

How Can I help My Spouse/ Partner Heal From Sexual Abuse?



www.healingprivatewounds.org

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Healing Private Wounds mission statement and contact information

What is Love? -poem



How can I help my loved one heal from sexual abuse?



“The best relationship is one in which your love for each other exceeds your need for each other.” Shirley Petersen

In my youth I was a victim of incest. Shame and threats kept me from telling my husband about the sexual abuse for over twenty five years. Once my story was out a chain of events began to unfold which were scary and also liberating. The positive outcome from telling my husband was our marriage began to evolve into something very valuable and new. We survived the growing pains from the betrayals and secrets and began building a real partnership. I began to communicate honestly and truthfully for the first time on every aspect of our life together. And my husband for the first time, began to understand why we had barriers, and gave me freedom to grow and change. **He became my “knight in shining armor” and I like to say, he loved me whole.** What I have learned on my (our) healing journey I felt worthy to pass on. **Couples can survive the revelation and trauma of sexual abuse and have a better marriage in spite of it.** I am so thankful we survived for I once thought there was little hope.

To get the full benefit from this material it is important that both you and your spouse read thru this information. Encourage your mate to tell you what is especially relevant to them and **to highlight what they want you to know but find it difficult to tell you.** Also, your mate should read “How Do I Heal”. This booklet will answer many questions for them. The booklet is found on our web site at www.healingprivatewounds.org under Resources. I also recommend you talk to an experienced sexual abuse counselor. At the end of this booklet I have listed **helpful books** on recovery that I believe would also benefit you and your spouse. There are helps available and I encourage you to grab hold of them. Recovery is not an easy road to travel by yourself.



You have what it takes

The healing process to overcome sexual abuse is complex and not easy to condense. However, I have tried to relay the **most important things you can do to help your spouse heal** from sexual abuse. If I had one word to give you to help your loved one heal it would be “love”. **You can love your spouse whole, for what victims of sexual abuse experience is a broken heart and** their heart will continue to ache until they experience the love, support and knowledge they need so they can recover. **You have the chance to mend their heart with your love.** Nonjudgmental unconditional love is the key that will allow your spouse to begin to heal. You may think you have enough love to “hang in there” but the healing process will challenge you to **dig deeper into your well of love and express it in ways you may never have before.**

If you are like my husband you have many questions and concerns for your mate and your marriage. The more knowledgeable you are about sexual abuse the better able you will be to understand and support your spouse as they seek to recover. The fact that you are reading this material shows you care for your mate and have an interest in helping and I commend you for your effort. **Many spouses do not know what to say or do to help their mate heal so they stay silent** and let them “do their thing”. **Healing requires your active involvement.** Tell your mate you want to get involved and learn all you can so you can help them heal. Become involved in their story and the recovery process. **Be willing to listen** and talk about what they are concerned with, and offer to read materials, and go to counseling together.

The revelation of sexual abuse may be a shock to you and you may feel hurt and betrayed that your mate did not tell you about the sexual abuse sooner. **You need to understand they could not tell you any sooner.** Unless you have experienced sexual abuse, you do not understand the horrific shame or fears victims live with every day. Try to understand “why” your mate did not tell you and forgive them for not telling you sooner, and please do not hold it against them or allow this to be a hindrance in helping them to heal.

The two main reasons victims remain silent are fear and shame. They may have feared you might go out and kill their abuser or those who did not protect them if you knew, and then they would lose you. Some victims were threatened with their lives or the lives of their children or pets if they told. Many victims were told no one would believe them, or would want them if they told. Some victims have told their story and it backfired on them. **Because victims feel dirty and unlovable, they believe no one would want them if they knew about what they were forced to do or what was done to them.** There are some victims who have “repressed memories” and truly didn’t remember the sexual abuse until later in life. It is often when a victim feels safe that memories begin to come back or when their child reaches the age when they were abused. Sexual abuse leaves a false dark stigma on the victim that needs to be erased so they can be set free. **You have the opportunity to shine a light where no one else has and remove that stigma.**



Your spouse’s story is unique for it has its own set of characters and heartaches. Their recovery time will also be their own for each victim’s threshold of pain are different and each one handles stress differently. Whatever type of sexual abuse your loved has **experienced be careful not to down play it or minimize their experience. Pain is pain regardless of the degree of abuse.**

