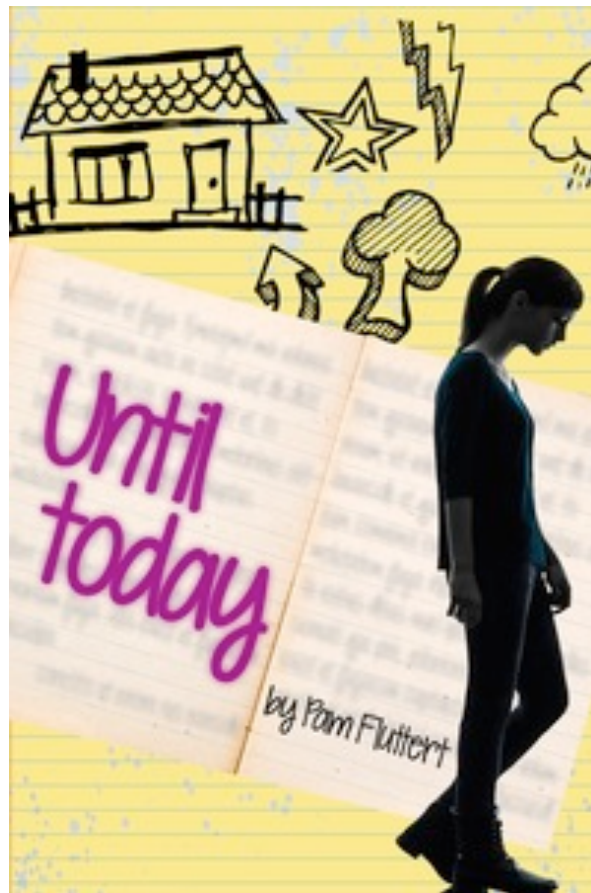


Until Today

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Teacher's Guide



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Overview

Synopsis

In many ways, Kat Stephens is like any typical teenage girl. Her life is changing as her adored older brother is leaving for university. Kat struggles with her relationships with her parents, younger sister, and sometimes even her best friends.

Kat has one thing that she feels differentiates her from everybody else. Kat has a secret that she has only confided within the pages of her journal. Greg, a good friend of her parents, has been sexually abusing her since she was a little girl.

During Kat’s journey, she develops a relationship with a child, Taylor, who has been physically abused by her father, a trusted authority figure within their small community. Kat fears for this child’s safety and believes the authorities need to do something. Why is Kat’s situation any different?

When Kat’s journal disappears, she knows that somebody else out there has learned her secret. Does she have the courage to tell before someone else does? Kat discovers her inner strength and courage as she helps Taylor. Finally realizing and accepting that she is worth fighting for, Kat is able to embark on the difficult and brave journey from being a victim to becoming a survivor.

Education is Critical

Until Today educates readers about sexual abuse from a victim’s perspective. The reader, through Kat’s point of view, will experience Kat’s feelings of hopelessness, lack of control, confusion, frustration, and fear.

Until Today describes how abusers control and manipulate their victims, without graphic details of the abuse. It’s unlikely that child sexual abuse can be stopped, but educating our youth so they understand that it does happen—and how they can help someone who has been abused—is critical toward helping these victims take their first steps to healing. Readers need to know

- How frequently it occurs
- The feelings of loneliness, isolation, confusion, and self-doubt the victims feel so that others learn how to provide the proper support and understanding
- The power abusers have over their victims, especially since they are typically in a position of trust or authority
- The methods abusers use to manipulate their victims
- The majority of victims choose a friend to confide in over a parent, doctor, or the authorities.

Pre-Reading Activities/Discussions

1. What is child sexual abuse? Does it have to involve intercourse for it to be labeled as sexual abuse?
2. Is child sexual abuse a problem today? Are we, as a society, acknowledging it as we should? Is it more of a problem today than it used to be?
3. Do you believe that there is enough information on child sexual abuse, and assistance for victims?
4. How could somebody force a child into doing something they don’t want to do, or that the child knows is wrong?
5. Do child sexual abuse victims have an obligation to report what happened to the authorities?
6. Why don’t the victims tell? Why do they protect the abuser, or are they?

These questions could also be repeated after the book is read to compare how the responses have changed after reading *Until Today*.

