



## If Your Child Is the Offender

### Introduction

Dan Turner, the father of Brock Turner, the Stanford University student who was caught in the act of raping an incapacitated young woman behind a dumpster in 2015, sparked outrage when he said, and I quote:

“[Brock’s] life will never be the one that he dreamed about and worked so hard to achieve. *That is a steep price to pay for 20 minutes of action* out of his 20 plus years of life.” (Italics mine)

While the younger Turner faced 14 years in prison, the prosecution asked for six. Yet the judge sentenced him to just six *months* in jail and three years of probation, saying that a stiffer sentence would have a “severe impact” on the 20-year-old.

Geez. That poor guy. Like *he’s* the victim!

*THIS* is too often how young perpetrators of sexual assault are viewed and protected against their crimes (the fortunate ones that is, most of whom are white; the story is often very different for black offenders).

### When ‘Child’s Play’ Get Serious

Sexual experimentation between consenting young people is one thing, but sexual harassment, assault, or rape is a completely different ballgame. If you learn your child has committed sexual assault or rape, your reaction may include:

- Difficulty believing the victim’s accusations
- Anger at the victim, your child, or yourself
- Feeling upset or disappointed in your child
- Wanting to withdraw from your child
- Feelings of guilt or shame
- Sadness and depression



- Confusion about what exactly happened and whom to believe
- Uncertainty about how to respond or what to do next
- Nightmares or other traumatic stress reactions, especially if you yourself were ever sexually abused

It's important to know that you're not alone; many other parents have had to come to grips with their children's bad sexual behavior.

## Signs That a Juvenile May Be at Risk of Harming Another Child

In many cases, the youth offender may not recognize his actions are harmful. And for the parent, it can be tough to know when the line between innocent child play and sexual harm has been crossed.

According to StopItNow.org, here are some behaviors to watch for that may indicate a young person is at risk of sexually harming another kid:

- He's confused about social rules and interactions:
  - Experiences typical gestures of friendliness or affection as sexual.
  - Explores his own natural sexual curiosity with younger children or those of differing size, status, ability, or power.
  - Seeks out the company of younger kids and spends an unusual amount of time with them rather than with peers.
  - Takes younger children to "secret" places or hideaways or plays "special" games with them (e.g. playing doctor or engaging in undressing or touching games).
  - Insists on physical contact with a child even when they resist the attention.
- He's anxious, depressed, or seeming to need help:
  - Doesn't want to be alone with another child, or group of children, or becomes anxious about being with a particular young person.
  - Was physically, sexually, or emotionally abused and has not been offered adequate resources and support for recovery.
  - Seems to be crying out for help or behaves as if he wants to be caught. He leaves "clues" or acts in ways that seem likely to provoke a discussion about sexual issues.





- He's impulsively sexual or aggressive:
  - Links sexuality and aggression in language or behavior (e.g. makes sexual threats or insults).
  - Is unable to control inappropriate sexual behaviors involving another child after being told to stop.
  - Engages in sexually harassing behavior.
  - Shares alcohol, drugs, or sexual material with younger kids.
  - Views sexual images of children on the Internet or elsewhere.
  - Forces sexual interaction, including direct contact and non-contact (like exposing his genitals) on another child.

## What to Do if Your Child Has Been Accused of a Sex Crime

If you learn your kid has been accused of causing sexual harm or trauma to another person, you have a grave responsibility to take action—not only for the victim's sake, but for your child's.

Most parents in this situation quickly “lawyer up,” and I'm not saying that's a bad strategy, but it IS bad when that strategy includes protecting your child from the consequences of his actions.

Your son (or daughter) may be a great kid in every other respect, but you are NOT helping him, mom and dad, by protecting him from the fallout; in fact, you may be encouraging him to do it to someone else in the future.

Whether his behavior occurred when they were sober or under the influence of drugs or alcohol, it's NOT okay and it's your job as his parent to make sure he understands that.

If you want to stop your child from being a serial sexual predator, you have to make it absolutely crystal clear that what he did was wrong and will not be tolerated. You also need to allow him to face the consequences, as difficult as they might be.

Again, I'm not saying you shouldn't retain an attorney to protect your kid's rights and help him navigate the criminal justice or school system, just don't use that as a way to keep him from accepting responsibility.

“Accepting responsibility” may include serving a sentence, making restitution to the victim, getting drug or alcohol rehab, and getting into counseling to ensure he doesn't harm anyone else. With proper treatment, young sexual offenders can learn to have greater respect for others and honor their boundaries, and engage in healthy, appropriate relationships.





## **Getting Treatment for Your Child**

Concerning sexual behaviors in young people can often be resolved—and future problems avoided—with appropriate treatment, particularly when parents are actively involved in that treatment. Keep in mind that kids with sexual behavior problems are—first and foremost—kids, and kids across the board do dumb shit. Your tween or teen may have made a poor decision, but he can learn to make better decisions with your guidance and the right treatment.

If you know or suspect your child has committed sexual assault, I urge you to contact your state’s child welfare authorities immediately to conduct an investigation. If you’re not sure who to contact, reach out to the ChildHelp® National Child Abuse Hotline at 1.800.4.A.CHILD or online at [http:// www.childhelp.org/get\\_help](http://www.childhelp.org/get_help)).

## **About the Author**



CJ Scarlet is a danger expert, victim advocate, and crime survivor herself. CJ has given speeches and workshops at national and international events; and has appeared on numerous radio and television programs, including *MSNBC* and *NPR*. Her books include *Raising Badass Kids*, *Badass Parenting*, and *Heroic Parenting*.

The former U.S. Marine photojournalist and forest firefighter holds an interdisciplinary master’s degree in human violence from Old Dominion University. Named one of the “Happy 100” people on the planet, CJ’s story of triumph over adversity is featured in two bestselling books, including *Happy for No Reason* and *Be Invincible*.

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