I understand that if your loved one was a victim of sexual abuse **you have also suffered.** Your expectations for your relationship have not been met and that has most assuredly caused you a lot of grief and frustration. **Also, you most likely hurt deeply for your mate** for all the pain she or he has experienced. And you could have huge anger issues towards their abuser, or for those who did not protect your mate and understandably so. **Anger is certainly a justifiable emotion for this evil. Though you may feel like going out and destroying those who abused or abandoned your mate, it is important to put the energy from your anger into something positive like helping your mate to heal.**

Dealing with sexual abuse issues is very exhausting and depressing for it is a sickening sin. **The amount of involvement and assistance you give needs to be the victims decision, and in her or his own timing.** Your first concern should be to do what is best for your spouse. Your spouse may not want your involvement because she wants to protect you from her pain, or is afraid you may overreact and do something frightening. **Reassure your mate you can handle the stress and will act responsibly.**

It takes an unselfish person to help their spouse heal. A mate is to be a helpmate and because a victim cannot heal in isolation **your participation is vital for their healing.** When a mate refuses to get involved it tells the victim they aren’t worth their time or attention and your rejection adds to their already low self worth. It is often better for a victim to be single than to live with someone who does not care enough to help. One husband said “I can’t help because I can’t stand to think of all she went through. It hurts too much.” If this is you, remember all the pain your spouse had to go through alone. It happened to them. She or he is the injured innocent party. Do not make your spouse face recovery alone or ignore this issue. **Remind your spouse you want to be involved and ask her or him to tell you how you can be more helpful.** Your efforts will be greatly rewarded.

Define sexual abuse



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

Sexual abuse can come in the form of incest, sexual assault, molestation, rape, sodomy, exposure to pornography, sexual acts or words. All forms can cause extreme shame, humiliation and fear for the victim.

Sexual abuse can happen to anyone at any age, and it also happens in relationships and marriages. The most common age for sexual abuse to occur is six. One in four females and one in six males will become a victim of sexual abuse before the age of eighteen. Every three minutes there is a rape reported in the United States. Government authorities believe there are far more rapes that go unreported. For more sexual abuse statistics visits www.prevent-abuse-now.com/stats.

Abusers are wide spread and many. They can be a parent, grandparent, brother, sister, step sibling, relative, step parent, coach, a peer, parent's boy or girlfriend, friend of a parent, authority figure, caregiver, teen, neighbor, religious leader, group leader, or a stranger. **The most common abuser is a close family member.**

Ask your spouse to share who their abuser or abusers were. As they revisit their past they often find they had more than one abuser.

The healing process takes the victim through the following five steps:

- 1-**Admitting the sexual abuse happened** and telling their story to a safe person or group
Victims have to be truthful and not hide parts of their story.
- 2- Identify 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 discovering what is true and right and living by it
- 5-Making positive changes so their life will be better

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

Help me to understand what my mate's struggles are.

To better understand the challenges your mate faces it is good to identify the many ways the abuse has affected them. The obvious wounds from sexual abuse are sexual related issues **but they are just the tip of the iceberg.** Your mate may be struggling with many of the following:



- weariness from keeping dark secrets
- 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 relate 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 possibly becoming an abuser
- self loathing- self destructive behaviors-addictions-excessive drug or alcohol use
- lack of identity –codependent –has no voice-knows no boundaries-promiscuous
- 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, frigid, or sexual identity issues
- physical pain and health issues resulting from the abuse
- very needy from not being loved, nurtured or protected
- unable to be truthful or authentic
- poor coping skills
- may over eat, or be anorexic or bulimic

With issues such as these it is no wonder victims will try anything to find relief. Victims will look for escape from their painful memories and troubled life through drugs, alcohol, sleeping, sex, busyness, acts of service, religion, over-eating, over working, over-spending, compulsive exercise and perhaps even cutting.

Victims were forced to do many things they regret, and many were told it was their fault and that they were bad. **For many victims, the sexual abuse became a family secret, or a secret between the victim and the abuser.** 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”. **It is very liberating for them to finally learn it was not their fault, and there is a reason for their behaviors and difficulties.** Victims aren't weak or bad people! They are great people who have been wounded and are surviving the only way they know how. **There is always an underlying reason why people act like they do.**



When sexual abuse is ignored and a child is not rescued the victim will feel abandoned and unimportant. They will assume they are not worth saving. **Rage and anger can set in for young victims know of no other way to relieve their pain and frustration.**

Unresolved painful issues will eventually show their ugly head. Eventually victims will have to talk about their sexual abuse, or else they will continue to cover up their pain with alcohol, drugs, business, religion etc. to survive. As the victim becomes an adult their anxieties and problems will continue to escalate. Time does not soften the effects of abuse.

