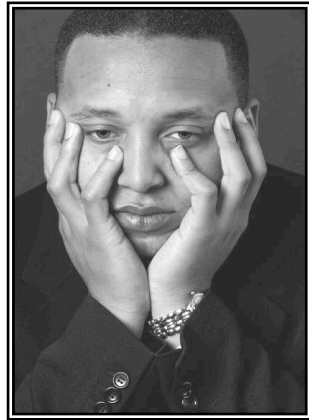


Cliff Notes for Clergy



*What every Pastor needs to know about
Sexual Abuse and Recovery*



www.healingprivatewounds.org

Cliff Notes for Clergy

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“Praise be to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” II Corinthians 1:3-4

Could this be you?



Since 2006 ***Healing Private Wounds*** has offered sexual abuse recovery groups for victims of sexual abuse and in **every group** we hear a familiar story of how a group member felt reinjured by their clergy when they shared their story with them. It took great courage to admit to their sexual abuse and seek guidance, however when they did, **many felt wounded and shamed once again by their pastor's responses**. Victims have reported leaving their pastor's office feeling embarrassed, not believed, and not given any hope or direction. Why does this happen?

We believe it is because many clergy are naïve and ill-equipped when it comes to understanding victims and dealing with the severity and complexity of sexual abuse. **Many clergy have shared with us that they are uncomfortable** and feel inept when it comes to helping victims of sexual abuse. We believe **clergy have a genuine caring heart for the hurting** and our hope is that the following information will help them to be more effective in ministering to victims of sexual abuse.

Healing Private Wounds understands that pastors are very busy people, and it is our desire to ease their burden and be a helpful arm to them. HPW was begun by survivors of sexual abuse. We know firsthand about pain and recovery and have put our personal experiences, along with other survivors who've attended our recovery groups, in this booklet to help you understand more about sexual abuse.

Undeniably, sexual abuse is a repulsive crime and no one likes to hear personal stories about it. Yet, it is **vital that victims have a safe person with whom they can share their burdens and tell their story. Their healing depends on it.** And because clergy are often a direct reflection of God, they have the important responsibility to listen and react as God would react. **More than advice or a sermon, a victim needs a listening ear and compassion.** Both are life-giving expressions of God's love.

Clergy also have a tremendous opportunity to free victims of the shame and fears they carry. Most victims live with self condemnation and have little dignity or self-worth left. **They are fragile in body and spirit and desperately need the love and assistance the Church can offer.**

The current outbreaks of sexual abuse stories provide the perfect opportunity for clergy to speak out and preach about the sin of sexual abuse. **Sexual abuse is not a political issue. It is a sin and crime issue and not one to avoid.** As pastors begin to talk about sexual abuse, victims will feel free to come forth and seek help. **Church members are also eager for clergy to shed light on sexual abuse so they will know how to better respond to victims.** If pastors do not address sexual abuse and reach out to victims what hope do victims have in finding help and comfort in our churches? **We believe the Church should be the first place hurting souls can go to for understanding, compassion and hope.**

The two main issues most victims struggle with are;

- 1) The relentless pain (emotional and possibly physical pain) caused by the sexual abuse. This includes the pain from keeping a hurtful secret, not believed, not rescued, not supported and possibly the pain from repeating what was done to them.
- 2) The destructive consequences from the sexual abuse. Sexual abuse creates low self-worth and causes the victim to make poor choices and behave in ways they never would have if it wasn't for the abuse. The consequences also include codependency,

unable to trust or bond, intimacy and sexual identity issues, and destructive coping mechanisms and more.

This booklet will elaborate more on these two main issues and others so you will have a better understanding of the difficulties and heart aches victims face. Sexual abuse is not an easy fix but there is hope and healing. God created us to overcome the world not to be overcome by it. Victims desperately need to hear this news for most feel they are stuck, ruined and life will never get any better.

Define sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is a term that includes many different offenses. It is not limited to penetration like many believe. **To better understand sexual abuse we need to accurately define it.**



Sexual abuse is any sexual behavior that is coerced or forced upon an individual for the sexual gratification of the abuser, or directed to entice or sexually stimulate the victim. It is the wrongful and hurtful invasion of another's mind or body by using sexual words or acts. Sexual abuse is a destructive crime of power and selfishness.

Sexual abuse can come in the form of inappropriate touching, incest, molestation, rape, oral sex, sodomy, exposure to pornography or sexual body parts, and degrading sexual words or acts. It is a very damaging form of bullying that can cause extreme shame, humiliation and crippling fear. **Research indicates that the emotional abuse from hurtful or degrading sexual words and innuendos can cause as much pain and damage as the physical sexual abuse.**

Sexual abuse can happen to anyone at any age. It also happens in marriages and in adult relationships. The most common age for sexual abuse to occur is six years old. One in four females and one in seven males will become a victim of some form of sexual abuse before the age of eighteen. One in five children will be exposed to sexual material or solicited for sex on the internet. Every three minutes there is a rape reported in the United States and government officials believe that **far more sexual assaults go unreported**. The average age a victim tells their story is 40-45 years old. **Most victims never tell because of the tremendous shame, shame which was not for them to carry.**

Abusers are wide spread throughout our cultures regardless of their race, sex or economic level. They can be a parent, grandparent, stepparent, brother, sister, stepsibling, step relative, relative, a peer, friend of a parent, authority figure, caregiver, teen, neighbor, religious leader, coach, group leader, or a stranger. **95% of sexual abuse crimes are committed by a relative or extended peer family member. Two percent** are by strangers. As a victim revisits their past they often find they have had more than one abuser.

As you begin to care for victims of sexual abuse **be careful not to minimize their pain or compare sexual abuse stories. Each victim's story and situation is unique** for each has their own set of characters and heartaches. Because every personality handles stress differently, we need to treat each victim with an equal amount of compassion for **pain is pain regardless of the severity of their sexual abuse.**

Unresolved sexual abuse issues will cause more issues. Time does not soften the blow of sexual abuse. **For most victims, the sexual abuse became a family secret, or a secret between the victim and the abuser.** The gnawing unrest from keeping dark secrets takes its

tow on the body. **Author Maya Angelo states “There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”**



Victims become as sick as their secrets. Our bodies are not designed to keep dark hurtful secret. **The stress from keeping dark secrets, not being believed or rescued can stunt emotional growth and development.**

Research indicates that the brain of an abused or traumatized child does not develop like the brain of a child raised in a healthy environment.

Research also indicates that a rescued victim can significantly recover for the mind can be renewed and heal with assistance.

(www.wmichigan.edu/hhs/unifiedclinics/ctac). **This is not surprising for we**

know God created us to overcome adversities, not to be overcome by them.

Sexual intimacy and sexual identity issues

Sexual intimacy and sexual identity issues are universal areas of confusion for victims.

If a girl was abused by a woman or boy abused by a man the victim may think they are homosexual for they learned to be familiar with the same sex, plus, for some, the same sex experience gave them pleasure. One victim stated because she knew how to please a woman she began a lesbian relationship, for with men, she felt strange and inapt. If a victim was abused and badly hurt by the opposite sex they may turn to their same sex for love and companionship for they no longer trust the opposite sex.

Sexual abuse often steals the ability to share in sexual intimacy. Most of the victims we've worked with said they found sexual intimacy difficult and often repulsive. A victim may feel strange or afraid with the opposite sex depending on who their abuser was. Feeling dirty, ashamed, along with the sights, smells and flashbacks can easily destroy times of sexual intimacy. **Sexual identity and intimacy issues are complex issues.** We have only touched on a few of the challenges victims face. A victim needs hope that they can find their true identity and sexual healing for it is possible. For more information on sexual healing, encourage the victim to read “How Can I help My Spouse Heal?” This will benefit both the victim and spouse. The booklet can be found on Healing Private Wounds website, or they may request it at office@healingprivatewounds.org.

The healing process takes the victim through five important steps

1. **Admitting the sexual abuse happened** and telling their story to a safe person or group. Victims **need to be truthful** and not hide parts of their story. The more transparent they are the better it is for them.
2. Identifying how the sexual abuse (and/or lack of protection) has impacted their life
3. Taking time to grieve over their losses and pain
4. Gaining knowledge, and living by what is true
5. Making positive changes so their life will be better



Each of the five steps involves thought, courage, time, and work.

What are the wounds from sexual abuse?

Most victims believe their main issues from the abuse are sexual related, but **they are just the tip of the iceberg.** The following are common conditions victims suffer with.

