

Sexual Abuse and Family Violence Scenarios

(Note: Duplicate this resource and cut into strips or paste each scenario on an index card for use in small groups.)

1. All night Ronnie had been listening to her stepfather yelling and slapping her younger brother, Gerald. He picks on Gerald all the time, but this is different, she thought. She noticed last weekend that Gerald had several bruises on his face and she wondered what happened, but her mom said "nothing" when she asked. Tonight there had been so much yelling, and poor Gerald was screaming and crying. Ronnie was scared — she didn't want to cause more trouble for her mom by saying anything, but she didn't want Gerald hurt either. She didn't know what to do. She decided to call that teen hotline she saw in the counseling office yesterday for help.
2. Ayesha started crying softly after her father left her room. She felt like she always did when he came into her room and molested her — she wanted to die. He would always do the same things; he had been doing them since she was only nine. She hated it and always felt so dirty and disgusted with herself when he left. He told her that it was her fault, that she made him do these things — and that if she told anyone, she would be made to leave the family and go live in a home for girls. Ayesha had thought about telling her mother, or running away or killing herself. But she was always too scared to do anything but lie in her bed and pretend she was asleep. She was so miserable. Maybe she **should** do something this time. It wasn't getting any better. She remembered that commercial on TV about a place teenagers could call for help. It said, "If you want to stop what's happening, start talking. We're here to listen." She slipped out of bed and put on her robe.
3. Jeffrey's uncle acted like all that touching and feeling him up last night was normal, but Jeffrey was pretty sure it wasn't. He had tried to stop it when it was happening, but he was caught off guard and didn't really know what to say. His uncle had teased him then, about his growing up at last and had implied that fooling around with each other was part of what manhood was all about. Jeffrey's mom hadn't told him about the feelings he had now, and he didn't know who to talk to. But he knew when his uncle touched him last night it made him feel good physically and it also made him sick inside. His biggest fear now was whether he might turn out to be like Ted, his neighbor's older son. Jeffrey had overheard his mom and her friend, Sallie, talking about Ted and how he liked guys. Jeffrey thought about calling that teen hotline — supposedly they had guys there that knew all about this stuff and wouldn't ask for your name or anything.

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4. Marlena wondered all the way home what she should do. Rafael had forced her to have oral sex with him and she had told him over and over again that she didn't want to. He said it was her fault for kissing and touching and letting him get so turned on. He said she wanted it, too, and besides, it was her place to please him. Afterward, she had felt numb and only stopped crying when he finally told her he loved her. But she felt no love, not anymore. She felt hurt, and used and betrayed. Would anyone care that he had made her do this? Would anyone believe she had told him no? He said it was her fault. Was it? She wanted to talk to someone so badly, but she couldn't bear to tell any of her friends. What would they think of her? She wondered how late that teen crisis line was open.
 5. Barr heard the sounds again. He knew what was going on. His mom's boyfriend, Maurice, had come in around 9:00 and he had already been drinking. His mom had gotten Maurice dinner and another beer and turned on his favorite television show. Barr always got angry when he watched his mother try to please that jerk. Now it was almost midnight and he knew what was happening. He knew where his mom's last split lip and black-and-blue eye came from. But he didn't know what made the most sense, whether to go in there and break it up, or to plead with his mom in the morning to leave this guy. Only tonight, things sounded even worse than usual. Barr was really worried about his mom. He thought about that "hotline" he had heard about in health class the other day. Would they have any ideas?

Suggested Actions and Responses

Case 1: Ronnie and her stepfather

Ronnie needs to get help immediately, to go to a neighbor's house and call 911. Her stepfather will be angry, but someone might be able to help her brother. Once the immediate danger is past, the family will need counseling and Ronnie's mother may have to separate from the stepfather to keep her children safe.

Intervening in an abusive situation like this is always difficult. But, many children are killed each year in the U.S. by abusive parents and other adults. Get help immediately. Calling a neighbor or the police to stop a parent from abusing a child may save a life.

Case 2: Ayesha and her father

Ayesha is in one of the worst possible family situations. Her father, the man she should be able to count on to protect her, has been sexually abusing her since she was a child. Since it has been going on for so long, Ayesha may feel like she has given permission for the sexual contact, and she may be too embarrassed to tell anyone. Her father may even argue that Ayesha likes what he does to her. As her father, it is illegal for him to have sexual contact of any kind with her. He has been forcing her to have sex against her will, even though he hasn't used a weapon or physical force. Giving in to unwanted sex out of fear is **not** giving consent. This is clearly a case of sexual abuse and he can be prosecuted.

