



2009 Report On Child Protection in Vermont



VERMONT

**AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES
DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES**

Annual Report for Calendar Year 2009

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This report is also available online at *www.dcf.vermont.gov*.

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Message from the Commissioner

Although Vermont is one of the safest and healthiest states in the nation for children, child maltreatment remains a serious problem. The effects of child abuse and neglect on children are serious and long lasting—affecting children’s development, ability to learn, and their future. This child protection report is issued annually to ensure Vermonters are aware of this serious issue and to keep us focused on continuously improving our response to child abuse and neglect.

Over the past three years, Vermont has sought to transform its system to more effectively achieve its two primary objectives: protecting children and strengthening families. Those changes include the following:

- ***Creation of a Centralized Intake Service:***

Beginning in September of 2008, concerned citizens and professionals call one toll-free number (1-800-649-5285) to report suspected child abuse and neglect. This has resulted in a greater consistency of response around the state, as well as an increase in the total number of reports accepted for intervention.

- ***Increased Focus on Less Adversarial Interventions with Families:***

To protect children and prevent more serious issues down the road, we are increasing the use of early intervention strategies and focusing on new ways of engaging families and extended families to keep children safe. This report reflects a large rise in this type of intervention.

- ***Child Sexual Abuse Prevention:***

Over the past year, DCF has worked with many partners to implement comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention in response to Act One of the 2008 legislature, including:

- Developing resource materials that can be used by schools and licensed childcare facilities to instruct employees and volunteers about the prevention, identification, and reporting of child sexual abuse; and
- Implementing an outreach plan to inform all Vermonters about the nature and extent of child sexual abuse and what they can do to help prevent it.

DCF is committed to taking action to stop abuse, making sure children are safe, and providing services that support healthier family functioning and address the impact of trauma on children. These efforts are only part of the solution. Ultimately, every Vermont adult must take on this issue, including parents, family members, educators, neighbors, and other community members. Child protection truly is everyone’s business.



Stephen R. Dale, Commissioner

Introduction

The Family Services Division of the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF) is responsible for responding to reports of child abuse and neglect, providing ongoing services to families at risk, and working with families and community partners to make sure children are safe. The ultimate goal is for children to live in safe, supportive, and healthy environments where they can grow and thrive.

This report provides child protection data for calendar year 2009. As a result of pending investigations, assessments, and appeals, the data may change slightly.

Reports to the Child Protection Line

In the fall of 2008, Vermont established a centralized intake unit to provide high-quality, consistent service to individuals reporting suspected child abuse and neglect. This change in decades-long practice transferred the responsibility for receiving child abuse and neglect reports from 12 district offices to one central location in Waterbury.

The Child Protection Line (1-800-649-5285) is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. During regular business hours, calls are handled by a minimum of six intake workers and two supervisors. After regular business hours, calls are answered by the Emergency Services Program.

In 2009, the Child Protection Line received 14,488 calls regarding suspected child abuse and neglect — an increase of 7.9% over 2008.

Reports to the Child Protection Line, 2004 to 2009		
Year	Total Reports¹	Annual Change
2004	12,873	-
2005	12,746	-1.0%
2006	12,635	-1.0%
2007	12,829	1.5%
2008	13,434	4.7%
2009	14,488	7.9%

¹ A report means a call to the Child Protection Line. One report may involve more than one child. Similarly, we may receive multiple calls about the same child or situation.

Child/Family Factors Identified by Reporters

The following table identifies factors, in both children and families, identified by reporters at the time they contacted the Child Protection Line. These factors may, or may not, have been validated during ensuing investigations or assessments.

Knowing about these factors can help supervisors and social workers plan the most effective intervention strategies. For example, if a language barrier is identified, a worker may arrange for an interpreter. If domestic violence is identified, a worker may consult with the department's domestic violence coordinator to plan needed interviews in a way that does not increase the risk to an adult victim.