Your spouse's thoughts and actions are “normal” for a victim. Sexual abuse can have a profound negative effect upon the victim more than a non victim can imagine. Victims need to be encouraged to seek recovery so they will be less consumed or impacted by their abuse. **With help, a victim's life can become much improved. The suffering and nightmares can stop.**

How long will it take for my mate to heal?



The time line for healing is different for each victim and is influenced by many factors. Healing takes time because victims are dealing with many emotional and physical issues. It takes time to sort out their past, learn to trust, accept what is true and gain courage to implement change, especially if the victim has no support system **and many do not.** Breaking old habits also take time. It is encouraging to know that if a child victim is rescued early on, and intervention begins, they can recovery rather quickly with little affects or residue from the abuse.

The average age an adult victim seeks recovery is 40-45. The sooner a victim seeks help the better their future will be. Most victims claim it takes two to five years to work through the most pressing sexual abuse issues and up to a lifetime for those with physical and mental health issues resulting from their abuse. As they continue to pursue healing they will gain more insight, self worth and confidence which will **move them further and further away from their abuse.**

The healing process brings freedom, and it is a transforming experience 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.

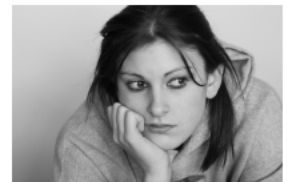
A victim's recovery time is influenced by the following factors:

- The degree or severity of the sexual abuse
- The age the abuse began
- The duration of the abuse
- The number of perpetrators
- The age the victim was rescued and recovery began
- The truthfulness of the victim
- The amount of support
- The 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 may have experienced



Because of the powerful shame and fear factors, most victims keep silent and try to heal by themselves. **Victims can not heal in isolation. The only way out of their pain is to admit to the abuse and share their secrets and story with a safe person. Thus, treatment requires your support and the help of competent healers** preferably those who have experienced sexual abuse and **Almighty God**. Healing Private Wound's recovery group leaders are well trained, committed Christians and sexual abuse survivors who have experienced freedom and recovery.

Victims experience humiliation and embarrassment for what their abuser did, especially if it was a parent or close family member. **Incest is a sick perversion and embarrassment is a very normal emotion.** If the story gets in the news and circulates in the victim's community it will naturally bring additional embarrassment. And if the victim has the same last name of the abuser it is hard to shake the association. Many victims have changed their last name. The pain of embarrassment of sexual abuse is very deep and can cause the victim to isolate themselves further, or split, or wish they were dead. **Even well intended comments from family members and friends are often very hard to take.**



What victims want is to forget the abuse ever happened and have the whole mess go away. However sexual abuse is not something one can forget. Sexual abuse brings a whole gambit of painful emotions, behaviors, and depression. There are reasons to be sad but the **victim needs to remember they did not cause this mess.** They need to stand tall and grab the support they need and thank God that healing is possible. This is not the end of their story. The best is yet to come.

Victims need to believe they are innocent. The abuse was not their fault no matter what they think or was told. **They were a victim of unfortunate circumstances and evil and that evil left them wounded, needy and vulnerable.** The abuse most likely caused them to do many things they regret which makes them feel even more worthless and horrible.

Victims may appear like they are doing OK. Many become masters at putting on a big smile and good front but in reality they are just existing and hanging on to life the best they know how. Most are not aware that their sadness and difficulties are a direct result from the sexual abuse and/or lack of love and protection. Many will say, "Why am I like this? The sexual abuse happened a long time ago." **A victim's problems won't go away until they deal with their abuse.**

Sexual abuse and family issues

Not all victims come from dysfunctional abusive homes. Many come from great families, yet 95% of victims are abused by a family member. Because of that statistic, we need to address the dysfunction in families that often contribute to incest or sexual abuse. We are not here to condemn families but to **bring light and hope to a difficult situation.**

