

# ACSA Fact Sheet

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## Understanding Animal Childhood Sexual Abuse (ACSA)

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*A NOTE: A special thanks to the survivors who contributed their valuable time and experience to this factsheet.*

### **What is ACSA?**

Animal Childhood Sexual Abuse is sometimes referred to as forced bestiality. It is defined as coercing or forcing another child (or adult) to engage in sexual acts with an animal. While bestiality involves a consenting adult and a non-consenting animal, ACSA differs because a perpetrator forces or coerces a child and animal to perform sexual acts together. As both the animal and child cannot consent, both are victims.

'Sexual acts' cover a wide range of behaviours. It may not always involve physical contact - exposure to acts or film can also be included. It may consist of fondling, oral/genital contact and penetration - either vaginally, anally, orally or using objects. Injuring and killing the animal may also occur for sexual gratification or as a result of the abuse. The acts may also be filmed, distributed/sold, live-streamed, or have other participants watching and/or engaging in real-time. Access to the child/animal may also be offered to others (for financial gain or otherwise). The survivor may also be forced to watch bestiality, forced bestiality or ACSA media and sometimes forced to re-enact them. For some survivors, ACSA may also crossover into trafficking and ritual abuse.

Although "animals" and "mammals" are commonly used in ACSA, other species, such as reptiles, insects, or other categories, may also be included.

## **Who Experiences ACSA?**

Just like childhood sexual abuse (CSA), there is not a specific profile for ACSA survivors. ACSA survivors can be any child of any age or gender. Adults can also be coerced or forced into these acts.

## **Who Are the Perpetrators?**

The perpetrator/s are often known to the child and can be of any age or gender. They may be an individual or a group. They may be (but not limited to) family members, friends, authority figures, or organised groups. ACSA can happen in any part of the world and in various environments.

## **Why Don't Survivors Tell?**

Survivors may not disclose their experiences for many reasons, including (But not limited to):

- Threats of being removed from the home or breaking up the family.
- Threats/fear of harm to the survivor or their loved ones/pets.
- Fearing not being believed or being convinced nobody will believe them.
- Perpetrators will use shame and blame to keep the survivor silent.
- The survivor believes it is their fault.
- The survivor believes their experience was normal due to how the perpetrator normalised it.
- Negative experiences of sharing in the past.
- Amnesia to the abuse.
- Perpetrators may condition survivors to have particular responses if they try to tell, responses that may protect the perpetrator or discredit the survivor.

## What to Do If Someone Discloses ACSA

### 1. Believe Them

The first and most important step is to believe the survivor. Listen calmly, without interrupting, and focus on supporting the person before you. Do not shift focus to the animal or the acts that were committed—stay centred on the survivor and their experience. When responses focus more on the animal involved than the person, it can reinforce the belief that the animal is more important than the survivor. Always prioritise empathy for the survivor. Listening and showing belief can be incredibly healing.

### 2. Understand the Challenges of Disclosure

Disclosing ACSA can be an extremely vulnerable and terrifying step for survivors. Many have been conditioned to believe that they won't be taken seriously or fear judgment and harmful repercussions for themselves, loved ones, pets, or others. This makes sharing their story particularly difficult.

Survivors who have previously disclosed may have faced further shame and blame, being unfairly labelled as zoophiles or animal abusers. This again places the blame on them rather than the perpetrator. Some survivors may also believe they are less than human or identify as an animal due to their experiences.

### 3. Avoid Harmful Reactions

Refrain from making disgusted or judgmental comments, such as:

- "That's disgusting."
- "How could someone do that?"
- "That's so gross!"

These reactions can unintentionally cause more harm. Some survivors may interpret these comments as being about them, which can reinforce feelings of shame and self-blame. As a result, they may believe that **they** are disgusting or gross. Others may have been forced to perpetrate or conditioned to believe they are at fault. As a result, comments showing disgust, blame, judgment or putdowns towards the perpetrator may unintentionally cause further harm and shame as the comments may be personalised.