Family Factors	Number
Cognitive/Physical Disabilities	415
Domestic Violence	1,422
Financial Stress	709
Mental Health Issues	934
Substance Abuse	3,293

Child Factors	Number
Challenging Behavior	1,806
Cognitive/Physical Disabilities	1,041
Mental Health Issues	1,002
Speech/Language Barriers/Hearing Problems	444
Substance Abuse	335

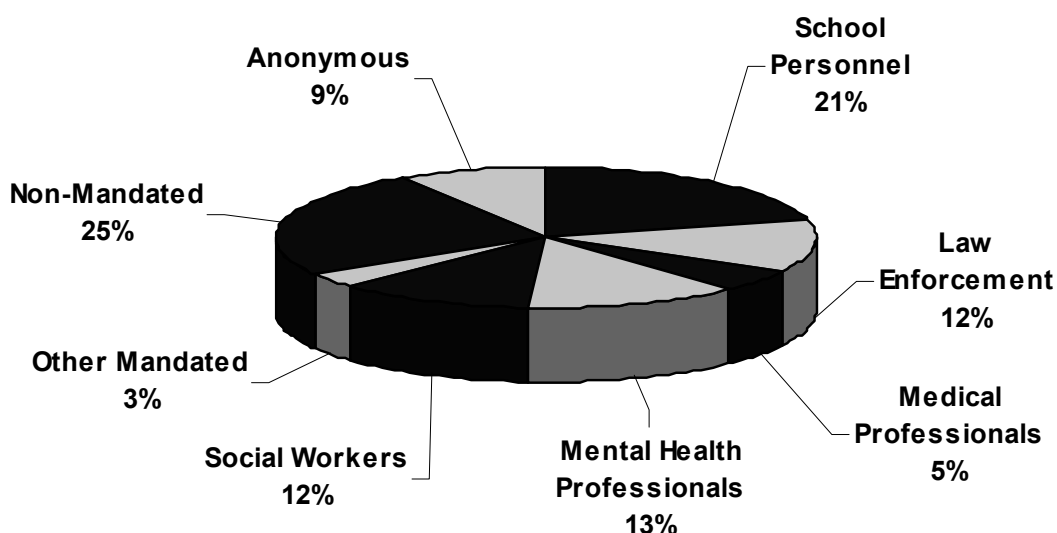
Mandated Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect

Certain people are required by Vermont law (Title 33, Chapter 49, §4913) to report suspected child abuse and neglect. Called mandated reporters, these individuals are legally required to report their suspicions to the Family Services Division of DCF—within 24 hours. Additionally, anyone who has reason to believe that a child has been, or is being, abused or neglected may make a report.

Mandated Reporters in Vermont

- Chiropractors, dentists, emergency medical personnel, licensed practical nurses, medical examiners, mental health professionals, osteopaths, pharmacists, physicians, physicians' assistants, psychologists, registered nurses, surgeons, and any other health care providers;
- Hospital administrators, interns, and resident physicians in any hospital in the state;
- School guidance counselors, librarians, principals, superintendents, teachers, and any other individuals regularly employed by school districts, or contracted and paid by school districts, to provide student services for five or more hours per week during the school year;
- Childcare workers, police officers, probation officers, social workers, and clergy members;
- Residential and non-residential camp administrators, counselors, and owners; and
- Employees, contractors, and grantees of the Agency of Human Services who have contact with clients.

**Reports Alleging Child Abuse and Neglect, by Reporter Type
(2009)**



Child Abuse and Neglect Definitions

Vermont law (33.V.S.A. 49, § 4912) defines an “abused or neglected child” as:

A child whose physical health, psychological growth and development or welfare is harmed, or is at substantial risk of harm, by the acts or omissions of his or her parent or other person responsible for the child’s welfare. It also means a child who is sexually abused or at substantial risk of sexual abuse by any person.

