

Responding to Sibling Sexual Trauma (SST)

Parents: You are not alone. You can help your children.

Believe It Happened

Sibling sexual trauma can happen in any family. It is common, likely affecting 2-5% of all children.

- It is rare for any child to report sexual activity that did not happen.
- Children who have been abused often tell a little at a time. Their account of what happened may change. Some details may be missing. But the essential truth they are telling is real.
- It may take time for a child who acted wrongly to admit what they did and take responsibility.
- Many parents never learn all that happened. You can still help your children.

It will likely take time for this reality to sink in, to wrap your mind around what has happened and how to respond to it. Most parents need to grieve the family they once had. It's OK to be concerned for the child who acted wrongly. It's OK to feel furious or ashamed toward this child. It's OK to feel both, or neither.

Find Help for You

Stop It Now! Helpline: stopitnow.org/get-immediate-help has confidential, personal support for you and all children involved. (Staffed M-F afternoons, eastern time, talk, text, chat, or email)

Private peer support groups for parents of SST, moderated by 5WAVES:

- "Parents Coping with Sibling Sexual Trauma and Abuse" [Facebook.com/groups/siblingtrauma](https://www.facebook.com/groups/siblingtrauma)
- Discord: SST/SSA Community; email info@5WAVES.org for invite

Contact 988 for 24/7 help. Ask your doctor or 988 for referrals to a trauma-informed therapist

Protect & Support Children Who Were Harmed

Your child needs to hear:

- "I'm sorry this happened to you. It was **not** your fault."
- "I'm glad you told someone/me."
- "I'm here to help you and keep you safe."
- "You can tell me more later if you'd like."

You may need to find another place for the child who acted harmfully to live, at least temporarily. This keeps the child they harmed both mentally and physically safe, and able to begin healing.

Support Children Who Caused Harm

Your child needs to hear:

- "I still love you. I will always love you."
- "You are more than the worst things you have done."
- "You can tell me more later if you'd like."
- "Thank you for telling me this/being honest" and/or "I expect you to take responsibility."

Why did my child act like this? Most parents wonder; many never find out. Some common factors:

- exposure to explicit images or videos online
- social isolation, difficulties, or delays
- neurological differences such as autism, attention deficit disorders, intellectual disabilities
- experiencing or witnessing abuse of any kind

Will my child be a danger to children forever?

This is possible, but not likely. With treatment, support, and time, most children grow and mature to be sexually healthy adults. Harmful sexual behavior in youth does not mean a person has pedophilia.



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