

# Protecting you from sexual abuse

A booklet about sexual abuse and the law for young people **under 16** years old with a learning disability



**RESPOND**)  
from hurting to healing

 Mencap made this  
easier to read  
[www.mencap.org.uk/accessible](http://www.mencap.org.uk/accessible)

 Home Office

## Who wrote this booklet?

This booklet was written by the Home Office, which is part of the government. Their job is to keep people safe and protect them from crime.

The Down's Syndrome Association, Mencap and Respond helped to make this booklet easy to read and understand.

## What is this booklet about?

This booklet is about sexual abuse. Sexual abuse does not actually happen to lots of people, but it could happen to anyone. You need to know about abuse so that you can protect yourself and get help if you need it. This booklet also tells you about the laws which protect you from abuse.

### Warning!

**You may find some parts of this booklet upsetting. If this happens, please talk about how you feel to someone you trust.**

**You might want to read this booklet with a friend or supporter.**



## Who is this booklet for?

This booklet is for young people who are under 16 years old and who have a learning disability.

If you are over 16 years old please go to the back of this booklet.

## What do the words mean?

If you do not understand any of the words in this booklet, please go to the centre of this booklet, or ask a friend.

### What is sexual abuse?

**Sexual abuse is when someone does sexual things to you that you do not want or do not understand.**

## Sex and young people under 16

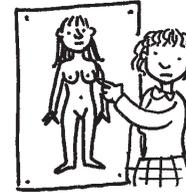
The law says you should not have sex with another person before you are 16. This is because your body may still be developing and because you are still learning about how you feel. The law is there to protect you from someone doing sexual things with you until you have grown up.

This means that if you are under 16 and someone tries to have sex with you, even if you say “yes”, it is against the law.

Even though the law says that young people under 16 should not have sex, in real life young people who are under 16 do have relationships with each other, and sometimes they do sexual things with each other. If both young people are about the same age, and if neither of them is putting pressure on the other one to do something that they do not want to do, the law is not intended to be used against them.

The main thing to remember is that, however old you are, you shouldn't have sex unless you understand about sex, and feel that you are ready.

Even though the law says that young people under 16 should not have sex, it does not mean that young people cannot talk about sex, or get advice from other people about sex. Young people under 16 have the right to find out about sex, and to talk to their carers, or doctors or nurses, about things like condoms and not getting infections, and how to make sure that young women do not get pregnant and have a baby.



## What is a private part of your body?

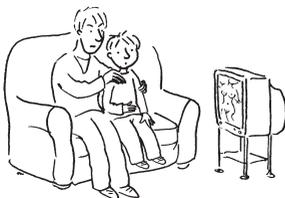
- The most private part of your body is between your legs.
- For girls, another private part of your body is your breasts.

Sometimes doctors or nurses may need to touch your private parts, but they must always ask your permission first.

## Different kinds of sexual abuse

Sexual abuse can happen in lots of different ways:

- Someone might try to touch a private part of your body.
- Someone might try to make you touch a private part of their body.
- Someone might make you take your clothes off because they find it exciting to look at you when you have no clothes on. They might take photographs or make a video of you when you have no clothes on.
- Someone might try to have sex with you. They might try to put their penis inside you. This is called rape.
- Someone might try to make you watch them, or another person, doing sexual things.
- Someone might try to make you watch them, or another person, having sex.
- Someone might try to make you look at pictures or watch a video of people doing sexual things.



## What other things might someone do when they are abusing you?

The person who is abusing you might:

- Tell you not to tell anyone else about what they have done. They may ask you to keep it a secret.
- Promise you things, or give you presents, to make you do what they want.
- Threaten or bully you so you feel scared and will do what they tell you to.
- Tell you lies.
- Tell you that they love you or say other nice things to you, so that you will let them abuse you.
- Hurt you – by doing things like hitting you – so that you will do what they want.



## What kind of people could abuse you?

Someone who is abusing you could be:

- A teacher or care worker.
- Someone in your family.
- Someone that you meet when you are out.
- Someone you know and care about.

There are special laws to protect you from different kinds of people who might abuse you. If a teacher, a care worker, someone in your family, or anyone at all tries to do sexual things with you when you are under 16, they are breaking the law.

## How does sexual abuse make you feel?

If someone is abusing you, it can make you feel:

- Sad
- Angry
- Ashamed
- Frightened
- Mixed up
- Upset
- Scared
- Stressed



## Is sexual abuse my fault?

If someone is abusing you, it is **not** your fault.

You are not to blame. The person who is abusing you is the one who is doing wrong.

They are to blame for what is happening.