By believing their story and creating a supportive and safe space for the survivor, showing that they are not alone and that their experiences are valid. It takes tremendous courage for survivors to share their stories despite their fears. Recognise the privilege of being trusted with such a vulnerable experience. Offer empathy, compassion, and validation. Being believed and valued as a human being with worth can be incredibly powerful for a survivor.

## Common Myths

**MYTH- *"It's the survivor's fault"* -**

**TRUTH** - Both child and animal cannot consent - therefore, both are victims (Or coerced/forced adults). It is NEVER the survivor's fault - the responsibility lies with the perpetrator.

**MYTH - *"Survivors abuse animals themselves."***

**TRUTH** - Survivors of ACSA are more likely to have compassion for animals and their protection. Although some survivors have also been

forced to perpetrate against animals, it is not their choice or decision - as the perpetrators have taken away that choice.

**MYTH - *"Supporters should refrain from talking about their pets or bringing them around survivors."***

**TRUTH** - Choice is essential for survivors - simply asking what they prefer is empowering. It is up to the survivor to decide if and when they can engage with animals after the abuse. Many survivors are happy that pets bring healing and happiness to others, even if it can be challenging for them.

**MYTH - *"If you can talk about your ACSA, there is no way you could have experienced it."***

**TRUTH** - Always believe a survivor's story. Many survivors innately use dissociative defences to varying degrees, meaning some have learnt to separate emotion from story. This separation means that some survivors may be able to share with little visible emotion. This doesn't mean it hasn't happened or that it doesn't affect them. It is more helpful to assume their experience is real than to assume they're lying and dismiss their experience. It is unlikely that a survivor will be fabricating their story.

**MYTH - *"No adult would harm an animal in that way."***

**TRUTH** - ACSA is a challenging reality for many people to accept, and a common response to ACSA is disbelief or focusing more on the animal than the survivor. The truth is that perpetrators will go to great and even unimaginable lengths to achieve their goals and keep the secret hidden. Perpetrators will often rely on the disbelief a survivor may face from disclosing - as it enables them to continue perpetrating.

**MYTH - "I haven't heard of ACSA before; it must not be that common."**

**TRUTH** - Unfortunately, very little data is available due to minimal research. Lack of awareness and disbelief from the general population means that survivors may be more hesitant to come forward and share - leading to low disclosure rates. However, evidence from social media and online survivor platforms suggests that a significant number of Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA) survivors are also ACSA survivors. As public belief and awareness increase and research begins, a more accurate scale of this type of trauma will start to emerge.

## Message to survivors

The following paragraph is a written compilation from survivors about what they want other survivors to know:

*"You are not alone, and you are not the only one. What happened to you is NOT your fault. You didn't choose what happened to you. You are not what your abusers forced onto you; you are not what your abusers tried to make you believe you were. You are not fucked up or messed up. You don't have to be ashamed of what you were forced or conditioned to do. You are NOT disgusting, dirty or defective, and people cannot tell what has happened just by looking at you. I know it might feel like your image of the world and life is forever changed in the worst ways, but I want you to know that recovery is possible and you are worthy of it. You do not always have to feel shame, blame and responsibility for their actions, as that belongs to the abuser and no one else. We believe you and will listen to your stories when you are ready to tell. You are not alone!"*

## What resources are available?

Unfortunately, current resources for ACSA are limited. Below is a list of known resources, and will be updated as more become available.

### What is Animal Childhood Sexual Abuse?

Jada - A Survivor's Reflections

Anonymous - A Survivor's Reflections

Jada's podcast episode on ACSA

Jada's Tiktok - ACSA Survivor & Advocate

Kate - A Survivor's Reflections

Faith Allen - Recovering from Childhood Animal Rape

Faith Allen - Animal rape - why is it so hard to heal?

Faith Allen - After Effects of Animal Rape

Faith Allen - The Shame of Animal Rape

## References

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<https://www.amazon.com.au/Healing-Unimaginable-Treating-Ritual-Control/dp/1855758822>

<https://rainn.org/articles/child-sexual-abuse>