Discussion Questions by Chapter

Chapter One

1. Describe Kat’s relationship with her family, especially her father.
2. The author uses descriptive language to describe the clubhouse. How does this help the reader visualize the clubhouse and why do you believe so much detail was provided for this scene? What does the clubhouse represent to Kat?
3. Describe what you think Kat is feeling as she writes the journal entry at the end of the chapter.
4. Divide the class in half. Half the class will create a character web for Kat, filling out details as they read through the rest of the book. The other half will build a character web for Greg. A character web lists the character’s name in a circle in the middle, with branches to other circles listing characteristics about the character. The other circles could be labeled as follows:
 - a. what this character says: students should include quotes throughout the book that illustrate his/her personality,
 - b. what others say about this character: students should include quotes or examples throughout the book that illustrate what others say about this character, or how they feel towards them,
 - c. what this character does: students should list specific actions from the book which contribute towards building this character’s personality, likes, dislikes, etc. ,
 - d. how this character looks: students should list descriptive details about the character to assist with visualizing

Chapter Two

1. Describe what you believe Kat is conflicted about in her journal entry at the beginning of the chapter.
2. Why would Kat be upset when she learns that Sarah is not going with her parents and Jared?

3. Describe how you think Kat perceives herself and how she believes others perceive her. Some of your answer may be relevant for Kat’s character web.
4. What significance would be behind Greg referring to Kat as his “special girl”?

Chapter Three

1. How would you interpret Greg’s words “This isn’t over.”? How would those words make Kat feel?
2. Should Kat have respected Taylor’s mom’s wishes and left the room when she was asked to?
3. Is Kat being too suspicious about what may have happened to Taylor?
4. What does Kat mean at the end of the chapter about knowing how Taylor feels?
5. Research and describe what some of the symptoms of child sexual abuse are. Which, if any, of those symptoms has Kat displayed?

Chapter Four

1. Kat mentions that her father sometimes reminds her so much of Greg that it’s “eerie.” What do you think she means by this?
2. Kat becomes angry with Scott and Steph when they state that a person couldn’t hide the fact that they hurt children. Do you agree with Scott and Steph? Can a person hide this and for how long? How do people who hurt children get away with fooling people?
3. Do you feel that Kat’s suspicions about Mr. Bradford are blown out of proportion? Research, on the internet or in old newspapers, and try to find real examples of people in an authority position who have been accused of child sexual abuse. Share what you find with your class, and discuss how these stories make you feel. Do you find them hard to believe?
4. Research some of the laws that are put into place to protect children from abuse. Share what you find with your class. Are these laws thorough enough or are they too strict?

Chapter Five

1. Kat asks herself if she wants to help Taylor because she can’t help herself. Do you believe this could be Kat’s motivation?
2. Discuss the irony behind Kat’s frustration that Taylor won’t do what’s necessary to help herself.
3. Why did Kat react the way she did when Sarah was hugging Greg?
4. How much of Kat’s awkward relationship and anger with her father has to do with her situation with Greg? Do you believe that the sexual abuse is affecting Kat’s relations with other people as well?
5. Kat’s father states that Greg is right about teenage girls during his argument with Kat. Can you describe how this statement shows some of the methods Greg is using to manipulate Kat and her family?

Chapter Six

1. Can you identify any impact from the abuse Kat may be displaying in her journal entry at the beginning of the chapter?

2. Kat relies on her journal, almost as much as some of us rely on a best friend to confide in. How do you think this helps her with the abuse? Think about coping tactics you use when you are in a difficult situation. Could any of your tactics be helpful for abuse victims?
3. Kat thinks she doesn’t deserve any better when she is upset about Steph. Why would she feel like this?
4. During Kat’s flashback, what techniques do we learn Greg uses to manipulate Kat? Update your character web of Greg with some of these techniques. How can we make people more aware of how manipulative abusers are?
5. Foreshadowing is a technique an author uses to provide hints of events that may occur later in the story. Describe an example of foreshadowing in this chapter.

Chapter Seven

1. What techniques does the author use in this chapter to further develop Kat’s character and make her seem more real as a teenage girl?
2. Kat is unwilling to call home for a ride in case her dad would leave Greg alone with Sarah. Do you agree that this shows that Kat has an inner strength, given her current situation? Do you believe she is aware that she has an inner strength like this?
3. What triggered Kat’s panic at the end of the chapter? Research and define a sexual abuse trigger. What are some common triggers for victims? Are they the same for all victims?

Chapter Eight

1. Can you interpret any of Kat’s feelings and fears from the dream she describes at the beginning of the chapter?
2. If Steph would pay closer attention, would she be missing any clues or signs about what Kat is going through?
3. Is Kat overreacting about Sarah hugging Greg? Could she have handled her questions with Sarah differently?