Sexual abuse hurts not only the victim but it can destroy the whole family. Once a victim's story is out they **often experience family friction and division.** Often family members will not believe the victim, or want to talk about the abuse or help them heal. Some find it easier to live in denial or believe lies and side with the abuser than it is to help the victim. This is extremely painful for the victim. It is not bad enough that the victim was sexually abused but many are left with the reputation of being the "bad guy" for telling their story and are rejected. **Victims often become injured and isolated from their families.** If a brother or sister abuses their sibling, families are torn apart and parents experience excruciating pain and sadness for both their children. **Some victims have to 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 choose to press charges, this will bring added stress and friction to the family. **Victims need to be supported and assured they have the right to report the sexual abuse and press charges.** Sexual abuse is a crime and there are consequences for crimes. Most abusers won't stop until we stop them. Statistics show that over 58% of abusers will repeat. Pedophiles will abuse over 120 children before they are caught. www.usa.gov.org/sexualassultstatistics. **It is always refreshing to hear about the family that supports the victims and does the right thing.**

Victims and parent issues



Many victims have serious love-hate issues with their mother and have been hurt badly by them. They hate them for possibly not protecting them, abandoning, or abusing them. Yet, they love them hoping their mother will eventually come to their aid and love them back. **Victims will go to great lengths to try and gain their mothers love but unfortunately the moms who abandon or abuse do not have love to give back, and probably because they were abused and never experienced protection or love.** Many moms have turned a blind eye to the abuse. Others have chosen to stay with the abuser and let foster parents raise their children. There are moms who refused to believe the child or rescue the child. There are moms who sexually abuse their children, and/or allow others to sexually abuse them as well. Mother issues are very disturbing and destructive for it rips apart the heart and core value of the individual and cause great suffering and anger.

Mothers 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. If a mother never bonded with her child the child will have detachment disorders and often will not be able to bond to another. Many victims have said they went looking for love in all the wrong places, love which should have been given by their parents. In doing so they experienced more hurt and regrets. We know there are similar serious father issues that need addressing for sexual wounds caused by a father can cause a chain reaction that destroys the worth and spirit of the victim. The most devastating form of incest is caused by parents who sexually abuse their children. **Abuse, rejection and abandonment by ones parents, can send the victim into a deep hole of despair, destruction and confusion.**



Have you ever said this? If you have you should apologize.

Common and hurtful statements victims of sexual abuse hear are:

- “It happened a long time ago. Just get over it.”
- “You claim to be a Christian, just forgive them and move on!”
- “Are you sure you remember right? Maybe you are dreaming.”
- “Why would you talk about this now and hurt others?”
- “Could you be exaggerating?”
- “I think you are overreacting.”
- “But they are such nice people. Just forget about it.”



If non victims only knew how difficult it is to face sexual abuse and move on they would be more careful at 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. Talking about one’s sexual abuse or seeking recovery is **NOT** something victims want to do. **They do it to survive! They should be praised for taking this journey, not discouraged or judged. Taking the step to recover shows just how strong they really are** for recovery is hard painful work. Hurtful secrets need to be shared so their burdens can be lifted and their dignity restored. **Victims need to get to the bottom of their pain so their heart can heal and they can begin to enjoy life. Their state of physical and mental health also has a dramatic effect upon you, your children and other relationships so it is very important you support your mate as they seek to recover.**

Dark secrets destroy

Our bodies are not designed to keep dark secret. Hurtful secrets cause enormous stress and can create many health issues and sleepless nights. **The stress from sexual abuse, keeping dark secrets, and from not being protected can also 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 victim can significantly recover for the mind can be renewed and heal with assistance.**

(www.wmichigan.edu/hhs/unifiedclinics/ctac) Victims need rescuing so they can heal.



Victims who are not rescued grow up to be challenged and needy adults who often make poor choices. They are vulnerable and easily misled because they have no self worth or identity. **And because many were never valued or protected, they do not know how to value or protect themselves.** Abusive treatment is often their “normal” so they tend to choose mates and friends who treat them as they were use to being treated. Victims develop “victim mentality” from how they were treated in their youth.

And the victims who were told they were weak, dirty or unworthy, do not believe they deserve good treatment. Instead, **the words they were told become their self prophecy and they begin living out their life as if they were weak, dirty or unworthy.**

The statement “abuse begets abuse” is often true. Some victims become unsafe and even abusers because of their examples. **Child victims if incest can become abusers because they did not know it was wrong.** For them sexual abuse was a normal or acceptable behavior. If your spouse was an abuser, they need to forgive themselves and prepare to go to the person they abused and tell them they are sorry and ask for their forgiveness. They should tell them; because they were abused, they did not realize at the time it was damaging and they deeply regret abusing them. This will also help the one they abused to heal and it may begin a reconciliation. Confession is SO good for the soul. **It is important to know that the vast majority of victims do not become sexual abusers.** Most victims become people pleasers looking for acceptance for **they feel insignificant and worthless and are desperate for acceptance.**