Harm can occur by abandonment, emotional maltreatment, neglect, or physical injury. Risk of harm means a significant danger that a child will suffer serious harm other than by accidental means, which would be likely to cause physical injury, neglect, emotional maltreatment, or sexual abuse.

DEFINITIONS

Child: an individual under the age of majority: 18.

Person Responsible for a Child's Welfare: includes the child's parent, guardian, foster parent, and any other adult residing in the child’s home who serves in a parental role; an employee of a public or private residential home, institution or agency; or other person responsible for the child's welfare while in a residential, educational or child care setting, including any staff person.

Emotional Maltreatment: a pattern of malicious behavior, which results in impaired psychological growth and development.

Neglect: failure to supply a child with adequate food, clothing, shelter or health care.

Physical Injury: death, permanent or temporary disfigurement, or impairment of any bodily organ or function other than by accidental means.

Sexual Abuse: any act or acts by any person involving sexual molestation or exploitation of a child including but not limited to incest, prostitution, rape, sodomy, or any lewd and lascivious conduct involving a child. Sexual abuse also includes the aiding, abetting, counseling, hiring, or procuring of a child to perform or participate in any photograph, motion picture, exhibition, show, representation, or other presentation which, in whole or in part, depicts a sexual conduct, sexual excitement or sadomasochistic abuse involving a child.

How Reports Are Made

Both mandated and non-mandated reporters in Vermont call 1-800-649-5285 to report suspected child abuse and neglect. This 24-hour Child Protection Line makes it easy for people to share their concerns about a child with a trained social worker.

When someone makes a report, a social worker:

- Questions the reporter about the nature of his or her concerns;
- Requests any known details about the child (e.g., the child's name, date of birth and home address, as well as the names of the child's parents or caretakers);
- Records the information provided; and
- Asks the reporter to complete a written report.

Vermont law provides reporters with immunity from civil or criminal liability as long as their reports are made in good faith.

What Happens to Reports Received

A supervisor evaluates each report to determine whether to accept it for intervention. To make this determination, the supervisor considers:

1. The age of the alleged victim.

Vermont law allows DCF to intervene when the alleged victim is under the age of 18.

2. The alleged abuser's relationship to the child.

- If a report alleges sexual abuse or risk of sexual abuse, Vermont law allows DCF to intervene no matter what the relationship is between abuser and child (e.g., parent, sibling, friend, teacher, or neighbor).
- For all other types of abuse, the alleged abuser must be "a person responsible for the child's welfare" (see definition on page 7).

3. The nature of the allegation.

Vermont law allows DCF to intervene if the report alleges that:

- A child was abused or neglected as defined in state law (Title 33, Chapter 49).
Beginning July 1, 2009, Vermont law authorizes two types of intervention (referred to as *differential response*) in response to these types of report: child abuse investigations and child abuse assessments.
- A child is without proper parental care (Title 33, Chapter 51).
In response to this type of report, Vermont law authorizes DCF to undertake a family assessment to determine whether "a child is without proper parental care or subsistence, education, medical, or other care necessary for his or her well-being."

If a supervisor accepts a report, he or she then determines the appropriate intervention: child abuse investigation, child abuse assessment, or family assessment.

1. Child Abuse Investigations:

An investigation will be conducted if a report alleges substantial child endangerment, including allegations that:

- A child has been sexually abused.
- Any type of abuse occurred in a facility licensed or regulated by the department.
- The acts or omissions of a person responsible for a child's welfare resulted in a child's death.
- A person responsible for a child's welfare abandoned a child; maliciously punished a child; physically abused a child under the age of 3; physically abused a child of any age who is non-verbal or non-ambulatory; or allowed a child to be exposed to the production of methamphetamine.

Additionally, the department may conduct an investigation of any report. An investigation results in a formal determination of whether the abuse occurred. The reported abuse is either *substantiated* or *unsubstantiated*.