- Low energy, weariness
- feeling alone, isolated, different, wrecked
- fears, anxieties, night terrors, insomnia
- not being believed or supported-no family support
- feeling unworthy, unlovable, dirty, stupid
- a broken heart-depression-no interest in life
- relational difficulties, unable to bond or connect with others
- cycle of painful memories, poor choices and regrets
- general loss of trust, including trust in God
- fear from threats, abandonment, and the unknown
- deep wounds of shame for what they were made to do
- guilt for believing somehow the abuse was their fault-or for eventually becoming an abuser
- self loathing- self destructive behaviors
- lack of identity
 - codependent
 - has no voice
 - knows no boundaries
- lack of knowledge, naive, not knowing they have choices
- believe all their abuse is somehow their fault
- cold, numb, no feelings or emotions, or overly emotional
- overly sexual, promiscuous, frigid, sexual identity issues
- physical pain and multiple health issues resulting from the abuse
- very needy and clingy
- startle very easily
- unable to be truthful or authentic



With issues such as these it is no wonder victims will look to find relief and escape from their painful memories and troubled life. **They aren't weak people nor should they be thought of as damaged for life. There are underlining reasons why victims act like they do.** Victims are wounded and hurting souls **in need of love and light** so they can find their way out of the darkness and shame they live in.

Victims were forced to do many things they regret, and many were told it was their fault and they were bad. Because of the secrecy, they believed what they were told and many end up blaming and loathing themselves. **A victim often bears all the responsibility for their abuse, their failures and shortcomings.** Many believe they are "no good" or a "loser" and struggle with a sense of **pervasive badness**. It is very liberating for them to finally learn that they aren't bad people. There are reasons for their depression, behaviors and difficulties. **Victims are wounded people who are surviving the only way they know how.**



The emotional pain from the betrayals, not being protected or believed, goes straight to the heart. **What victims experience is a broken heart and their heart will continue to ache until they experience the love, support and knowledge they need to recover and find joy in living.** Compassion and truth are important factors that will allow a victim to begin to trust and heal. **God's great commandment "to love" pays great dividends** and allows the victim to trust so they can open up. Victims need to know they are loved as they are in their present condition. They do not have to cover up, pretend or lie anymore. **They need to know we love them with no strings attached.**

To help the wounded, the church has the awesome opportunity to embrace the victims as Christ would and love them well - without criticism, condemnation or judgment.

How long does it take to heal from sexual abuse?

The time line for healing is different for each victim and is influenced by many factors. The biggest factor is the victim. Do they really want to do the work and heal? Or, do they enjoy playing the martyr role? **Pride and embarrassment often stop the victim from telling their story and beginning the healing process.**



Healing is a continuing process because victims are dealing with many emotional and possibly physical health issues. One victim related to healing as untangling a wad of sticky spaghetti for so many aspects of healing are intertwined and related to another. It takes time for victims to learn to trust, get out of abusive relationships, accept what is true, and implement change especially if the victim has no support system, **and many do not.**

Most victims claim it takes two to five years to work through the most pressing sexual abuse issues and up to a lifetime for victims who suffer with family issues, and physical and mental health issues resulting from their abuse. Another common measuring stick some counselors use is one month for every month they were abused. As victims continue to pursue healing they will gain more insight, self worth and confidence which **moves them further and further away from their abuse. The healing process is transforming** for it allows the victim to grow into the person God created them to be - **free from the burdens of the past, yet, wiser and better because of them.** With your assistance, a victim can experience the unconditional love of God. God can become real to them as they see and feel his love in tangible life changing ways thru you.

A victim's recovery time is influenced by the following factors:

- The degree or severity of the sexual abuse
- The age the abuse began
- The duration of the abuse
- The truthfulness of the victim
- The number of perpetrators
- The age the victim was rescued and recovery began
- The amount of support
- The well-being or competency of the victim's family and support system
- The readiness of the victim to receive help
- The state of physical and mental health of the victim
- Other forms of abuse the victim has experienced
- The victims readiness to heal

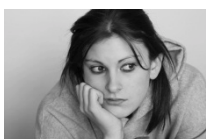
Understanding the effects of shame and fear



Because of the enormous shame and fear factors, most victims try to heal by themselves yet, **victims cannot heal by themselves. The only way out of their pain is to plow through it. Thus, treatment requires support and the help of competent healers** preferably those who have experienced sexual abuse, and our **loving Heavenly Father.** Victims need "God with skin on" to help them heal and

experience the love of God in a personal way. **Healing Private Wounds'** recovery group leaders are well trained, committed Christians and sexual abuse survivors who have experienced freedom and recovery. Our goal is to "love" first and foremost every victim that seeks us out.

Victims also experience humiliation and extreme embarrassment for what their abuser did. This is especially true if it was a parent or close family member. If the story gets in the press it will naturally bring additional embarrassment. Many victims will move, or change their last name hoping to lose all association with the abuser. The tremendous emotional pain can cause the victim to isolate themselves further, split or become suicidal. **Even well intended comments from family members and friends can be very difficult to take.** What victims wish is for the whole mess to go away.



Depression is also a very normal and common response from sexual abuse. There are valid reasons why victims are depressed and sad. **Victims need to be reminded that they did not cause this mess and life will get better. The sexual abuse was not their fault.** They need to hold their head high and grab the support they need and **thank God that healing is possible.**

This is not the end of their story. For those who seek healing **the best is yet to come.** When victims experience lingering depression medications may be needed for a time. Stress can inhibit the body from producing natural "upper endorphins" and medications can assist in restoring that balance.

A double tragedy

Many victims have told someone about the abuse but were never believed. If a victim is not believed it is unlikely they will ever tell anyone else again. It is believed that most victims never tell their story and die with their secret. Children do not lie about sexual abuse. Yet, 40% of parents won't believe the child. Many parents do not address the sexual abuse or want to believe it is true because they do not want to face the embarrassment of not protecting their child. **Victims who are not believed experience a double tragedy.**

Some victims appear like they are doing OK. Many become masters at putting on a big smile and good front but in reality they are merely hanging on by a thread and doing the best they know how. **A dark cloud of unworthiness and shame are always present. Most victims are not aware their feelings and difficulties are a direct result from their sexual abuse and/or lack of love or protection.** They do not understand how something that happened a long time ago can affect them now so drastically.

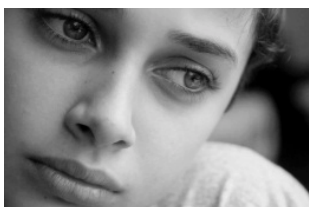
Sexual abuse and family dynamics

Once a victim's story is out they **will experience family friction and division.** That is why your support is vital to them. Often family members will not believe the victim, or want to help them. Some find it easier to live in denial or side with the abuser than to believe or support the victim. This is extremely painful for the victim. It is not bad enough the victim was sexually abused but many are left with the reputation of being the "liar", "sick one" or "trouble maker" in the family and are slighted. **Victims often become reinjured and isolated from their families.** Some victims have to logistically separate themselves from their unhealthy family to survive and heal; consequently, they experience more loneliness and loss.



If the victim's abuser is a family member and they press charges, this will bring additional stress and friction to the family. Incest splits families apart and brings enormous pain, especially for the parents. Healing Private Wounds offers a support group for parents and on-line assistance for family members to help them cope and work through the healing process.

Victims need to be supported and reassured they are doing right by reporting the sexual abuse and pressing charges. Sexual abuse is a crime and there are consequences for crimes. Most abusers won't stop until we stop them. Statistics tell us that over 58 % of abusers will repeat. Pedophiles will abuse over 120 children before they are caught.



The most devastating form of incest is caused by parents who sexually abuse their children.

Tragically, there are moms who sexually abused their children, and/or allowed others to sexually abuse them. There are moms who've turned a blind eye to the abuse and refused to believe or rescue the child. There are other moms who have chosen to stay with the abuser and let foster parents raise their children. Consequently, many victims have serious love-hate issues with their mother because they have been hurt badly by them. Victims can hate them for abandoning or abusing them, yet, love them hoping their mother will change and love them back. **Many victims will go to great lengths to try and gain their mother's love. Unfortunately the moms who abandon or abuse do not have love to give back** and probably because they were abused and never experienced love. Mothers have reported to us that they felt they had no choice, or the income to do anything about the abuse. Mother issues are very disturbing and extremely painful for they rip at the heart and destroy the core value of the individual.