Chapter Nine

1. Is Kat’s dad’s reaction in this chapter unreasonable? Could Kat’s recent behavior be that easily misinterpreted by her father?
2. How does Greg work this whole situation to his advantage and manipulate Kat and her parents?
3. Did Kat miss a perfect opportunity to talk to Scott when he asks what happened the other night?
4. Do you believe that someone who is sexually abusing a child would be as bold as Greg is with Kat’s parents close by?
5. Why is Kat feeling guilt at the end of the chapter?
6. Research and define disassociation. Can you find an example in this chapter? Why do you believe it would be common for child sexual abuse victims?

Chapter Ten

1. Kat misinterprets who her aunt is speaking about at first. Were you disappointed to find out it wasn’t Kat whom her aunt meant? Why or why not? Would Kat’s aunt be somebody she should confide in?
2. Kat’s Aunt Sheila states that “*Children are a gift, and it’s our job to teach them, love them, and nurture them.*” If that’s true, why do you believe abuse still happens?
3. Kat’s Aunt Sheila is very frustrated with Taylor’s situation. Why do you think this is?
4. Do people like Aunt Sheila provide hope for victims? What other characters in the book have provided hope? Write about somebody in your life who has provided hope for you, and the impact it had.
5. Aunt Sheila voices concern that Mr. Bradford is around so many other kids, causing Kat to wonder if Greg has abused others. Do you believe that kids who have been abused are obligated to report the abuse to the authorities so that they can protect others?
6. Why do you think Taylor’s mom isn’t at the hospital this time?

Chapter Eleven

1. Kat’s journal entry at the beginning of the chapter describes a story she told to Taylor. Was this a positive move toward helping Taylor? For this story to be effective, Taylor would have to trust Kat. How has she displayed her trust in Kat? Can you list some examples of things Kat has done to build that trust?
2. How is Taylor’s situation helping Kat through her own confusion and guilt?
3. Why did Kat panic about her journal sitting on the table when Amy was coming to the clubhouse?
4. Amy asks Kat if she believes her to be blind or stupid. Put yourself in Amy’s situation, and think about what she has actually seen and heard. Do you think Amy is blind or stupid for believing Greg’s story?
5. Write about a situation that you were in where somebody misinterpreted what happened. How did that make you feel and what did you do about it? What was the cause of the misinterpretation?
6. Kat ends up running away from Amy and the clubhouse. Is this lack of courage? Should she have stayed and confronted Amy? If she had confronted Amy, how do you think Amy would have reacted?

Chapter Twelve

1. The chapter begins with Kat feeling pressure to tell her secret before Amy shares the lie that Greg told. If Kat revealed her secret to her family after they heard Amy and Greg’s version, who do you think they would believe and why? Describe a situation you, or someone you know, may have been in when something revealed was interpreted as a lie or exaggeration due to the circumstances. Could it have been prevented? How?
2. Kat states that “*Sarah gets to be the little girl I never could be.*” What does she mean by this?

3. Taylor has refused to talk to the social worker and the hospital staff, so there is a chance that she could be returned to her home because nothing can be proven at this point. Is this a flaw in our legal and social services system?
4. Taylor’s family does not come to the hospital. What can we speculate about this?
5. Describe how Kat’s story about Suzie helps Taylor talk to Kat.
6. Kat is in a very difficult but critical situation with Taylor in this chapter. If Taylor was confiding her story to you, what are some things you believe would be important to say and do?

Chapter Thirteen

1. What do you think will happen with Taylor and her father?
2. What do you believe the reaction will be of the kids, parents, and teachers at Mr. Bradford’s school? Describe how you would feel if it was your principal.
3. What is the significance of Kat seeing herself as a child in the mirror, and realizing she has to fight for that child?
4. How different do you believe the child Kat sees in the mirror would be if she hadn’t been sexually abused?

Chapter Fourteen

1. Kat missed an opportunity to talk to Steph about what’s going on. If they weren’t going through difficulties because of Mike, do you think she would have or should have confided in Steph? What type of person do you believe Kat should confide in?
2. Kat is angry about Steph’s reaction to her story about Taylor. Why? Do you think Steph’s reaction is typical for a story like Taylor’s? What could we, as a society, do to change this type of reaction?
3. Kat steps out of her comfort zone to keep the peace with Steph, and it didn’t end well. Think of a situation where you did something out of your comfort zone for a friend and write about it. Did it end well? Why or why not? What did you learn from that experience?
4. In her efforts to fit in with Mike’s crowd, Steph is not acting like a good friend toward Kat. How would this make Kat feel? Do you think that Kat should forgive Steph for what happened at the dam?
5. This chapter reveals more details about Steph’s relationship with Mike. The author uses similes (a comparison using the words *like* or *as*) in this chapter to show some of Mike’s control over Steph. Can you find some examples of these similes? Do you think Mike’s control over Steph has anything to do with how she is acting toward Kat?

