

Erin's Law:

What it is and What You Need to Know

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What is Erin's Law?

- Erin's Law is a law in Illinois and 37 other states! It says that all public K-12 schools should have a child sexual abuse prevention program. The program needs to teach students, parents, and teachers what child sexual abuse is, how to recognize it, and how to get help.
- The law is named after Erin Merryn. Erin was sexually abused by a friend's uncle and her older cousin from the ages of 6 to 12. When this happened to her, she didn't know it was wrong, and didn't tell anyone. After she finally got help, she decided to advocate to make it a law that students have to learn about sexual abuse in school.



Erin Merryn
telling her story

What is Child Sexual Abuse?

Child sexual abuse involves sexual activity with a minor. This includes:

- An adult or older person touching or looking at a young person's private body parts (genitals, breasts, or buttocks).
- An older person asking a young person to look at or touch their private body parts
- An older person showing a young person pictures/videos of naked people
- An older person making sexual comments to a young person

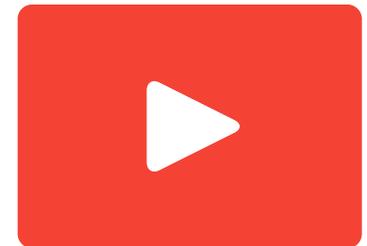
If an adult is looking at or touching a young person's private body parts to keep them healthy and safe, that is not child sexual abuse.

Some examples of this would be:

- changing a baby's diaper
- giving a child a bath or helping them shower
- a parent/guardian or doctor looking at a young person's private body parts because they hurt or to make sure they are healthy

The age of consent in Illinois is 17. This means that anyone under 17 is legally unable to consent to sex. Even if a 16 year old wanted to have sex with a 17 year old and gave consent, the law says it is considered child sexual abuse.

- If both people are under the age of consent (such as a 12 year old and a 16 year old), it is still considered child sexual abuse.



Learn More!

Click on any of the titles below to watch short animated videos on these topics.

- [What is sexual abuse and how to ask for help](#)
- [Age of Consent \(the law\)](#)
- [How to find an adult you trust](#)

1 in 10

children will be sexually abused before their 18th birthday.

Many people never report their sexual abuse, so this number is probably even higher.

93%

of child sexual abuse victims know their abuser

Abusers are much more likely to be family members or acquaintances (such as neighbors, family friends, teachers, school staff, or coaches) than a stranger.

Sexual abuse is always the older person's fault.

It is the older person's fault even if the young person "gave permission." Some abusers may even try to manipulate or trick victims into thinking it is their fault.

Some examples include:

- Making a young person promise not to tell anyone what happened.
- Bribing the young person with something they really want, like money, games, or a trip, to let them sexually abuse them.
- Threatening a young person, such as saying "I will hurt you if you tell anyone" or "I will never love you again if you tell anyone."

How to Get Help

If a young person is sexually abused, these are the steps they can take in order to get help:

1. First of all, remember that what happened is **not their fault**. No matter what.
2. Tell any adult they trust as soon as they can. This can be a parent or guardian, older sibling, family member, neighbor, teacher, social worker, school staff, or coach.
3. If they tell an adult and the adult doesn't believe them or doesn't do anything to help them, tell another trusted adult.
4. **Mandated reporters:** anyone who works at a school or in a youth program is a mandated reporter. If a young person tells a mandated reporter about child sexual abuse, they are legally required to report it to the hotline and make sure the young person is safe. This includes teachers, school staff (like custodian or lunch helpers), social workers, workers in after-school programs, camps/daycamps, and principals.

Make a report to the hotline:

1-800-25-ABUSE
(1-800-252-2873)

[Loveisrespect.org](https://www.loveisrespect.org)

has a free 24/7 call, text, and chat line for teens. Youth can talk to someone anonymously with any questions about unhealthy relationships or sexual abuse. If you want to talk to someone about your questions without making a report, you can do so here as long as you don't give them your name or location. They also have great informational blogs on relationships!

Contact YWCA

Evanston/North Shore

if you have questions about this fact sheet, child sexual abuse, or healthy relationships:

bhr@ywca-ens.org

847-864-8780 (24 hour domestic violence hotline)