## How can I stop sexual abuse from happening?

If someone is trying to abuse you, you can:

- Say '**NO**' when the person asks you to do things that you do not want to do.
- Tell someone that you trust about what is happening and ask them to help you.
- Telephone the people at **Respond on 0808 808 0700**. You can ask to speak to a man or a woman. They will listen to you and help you understand what you can do. You can read more about them in the centre of this booklet, along with other organisations who can also help.
- Tell the police or the local social services department. Their telephone number is listed in your local telephone directory.



## What can help if you have been abused?

If you have been abused, or if you are worried about being abused, it can help you to talk to someone you trust. Tell them what is happening and how it makes you feel.

Try not to worry about making trouble for yourself or for the person who is abusing you. It is important that you speak out about what is happening.

When people know what has happened, they can make sure that you stay safe.

If you do not want to speak to someone you know, you can get in touch with one of the organisations in the centre of this booklet. They will listen to you and help you understand what you can do.



## Is sexual abuse against the law?

**Yes.** Sexual abuse is against the law. If a person is abusing you, they are breaking the law. Remember, the law says that children and young people under 16 are too young to understand properly about sex. So anyone who tries to do sexual things to you when you are under 16 is abusing you and is breaking the law.

The police can arrest the person who is abusing you. They can ask them questions about what they have done. They can be sent to court, where people will try to find out what they have done. If it can be shown that they have been abusing you, they can be punished. This might mean that they go to prison.

**There are special laws to protect children and young people with learning disabilities from sexual abuse.** Have a look at page 4. All the types of sexual abuse listed on these pages are against the law.



## Dictionary:

### What do the words mean?

#### Arrest

When the police think someone has broken the law they can make them go to the police station. The police will ask them questions about what they have done. If the police find out that the person has broken the law they can then take them to court.

#### Consent

When people 'consent' it means they agree to do something suggested by someone else.

To be able to consent to sexual things, you need to:

- be 16 or over
- understand what sexual things are, **and**
- want it to happen

#### Court

The place where people decide whether a person has broken the law or not.

#### Crime

When someone breaks the law.

#### Government

The people in charge of running the country.

#### Home Office

The Home Office is part of the government. Their job is to keep people safe and protect them from crime.

#### Law

Rules that everybody in the country has to follow.

#### Pregnant

When a woman is going to have a baby.

#### Private parts

Private parts are parts of your body. The most private part of your body is either your penis or your vagina. For girls, another private part of your body is your breasts.

#### Sexual things

Sexual things are things like kissing that makes you feel uncomfortable, touching someone in private parts, and having sex.

#### Sexual abuse

When somebody makes you do sexual things that you do not want to do.

## Organisations that can help

**If you are being abused, or are worried about abuse, you can contact one of these organisations. They will listen to you and help you understand what you can do.**

### Respond Helpline

**You can contact Respond's telephone helpline on 0808 808 0700.**

The people at the helpline are trained to help people with learning disabilities who are being abused, or who are worried about abuse. You can ask to speak to a man or a woman.

The helpline is open from Monday until Friday each week, between half past one and half past four in the afternoon.

The service is for children and adults with learning difficulties and also for their families, carers and professionals.

If you ring the helpline, you will not be charged. It is a **free service** and their phone number will not be shown on your phone bill.

### Email

You can also email the people at Respond. Their email address is

**helpline@respond.org.uk**

Respond also has a website, with a useful section called 'What is Abuse?'. You can visit their website at **www.respond.org.uk**

### Voice UK Helpline

You can contact Voice UK's telephone helpline on **0870 0133 965**. The people at the helpline are trained to help people with learning disabilities who are being abused, or who are worried about abuse.

The helpline is open from Monday until Friday each week, from nine in the morning until four in the afternoon.

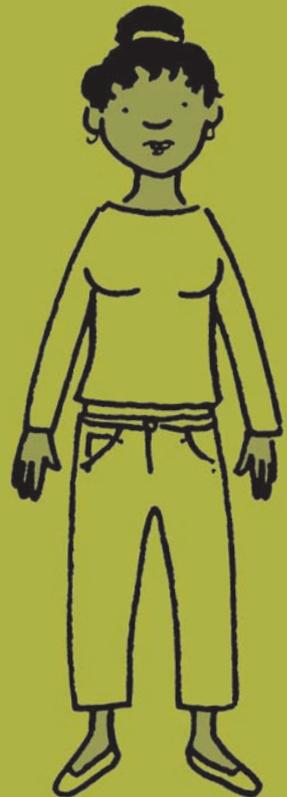
If you ring the helpline, you will only be charged for a local call, and their phone number will not be shown on your phone bill.

### Email

You can also email the people at Voice UK. Their email address is **voice@voice.org.uk**

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## Who is this booklet for?

This booklet is for people over 16 years old who have a learning disability.