Chapter Fifteen

1. Kat’s mom refers to Greg as ‘*family*,’ causing a strong reaction from Kat. Why do you think Kat reacted so strongly to this word?
2. Scott points out the possibility that Taylor’s story may appear in the paper. Write a newspaper article, for Kat’s small town newspaper, about Mr. Bradford’s charges. Include what you think may happen to him with his job, his family, and his future.

3. Scott’s comment about the newspaper makes Kat uncomfortable. How should newspapers report these situations without hurting the victim, or should they be able to report on the situation at all? Do you believe that fear of the media influences people’s decision to come forward when they are abused? Is the media always fair and accurate with what they report?
4. What does Kat mean by *“I think it was the child inside me that reached out to Taylor”*?
5. We learn that Taylor’s brother, Darren, generally avoids the other kids at school and stays to himself. Thinking about Darren and what his home life must be like, write a page describing his thoughts and feelings about his father, his sister, and his mother. In this page, answer the question of why or why he Does he try to help his sister? Why or why not? Describe his feelings about the future with Taylor’s story out in the open. Is Darren a bad person if he never tried to help his sister?
6. Describe what Kat would be feeling when she discovers her journal is gone.

Chapter Sixteen

1. Scott’s words *‘trust me’* have a big impact on Kat and her decision to tell him why she is so upset about losing her journal. How important is it to trust the person you confide this type of secret in? How would a victim know who they can trust? Would it be difficult for a victim to trust anybody?
1. If your friend told you a secret like Kat told Scott, what would you say and do? Should you tell an adult or the police?
2. Scott asks Kat why she is protecting Greg. Is this why victims don’t tell? Are they protecting the abuser?
3. Kat tells Scott that he is being like Greg by trying to take control and not thinking about how she feels. Many people sexually abuse children do it because of the control they feel over their victim. Discuss why you believe they would want to feel control over a child.
4. Kat says her parents won’t believe her. Do you think they will? Why or why not?
5. Kat confesses her fears about how others would look at her if they knew, and the impact to her parents’ jobs. Write a journal entry for Kat that describes her day and feelings after a newspaper story about her situation is released to her small town.
6. Who do you think took Kat’s journal? What do you think they will do with Kat’s secret?

Chapter Seventeen

1. Kat is disappointed when Scott mentions Steph during their phone conversation and wonders what she was expecting. What do you think she was expecting?
2. Amy broke Kat’s trust by taking her journal. Did she have a right to do this, even with the seriousness of Greg and Kat’s conflicting accusations?
3. Amy admits her first instinct after reading the journal was to ignore what she had read and proceed as normal. Do you believe there are often people who know or suspect the truth about an abusive situation, but don’t acknowledge it or do anything about it? How do you think they would feel knowing something like this, but ignoring it?
4. Write a letter to Greg, from Amy’s perspective, confronting Greg about what she has learned, and describe her feelings and why she is leaving town.

5. In this chapter, Amy states that if what’s in the journal is true, then it means she has married a man who is still a stranger. How difficult would it be for Greg to maintain two separate personalities? Can you think of a situation where you acted differently around somebody? How difficult would this have been for you to maintain for a long period of time?

Chapter Eighteen

1. How does the author appeal to all of our senses in this chapter to help visualize the scene? Find examples in the chapter and discuss their effectiveness. Why would it be important that readers feel they are part of this scene?
2. Kat changes from a frightened girl to one who is willing to stand up for herself. Discuss how you believe Kat was able to make this transition. How difficult would it have been for her? Did this reveal new characteristics to add to Kat’s character web?
3. Greg displays many different ways of manipulating Kat in this chapter. Find them and list them. Compare this list to what you wrote in #4 of the pre-reading activities. What have you learned by comparing your lists? Does your list include characteristics to add to Greg’s character web?
4. Discuss the significance, to Kat, of Greg coming into the clubhouse and “*stealing her only haven.*”

