



## What is a statute of limitations?

A statute of limitations is like a legal stopwatch that counts down the time to file criminal charges or a civil lawsuit. It is important to know when the clock starts ticking, when the clock stops ticking and whether anything restarts the clock.

### CRIMINAL

A criminal case is where the perpetrator is held accountable to the state for breaking the law and can be sent to jail.

VS.

### CIVIL

A civil case is where the perpetrator or another legally responsible entity is held accountable to the victim and must pay the victim money and do other things to make up for it.

Criminal and civil cases have different statutes of limitations for sexual abuse of a child.

#### CRIMINAL STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS

In New Jersey, the criminal statute of limitations was eliminated for most sexual offenses or assaults in 1996. For survivors whose abuse occurred five years or less prior to 1996, they too may be able to bring criminal charges.

Whenever there is any question about the applicable statute of limitations, contact a New Jersey lawyer experienced in these cases to analyze the facts of your case and determine which statute of limitations applies.

**1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys**  
will be a victim of sexual abuse  
before they turn 18.

University of New Hampshire Crimes Against Children Research Center

#### CIVIL STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS

##### BEFORE Statute of Limitations Reform

**Survivors Sexually Abused When Under the Age of 18**  
For those who are victims of child sexual abuse, lawsuits had to be filed before age 20 or two years from discovery of damages\*, whichever was later.

**Survivors Sexually Assaulted When Age 18 or Older**  
For adult survivors of sexual assault, lawsuits had to be filed within just two years of victimization.

##### AFTER Statute of Limitations Reform

**Survivors Sexually Abused When Under the Age of 18**  
Survivors of child sexual abuse can now file a lawsuit against individual perpetrators and negligent institutions, both public and private, prior to their 55th birthday or seven years from the discovery of damages\*, whichever is later.

**Survivors Sexually Assaulted When Age 18 or Older**  
Adult survivors of sexual assault now have seven years from the offense or seven years from discovery\*, whichever is later, to file a lawsuit.

##### All Survivors – Regardless of Their Age When the Harm Occurred

Between December 1, 2019 and November 30, 2021, survivors of any age who were abused as minors or adults can file a lawsuit against the person(s) who harmed them and negligent institutions, both public and private, who covered up and enabled the assault – no matter how long ago the harm occurred.



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\*A legal term defining when someone identified the fact they were previously harmed