We know **there are similar serious father issues** that need addressing. A father is to support and protect, not neglect or sexually abuse. Fathers carry enormous power and influence, and when it is misused, it greatly damages a child self image. It also confuses the father's role in the family. Children learn from their parents, and it is no wonder that abuse often begets abuse. Sexual words or wounds caused by a father cause a chain reaction that can destroy the worth, spirit and future of the victim.

Parents, by God's design, are supposed to love, nurture and protect their children, and when that doesn't happen, a child will diligently search to fill those basic needs and often end up experiencing more hurt. In their search for love, many experienced sexual abuse, more pain and many regrets. Many victims have said they went "looking for love in all the wrong places"; love which should have been given by their parents. **Sexual abuse, rejection and abandonment by one's parents, can send the victim into a deep hole of despair, anger, and destruction that can seem impossible to escape from.**



The chain reaction from sexual abuse



Victims who are not rescued grow up to be challenged and needy adults who often become co-dependent. Abuse can steal one's self-worth, identity and the ability to maneuver through life by themselves. Many were told they were stupid or dumb, and their low self-worth causes them to doubt their abilities so they allow others to make decisions for them. They will transfer or attach their identity on to their spouse, children, friends, and even their abuser to make them feel alive or significant. Victims are easily taken advantage of because they are seen as

vulnerable and weak. Many were never allowed to say “No” or understand they have a right to state their opinion. The victims who were told they were weak, dirty or not important, do not believe they deserve any better treatment. Instead, **the words they were told become their identity and they live as if they are weak, dirty or insignificant.** Those who were never valued or protected do not know how to value or protect themselves. Abusive treatment was their “normal” so they tend to choose mates and friends who treat them how they are used to being treated. Victims often believe they deserve to be treated like a second class citizen.

The core damage from sexual abuse is it creates low self-worth which leaves the victim extremely vulnerable for more pain and abuse throughout their life. Until a victim’s self-worth is restored, they remain a victim and easily accept abuse for that is all they believe they deserve.

The statement “abuse begets abuse” is true. 11-16% of child victims will become abusers. Less than 5% of female victims will become offenders. **Sexual abuse is a learned behavior.** Child victims of incest may abuse other children because it was done to them and they were never told that sexual abuse was wrong or against the law.

One victim was read pornography by her dad every night before she went to bed and was trained to do what was shown to her. In school she offered to repeat what she learned from her dad to her class mates. The responses from adults and friends were devastating for they thought she was disgusting and evil. She was neither. She was a beautiful innocent child only acting out what her dad taught her. However, the trauma and hurt from how people treated her still remains.

An alarming new finding reveals what devastating effects pornography is having on our children. 30-36% of child victims were abused by other children who viewed pornography. Children are curious and will want to experience what they see. Consequently they will seek out others children to practice on. Sadly our juvenile institutions are being filled with child sex offenders because of pornography. This alarming news should drive us all to take action against pornography!

Have you ever said any of the following?
If you have you should apologize.



Common and hurtful statements victims of sexual abuse hear are,

“It happened a long time ago. Just let it go.”

“You’re a Christian, forgive them and move on!”

“Are you sure you remember right?”

“I think your overreacting because you are going through your change of life.”

“Could you be imagining things or exaggerating a bit?”

“I think you have anger issues and need to address them”.

“They are such good people. I’d let this go.”

“Look at all the good they do. I’m sure they won’t do it again.”

“Why are you telling me? You need to find a counselor.”

If non victims only knew how difficult it is to face sexual abuse and move on, they would be more careful with what they say to victims. For years most victims tried to “forget it” and “move on”, but because life kept getting worse, they finally had to tell their story and seek help.

Recovery is something victims do to survive. It is usually their last straw. They should

be praised for taking this journey, not judged for past behaviors. **Taking the step to recover shows just how determined and strong they really are** for recovery is hard painful work. **Most victims never take this journey and remain physically ill and emotionally crippled.**

Victims need to get to the bottom of their pain so their heart can heal and they can let go of the unhealthy crutches they use to cope. Their state of physical and mental health also has a dramatic effect upon their children and other relationships. Sexual abuse can also cause extreme difficulties in marriages. The divorce rate for victims is much higher than for non victims. **Healing is so important for it has a rippling effect and can benefit the whole family system.**

Healing begins in the mind

Because healing begins in the mind, victims need a renewing or reprogramming of the mind. This begins when they can unload their heavy burdens to a trustworthy person or group and begin to accept what is true such as: **they are worthy**, not stupid, bad, dirty, or the cause for the abuse. The need to throw out the lies and begin believing what is true. Healing progresses as they begin to understand “grace” and can forgive themselves and others, and also realize they have the power to change their life regardless of;

- what was done to them,
- what they have done,
- how they feel, or
- what they were told.



A victim needs to believe **they are no less because their body was used by another even if they enjoyed the attention and sexual activities.** They were a victim and manipulated and unable to prevent it. Abusers are masters at lying and confusing their victims. They work at getting the victim to enjoy sex so the abuse will continue.

As stated earlier, sexual abuse greatly attacks a victim's self-esteem. Because of the need to be liked and accepted, victims will exaggerate, become chronic liars, over apologetic, talkative, tell all, become people pleasers, overly spiritual, an over achiever, “a do-gooder” or become a perfectionist, all **hoping to gain the approval of others.** And because they feel unworthy and dirty, some try to become invisible by wearing layers of clothing, avoid looking one in the eye, or accept a hand shake or a hug.

A victim's posture and appearance are indicators of the level of their self-worth and shame. Some may look unkempt and have a “don't care” attitude while others may try to look like a glamorous model **to help them feel significant** and cover up how dirty and worthless they feel inside. Other victims will gain weight purposely so their spouse or boyfriend will not want to have sex with them. Weight can also become a protection mechanism hoping to protect them from further abusers.

Victims need to live by what is true rather than how they feel for feelings are often unreliable. They are worthy and deserving of equality in relationships and a great life. They are lovely sensitive people not second class citizens like they often believe.

One victim told us she takes four showers before coming to church, and often came in the side door so she would not have to shake anyone's hand for she did not want to contaminate anyone. Many victims shy away from hugs and are very uncomfortable with anyone touching them. If you feel lead to hug a victim, always ask permission first and give them the option to

decline.

Never underestimate the strength of a victim

Victims are great people. They are often smart high achievers and very conscientious workers. Victims will often pursue positions of authority (being in control gives them a sense of security) or service jobs where they can put their experiences and energy into helping others. Many victims are overly conscientious, and perfectionists. Victims can also be “control freaks” and are compelled to take on more responsibility than is theirs to take.



Because most victims have huge trust issues they can be very suspicious of everyone and will **commonly think they are the only one they can trust to do the job.** The “people pleasers” are driven to do well, to be the very best because they need the pats on the back and recognition for their good work to boost their low self image. Bosses love these hard workers because they will never talk back or complain. However, co-workers can find them hard to work with and have a lack of respect for them.

The victims who develop the “**victim mentality**” believe they deserve poor treatment and/or the extra work and will not complain. Other victims are driven to get all they can out of life to make up for what was taken from them and for all the pain they’ve experienced. Achievement, entertainment and business are how many cope. And, because most victims have sleeping difficulties, life can be very exhausting.

What can trigger a memory of sexual abuse?

Getting past sexual abuse is very difficult because many things in daily life constantly remind the victim of it such as:



Walking by the cologne counter at the store, body or hair odor, being startled in the night, certain words or expressions, certain positions or touches, a mustache or beard, places or particular rooms, seeing a hat or article of clothing, pornography, a light turned on at night, being nude, licking an ice cream cone, taking a shower or bath, eating gravy, certain colors, hearing someone clear their throat, and deep breathing - to name a few.

Recovery allows the victims to identify and defuse these triggers so they will not control their life or steal their peace anymore.

Sexual abuse and health issues

You will find that victims usually have many health issues. It’s true “we are as sick as our secrets”. Sexual abuse causes many chronic, painful and life altering health conditions such as, fibromyalgia, interstitial cystitis, migraine headaches, pelvic and bowel inflammatory conditions, chronic depression, heart and stomach conditions, and mental illnesses. The financial burden for therapy, medical care, and medications is tremendous.



The Center of Disease Control stated in their February 2012 news letter that the estimated financial cost for the U.S. for **one year** of confirmed cases of sexual abuse, physical abuse, psychological abuse and neglect is approximately **\$124 billion**. Every victim experiences some level of PTSD.

We must not trivialize sexual abuse for the damaging effects from sexual abuse are much more than non victims realize.

There are victims young and old in your congregation who suffer with chronic ailments which are a direct result from their sexual abuse and neglect that need compassion and healing. They need to be encouraged from the pulpit to come and talk to you or your staff so they can be set free of their secret pain and shame and heal.