2. Child Abuse Assessments:

A child abuse assessment focuses on the underlying factors that interfere with a caregiver's appropriate care for a child and the family's need for ongoing services. While an assessment does not result in a formal determination of whether the reported abuse occurred, it does result in a recommendation to:

- a) Provide Ongoing Services; or
- b) Close the Case (no ongoing services needed through the department; although in some cases, referrals may be made to community services).

3. Family Assessments:

A family assessment helps us determine whether "a child is without proper parental care or subsistence, education, medical, or other care necessary for his or her well-being." The immediate focus is on a child's safety, while we work with the parents to address issues that are interfering with safe and appropriate parenting. At the conclusion of a family assessment, we may provide ongoing services and/or seek court action or close the case. Reports accepted for family assessments could include, for example:

- A pattern of concerns that, when evaluated together, call a child's safety into question.
- An allegation that a parent is neglecting a child's education.
- A newborn with a positive toxicology screen for illegal substances.
- An allegation that there is a serious threat to the health of a child due to a mother's substance use during pregnancy.

Note: a child abuse investigation may be opened at any time during a child abuse or family assessment if one appears to be warranted

Statewide Trends, 2004 to 2009

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Reports To Vermont's Child Protection Line	12,873	12,746	12,635	12,829	13,434	14,488
Reports Accepted For:						
1. Child Abuse Investigation	2,631	2,371	2,528	2,633	2,896	2,831
2. Child Abuse Assessment ²	-	-	-	-	-	638
3. Family Assessment	115	176	244	305	630	1,021
Total Reports Accepted For Intervention³	2,746	2,547	2,772	2,938	3,526	4,490



² This type of intervention was not available prior to July 1, 2009.

³ We may receive more than one report about the same incident or child. Additionally, a report may be about more than one child in a family.

Reports Accepted in 2008 & 2009, by District

Districts	Child Abuse Investigations		Child Abuse Assessments ⁴		Family Assessments		Total Interventions	
	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009
Barre	328	315	-	72	64	95	392	482
Bennington	191	189	-	27	34	56	225	272
Brattleboro	117	124	-	41	42	91	159	256
Burlington	619	526	-	106	127	182	746	814
Hartford	187	183	-	48	31	53	218	284
Middlebury	140	139	-	32	29	45	169	216
Morrisville	194	182	-	56	36	59	230	297
Newport	153	141	-	45	24	59	177	245
Rutland	306	293	-	66	68	135	374	494
Springfield	204	217	-	47	58	96	262	360
St. Albans	273	321	-	64	78	84	351	469
St. Johnsbury	147	151	-	30	36	62	183	243
Central Office	37	50	-	4	3	4	40	58
Statewide	2,896	2,831	-	638	630	1,021	3,526	4,490

⁴ This type of intervention was not available prior to July 1, 2009.