Ayesha should call the teen crisis line and talk to a counselor who can suggest a safe place for her to go to report the abuse. Several things may happen: Ayesha's father might stop the abuse as soon as it is reported and he is confronted with his abnormal sexual behavior; he might go to jail or Ayesha might go to live with a relative for a while. She will receive counseling to help her deal with some of the anger, shame and sadness she feels; she will eventually recover and feel much better about herself.

Ayesha is not alone. Before they turn 18, one out of 3 girls (33 percent) and one out of 6 boys (17 percent) is sexually abused, often by a parent or other family member. Without lots of help and counseling, even when the sexual abuse ends, survivors often find themselves caught in a cycle of negative and self-destructive behaviors that include prostitution, drug and alcohol abuse and sexual abuse of their own or other's children.

Case 3: Jeffrey and his uncle

Most people believe that sexual abuse only happens to girls, but one in 6 boys is sexually abused by the age of 18. Jeffrey is right in believing that the way his uncle touched and fondled him was wrong. No force was used, but his uncle took advantage of a situation, behaved inappropriately and then tried to explain it away with humor.

Jeffrey should not believe his uncle's explanation that sexual fondling between family members is part of growing up. Jeffrey may be experiencing sexual feelings now that he's a teenager, and the touch may have aroused him or even felt good. But that doesn't make it right and Jeffrey knows that. He should trust his instincts and call the teen crisis line — a counselor will explain to him that what happened is called sexual molestation, and it is not his fault but his uncle's fault. The adult always has the responsibility for making sure no inappropriate conduct occurred. Jeffrey did nothing wrong.

It is important for boys who are sexually abused to get help and talk with a counselor. Boys need to understand that sexual contact with an older boy or man does not have anything to do with their developing sexual orientation. They will not become gay just because they were molested. It may affect the way they will behave as adults because anger about the abuse may be turned inward and result in suicide or substance abuse, or it may be turned outward and result in violence.

Case 4: Marlana and Rafael

She may not think so, but Marlana has just been raped and she can do something about it. Forced oral or anal intercourse is rape, just like forced vaginal intercourse. The rapist can be charged and prosecuted. Even though Rafael was Marlana's boyfriend, he had no right to force her into any kind of sexual act and she can have him arrested. It is up to her to decide whether she wants to prosecute Rafael — only about one in 10 rapes is reported — but it is an option. Not reporting rape or sexual assault may encourage the perpetrator to do it again.

Unfortunately, what happened to Marlana is quite common. It is estimated that a women is raped every five minutes in the U.S. and, in cases of rape reported to rape crisis centers, at least 70 percent of the rapists are known to their victims. One in six high school and college women (17 percent) report they have been forced to have sex when they did not want to, often by a date, partner or acquaintance. Many men have been socialized to believe that women exist for their sexual pleasure and that in a relationship, they have the right to force their partners to have sexual contact with them. They are wrong. **Women always have the right to refuse any kind of sexual contact**, regardless of the nature of the relationship or the situation they are in.

Case 5: Barr and his mother

Like Barr, some 3.3 million children in the U.S. witness family violence each year. According to research, these children often grow up with deep psychological scars, even when they have not been abused themselves. When compared to children who do not grow up as silent witnesses of domestic violence, they are:

- ✓ Much more likely to be involved in delinquent behavior
- ✓ Six times more likely to attempt suicide
- ✓ Twenty-four times more likely to commit a sexual offense (such as rape, incest or sexual assault)
- ✓ Seventy-five percent more likely to commit violence against people
- ✓ Fifty percent more likely to abuse drugs and/or alcohol

Barr should take immediate action by calling 911, either from a phone in his home or from a neighbor's. His mother is in danger from her boyfriend and appears to be powerless to stop the battering or end the relationship. If Barr fears that his mother's life is at risk at this moment, he should get out of the house and ask neighbors to go back to his home with him. It will be embarrassing to have the neighbors see what is going on, but the truth is that they probably know about it already. Bringing them there will probably interrupt the fight long enough for Barr to get his mother away from Maurice. The one thing Barr **should not do** is try to interrupt the fight himself. He might get hurt or hurt the mother's boyfriend more than he wants to.