The great phenomenon of sexual abuse is that the victim bears the pain and takes on the shame that belongs solely to the perpetrator.

Introducing faith and forgiveness



Believing in a loving God and understanding the importance of forgiving is a process. **To help victims with this process they need to see, hear and feel the love of God from you and the Church.** Your positive influence will help them to accept what is true, which will help them to move past the abuse and forgive.

Victims who claim to have a faith often blame God for their abuse and can have serious God issues. That is why your influence is so important to them. **They need to be told the truth and see our loving compassionate God in you.** The important turn in a victim's recovery is when they can see God as the loving, caring and perfect Parent that he is and can surrender their life and the whole mess to him. Victims need to be encouraged to receive the grace and love that is waiting for them and know that God did not cause the abuse and hated it worse than they did.

A Christian therapist once said she believed that some victims can experience a great deal of healing without having a faith in God but not without using the laws or principles for healing that God gave us such as; "The law of being teachable," "The law of sowing and reaping," "The law of forgiveness," "The law of action," and "The law of perseverance". **Victims need hope their life will be better. Faith in God gives them that hope. Faith believes in things that are hoped for, those which are not yet seen.** Faith is indeed an important and powerful healing factor.

God tells us we need to be "all in" or "all out." We can't be part His. **We need to be 100% invested with God and allow Him to guide and heal us.** The first commandment says we are to put no other gods or persons or things before him. **He has to be our number one love.** Victims need to focus on loving God and surrender their life and will to God every day. **In that pure and holy love relationship they will find their true value;** that of being a cherished son or daughter of the Most High and Creator of the Universe! When we become a child of God we inherit his gifts along with his name. God gives us a unique identity that cancels or nullifies our wrongs and empowers us to be more like our Heavenly Father. God says He will cover us from all our mistakes so we can be free to be real and true to our selves, not a person who is bogged down with guilt or shame, but the amazing and creative child God created each one of us to be.

Because God sees each believer as sinless, in His eyes we are all saints. We are no longer what the world made us to be but FREE to be the unique and marvelous person God created us to be. We no longer want to perform for the world but want to please the One who unconditionally and completely loves us. **When you know who you belong to, you are loyal**

to that voice. And, when we accept our new identity, we need to accept the power and authority that comes with it. **God gave us power to overcome evil.** Our words and prayers become powerful agents to defeat evil and temptations so we no longer remain a victim to lies or sin.

A victim's new identity helps them to **let go of their guilt, old ways of thinking, and their "victim mentality" and exchange it for a healthy self worth, a powerful voice and new free life. And it's all because of God's great love!** ...These are just some thoughts to pass on to help victims understand the great love of God and significance of having God in their life.

God never intended for us to carry our burdens or heal by our self. Clergy, loved ones, friends, counselors, support people can be "GOD with skin on" and assist God in loving the victim well. **Victims can be victorious!** One of the greatest gifts you can give a victim is this **hope.**

Recovery also includes discovering where the victim came from, their history. The more an incest victim can learn about their family history the easier it is for them to put the abuse behind them. Incest is often a generational sin. **Many were set up from birth to experience sexual abuse. This does not excuse it by any means,** but it can help the victim to understand where it came from and take the burden of guilt off the victim.

To forgive, or not to forgive? The choice each victim must make

Forgiving is not a topic that most victims like to talk about and many believe forgiving is not necessary to heal. Many believe; if they forgive, it signals their abuse didn't matter or was not important enough to address. **Just the opposite is true. The sexual abuse is so significant and damaging they need to forgive so they can let go of all their pain, hate and anger before it destroys them.**



Forgiveness is a tough hurdle for most victims to jump. **Sexual abuse causes great pain and it is not easy to forgive those who hurt us so deeply.** Some victims believe if they hold on to hate and work at getting even it will make things even. Holding on to ill feeling does not even the score. Victims can never get even for what was done to them. The sin of sexual abuse is too grave for they can never recapture their innocence. Forgiving is the only way to get even for it allows the victim to get the abuser off their back for good.

Those who've experienced the freedom and peace forgiving gives can testify to the power in it. Forgiveness is vital for recovery for it releases the power the abuser has over the victim and sets the victims free. Victims need to understand this important truth. Author and psychologist Dr. Gordon Livingston defines forgivingness as giving up some grievance to which we are entitled. Victims who choose to hold on to a grievance pay a high price for doing so.

Victims need to understand that forgiving does not diminish its significance, erase the memory, or change the past but it does give new life to the victim. Those who choose not to forgive offenses often have a sharp edge and "a look of distrust" about them. **They remain stuck** and are often not easy people to be around. Not forgiving prevents healing. It wears heavily on the victim physically and emotionally more than they realize. God knows how difficult it is to forgive such evil. Forgiving crimes like sexual abuse can seem unnatural and crazy to many. When we release our will to forgive to God, **God gives us the grace and ability to do what we find impossible to do by ourselves.**

God tells us to forgive so we can be healed and forgiven for our sins. We are forgiven in the same ratio as we forgive others. Forgiving does not take the responsibility or consequences away from the abuser. **Forgiveness is between the victim and God.** Our God is a God of justice and will preside wisely and severely over sexual sins especially those committed against children. Victims no longer have to hold on to revenge. They need to let go and trust that God will make things right.

Victims also need to know that forgiveness is a process. It doesn't happen overnight but it can happen. A victim may pray, "Lord I forgive (abuser's name)", and still feel the same. As they release each hurtful memory and bitter feeling to God (they may have to release it many times a day) **the victim will begin to feel relief, and oddly, even pity and then compassion for their abuser.** They will begin to understand that their abuser has deep issues and worse off than they are. It is our obedience to God to forgive that allows us to forgive and experience freedom. **It is doing His will rather than ours that makes the difference.**

Some victims believe they do not have to forgive until their abuser asks them for forgiveness. What if their abuser never asks? Do they hang on to their hurt feelings and hate forever? If so, they will never be free from their abuser. We have talked to victims who refuse to forgive and have witnessed how not forgiving has crippled their life.

When a victim is stuck in their recovery it is often because they refuse to forgive. But once the victim understands what forgiveness is and the benefits of forgiving, it is more easily embraced. One victim stated that the word "forgive" was frightening, so she choose to say, "I am letting this go," until she was free to say "I forgive." It is not wise to push forgiveness until the victim truly understands what forgiveness is and how it can benefit them.



Restoring trust in God

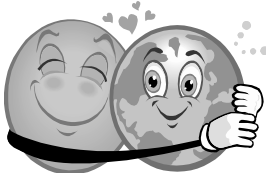
Because victims have trust issues, trusting God can be very difficult. Victims with a faith background may feel they were betrayed by God and blame God for not rescuing them; not understanding God gave us all free will to choose our actions. **Likewise, victims have the free will to choose to heal, forgive, or remain a victim.** God wants to redeem, fix and make life better, but we have to do our part and surrender and allow God to work in us. The important truth to emphasize is you CAN trust God. God did not cause the sin and hated it worse than the victim. God is the perfect all knowing judge and will make **all things right.** God wants to ease their burdens and turn the evil they experienced into good. **God comes with great "benefits" and wants to bless His children.**

One pastor told a victim on her first visit that she needed to forgive her rapist to heal. At that time she was still badly hurting and grieving from the violation and unable to think about forgiving. She never went back to see her pastor again. When one is weeping in pain their wounds needs to be attended to first. Victims need to be first loved and given compassion and as their heart heals and needs met they are better able to let go and forgive. It is **"love first"** that allows them to progress and forgive.

Another victim said she went forward at church for special prayer to be healed from her private pain thinking that was all she needed. When she didn't experience relief, she believed she was too dirty or not good enough to be healed by God. She believed she was a lost cause. **Prayer is powerful; only, prayer without works is not enough.** Victims must break through their thick layer of shame and tell their story so others can love them and give them the knowledge

they need to heal. Confession is not only good for the soul, it is vital to the healing process.

