

## How can I help my child heal from Sexual abuse?

There are many things parents and caretakers can do to help children heal from sexual abuse. The sooner the child is rescued the greater chance they have for full recovery. However, it is never too late to begin supporting your child and helping them to heal.



If your child has been a victim of sexual abuse you are probably experiencing many intense emotions and this is a very difficult and sad time for you. It is important to be careful and not direct any of your anger or hostility at your child. Never say, "Why did you allow him (or her) to touch you?" Or, "You should have known better." "Why didn't you come to me earlier?" "Are you sure you are telling me the truth?"

Children do not make up stories about sexual abuse.

### What you can say is;

"Honey, I am so glad you told me. I did not realize the sexual abuse was going on. The abuse was not your fault and I am going to protect you from him (or her) so it will never happen again. I love you so much."

These comforting words will help to remove the victim's fear and any shame they may feel. **Sexual abuse is always the fault of the abuser.** Even if a child is educated about sexual abuse they cannot protect themselves when overpowered, tricked or manipulated.

**Always protect your child over the abuser even if it is a family member or a loved one. Confront the abuser and/or those who did not protect your child and report all criminal sexual offenses to the authorities.** All sexual abuse is wrong and should never be overlooked.

Children live in the present and want each day to be happy and free from harm. However, a **victim's life is very complicated and filled with fear, stress and confusion. Child victims can feel responsible which makes it difficult for them to talk about the abuse.** Fear is another reason they may not tell for if they were threatened they may fear for their life, or the life of another or even a pet. Once they feel safe and realize they are not in trouble they will talk more freely. A trusted counselor may be needed to help your child work through their fears and confusion. However, a safe, loving and knowledgeable parent is most effective.

Explaining sexual abuse to the victim in **a manor they can understand** is crucial so the child will stop blaming themselves. Your explanations will help to remove any shame or responsibility they may be feeling. Encourage your child to talk to you about their concerns and fears.

### To help them talk ask questions such as,

Are you afraid? Can you tell me what you are afraid of? Did you have a nightmare last night? Can you tell me about it?

What do you fear the most?

Can you tell me what you are worried about?

When do you think about the abuse the most?

Do you know you're a fantastic kid?



Often abusers extend kindness and gifts to get the child to participate in sex. Once the abuse is discovered and stopped some victims may become upset for they enjoyed the attention and gifts. Many abusers tell their victim they love them and what they did together was very special and an act of love. It is no wonder children are confused about what love is and question why the sexual abuse needed to be stopped.

Most victims want the abuse to stop and life to go on like it was before the abuse began. However, they often become angry by what happens after the discovery is made. **They do not understand the seriousness or legal ramifications of sexual abuse.** Victims will feel bad their abuser (especially if it is a

loved one) has to be separated from them, or may need to go to jail (if that happens). Because of the lies they were told and ignorance about sexual abuse, young victims often take the blame for the sexual abuse and **for the consequences their abuser** must face. Child victims often **believe everything is their fault, and wish they had never told**. A child can become extremely depressed at this time. It is important to remind them that **they did right by telling. They were supposed to tell**. People who abuse children must be stopped and pay the consequences. Children also need to be told who is safe to tell their story to and who is not, for their friends may not understand and can say hurtful word. They should ask you first if it is OK if they tell a friend or another adult. **Whenever it is safe, allow them to tell their story for it is healing for them and may stop another child from becoming a victim.**

Remind the victim that even though **they may feel bad, they aren't bad**. Reinforce that your love for them has not changed. Even a rescued child will most likely experience fear, loneliness, betrayal and bewilderment. Your loving words and actions will help them to heal and feel good about themselves again. **Hearing assuring words from a safe loved one is very comforting to a child and helps to ease their stress and sense of badness.**



Again, never degrade or act mad at your child. **Children can confuse your anger at the abuser with being angry at them.** Be sure your child is clear on who you are angry at. Tell your child that you are proud of them for telling you about the abuse and that you will protect them from their abuser. Reinforce that they aren't bad or dirty. It was those who took advantage of them who acted very badly.

**Finding out your child was sexually abused is heart wrenching** and it is normal for the parent to be outraged and angry and go through many difficult emotions. The disclosure of sexual abuse brings about a chain of events that is very difficult and painful. Be sure you get the support and information you need so both you and your child can find healing and able to move on from this nightmare experience.

