

Incest

If you've experienced sexual abuse by a family member you are not alone — and what happened to you is not your fault. While it may be difficult to talk about, you should know that this is an issue that impacts many people. The majority of juvenile victims know the perpetrator, and approximately 34 percent of perpetrators in cases of child sexual abuse are family members.¹

While incest is often underreported, RAINN frequently offers support to survivors of incest of all ages through the National Sexual Assault Hotline. If you want to talk to someone confidentially about what you are going through, visit online.rainn.org, any time, 24/7 to speak with a RAINN support specialist.

What is incest?

The term incest refers to sexual contact between family members. Laws vary from state to state regarding what constitutes crimes of incest, child sexual abuse, sexual assault, and rape. Regardless of state laws, unwanted sexual contact from a family member can have a lasting effect on the survivor.

Why is it difficult to tell someone about sexual abuse by a family member?

It can be difficult for an individual to disclose sexual assault or abuse when they know the perpetrator. It can be especially difficult if the perpetrator is a family member.

What can keep a victim of sexual abuse by a family member from telling someone?

- They may care about the abuser and be afraid of what will happen to the abuser if they tell.
- They may also be concerned about other family members' reactions, fearing they won't be believed or will be accused of doing something wrong.
- They may have already tried to tell someone what happened, but the abuse was ignored or minimized.
- They have been told by the perpetrator that what is happening is normal or happens in every family, and they don't realize that it is a form of abuse.

- They may not know that help is available, or they don't know who to trust.
- They may be afraid of getting in trouble for telling, or that the abuser will follow through with threats.

To talk through ways to get help, or guidance on how to talk about what is going on with trusted friends or family members, contact the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800.656.HOPE (4673) and online.rainn.org. Trained support specialists can help you come up with a plan to get the help that you deserve.

How to help someone who has experienced sexual abuse

- If you suspect a child is being harmed, talk to the child directly using these conversation tips.
- Report child sexual abuse to Child Protective Services. If an at-risk adult (such as someone with a disability) is experiencing abuse, contact the Department of Human Services or the police. Your state's mandatory reporting laws may require that you report suspected sexual abuse.
- If someone tells you that they have been abused, take their words seriously. Let them know you believe them and thank them for coming to you. Learn more about how to respond to a survivor.
- If you are a child, tell an adult you trust who isn't a member of the victim's family, like a teacher, faith/religious leader, or a family friend.
- To speak with someone who is trained to help, call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800.656.HOPE (4673) or chat online at online.rainn.org.

Where can I find support?

If you have experienced sexual abuse by a family member, you may encounter a range of short and long term effects that many survivors face. You may face additional issues related to your sense of safety and trust because this type of abuse often disrupts your primary support system—the family. The people who were supposed to protect and care for you may have caused harm or allowed the harm to continue.

- To speak with someone who is trained to help, call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800.656.HOPE (4673). You'll be connected to a trained staff member from a local sexual assault service provider who can connect you to resources in your area.

- Chat online at online.rainn.org with someone who is trained to help you talk through what happened. RAINN's online chat is anonymous and confidential.
- For additional resources in your local community, visit Survivors of Incest Anonymous, an organization that can help you find survivor support groups in your area.

Want to learn more about healing after child sexual abuse? **Access RAINN's eight-week learning series "Redefining Resilience"** with topics such as understanding trauma, moving past shame, managing memories, and more.

(This information is taken from the RAINN website August 2025.)