Many victims suffer from tremendous guilt and shame from the sinful life-style the abuse created and **loath themselves and can't imagine anyone loving them, including God.** One victim stated that it was harder to forgive herself for the awful things she had done than it was to forgive her abuser or those who did not protect her. Once she understood it was her abuse and neediness that caused her to react and behave as she did, she was better able to forgive herself and change her direction. The main reason a victim hates themselves is they have never forgiven themselves. Again, **accepting God's grace and forgiveness is vital for healing.** Victims need to understand **God loves us as we are, in our present condition and does NOT condemn.** God understands us and is there to erase our sins and help us to walk the straight and narrow. We only need to let Him. **The song writer John Newton had it right for "God's grace is truly amazing," and, may we add, healing.**



God's vast ocean of love cannot be measured or explained, but it can be experienced. Victims need to climb into the arms of God and except God's love and receive the awesome gift of "grace" that is offered to them. God's children are in **the center of his heart. God has done everything possible to love us and set us free.** Victims need to do **their part** and that includes having faith that God loves them and will redeem their life and make good come out of the evil they experienced. They need to **develop a positive attitude** and replace negative words with truths such as: "I believe," "I am healing," "I have a future and it will be good," "I forgive myself," "I am not wrecked for life," "I am worthy," "God is with me," "I am loved and loveable," "Life will be better," "I will conquer," "I can do what needs to be done," "I will forgive," "I deserve love and health," and "I refuse to be a victim any longer." **Positive statements are empowering.**

There are many Bible verses that will also empower victims and help them defeat doubt and despair. We have listed a few of our favorites at the end of this booklet. You may want to share your favorites with them as well.

A thankful spirit produces a calm spirit

Victims need to develop a thankful attitude for all that is good in life and for the healing that is taking place. Saying "Thank-you, God" and being grateful needs to become a habit. **We cannot be thankful and hateful at the same time.** Challenge each victim to make a list of all the things they are thankful for in one day, and then read the list daily and end each blessing with "Thank you, God." This exercise helps the victim to see God in a positive light as the giver of good things "Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father." God tells us to be thankful at all times. Being thankful changes our thought patterns. Victims can be thankful that healing is happening. Being thankful creates happy hormones or endorphins that help us to feel better and fight depression. That's part of God's design.

The impact of the church and healing



The church can have a huge impact in helping victims to heal by being an example of God's love and grace to them, by praying for them, giving encouragement, and sharing testimonies of how God has touched their lives. **Victims need friends,** and, depending on their circumstances, they may also need practical items such as food, shelter and necessities. **There is no greater love or assistance than what God can give and He uses us to**

administer that love. What an honor it is to assist God! Jesus came to save us and to heal the broken hearted so our joy can be restored. **Victims desperately need joy!**

Victims need to be reassured that God's love is unconditional and his grace covers all our sins just as if they never happened. Victims need to receive this life changing gift. **When victims receive God's grace and love and begin to see themselves as God does, (clean, worthy, loveable and sinless), their world begins to change.** Their shame eases and they begin to feel worthy of love, healthy relationships, and deserving of a good life. Thus, giving them the strength to make changes and **start acting like the person that God sees them as.**

Recovery requires daily surrender of old ways and thoughts and developing new thought patterns. **It requires change.** Victims have to give up their self-loathing and old ways of reacting and make each decision based on what is true and good. **God helps those who help themselves. Just as abusers have the choice to injure, victims have the choice to change their mindset and recover.** Change is often a struggle with the "will" to want to change, and sins can be hard to let go of for sin can have its pleasure for the moment. **Victims can justify their actions because of the pain they experienced instead of taking responsibility to change them.**



We survivors at Healing Private Wounds have experienced change and healing, and our healing continues. It took time, work, and a desire to heal, and we recognize it was not our own doing. With support and God's help we were able to change and overcome. We've found that the prayer "**Lord, your will be done, not mine.**" is a powerful prayer that changes lives.

What victims need to hear

There is enormous power in words. It is very important to know how to respond to a victim so that your words and actions bring healing rather than add additional pain or shame. **Because we often do not know what to say, we can say the wrong words or stay silent,** however both can be extremely hurtful. Healing words can help to remove shame when the victim feels dirty or responsible, bring hope when they are discouraged, comfort when they are afraid, love when they feel unlovable, and knowledge when they feel stupid or confused.



The following statements are safe and comforting

- I am so sorry and I feel badly this happened to you.
- I believe you and I'm here to help you.
- It was not your fault no matter what you think or was told.
- I wish I was there to protect you. I am so sorry.
- I hate what was done to you.
- Sexual abuse is evil and wrong. You were an innocent victim.
- I'm interested in you and want to hear more of your story.
- Please tell me what you are thinking and what you are afraid of.
- You are not wrecked for life. You've been wounded, but you can heal.
- The shame you feel belongs to your abuser. Don't accept it. You are innocent.
- Sexual abuse can make you feel dirty and bad but you aren't either one!
- I certainly do not condemn you or think any less of you.
- Sexual abuse causes one to do many things they regret.
- It is not your fault. Accept God's grace and forgive yourself.
- Thank you for telling me your story. I think you are a courageous person

- You are a fantastic person and that has not changed
- You deserve a great life.
- Hang in there. You will heal. God created us to overcome.
- There is hope. Life will get better.
- You are not ruined or spoiled. You have great value and are destined for greatness.

Victims need special support

Victims need a safe place to tell their story and receive the affirmation, love and “healing knowledge” they need to heal. It may be in a group setting or in a one-on-one situation. For most victims, groups are more effective.



Most sexual abuse victims will not feel free to share what needs to be shared in a regular church care group. Shame is a powerful silencer. That is why they need a special confidential group designed for people who have experienced sexual abuse. Also, regular support group leaders are usually not equipped to give the support sexual abuse victims need.

Because most victims feel isolated, sexual abuse recovery groups are a tremendous help. In healthy groups they learn they are not alone with their feelings, issues or pain. There is truth in “misery loves company”. Groups also offer friendships, hope, accountability, and knowledge. Encourage victims to join a recovery group. For the victims who are not ready for a group, encourage them to talk to a Christian sexual abuse counselor.

We have found that most “church folks” will not admit to their sexual abuse or join a support/recovery group in their church. They worry about what people will think of them. Victims in your church need to hear from you that the abuse was not their fault and **they should talk about their struggles and fears in church.** They have no reason to be ashamed for the sexual abuse was not their fault. **You have the opportunity to disarm their shame, fear and pride,** and encourage them to tell their story and find the health and peace that God wants for them.

One victim who was also a Sunday school worker said she could not tell anyone at church about her sexual abuse for fear they would not let her work with children.

Another victim stated she did not have to talk about her abuse because she had God and God healed her. She was divorced three times, has serious relational issues, she also had many health issues, was unkempt, a people pleaser and extremely overweight, but in her eyes she was healed.

Victims are usually unaware of the many rippling effects from the sexual abuse. **It is not until they take the journey to heal do they see how the abused has greatly impacted their life.**

Many victims struggle with trying to remember all of their abuse. **It is not necessary to remember every detail of their abuse to heal.** In time a victim may remember more, or they may not. Some victims can only remember fragments of their sexual abuse. Memories can become very sketchy especially if the abuse happened as a young child. What victims do know is the sexual abuse happened and they are hurting because of it. Victims **cannot change the past.** They need to focus on healing and the future **which they do have control over.** They also need to be reminded of what’s true until it sinks in; that they are significant, precious in God’s sight, forgiven, and filled with potential. This is very hard for many victims to accept for **they see little good in themselves at all. And the reason is because sexual abuse changes the victim and severely damages their self worth.**

A story is for telling

Victims need to tell their story again and again until they are free from it, and that time will come. There is power in the voice to heal. Talking about their abuse helps the victim to gain clarity and understanding. Many victims have never had anyone listen to their story or hear about their pain and struggles. **Sharing with a compassionate group or person is extremely therapeutic.** Purging gets the pain out and releases the stress so they can begin to heal for **we heal from the inside out. The truth sets us free.** Telling, however, is very excruciating and the longer the victim has kept their secret in the harder it is for them to tell it. **Show great empathy and compassion as victims tell you their story for telling is harder than you can imagine.**



It is also very therapeutic for the victim to write out their story and read it to you or a support person. **The more they can purge the better it is for them.** Our booklet “A Time to Heal” was written for victims to help them heal and provides guidelines to help the victim write out their story. It is available on our web site, or you can contact us for it.

Healing is contagious

Victims who are in recovery are some of the bravest people you will ever meet, and you will find it a privilege to work with such courageous people. These brave souls may challenge you to be more bold and authentic, and inspire you to deal with issues you are struggling with. We all have issues, a story to tell, and a lesson from it to share.

The more transparent and authentic we are, the more effective we are at ministering to others. Our story (whatever it is) is a tremendous asset in helping others. Yet, we cannot share our story if we are not free to tell it.

