

When Parents Sexually Exploit Their Children - What Safe Adults Need To Know

The VIRTUS® Programs

A federal judge sentences a woman to 40 years in prison after she was convicted of sexually exploiting her 14-year-old daughter.

The woman transported the girl across state lines and used her cellphone to videotape her daughter engaged in sexual intercourse with two men, as well as other sexual acts.

The defense attorney claimed that the woman became distraught when her husband left her two years ago and began drinking and using drugs. Federal prosecutors had sought a 100-year jail sentence.

The prosecutor described the daughter as the undisputed victim, pointing out how the daughter felt responsible for her mother's conviction. The judge agreed, saying that the girl's feelings of guilt were evidence of the damage the mother inflicted on her daughter. Lynne Tuohy "Mom Who Made Child Porn With Daughter Sentenced," www.huffingtonpost.com (May 23, 2013).

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), neglect continues to be the most common form of child abuse and plays a role in over 78 percent of reported abuse cases.

Unfortunately, where there is parental substance abuse, there can be child neglect. Research statistics estimate that anywhere from one-third to two-thirds of child maltreatment cases involve substance abuse.

A parent who abuses drugs and alcohol is more likely to be ineffective as a parent. The use of drugs and alcohol often results in physical and mental impairment; domestic violence; misuse of household funds; frequent arrests and incarceration; and alienation from the support system of family and friends, all of which can contribute to child neglect. In addition, families in which one or both parents are substance abusers tend to experience mental illness, unemployment, and raised levels of stress, leaving the children at risk for maltreatment.

Recognizing and reporting child abuse and neglect is central to protecting children. All states have laws that identify "mandatory reporters"—those individuals who are required to report child maltreatment and neglect. These are adults who interact frequently with children, such as physicians, teachers, and coaches, and are often in the best position to notice neglect. However, everyone has a responsibility to know the signs of neglect and report suspected child mistreatment to authorities.

Childhelp.org provides these signs of child neglect:

- Child has medical or physical problems that have not been treated;
- Child has dental needs that are untreated;
- Child has consistently bad hygiene;

- Child wears clothing that is too big or too small;
- Child exhibits self-soothing behaviors like thumb-sucking or rocking;
- Child displays excessive need for affection or attention;
- Child is frequently absent or late to school;
- Child has attended numerous schools with delays in enrollment;
- Child exhibits learning problems, speech delays, or other delayed physical development;
- Child feels responsible for meeting the needs of parent; or
- Child is self-destructive or engages in dangerous or risky behavior.

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