Chapter Nineteen

1. Describe what Greg would be feeling at the beginning of the chapter when Kat’s dad is looking for him. Does Greg notice that Kat has realized she is more in control of the situation than he is? What would that feel like to somebody like Greg?
2. Greg almost convinces Kat’s dad to leave with him before Kat can say anything. Kat’s dad even turns his back on her to walk away with Greg while she is trying to tell him about Amy. What does this tell us about his relationship with Greg?
3. Did Scott overreact and force Kat into a situation she wasn’t ready for?
4. What is the significance of Kat’s father telling Greg that he’s wrong and that his family is not Greg’s family?
5. Were you surprised by Kat’s father’s reaction when he hears the truth from Kat?
6. Before reading the next chapter, write a few pages describing the next scene following Kat’s statement “*If you think I’d lie about something like this, you don’t know me, and I’m not your daughter.*”
7. How difficult do you think it would be for Kat to reveal the truth in this type of situation?

Chapter Twenty

1. Should Kat’s father have handled his reaction differently and avoided a fight with Greg, or did he not have much of a choice?
2. Write a one-page journal entry, from Sarah’s point of view, about what she has seen and heard.
3. What do you think would have happened if Kat’s mom hadn’t called the police? Did she make the right decision?

4. At one point in the chapter, Kat’s mom looks at her and says, “*I just don’t seem to know much of anything these days.*” Describe what she means by this. How do you think she is feeling about everything she has just heard and seen?
5. What does Kat’s mom mean when she tells Kat not to be sorry, because they’re the ones who are sorry?
6. Write Kat’s next journal entry, from her perspective, about how she felt when the handcuffs were placed on Greg.

Chapter Twenty-One

1. Kat remembers her father saying everything would be okay and wonders if it was the lawyer in him, or the father in him making that statement. What does she mean by this? What would be the difference?
2. Kat reached a pivotal moment in this chapter when she realized she wasn’t afraid of Greg when he stared at her with hatred. Why is this pivotal and why is it significant that Kat realized she had the upper hand over Greg?
3. Write Kat’s next journal entry after she realized she had the upper hand over Greg for the first time ever.

Chapter Twenty-Two

1. Should Kat’s mom have told the police officer the reason for the fight?
2. Many victims of child sexual abuse feel weak, frightened, and unworthy of love and affection. Do you agree with this view? Are they weak because they don’t tell and let the abuse continue?
3. Kat is uncertain of her mom’s message when her father comes into the lobby and her mother squeezes her hand. Do you think Kat’s mom wanted her to tell her story to the authorities? Why or why not?
4. Kat speculates that Greg killed the little girl she used to be. What does she mean by this?
5. Would it be more difficult for Kat to talk to the authorities right away, or would it be better to go home, rest for a night, and think about it a little more?

Chapter Twenty-Three

1. Detective Donaldson does many different things throughout the chapter that make it easier for Kat to talk about Greg. Can you list some examples and describe how that action would make Kat more comfortable with continuing her story?
2. This wouldn’t be the first time that the detective has heard a story about child sexual abuse. How do you think she feels and copes with hearing these stories? Would stories like this make it more difficult to do her job?
3. The word “survivor” has a positive effect on Kat. Describe what this would mean to Kat and why such a simple word could be so important.
4. What does the detective mean when she says that Kat may sometimes feel as if she has exchanged one burden for another?
5. The detective mentions support groups and counseling services to Kat. Make a list of where some of these services are available within your community for child sexual abuse survivors.

6. Kat is worried when she hears about what will happen once criminal charges are laid against Greg and the impact this will have on her. Is this what stops a lot of victims from coming forward?

Chapter Twenty-Four

1. The detective told Kat that Greg may not be a serial killer but he is a dangerous criminal all the same. Do you agree with this statement? Have you ever thought of people who abuse children as dangerous criminals?
2. Kat’s dad says a few things in the chapter that make Kat defensive. List some of the things you shouldn’t say to somebody who just told you they have been sexually abused. Can you list some things that you could say?
3. Kat’s parents have surprised her by being supportive. Unfortunately, this is not always the case, especially if one of the abusers is a parent. Discuss where a child in that type of situation could go to be safe, or who they could talk to. How difficult would it be for a child to stop the abuse and begin to heal without the support of parent(s)?
4. Kat felt better after finally revealing her secret. In fact, it made her even stronger and helped her talk openly with her father. Think of a situation where you confided to a friend or family member and how talking about the issue may have helped. Does it always help, or are there situations where it might not?
5. Kat says she isn’t angry at her father for failing to protect her from Greg. Should she be angry at her parents for not protecting her?