It has been awesome to watch five pastors become free from their burdens of sexual abuse as they sought help from Healing Private Wounds. Grace and love are found in Jesus but healing happens in relationships where love and truth are freely given. Author Paula White states, **“We cannot conquer what we won’t confront.”** We cannot heal by ourselves either. God made us relational people. Too often we allow pride to interfere with our healing and worry about what other people will think if they knew our story. When our prideful wall comes down, an amazing thing happens. **We become accessible and effective in ministry.**



Pastors have shared with us that they are often asked to help others with issues they also struggle with. One pastor said she didn’t realize it but she had been playing the clergy role for years until she shared her sexual abuse story and personally experienced God’s healing power and presence in her life. Her ministry has taken a giant step forward now that she is free from the burdens of her past. She no longer plays the role but genuinely celebrates every opportunity to serve because she is free and has experienced God in a very personal way.

When we step out in faith and reveal our pain our faith works for us. We become “real” and believable. **It is when we hide our “stuff” and pretend all is well that we become performers of the Gospel instead of experiencing the beauty and power in it.** The power in faith is that it changes us and gives us freedom. **We no longer fear the outcome of sharing our story but have confidence knowing God will use it to bless others.** It is when we share truthfully that the spirit of **God comes through and allows us to impact another.** Your story, whatever it may be, is a powerful sermon. Church folks can be great pretenders

and will say “all is well” when in reality deep down they are hurting. As others hear your story they will be inspired to share their story and seek healing for themselves. **The ultimate purpose in sharing our story is to give another hope and lead them to our Great Healer.**

Hurting people need to experience the love of God through others especially those who have experienced their same pain. Listening to another’s story and sharing truths are acts of love. God commands us to love for he knows the enormous power in it. Love is the most powerful force there is. In the end **it is love that heals, God’s love working through us. God also uses our pets, music, art, humor, and all creation to help us heal.** God loves us deeply and provides many aids to help us overcome evil and draw us close to him.



Too few understand the painful dynamics of sexual abuse and innocently hurt victims. Victims will purposely keep their story a secret because they know some may try to use it against them by making them seem weak or incompetent. Many victims have been told **they aren’t fit to be married to, or safe for raising their children because they were sexually abused.** Child custody cases have been won on those grounds, and victims have lost the rights to their children because they were sexually abused. **Again, a victim should be offered compassion and recovery instead of being punished for being sexual abused.**

Adult victims often feel stupid for allowing the abuse to happen and suffer with many regrets. They take on a great deal of the responsibility for the sexual abuse and often ask themselves, “Why didn’t I stop it or run away?” **But that is adult reasoning.**

Victims need to be reminded that children are incapable of protecting themselves or stopping abuse. They don’t have the intellect or the strength. **Most children do not know about sexual abuse or that it is wrong,** consequently, they are easily manipulated into participating. And children like to please, so they will naturally do what peers want. In many cases children had no choice but to comply especially if they were not protected. And if the child loved their abuser, it was very difficult for them to say “no” or tell someone about the abuse. Many victims were threatened with harm if they told. The sexual abuse was out of the victim’s control. **They did the best they could at the time and they should not blame or despise themselves.** The sexual abuse was not their fault. They were a helpless victim. As you talk to the victim, help them to understand their innocence.

There are victims who feel a tremendous amount of guilt because they enjoyed the sexual experience and attention they received from their abuser. Child victims aren’t bad or weak. They are naive and vulnerable and acted like a child would under their situation.

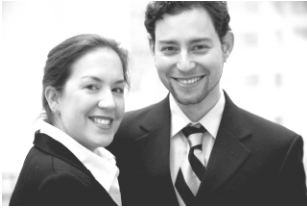


Victims need to understand that our bodies were designed to respond to sexual stimuli, and they are not bad for enjoying the attention or sexual feelings. Male victims are especially troubled with this issue because of their easy arousal, and they can think they are bad. Sexual abuse triggers sexual feelings in children long before they are emotionally and physically ready for sexual activity and can often **cause them to excessively masturbate, become promiscuous, or perhaps, innocently become a child sex offender.**

A rape victim may choose to freely give sex away so it will not be taken from her again. This way the sex will be her choice. Or, a victim may rationalize that they are no longer innocent and so why not “do it” anyway. Other victims believe they are bad at the core so why not act

badly. Some victims become promiscuous because they like the power sex gives them. Victims have such low self-worth that many believe the only thing they have worth giving is their body, so they easily give sex away hoping to gain love in return.

Protect your reputation and influence



Love is often a foreign word to victims. If a victim never experienced a healthy pure love, comprehending God's love is very difficult. **You have an opportunity to give them a glimpse of Godly love** by your compassion and faithfulness. If the victim was abused by their father, referring to God the Father can create an instant wall. When this is the case, it is best to **emphasize the almighty attributes of God** until they have healed enough to see God as the

perfect and loving parent that God is.

As a victim sees your compassion and love, they may become attached to you and overly affectionate, and some may make sexual advances. **They can't help themselves for they haven't yet learned appropriate way to show their gratitude.** Some believe sex is their only asset to give. Others may fall in love with you and find it difficult to break off sessions. Victims need your compassion and care, but you also need to put boundaries in place to protect yourself and to keep temptations away for both parties.

When you talk to victims it is wise to meet in an open area such as the park or quiet coffee house, or if you meet in your office always leave your door open or have another person inconspicuously sit in the back of the room. If another person is in the room, remind the victim that this is policy and what is said **will be kept confidential. Never agree to meet alone with them in their home.** These safe guards will help to protect yourself and your church. Billy Graham insisted that he and his staff were to always have another person in the room whenever they talked to the opposite sex, and it protected their organization. It's a wise rule to follow.

A victim's worse regret



One of the most painful realizations for a victim is when she or he becomes aware of how their abuse has affected the parenting of their children. Many victims are relationally and emotionally handicapped and find it difficult to bond or relate on an emotional level with their children. If they were not properly nurtured and protected, they will not know how to nurture and protect their children. **Healing allows the victim to grow up**

and to improve in many areas of their life. Victims need to know it is never too late to improve and be a strong loving parent to their children.

Author Maya Angelo states, "You do what you do because you know what you know. But when you know better you do better!" Victims should not condemn themselves for they did the best they could at the time, nor should they give up hope on restoring relationships with their children or loved ones. **They need to forgive themselves and work at making healthy changes. The past is the past but the future is for them to create.** One victim said she asked her children to forgive her for not being the mom they deserved, and that she loves them so much she is getting healthy to prove her love for them. The victim's children, young or old, should be told about the sexual abuse. **Children deserve to know so they can learn about sexual abuse and help love and support the parent.**

A family is strengthened by our stories. Secrets can separate and hurt families. **Our story can be our strongest asset to bond the family together and keep it safe.**

How can clergy help?



We understand that most pastors are not clinically trained to counsel victims of sexual abuse and need to refer the victims on to other qualified support people or professionals for further assistance. **However, pastors can have a great impact on a victim's recovery and be an important advocate.** Showing the victim compassion and nonjudgmental love helps the victim tremendously. And, if you are a survivor, you are the perfect person for them to talk to for you understand their shame and pain like only a survivor can.

Pastors are usually the first person a hurting person will turn to if they are connected to a church for **a victim is looking for God's help and God's presence in their pain.** Therefore, **a pastor must welcome the role he or she plays in receiving this person into the arms of God through his open mind and loving concern.** When a victim feels cared for and trusts the pastor's judgment, they are more apt to accept the pastor's recommendation for further assistance. The pastor may want to personally introduce the victim to their new helping person to ease the transition. Remind the victim once again that you are very glad they came to see you, and you will keep them in your prayers. When you see them at church, acknowledge them, smile and offer a hand shake and **discreetly ask how they are doing.** Healing is hard work, and the healing process will create additional anxiety and depression **for a time** so your encouragement is very important.

Tips for Clergy

- Mention sexual abuse in your sermons and in your conversations regularly.
- If you are a survivor of sexual abuse or other abuse, let it be known. Share your story and healing journey.
- Invite a survivor to speak at your church and share how they found healing and peace.
- Invite victims and abusers to come and talk with you.
- **Be a good listener. When a victim comes to see you,** stop all interruptions. Be pleasant and look them in the eye. No matter how repulsive their story may be, do not fidget or look at the ground. Stay concerned and interested.
- Give words that bring healing such as those listed on "What victims need to hear".
- Offer prayer and ongoing support. Find a recovery group and counselor for them.
- Remind them that the abuse was not their fault and you understand their actions.
- Remind them that God does not condemn us but offers us grace and unconditional love, but we must accept it.
- Ask them if they have any immediate concerns, or are in an unsafe situation. If so, address those issues.
- Remind them that everything said in your office is confidential. Their story is for them to tell not you.
- Smile and offer a hand shake when they leave. Thank them for coming and sharing their story.
- Call them in a few days after their visit to tell them once again you are glad they came to see you and ask how they are doing. **This is important. Often a victim will second**



guess if they did right by coming to you and will feel bad that you know so much about them.

