The activity may happen once or many times over a period of years. Incest is a form of child sexual abuse and is illegal.

What are some characteristics of families in which incest occurs?

Families in which incest occurs often appear no different from other families. However, secrecy, isolation, and psychological stress are major parts of family life. Children in these families commonly feel guilty about the abuse they suffer, not understanding that it comes from choices made by the sexual abuser.

Sexual abusers come from all races, religious groups, income levels, professions, and age groups. They may enjoy good reputations in their communities and seem quite normal. In reality abusers are emotionally distressed, isolated, and immature. They have false or distorted ideas about sexuality and often believe that there is nothing wrong with their abusive, manipulative, and coercive behaviors.

Some abusers, particularly male abusers, tend to think that they have a right to control their victim(s) and/or the family they are a part of. They can also behave in a forceful manner. Other abusers get power by appearing helpless and needy, pressuring their victims to take care of their needs and feel sorry for them.

When the abuser is the spouse, ex-spouse, or partner of a non-offending parent (usually the mother), the non-offending parent may give their children the feeling that she/he is unable to influence what happens in the family. The non-offending parent may be over-worked, in a battering relationship, a victim themselves, ill much of the time, depressed, economically dependent, and/or cut off from social contacts outside the family.

Available Services:

Crisis Intervention ~ Referrals
Assist in Obtaining Protection Orders
Information ~ Support Groups
Ongoing Support
Follow-up Assistance



Itasca County Office:

1325 4th Street NW
Grand Rapids, MN 55744
218.326.5008 • 866.747.5008

Aitkin County Office:

204 2nd Street NW
Aitkin, MN 56431
218.927.6266 • 866.747.5008

Funding Sources:



Blandin Foundation
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA



OTTO BREMER FOUNDATION



Incest

Sexual Abuse
Within the Family



What problems might incest create for victims?

Younger victims may exhibit one or more of the following problems. These symptoms may often appear in clusters:

- ◆ Nightmares and other sleep disturbances
- ◆ Reverting to bed-wetting, clinging, or whining
- ◆ Sexual knowledge, behavior, or language unusual for their age.
- ◆ Self stimulation (masturbation), sexual play
- ◆ Withdrawal from other people
- ◆ Frequent genital or bowel movement problems
- ◆ Unexplained gagging
- ◆ Agitation, hyperactivity, irritability
- ◆ Aggressiveness
- ◆ Loss of appetite



Signs of abuse in Older Children may include:

- ◆ Depression/withdrawal
- ◆ Poor self-image
- ◆ Substance abuse issues
- ◆ Seductive or promiscuous behaviors and/or prostitution
- ◆ Running away or fear of going home
- ◆ Repeated physical complaints such as infections, cramping or abdominal pains
- ◆ Muscle aches
- ◆ Dizziness, gagging and severe headaches
- ◆ Self-destructive or mutilating behaviors (self-harm)
- ◆ Skipping school or change in school performance

What should I do if I suspect that A child is being victimized by incest?

Contact Support Within Reach if you suspect that a child is being abused in any way for more information and support.

Itasca County: 218.326.5008/866.747.5008

Aitkin County: 218.927.6266/866.747.5008

Trust & Telling

When the “protector” and “abuser” are the same person, the victim learns that it is not safe to trust. Inability to trust others is a major problem for incest survivors. Victims usually believe that their abuse is the result of something they did or that they deserve to be abused for some reason. They may also believe that all families are like theirs, that children are commonly abused by older family members and forced to keep the abuse a secret.

It is often difficult for abused children to get help. Telling the family “secret” opens the family to outside pressures and increases a child’s feelings of not being safe. Children may not believe that anything will be done once the abuse is revealed, or that too much will be done. They may hope that the abuse will simply end.

How can incest survivors help themselves?

Incest survivors can overcome their abuse and live rewarding lives, but the healing process may be long and difficult. Professional counseling may be necessary.

Incest survivors can learn to make good decisions about relationships. They can learn to feel better about their bodies by developing a sense of ownership and control over them. They can learn to distinguish between touching which is caring and touching which merely uses their bodies. They can learn to be assertive and establish personal boundaries in relationships.

How does incest affect the lives of incest victims?

When thinking about sexual violence it is important to remember that there is no single or standard way that victims react or feel. Everyone is different and the experience and healing process will be different for each individual. Incest experiences generally lead children to form negative opinions about themselves, resulting in serious depression, guilt and feelings of powerlessness. Self-destructive behaviors, including involvement in victimizing relationships may result.

Incest victims may learn that their role in relationships is to give to others without expecting to be nurtured in return. Their sexuality is used as a weapon against them and it can make them fearful of being touched. Many victims have negative feelings about their bodies, do poorly in school because they are unable to concentrate, or get into trouble due to fighting or other antisocial behaviors. During adolescence they may become more and more isolated socially and emotionally.

Incest victims often take sexuality to one extreme or the other - withdrawing from voluntary sexual activity because it creates anxiety or other painful feelings, or becoming highly sexually active because it is the only way they know to get affection or to feel powerful. Incest victims may feel that they make poor judgments about other people. They are likely to have little, if any, experience with forming good relationships if they don’t get professional help.