



The Children's Assessment Center

HOW SEXUAL ABUSE IMPACTS CHILDREN

- **Children react differently to sexual abuse**
- **There are no symptoms that occur in a majority of children**
- **Children's reactions to sexual abuse are highly variable**
- **Some children show very little effects while other children show extremely negative reactions and severe symptoms**
- **However, as a group, sexually abused children have more problems than non-abused children**
- **Some of these problems are:**
 - Sexual behavior problems
 - Promiscuity (38%)
 - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (32%)
 - Alteration of basic assumptions about themselves, others, the world (issues with trust in self, others, perceiving the world as unsafe)
 - Poor self-esteem (35%)
 - Depression
 - Anxiety
 - Guilt/shame
 - Somatic symptoms
 - Disruption in their development
 - Severe behavior problems (37%)
- **Long term or chronic problems can exist well into adulthood**
 - Intrusive thoughts about the abuse
 - Inability to experience a range of feelings (restricted affect)
 - Hyper-vigilance
 - Sleep problems
 - Substance abuse to avoid pain or memories
 - Self abuse
 - Relationship problems
 - Difficulty maintaining employment
 - Emotional instability

Sources: Finkelhor and Berliner, 1995
Saywitz, 2000
Berliner, 1997
Briere and Elliott, 1994
Kendall-Tackett, Williams and Finkelhor, 1993