If you are under 16 years old please go to the back of this booklet.

## What do the words mean?

If you do not understand any of the words in this booklet, please go to the centre of this booklet or ask a friend.

## Sometimes, sex is OK

The law says that it is OK to have sex with someone if:

- You are 16 or over and you can understand what sex is, **and**
- You want it to happen.

This is called being able to 'consent' to sex.



Everyone has the right to have sex when they are old enough and if they want it to happen.

For information and service about sex and relationships call **fpa** on their **national helpline 0845 310 1334** or **Brook** on **020 7284 6040**

## What is sexual abuse?

Sexual abuse is when someone does sexual things to you and you do not consent:



- Someone might try to do sexual things to you that you do not like or do not want. This means that they are abusing you, because they are doing things to you without your consent.
- If you do not understand what sex is you cannot consent to sex.

Sex is different from someone touching you to give medical or personal care. Sex is different to things like holding hands. When a man and a woman have sex, the woman might get pregnant. Sometimes people can catch diseases from having sex.

You need to understand this to give consent to sex. Some people may not be able to understand. This could be because they are too young, or because they have a learning disability which stops them from understanding what is happening. The law says that anyone under 16, or someone with a learning disability which stops them understanding about sex, cannot give consent.



## Different kinds of sexual abuse

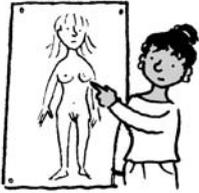
Sexual abuse can happen in lots of different ways.

- Someone might try to put their penis inside you when you do not want them to. This is called rape.
- Someone might try to touch a private part of your body when you do not want them to.
- Someone might try to make you touch a private part of their body.
- Someone might try to do things like kissing you when you do not want them to.
- Someone might make you take your clothes off. They might take photographs or make a video of you when you have no clothes on.
- Someone might try to make you watch them, or another person, having sex.
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## What is a private part of your body?

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- Tell you lies.
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Someone who is abusing you could be:

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- Frightened
- Confused
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If someone is trying to abuse you, you can:

- Say '**NO**' when the person asks you to do things that you do not want to do.
- Tell someone that you trust about what is happening and ask them to help you.
- Telephone the people at **Respond on 0808 808 0700**. You can ask to speak to a man or a woman. They will listen to you and help you understand what you can do. You can read more about them in the centre of this booklet, along with other organisations who can also help.
- Tell the police or the local social services department. Their contact details are listed in a local telephone directory.

Remember, if someone is abusing you, it is not your fault.

You are not to blame. The person who is abusing you is the one who is doing wrong.

You might be scared to talk about abuse. You might be worried about making trouble for the person who is abusing you. But it is important that you try to speak out about what is happening. If other people know about it, they can stop it happening and make sure that you stay safe.



## Sexual abuse and people with a learning disability

If you have a learning disability, you might be at risk of being abused. This is because:

- You might find it very hard to say '**NO**' when someone else is doing something that you do not like.
- You might not want to tell other people that you are being abused. You might be afraid that something bad will happen to you, or that nobody will believe you.
- The person who is abusing you might be a care worker, teacher, or a member of staff. You might not know it is wrong for this person to abuse you, or you might be scared about what could happen if you get this person into trouble.
- The person who is abusing you might be a care worker, teacher, or a member of staff. You might not know it is wrong for this person to try to have sex with you, or you might be scared about what could happen if you get this person into trouble. But it is against the law for people in jobs like these to try to have sex with anyone with a learning disability that they are looking after – even if the person with a learning disability gives their consent.



## Sexual abuse and the law



The government wants to keep everyone safe from sexual abuse. They have made new laws to protect people from abuse, called the **Sexual Offences Act**. Anyone who breaks these laws could be sent to prison.

### Protecting everyone

Some of the laws are to protect **all** people aged 16 or over. These laws say that it is against the law to make someone do anything sexual if they do not give their consent.



### Protecting children and young people

Some of the laws are to protect **all** people under 16 years. These laws say that it is against the law to make a child or young person under 16 do anything sexual.



## Protecting people with learning disabilities

There are also some laws to protect people with a learning disability.

These laws say:

- It is against the law for someone who works with people with learning disabilities to do anything sexual with them. This is people like care workers, teachers, and doctors.
- If you have a learning disability it might mean that you cannot understand about sex, or what might happen if you have sex. The law says that this means you cannot consent to sex. It is against the law for someone to have sex with you if you cannot consent to sex.
- It is against the law to frighten people with learning disabilities, tell them lies, or give them presents to make them do sexual things.



The law does not stop people with a learning disability from having sex. If someone with a learning disability is over 16 and can understand about sex, it is OK for them to have sex.