Child Abuse Investigations in 2008 & 2009, by Outcome

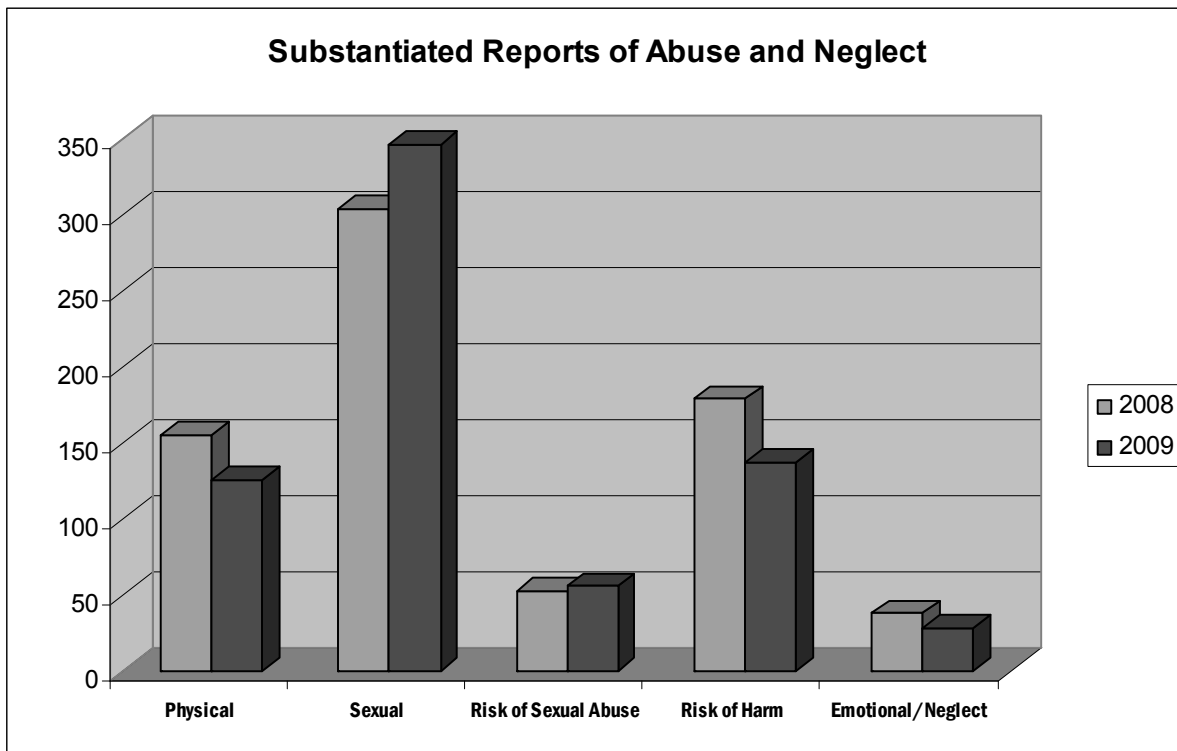
At the conclusion of an investigation, a supervisor reviews the results to determine whether the evidence would lead a reasonable person to believe the child has been abused or neglected. If so, the report is *substantiated*. In 2009, Family Services conducted 2,831 child abuse investigations, of which 631 were substantiated.

Year	Child Abuse Investigations		Substantiated		Unsubstantiated	
	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009
Barre	328	315	94	83	234	232
Bennington	191	189	58	42	133	147
Brattleboro	117	124	26	30	91	94
Burlington	619	526	112	104	507	422
Hartford	187	183	58	37	129	146
Middlebury	140	139	42	39	98	100
Morrisville	194	182	49	51	145	131
Newport	153	141	28	30	125	111
Rutland	306	293	48	28	258	265
Springfield	204	217	49	62	155	155
St. Albans	273	321	54	74	219	247
St. Johnsbury	147	151	44	40	103	111
Central Office	37	50	10	11	27	39
Statewide	2,896	2,831	672	631	2,224	2,200

Substantiated Reports in 2009, by Type of Abuse

In 2009, 631 reports were substantiated. Since a report can be substantiated for more than one type of abuse, the numbers below reflect a total greater than 631.

District	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Risk of Sexual Abuse	Risk of Harm	Emotional/Neglect
Barre	14	50	3	16	1
Bennington	6	28	4	9	0
Brattleboro	6	16	3	6	2
Burlington	29	48	12	23	4
Hartford	11	21	3	8	1
Middlebury	2	23	8	9	2
Morrisville	5	23	5	18	2
Newport	7	12	7	8	0
Rutland	10	10	3	8	1
Springfield	10	33	4	11	7
St. Albans	21	56	2	5	4
St. Johnsbury	5	19	1	13	4
Central Office	0	7	1	3	0
Total Statewide	126	346	56	137	28



Substantiated Reports in 2009, by Age & Gender of Victim

The data below represents the age and gender of the victims of substantiated abuse or neglect. Please note that a child is represented more than once if he or she suffered more than one type of abuse or was involved in more than one substantiated report during the year.