## **ALWAYS**

- Believe your child.
- Keep them safe from their abuser or those who did not protect them.
- Tell them you aren't mad at them and do not blame them.
- Tell them they aren't bad because it happened **and reinforce your love for them.**
- Confront those who abused your child and report all criminal sexual abuse to the proper authorities.
- Never put the blame on the child. He or she was a victim and powerless to prevent it.
- Reinforce the child did right by telling you and that you are proud of them for telling.
- Provide proper medical and/or psychological care as needed.
- Never allow the child to be **alone** with their abuser. Be vigilant to protect them from possible harassment, threats or further abuse.
- Ask questions to help your child talk about the abuse. Keep communications open. As time passes they will have more questions and concerns to work through.
- Never insinuate or say they are wrecked or damaged for life. Rather, tell them they are awesome, and full of potential and greatness.
- Early intervention is vital for their recovery. When abused children are rescued early on, and feel loved and safe, **they can go on to live a healthy and happy life.** It is wise to be educated on the possible repercussions from sexual abuse. Some repercussions may show up immediately or years later.



## **And what are some repercussions from sexual abuse?**

Insomnia, anxiety, fears, depression, shame, low self worth, excessive masturbation or promiscuous behavior, anger, phobias, withdrawal, nightmares, don't care attitude, low school performance, isolation, tiredness, wetting the bed or having accidents, feeling cold, self destructive behaviors, injury to animals.

**It is important that your child sees your genuine concern**, and watch you take the necessary steps to resolve the abuse issue. This helps to eliminate their shame. It also reinforces your love and their worth, and that you can be trusted. You are becoming a great example of what should happen under these circumstances.



**Sexual abuse can greatly affect one's self worth. Therefore, abused children often need assurance that the sexual abuse was *not their fault*, nor made them any less loveable or important.** They need to be told they are still beautiful, handsome, and wonderful! They have no reason to be ashamed. It may have made them feel bad but they aren't bad!

**For many victims, incest or sexual abuse also becomes a heart issue** for they loved their abuser, and were told their abuser loved them. What they experienced was a very cruel **lesson about what love is not**. This betrayal can cause considerable damage to the victim's spirit and **leave big trust issues**. Understanding what genuine, healthy love is and that it never involves using or sexually abusing another (especially a child) can help untangle their confused heart. They need to understand that the feelings they had for their abuser were innocent and not bad. It was their abuser who was horribly bad for misusing their love and innocence.

#### **A child may feel very angry and act out for the following reasons.**

For the abuse happening  
For not being protected  
For the changes in the home  
For feeling different  
Because no one believed them  
Because they feel no one understands  
Because they feel shame or guilt  
Because they are very sad  
Because they do not know how to handle the stress  
Because of all the questions and inquirers  
Because life is different



Victims have reasons to be angry. They were wronged and are experiencing pain. You need to acknowledge their pain and give them understanding. **Children need to know it is OK to be angry at wrongs but they need to express their anger in a non harmful way.** Physical activities are great stress relievers. Get out and play with the victim or involve them with others in a physical activity every day. **The more active they are the better.** You could also help them write a letter to their abuser and tell them how they feel, or draw a picture that describes how they are feeling. Clay and other forms of art work can help to relieve stress. Using soft music at night accompanied with warm milk can help them sleep. Have a warm milk tea party before they go to bed and end with a night time prayer. Your interactions also provide opportunities for them to talk to you in private. Remind them daily that you love them and will keep them safe, and ask them often what their concerns are.

**Children want each day to be fun and free from the ugliness of sexual abuse.** Parents need to make their days filled with activities and positive talk **that will balance out their grief.** Do not let them stay isolated. Interaction is very important. You can also read books or play games together. Get them involved with community or church service projects. **Do things that bring laughter and fun.**



Children who experience sexual abuse experience a broken heart. They suffer greatly and **do not know how to make themselves feel better**, nor do they have the capacity to understand all that pertains to sexual abuse. **The best remedy for a broken heart is love. In the end it is love that heals and allows them to grow up into a healthy adult.**

A child's recovery includes telling their story, being kept safe, allowed time to grieve, daily

physical activity time, being a helper, and given information and tools so they can avoid the many pitfalls sexual abuse often creates. Just as it is for adults, **recovery and healing is a process that takes time.** However, children are resilient and if a child is rescued early on and given the love and assistance needed they can recover with little affects from their abuse.

