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The Oprah Winfrey Show  
**The Oprah Scoop**

March 25, 1999

Thursday's Show: Would You Know if Your Child Was Being Sexually Abused?

**How Would You Know?**

If the all-too possible happened and your son or daughter became the target of a molester, how would you know? Do you believe your child would tell you? That he or she would begin to act differently? Perhaps. But in many cases nothing changes and the abuse continues, sometimes for years. On Thursday Oprah met several survivors of sexual abuse to discover the clues a parent can look for to end their child's nightmare.

**"I Thought it Was My Fault"**



Kate was in second grade when the father of a friend began sexually abusing her. Laura, her mother, noticed little change, aside from the fact that Kate began wetting the bed. She did, however, have a bad feeling about her neighbor, Ray Masterman. It wasn't until a series of suspicious events led her to question her daughter at length that the truth came out. Laura was shocked. She had talked with Kate about the realities of sexual abuse, they had watched videotapes about it together. Why hadn't Kate said anything? "I was too scared to do anything," Kate said on today's show. "I thought it was my fault for letting him."

**Absolute Proof**



Kathy married a wonderful man with a beautiful step-daughter named Amber. For years, Kathy believed that hers was a perfect family, until the day she discovered a videotape of her husband having sex with Amber. The abuse had been happening since Amber was six years old, but without

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**Info**  
 from today's show

**FEATURED GUESTS**

Elizabeth Jobes, prosecuted Ray Masterman in Kate's sexual abuse case.

Dr. Carolyn Newberger, psychology professor at Harvard University.

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**ADDITIONAL INFO**

the video Kathy says she never would have suspected it. Amber admitted she couldn't tell anyone what was happening. "If Kathy hadn't found that video," she told Oprah, "it would have gone on and I never would have had the courage to say anything."

### Adult Survivors

Vanessa and LaDonna are now grown, but both grew up in homes where sexual abuse was common. Vanessa remembers thinking that she had a "day dad" who was loving and supportive and a "night dad" who did terrible things to her behind closed doors. LaDonna was never touched by her older sister's husband, but would have to watch while he exposed himself to her. Vanessa says she displayed all the clues, but during the time she grew up adults - and especially her mother - didn't talk about things like sexual abuse.

### Your Own Instinct



Dr. Carolyn Newberger is a psychology professor at Harvard University. She said there are several clues that a child may present that could point to sexual abuse. These include sexual behaviors that are outside the normal range, such as a tendency to masturbation or intense curiosity in other children's or adults bodies, bed-wetting, withdrawal, a drop in grades, insomnia, depression, or fear of strangers, undressing, being alone or of a particular person. A child may display one, some or none of these clues. The biggest symptom, Oprah advised parents, "is your own instinct."

### A Process, Not an Event

Dr. Newberger also stressed the need for parents to make discussions of sexual abuse an ongoing process. It's also vital to create a supportive, non-judgmental relationship with a child, so that he or she will be able to come to you with any concern and know they will be listened to and believed. Also, prepare children to look for certain behaviors, not certain types of people, since abusers can come in the form of parents, relatives or family friends. Another useful technique is to play "What if?" games with your child, gradually working up to situations involving sexual abuse.

### Share Your Story and Your Courage

When one in four girls and one in ten boys

are victims of sexual abuse, "it's far more likely that your child will be abused than they will be hit by a car," said Dr. Newberger. Make safety from molestation as much a part of what you teach your child as safely crossing the street. If you're a survivor of sexual abuse, your input is as valuable as any expert's- perhaps more. Share it with others in our [Talk About the Show](#) message boards. Like the guests on today's show, the bravery you demonstrate in telling your story may give someone else the courage to stop or prevent the abuse of another child.

*Until tomorrow,*  
**HarpoScoop**

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