

## THE REASONS WHY IT IS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR MOTHERS TO KNOW AT THE TIME THAT THEIR CHILD IS BEING SEXUALLY ASSAULTED

- The abuser is usually someone known to the mother, and a person in a position of trust and responsibility, and so he would be the last person the mother would suspect, e.g., a partner, a friend, a relative etc.
- The abuser often maneuvers to prevent any closeness between the mother and her Child.
- The abuser usually goes to great lengths to demonstrate his apparent care for the child, buying presents, taking them out etc., so this can easily deceive the child's mother.
- Mothers and the general public are not given detailed information which would make them more vigilant and aware of the reality and possibility that their children could be assaulted by a person in their trust.
- It is difficult for the child to tell their mother because the abuser threatens/bribes the child to say nothing.
- The warning signs that a child shows that they are being assaulted are often non-specific. For example complaints of stomach ache, nightmares, having a rash, a child walking differently, headaches, a child pulling her hair out.
- The mother may be a lone parent and is preoccupied with caring for the children and working, she is unable to notice changes in her child's behaviour or feels that they are explained by current family stresses/changes.
- The abuser rationalises the children show to the mother to the point where she loses faith in her own judgment.
- The abuser if a partner, heaps blame on the mother for not satisfying him or for being sick or unsupportive, to such an extent, she has no sense of self-esteem and believes whatever seems to be going wrong for her child is her fault.
- Child sexual assault is hard for a mother to detect because the abuser is manipulative and plans it well.
- No one, including mothers, could imagine the ways and circumstances that abusers assault children. For example, in the same bed, while the mother is asleep, when there is a house full of people, in the toilet, the kitchen or the bathroom.
- If the mother suspects abuse and the husband/partner is violent, she can fear to speak out.
- A mother may have some suspicions that her child is being assaulted, but when she approaches an agency, they will not act without evidence or full disclosure, so what can she do?
- Some abusers realise agencies have concerns, and so prevent professionals having access to the mothers. For example, by taking mail before she gets it,

being there at appointments, and so silencing the professional whom fears tipping the abuser off about their concerns.

- Even when children do make full disclosures, mothers see reports of court cases, where men who have been named as abusers make successful applications for access and custody.
- Mothers are not listened to in this society, they are not seen as having status and doing a worthwhile job.
- Professionals don't trust mothers enough to arrange to speak to a mother on her own and share their concerns with her. The state stacks the odds against mothers believing their children, because there is no support for women who want to take themselves and their children away from fears of abuse. There needs to be hostels, support with child care, counselling support, legal support to get custody of their children etc.

*Adapted from a leaflet by Haringey Social Services November 1990  
Ruth, Caroline, May, Pamela, Susan, Anne, Anne Peake, Olive Otway*