Age	Physical	Sexual	Risk of Sexual Abuse	Risk of Harm	Neglect/Emotional
< 1	6	1	8	24	1
1	8	0	1	25	3
2	3	5	4	16	2
3	8	12	5	14	3
4	4	19	3	8	4
5	6	28	7	8	1
6	13	18	3	10	4
7	8	26	7	5	9
8	9	25	6	7	3
9	5	23	5	11	8
10	7	14	8	4	1
11	8	22	6	10	6
12	9	18	5	8	1
13	7	40	6	9	0
14	14	37	3	8	2
15	8	45	6	4	0
16	3	23	3	4	2
17	2	21	1	5	0
TOTAL	128	377	87	180	50
Gender					
Male	67	96	37	97	21
Female	61	281	50	83	29
TOTAL	128	377	87	180	50

Substantiated Reports in 2009, by Age & Gender of Abuser

The data below represents the age and gender of substantiated abusers. An abuser may be represented more than once if more than one type of abuse was substantiated.

Age	Physical	Sexual	Risk of Sexual Abuse	Risk of Harm	Neglect/Emotional
<20	1	144	2	7	1
20 - 29	33	74	22	57	12
30 - 39	60	44	17	55	13
40 - 49	24	41	11	20	5
50 - 59	9	25	8	12	2
60+	2	11	3	0	0
Unknown	2	9	3	1	0
Gender					
Male	72	317	40	81	12
Female	56	27	25	71	21
Unknown	3	4	1	0	0

Substantiated Reports in 2009, by Relationship of Abuser to Child

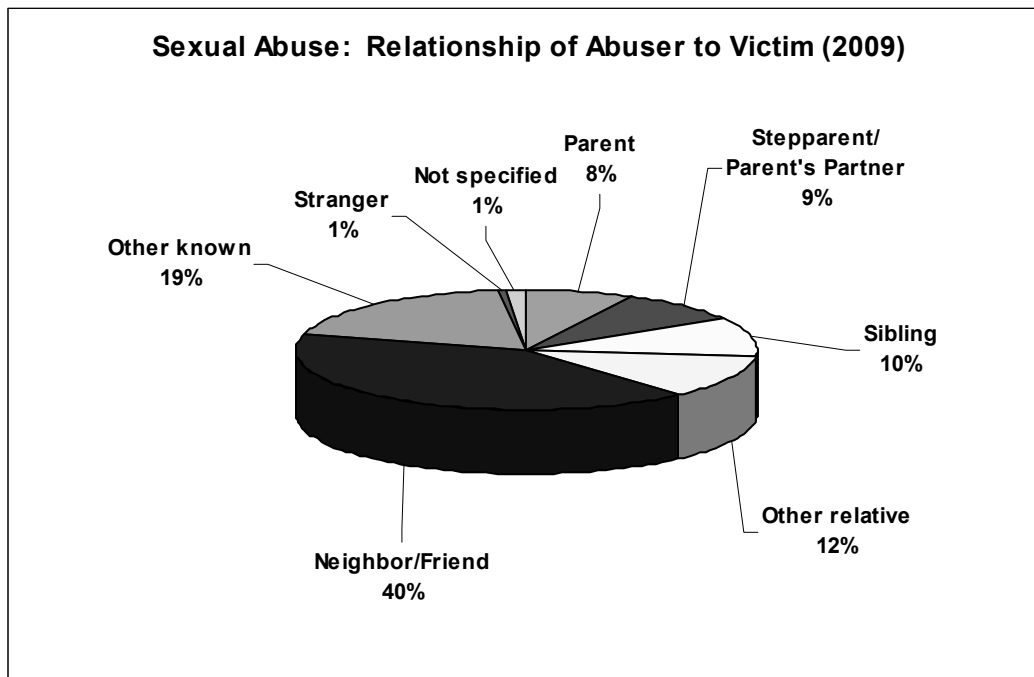
Relationship	Physical	Sexual	Risk of Sexual Abuse	Risk of Harm	Neglect/Emotional
Parent	94	27	43	163	43
Stepparent/Parent's Partner	21	34	14	29	5
Foster Parent	0	2	4	2	4
Sibling	1	39	0	1	0
Other Relative	3	46	20	7	0
Neighbor/Friend	1	156	13	2	2
Other Known	9	72	8	2	1
Stranger	0	3	0	0	0
Unspecified	5	5	1	8	6