- Give the victim hope for recovery. Encourage the victim to persevere and not allow fear or doubts to stop them.
- Offer the victim opportunities to serve others on a regular basis. Get them involved in service projects. **Acts of service are extremely necessary for their healing.**
- Develop a zero tolerance policy for sexual abuse within the church and establish policies to safeguard your members.
- Search www.sexoffenders.com to make sure your staff and volunteers are safe and post this web site so others can be informed about any possible abusers in their neighborhood.
- Develop a sexual abuse recovery group in your church.
- Invite speakers to come to talk about sexual abuse and recovery. **Make sexual abuse and other uncomfortable issues welcomed topics.** The church should be a “hospital for the wounded heart” and a safe place for the wounded to talk about their pain and find healing. **Christ came to heal the brokenhearted.**
- Provide materials on sexual abuse and recovery programs. www.healingprivatewounds.org has many resources available.
- Protect yourself by practicing safe counseling practices.



Once a victim has significantly recovered he or she can be a great asset to the church in helping other victims to find healing and peace. They may feel led to begin a recovery group in your church. **Their testimony of God's grace and healing power will be a powerful message of hope to others.**

The many tools and lessons victims learn on the healing journey will help them to survive and conquer other challenges in life for surely more will come. **Jesus came to teach us “the way” so we could overcome the world and experience life “abundantly”. No one should remain a victim.**

How safe is the Church, really?



A sad finding is that sexual abuse is being committed by those who attend church in alarming numbers. **Healing Private Wounds** has found that over eighty-five percent of our sexual abuse recovery group members have experienced sexual abuse by either someone who attended church, a person who claimed to be a person of faith, or a member of the clergy.

The Catholic Church has had to deal with their tremendous shame of priests abusing young victims. There are protestant clergy who are also guilty of sexual abuse.

For over seven years Healing Private Wounds has been assisting victims. We have had hundreds of contacts, and the ratio of those who were sexually abused by a protestant or catholic clergy was four to one; four representing Protestant clergy and one representing Catholic priests. This information has ignited our passion to help churches of all faiths become free from the sin and crime of sexual abuse.



The far majority of abusers are not clergy. Most victims are abused by a family member or someone they know. Still, we need to work at resolving this serious issue. It is an ugly

dark sin and stain that needs to be stopped and is the reason why many people do not attend church. **They are repulsed by institutions that hide or allow the sin of sexual abuse to continue, and they become suspicious and untrusting of all clergy.**

If we stay quiet or naïve about sexual abuse, it will continue, and we become enablers. The truth is our children are vulnerable for sexual abuse to happen even by “church folk” and those who are abused experience an even greater amount of confusion and disillusionment. **They experience spiritual abuse along with the sexual abuse.** If not rescued, most will never step inside a church again. **The sin of sexual abuse is a grave sin for it can alienate the victim from God and the truly good people of the Church forever. We should not shy away from addressing such a destructive sin.**

Healing Private Wounds has a special concern for victims who have been sexually abused by one claiming to be a person of faith, including any clergy. We believe speaking out against sexual sins and offering sexual abuse recovery and prevention education in our churches will help prevent sexual abuse from occurring. It could also demonstrate to the unchurched that our churches are addressing sexual abuse and attempting to make them safe. Children should be told to tell you or a safe person in the church if they are abused or approached and they should be introduced to that safe person so they will know who to tell.

If a child reports sexual abuse you are responsible to report the sexual abuse to the Child Protective Services at the Department of Social Services in your county. You will also want to talk to the family about the situation. **Once a disclosure is made, utmost care must be taken to insure for the safety of the young victim. Believe the child.** Children do not lie about sexual abuse. **Yet, 40% of parents will either blame or not believe the child.** Be aware that children are often threatened and can be talked into changing their story. Reassure the child that you believe them and that they should always tell the truth even if they are threatened or told to change their story.



Children need to be told that they have the right to say “no” to sin including sexual activities even to authority figures. **“Honor thy father and mother” does not mean a child must allow a parent or anyone else to sexually abuse them or cause them to sin.** This truth needs to be taught to our children. The book “I Am a Child-Love Me Like a Child”, the video “Let’s Talk about Touching”, and pamphlet “How Do I Protect My Child from Sexual Abuse” are available on our web site at “Resources” or by emailing office@healingprivatewounds.org. The greater area your voice is heard the safer our children will be. **Abusers are less likely to abuse a child who knows about sexual abuse and will tell.**

Churches also need to implement Safe Church Policies to ensure it is a safe place to worship, grow spiritually, share fellowship, and free from the possibility of sexual abuse. (Check www.sexoffenders.org to clear all church workers.)

Secondly, to help victims trust you with their story, it is essential they see you as safe, approachable, and caring. They also need to hear you speak against sexual abuse from the pulpit so they know where you stand. Again, **trust in their pastor is very important** for as they learn they can trust you, they are better able to trust their Heavenly Father, our ultimate healer.

Thirdly, it is important that clergy **invite victims to come and talk to you about their abuse.** If you avoid the topic of sexual abuse because you believe it to be “taboo” in church, victims

will also think it is not appropriate to talk to you about their abuse. **The church should be the first place one can turn to for truth and compassion from all wounds.**

As mentioned earlier, one in four females and one in seven males become victims of sexual abuse before the age of eighteen. With these statistics, **how many victims in your congregation are suffering in silence?** Need rescuing? Need recovery? Do you offer victims an opportunity to meet with you? Do you invite perpetrators to repent and seek help? **Perpetrators desperately need help so they can stop victimizing.**

One pastor told us that he chose not to open up the topic of sexual abuse for fear he would be overwhelmed by the congregation's responses. Healing Private Wounds wants to assist you so you won't be overwhelmed. We have many helps available.

God has placed you in a position of influence for a reason. Many need healing within our churches. Please offer it to them. **A healed church is a more effective church for God's kingdom right here on earth.** You have an opportunity to change statistics and make lives significantly better. Unfortunately, sexual abuse won't stop until we speak up and stop it. Likewise, **the pain for victims won't stop until we step up and help victims heal.**

We believers know God offers healing to the wounded and grace to those who will receive it. **This is great news to share from the pulpit!** Perpetrators also need truth and recovery. **Spiritual leaders carry great authority and should be a voice of truth and hope.** We urge you to be bold and speak to the issues people struggle with everyday including sexual abuse. **The key to making your church a safe and healing place is held in your mouth. We pray you will have courage to speak up about a topic that affects so many.**

In conclusion



As victims search for answers or reasons for their sexual abuse, we are enlightened by King Solomon's words of wisdom in Ecclesiastes. In it he reminds us that **we cannot make reason out of unreason or sense out of the senseless.** He states it is foolish to try for there is no reason or excuse for much of what happens in life. He encourages us to focus on

God and his goodness for in **him we can find peace** and purpose regardless of what the world may throw at us. These are encouraging words of hope to pass on.

We are instructed to be the light of the world; to bring hope and encouragement to those who are lost. You have the influence and answers to change lives. We hope you are challenged to be that critical light for the many victims of sexual abuse who live in pain and darkness. Victims are eagerly waiting for a word of encouragement and an invitation from you.

Love is God's trump card to overcome evil. Our job is to offer ourselves as servants and instruments of God's love to others so they can experience freedom and peace. In the end it is love that heals the brokenhearted. "Faith, hope and love abide. But the greatest is love." Love allows the victims to know God, so God can become their ever loving constant companion, and mentor. **The closer one becomes to God the less the abuse affects them.**

Many of the victims that come to Healing Private Wounds for help have tried secular approaches to healing and are still stuck. Thankfully, **our Christian faith and God's word offers us the solutions to life's most difficult issues** and we at Healing Private Wounds are thankful we can share God's love and truths with others. God does the healing. **All glory and praise goes to God our Father to whom we are privileged to serve.**

Healing Private Wounds is looking for churches and people of faith who would like to partner with us to help support this ministry. Would you give this some prayerful thought? We are a group of dedicated Christian volunteers doing what we can to help victims and families. There is so much more we could do with assistance.