Chapter Twenty-Five

1. Write a page describing Kat’s parents’ conversation with Sarah the next day. How will they explain everything to Sarah?
2. Kat panics when she realizes how easily word can spread about the sexual abuse. Is there anything that Kat’s family, Scott, or Steph could do to make this easier for Kat?
3. Why does Kat become upset that her secret is gone?
4. How different would this chapter be if Kat’s parents did not believe and support her? Do you believe that Kat still would have told the authorities if her dad or mom called her a liar in the backyard when she first told them what had happened?

Chapter Twenty-Six

1. Do you believe that Kat ever would have shared her secret if Scott hadn’t instigated the confrontation with Greg? Write about a time when you or somebody close to you had a secret that was hard to share. What helped you or somebody close to you talk about it?
2. Scott and Kat talk about how much power lies within the hands of the abused child, even though the abuser believes he/she is in control the whole time. Is this true? Why or why not? If so, do you think this realization would help more kids who are being abused to come forward and stop the abuse sooner?
3. Scott tells Kat that he wants to help her but he doesn’t know how. Discuss some things that you believe Scott could do to help Kat.

4. Kat has a difficult journey ahead of her. Do you believe that her day with Scott will ever come? Discuss the impact the sexual abuse may have on the relationship she tries to build with Scott.
5. Discuss what you believe Kat will face if this goes to court and how other people will react if they find out what happened to her.

Follow-Up Activities

1. Make a poster of some of the places victims of sexual abuse can go for help in your community. Perhaps your class can make a poster together that can be hung somewhere to help a person who has been abused.
2. How would the sexual abuse affect Kat and other victims like her, before and after sharing their secret?
3. Has Kat suffered mental abuse as well? Is mental abuse really a form of abuse? What are the impacts of mental abuse?
4. As a class, analyze the character webs of Kat and Greg.
 - a. How many of Kat’s characteristics could be related to the sexual abuse? How many of these characteristics could show on character webs for other sexual abuse victims? How will Kat’s character web change as she begins her journey of healing and becoming a survivor?
 - b. How many of Greg’s characteristics are used to control Kat? How many of these characteristics could show on character webs for other sexual abusers, or people who physically/mentally abuse victims?
5. What does it mean to forgive somebody who has sexually abused you? Is it even possible? If so, should Kat forgive Greg? Why or why not?
6. Write a one- or two-page summary about what you learned by reading this book. Describe how you feel this book may help victims of sexual abuse, or how it may help others assist people who have been abused.

Resources

When looking for child sexual abuse resources, the best place to start would be within your local community. Information and assistance for sexual abuse victims, or for those trying to help a victim, can be found through your community’s police force, local hospitals, health units, shelters, doctors, or social services (Child Welfare in the U.S. or Children’s Aid in Canada). These resources can be found on the web, or through the yellow page listings of your phone book.

The author’s [web site](#) contains information on child sexual abuse, including

- general information,
- statistics, and
- a list of resources that will be updated periodically.

Some resources for immediate assistance to victims include:

1. Helplines (anonymous, free and confidential)
 - 1-800-4-A-CHILD ([American Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline](#))
 - 1-800-668-6868 ([Canadian Kids Helpline](#))
2. Regional/community police force and hospitals
3. American
 - [Child Welfare](#): connects professionals to protect children and strengthen families
 - [Child Help USA](#): non-profit organization dedicated to helping child abuse victims, focusing on prevention, intervention, and treatment
 - [Prevent Child Abuse America](#): focus is on research, education, and developing a framework/strategy for preventing child abuse
 - [American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children](#): national organization providing professionals and services for children and families affected by abuse
4. Canadian
 - [Child Welfare League of Canada](#): voice for vulnerable children in Canada. This site contains a number of helpful links.
 - [Canadian Society for the Investigation of Child Abuse](#): taking action against child abuse in Canada
 - [Children’s Aid Foundation](#): helps Canada’s most neglected and vulnerable kids to have the skills they need to succeed
 - [Kid’s Court Preparation](#): an interactive web site for youths preparing for court
 - [National Center for Victims of Crime](#): non-profit organization working for victims’ rights. This organization will work with victims of crime.
 - Within Canada, every province has some type of department or ministry responsible for child welfare, supporting many provincial organizations and societies. For example, within Ontario, there is the [Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies](#) which link to regional organizations such as Family and Children’s Services.