Substantiated Reports of Child Sexual Abuse in 2009

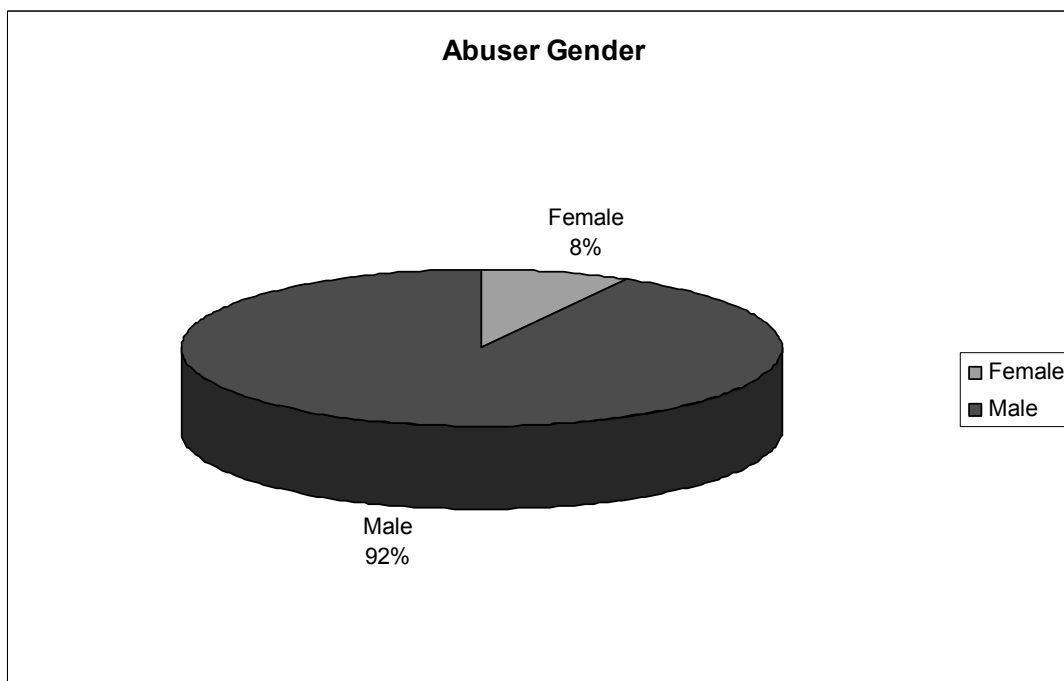
The department investigates all valid allegations of sexual abuse and risk of sexual abuse — regardless of the relationship between the alleged abuser and child.

Here's what the 2009 data tells us about child sexual abuse in Vermont:

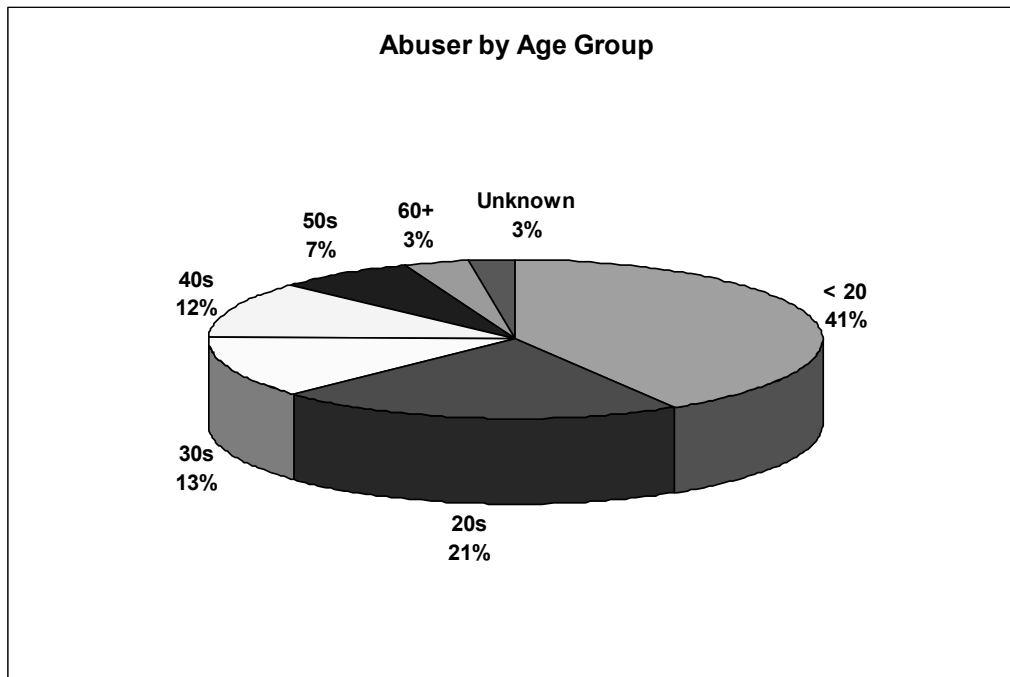
- **At least 98% of child sexual abuse was committed by people known to the children.**



- **92% of known abusers were male.**



- At least 41% of abusers were under the age of 20.



Child Sexual Abuse Prevention

On February 27, 2009, the Vermont Senate and House passed S.13 - AN ACT RELATING TO IMPROVING VERMONT'S SEXUAL ABUSE RESPONSE SYSTEM. It was signed into law on March 17, 2009. The legislative intent of the act (known as *Act One*) is to increase child sexual abuse prevention efforts, enhance the investigation and prosecution of child sexual abuse, and improve the supervision of sex offenders.

One component of the act, which is being spearheaded by the Department for Children and Families, is the development and implementation of a Community Outreach Plan (Act No.1, Section 11) to raise community awareness about the nature and extent of child sexual abuse, including the role of adults in protecting children.

The outreach plan includes the following:

1. Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Website: Vermonters can go to protectkids.vt.gov to learn what they can do to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse.
2. Media Campaign: Two radio PSA's (public service announcements) and one television PSA about the need for adults to "Step Up to Protect Kids" started airing on May 17 and will run throughout the summer and into September.
3. Parent's Guide: A guide to preventing child sexual abuse will soon be available for free downloading on the protectkids.vt.gov website.

STEP UP: Help End Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse is a serious problem—most often committed by those we know and trust. It's up to us to end it.

The safety of our children truly lies in the hands of our community. No one can do everything, but everyone can do something.

Go to protectkids.vt.gov to learn:

1. The facts about child sexual abuse (e.g., who abuses children, how it happens, and what to look for).
2. How to create and implement a plan to keep your children safe.
3. How to talk openly with your children about healthy sexuality and personal safety.
4. What to do and who to call if you notice inappropriate behavior or suspect abuse.
5. Where to find help if you need it. Get connected to community, regional, and statewide resources.

*Learn what you can do to prevent, recognize,
and react responsibly to child sexual abuse.*

protectkids.vt.gov

HELP PREVENT CHILD ABUSE

If you suspect a child is
being abused or neglected,
call Vermont's Child Protection Line to
report it — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

1-800-649-5285

Preventing child abuse helps
ensure the safety, health, and
optimal development of our children.

dcf.vermont.gov