**Tough love is also sometimes needed.** An abused child may use the abuse to get attention, or be a reason to act out and have people feel sorry for them. **A child victim (all children) needs to have boundaries set so they will know what is acceptable and inappropriate.** They need to know that being a victim is never a reason to hurt or take advantage of another. **Young victims will often have displaced anger and will lash out on those closest to them. They do not know how else to act.** They need to learn lashing out is unacceptable and experience consequences if they do. Victims need help in finding ways to relieve their anger. Again, along with talking about how they feel, physical activities are necessary and will help to release their anger and stress.

It is not uncommon for sexually abused children to innocently abuse other children for most do not know it is wrong. They pass on what they have learned. Yet, never assume that will become the case **for most do not become abusers and young victims should not be stereotyped as such.** However, it is still very important to remind the victim **they should never sexually abuse anyone for it is very wrong and they could get into serious trouble-even possibly taken out of the home.**



Children need to know there is a time and place for sexual activities, and it is OK for two adults who are committed and love each other to be involved sexually. In that loving, consensual environment, sexual touches of all kinds are acceptable and not shameful. **They need to understand that sexual activities are for adults, not children.** This may be a good time to tell your child about human reproduction. As children ask questions about sex and reproduction always be truthful and keep it simple. Tell only what they can understand. Too much

information can be scary and confusion. **More details can be given as they mature.**

## REVIEW:

- Talk to your children about sexual abuse.
- Be aware that sexual abuse can happen anywhere by anyone.
- Ask questions about their activities while you are gone.
- Make sure your child is supervised by a trustworthy person at all times.
- Do not assume enclosed areas such as tents, playhouses, basements or garages as safe places for unsupervised children to play in.
- Get to know the peers and authority figures in your child's life. Check them out.
- Keep communication open with your child. Talk about everything with your child not just sexual abuse. Make sure they know they are loved and important. **Tell your child you love them often.**
- Review what sexual abuse is and how it can happen with your child at least once a year.
- Explain the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touch.
- Dress your child appropriately so they will be less vulnerable for abuse. Tell them to always wear underwear. Bathe and dress your child before the babysitter arrives.
- Empower your child with words they can say to protect themselves and a plan of action if they are approached.
- Never assume your child will be safe without first investigating the situation.
- Teach your child to respect and protect their body and to respect the privacy of others.
- Check the sexual abuse offenders register in your neighborhood. Go to sex offender register <http://www.prevent-abuse-now.com/register>.
- Do not avoid talking about sexual abuse with others. People need to know you and your child have discussed it.
- Understand that children cannot protect themselves against sexual abuse. That is the parents or caregivers job.



Sexual abuse causes serious trauma and it's a crime that needs to be stopped. **The best way to stop it is to not allow our children to be in vulnerable situations and to educate them so they will know it is wrong.** It is our silence and ignorance that allows sexual abuse to continue. **Sex offenders won't stop until we stop them.**

**Written by Shirley Petersen, retired public health nurse,  
Founder and Director Healing Private Wounds.**

## A special note to parents:

Healing Private wounds offers support for parents. We offer one on one, group or on line support. If you want help email us at [office@healingprivatewounds.org](mailto:office@healingprivatewounds.org) or call 231-775-6804.

If you were a victim of sexual abuse and never received the help you needed, it is not too late for you. You matter and deserve a life free from shame and grief. The abuse was not your fault. **Healing Private Wounds was created by survivors** of sexual abuse to help other victims recover. Together we can find healing and peace. Feel free to contact us. We offer resources, workshops, counseling services, mentors, and sexual abuse **recovery groups for men, women, and teens. All classes are confidential and free. It is never too late to find healing and peace. Life can be much better!** Call to register at 231-667-0388 or 231-775-6804.

Can't come to a recovery group? Need to talk to someone?  
Email [office@healingprivatewounds.org](mailto:office@healingprivatewounds.org)

**If you would like to join our team in preventing sexual abuse  
please contact us. Together we can make a safer world  
for our children.**

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A tool to post on your  
refrigerator or bulletin board

*This is a safe house!*



*The children in this house have been  
taught about right and wrong*

*and know about inappropriate  
sexual activities.*

*We love our children and ask them about  
all the activities that go on  
while we are away.*

*Have fun, and play safe!*



*Love your children enough  
to tell  
them about*

**Sexual Abuse**

[Healingprivatewounds.org](http://Healingprivatewounds.org)

We would appreciate your feedback.  
If this has been helpful please let us know. You can email, write or call  
office@[healingprivatewounds.org](http://healingprivatewounds.org)

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Thank-you