“Don’t pretend to love others. Really love them.
Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good.” *Romans 12:9*

Written by Shirley Petersen, with contributions from Ken Nydam and Sheila Johnson.

Shirley is a retired public health nurse, and the founder and director of Healing Private Wounds. She is also the author of “The Whisper” and “Love Me Like a Child”.

Ken is a retired pastor and presently a licensed social worker and counselor. He has a private practice in Cadillac, Michigan. Both are survivors of sexual abuse and live in Cadillac, Michigan.

Sheila is a licensed family therapist and her practice includes sexual abuse recovery. Her private practice is in Elgin, Illinois where she resides.

References:

www.prevent-abuse-now.com/stats

www.fbi.gov/stats

www.childwelfare.gov/statistics

www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/ace/prevalence.htm

www.usa.gov.org/stats

What is Healing Private Wounds?

Healing Private Wounds is a faith based 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization with two main focuses. The first is to help victims and families traumatized by sexual abuse to find healing, and the second is sexual abuse prevention education to help stop sexual crimes.

HPW is an all volunteer organization and rely on our volunteers and donors to support us. We are always looking for more volunteers to help facilitate and promote our programs. **You do not have to be a survivor to volunteer and be a part of our organization. We are thankful to have many non victim board members and volunteers who assist us in our work.**

The need for our services continues to grow for every year more victims are coming to us seeking help. If you have an interest in our ministry and want to volunteer or donate to our cause please contact our office at 231-846-4495 or 231-775-6804, or donate to the address below. We rely on your help. Every call or gift encourages and empowers us to continue!

Mailing address

Healing Private Wounds

PO Box 854

Cadillac, MI 49601

231-846-4495 or 231-775-6804

www.healingprivatewounds.org

Email address: office@healingprivatewounds.org

Healing Private Wounds Mission Statement

The Mission of Healing Private Wounds is to be an advocate for the health and welfare of all victims of sexual abuse. We do this by providing faith inspired programs, services, funding and education that will promote health and wholeness to victims and their families. We also provide Sexual Abuse Awareness and Prevention Education to stop sexual abuse from reaching our next generation.

Healing Private Wounds services

- Sexual abuse recovery groups for teens, women and men. A new group begins every September, January and April. Each session last for ten weeks and every week a new topic is discussed that pertains to victims. To register call 231-846-4495 or 231-775-6804. All groups are confidential and free. The group facilitators are trained survivors
- Counseling services for victims and families
- Recovery workshops for victims and families
- In-service training for church workers, and caregivers on sexual abuse and what they can do to prevent sexual abuse and help victims heal.
- Educational talks to children about sexual abuse and how to protect themselves. We have a DVD video "Let's Talk about Touching with Peggy Porcupine" available which can be seen on our web site.
- We have a variety of educational pamphlets at www.healingprivatewounds.org
- Provide speakers and presenters on sexual abuse and the healing process
- Christian Life skill book studies such as "Boundaries" and "Reframe Your life"
- Internet support services email office@healingprivatewounds.org for helps
- Jail ministry to victims
- PUP -Parents support group for parents whose children have experienced sexual abuse

Recommended Books

Approval Addiction-Joyce Meyer
Bad Childhood, Good Life- by Laura Sleenger
Beauty for Ashes- by Joyce Meyers
Boundaries- by Henry Cloud and John Townsend
I Am a Child, Love Me Like a Child-by Shirley Jo Petersen
Reframe Your Life- by Stephen Arterburn
Secrets of the Heart-by Sandra Burdick and Dorie VanStone
Sheet Music- by Kevin Leman
The Battlefield of the Mind-by Joyce Meyer
The Haunted Marriage- by Clark Barshinger and Lojan La Rowe
The Message Bible
The Whisper- by Shirley Petersen
Why People Don't Heal and How They Can by Caroline Myss

Healing Private Wounds booklets on healing

"A Time to Heal"- for victims
"Cliff notes for Clergy"
"How to Help a Spouse Heal"
"How to Help a Loved One or Friend Heal",
"Healing from Rape"
"How to Tell Your Child about Sexual Abuse" & "How to Help a Child Victim Heal?"

Help on the web

www.healingprivatewounds.org
www.irvingstudios.com

www.openheartsmministry.org
www.rainn.org
www.protectkids.com
www.stopitnow.org

Bible inspiration

The following verses are from the NIV Version of the Bible.

“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted, and he saves those whose spirits have been crushed.” Psalms 34:17-18

“The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace.”
Psalms 29:11

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort.” 2 Corinthians 1:2-4

“God’s love never ends; his mercies never stop....The Lord is good to those who hope in him, to those who seek him.” Lamentations 3:22-25

“God, who has begun a good work in you, will complete it.” Philippians 1:6

“The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him.” Psalms 28:6-8

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your ways.” Proverbs 3:4-6

“I have loved you with an everlasting love. Therefore, with loving kindness, I have drawn you.” Jeremiah 31:3

“God will do what is right. He will give trouble to those who troubled you. And he will give rest to you who are troubled.” 2 Thessalonians 1:6-7

“Don’t worry, because I am with you. Don’t be afraid, because I am your God. I will make you strong and will help you. I will support you....I am the Lord your God who holds your right hand and I tell you, don’t be afraid. I will help you.” Isaiah 41:10-13

“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” Matthew 18:5-7

“I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a good future. When you call my name and pray to me I will listen to you. ...When you search for me with your whole heart, you will find me.” Jeremiah 29:11

“Anxiety in the heart causes depression. But a good word makes it glad.” Proverbs 12:25

“For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed nor hidden what will not be known.”
Luke 12:2

“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, **forgive** them, so that your Father in heaven may **forgive** you your sins.” Mark 11:24-26

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Romans 12:21

“Know the truth and the truth will set you free!” John 8:32

“Don’t be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow, too. Live one day at a time.” Matthew 6:34

The following verses are from the Message Bible

“I’ve thrown myself headlong into your arms; I’m celebrating your rescue. I’m singing to the top of my lungs, I’m so full of answered prayers.” Psalms 13

“I love you God, you make me strong. God is bedrock under my feet, the castle in which I live, my rescuing knight.” Psalms 18

“My choice is you, God, first and only. And, now I find I’m your choice! And, then you made me your heir!” Psalms 16

“I’m not trying to get my way, I’m trying to get your way, I’m staying on your trail; I’m putting one foot in front of the other, I’m not giving up!” Psalms 17

“I cry to God to help me. From his palace he hears my call; my crying brings me right into his presence--a private audience!” Psalms 18

“If I keep my eyes on God, I won’t trip over my own feet.” Psalms 25

“God’s grace and order wins; godlessness loses.” Psalms 10

“God made my life complete when I placed all the pieces before him. When I got my act together he gave me a fresh start. Now I’m alert to God’s ways, I don’t take God for granted. Every day I review the ways he works. I try not to miss a trick. I feel put back together and I’m watching my step. **God rewrote the text of my life when I opened the book of my heart to his eyes.**” **Amen!** Psalms 18-33

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Or call 231-775-6804

**“What greater purpose is there than to protect the young
and innocent and rescue the weak and wounded?”**

Shirley Jo Petersen-Founder and Director of HPW

(for the back cover of the booklet)

Quotes from Cliff Notes for Clergy

More than advice or a sermon, a victim needs a listening ear and truth. Both are important life-giving expression of love.

Church members are eager for clergy to shed light on sexual abuse so they will know how to better respond to it.

Clergy have a tremendous opportunity to free victims of the shame and fears they carry.



Victims are fragile in body and spirit and desperately need the love and assistance the Church can offer.

If pastors do not address sexual abuse and reach out to victims, what hope do victims have in finding help and comfort in our churches? The Church should be the first place hurting souls can go to for validation, compassion and truth.

God has placed you in a position of influence for a reason.

Victims and church members will think it's inappropriate to talk about sexual abuse until they first hear their clergy or pastor speak about it.

Sexual abuse is not a political issue. It is a sin and crime issue and not one to avoid. When we ignore sexual abuse we become enablers.

Sexual abuse won't stop until we speak out and stop it. Likewise, the pain for victims won't stop until we step up and help victims heal.

We believers know God offers healing to the wounded and grace to those who receive it. This is great news to share from the pulpit!

What stops you from talking about sexual abuse?

The key to making your church a safe and healing place is held in your mouth. We pray you will have the courage to speak up about a topic that affects so many.

Love is God's trump card to overcome evil. Our job is to offer ourselves as servants and instruments of God's love to others so they can experience freedom, peace and God; their ever loving parent.