WHY DON'T CHILDREN TELL US IF THEY'RE BEING SEXUALLY ABUSED?

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Some possible signs/risk factors of CSE:

- Changes from usual behaviour; erratic, volatile moods, aggressive outbursts or emotional withdrawal; disengagement
- Unkempt appearance; poor personal hygiene, eating disorders, distorted sense of self-image
- Panic attacks or anxiety; depression or self-harm, suicidal behaviour, reckless behaviour, self-loathing, low self-esteem, reluctance to discuss problems or feelings, bed-wetting, personality disorders, difficulty sleeping
- Promiscuous behaviour; awareness of sexual activity/use of sexual language beyond their age
- Running away from home; involvement in gangs or petty crime; drug or alcohol addiction
- Known difficulties at home; separated parents, emotionally unavailable parents or guardians, carers with mental health problems or chronic illness, bereavement, other abuse or neglect, being in social care
- Reported missing; reappearing without an explanation, having unexplained income or gifts
Takeaway Point:

No list of signs or symptoms can be exhaustive. Some abused children may present with different symptoms or none at all.
‘If you tell anyone, it will incriminate us both.’

‘Certain things should be kept private.’

‘You didn’t tell me to stop, so you must have wanted it.’

‘I’ll kill you if you tell anyone.’

‘You don’t want me to go to prison, do you? Don’t you love me?’

‘It’s just a special game we play - our little secret.’
'In those days there was no referral and I felt it was beyond my jurisdiction to push you further. How sad I feel about it.'

- My schoolteacher from when I was 11 years old. NB: There is still no mandatory referral requirement in law; reporting remains optional. See www.mandatenow.org.uk for more about this.
'Listen, if someone ever touches you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable, you must tell someone you trust, even if you’ve been told not to. You deserve to feel safe and have your boundaries respected, no matter what.

Is there something you want to tell me?'
‘You’re not to blame for what they did to you.’

‘Feeling like it’s your fault is a normal symptom of what you’ve been through.’

‘You did the right thing in telling me.’

‘You’re not alone.’