Healing the mind-where it all begins

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. Healing progresses as they begin to understand “grace” and 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 is no less because their body was used by another even if they enjoyed the attention and sexual activities. They were a victim and manipulated. Children cannot protect themselves nor stop sexual abuse. They have to tolerate it until it ends and it is a **very painful and confusing time in their lives.**

To heal a victim needs to be stubborn and refuse to believe lies. A victim needs to read, research, seek support, believe what is true, pray, change habits and perhaps change friends. **They need to reprogram their mind to think differently and act differently.** They need to search for the truth in every thought and situation, and live by what is true. They need to consciously make decisions based on what is healthy and true. Following these principles will help restore their self worth and protect them from further hurts.

Sexual abuse greatly attacks a victim’s self-esteem. To compensate, victims will often exaggerate, become chronic liars, are over apologetic, talkative, become people pleasers or over spiritual, “a do-gooder” or become a perfectionist **hoping to gain the approval of others.** And because they feel unworthy and dirty some try to become invisible, avoid looking one in the eye, or accept a hand shake or a hug. **Victims need to live by what is true rather than how they feel for feelings are often unreliable,** for they are worthy and deserve equality in relationships and to have a great life. **Victims need to step out of their comfort zone and look people in the eye and say what is on their heart and believe they are just as important as the next person.**

Don’t underestimate the strength of a victim



Victims are great people! They often are high achievers and very conscientious workers. Victims will often pursue positions of authority (being in control gives them a sense of self worth and security) or choose service jobs where they can put their restlessness, experiences and energy into helping others. Many victims are overly conscientious, and perfectionists. Victims can also be “control freaks” and compelled to take on more responsibility than is theirs to take. Because most victims have huge trust issues they are suspicious of everyone, and **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 for 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. Many **sexual abuse victims suffer with “victim mentality”** and 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 busyness are how many cope. And because most victims have sleep disorders 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 them 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, a light turned on at night, being nude, licking an ice cream cone, taking a shower or bath, eating gravy, certain colors, pornography, hearing someone clear their throat and deep breathing- to name a few. **Ask your spouse what triggers memories for them.**

Recovery allows the victims to identify and defuse these triggers so they will no longer control their life or steal their peace.

The high price victims pay

Sexual abuse causes many chronic, painful and life altering health conditions such as, fibromyalgia, interstitial cystitis, pelvic and bowel inflammatory conditions, chronic depression, heart conditions, and mental illnesses such as bi-polar and disassociation disorders. The financial burden for therapy, medical care, and medications is tremendous. The Center of Disease and 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 that non victims realize.**

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

How can I help my mate heal sexually?

Because sex was the arena in which your mate was abused it will naturally bring great stress and conflict, pain and nightmares.



One victim stated that she was **able to enjoy sex when she first got married but as time went on sex became very difficult and even “faking it” became impossible.** Even though she loved her husband, sex was repulsive because of the flashbacks it created and the fact that she felt so dirty. **Most mates are not the problem for their spouse’s sexual hang-ups so they should not take the rejection personally but should understand the dilemmas victims face.**

To help both of you have a fulfilling sexual relationship it is important for you to know all the details of the sexual abuse so you won’t repeat or create additional heartache. That is why your loved one must be truthful about the sexual abuse and share all what was done to them including, where, when and how long, what words were used or names they were called etc. Understand that **“telling all” is not easy for the victim. Sexual abuse is horribly shameful and for most victims, very difficult to talk about.** Yet, by knowing “all”, you can be creative and avoid initiating or requesting sexual activities that bring back the hideous memories.

Some victims remember everything about their sexual abuse and others remember very little. A victim does not have to remember all of the details to heal. Encourage them to share what they do remember, and at their pace.

To help your spouse talk about their sexual abuse you must become a good listener, one who listens well , doesn’t judge, or put words in their mouth or give unwanted advice. A victim also needs to be certain you will not go out and kill their abuser or those who did not protect them. They do not want to loose you because of what happened to them. **They need you to be level headed and able to give them support and solid feedback. Assure your mate you want to help them and will act responsibly.**

Good communication is important in all relationship. **The deeper you are connected emotionally, the closer and safer your mate will feel towards you and more receptive to engaging in sex.** A victim needs to feel they have control over their body and especially in lovemaking. When making love, let your mate choose the sexual positions. It is important to allow your loved one to say “no” or “later” to sex, and respect their decision. **Ask them what is difficult about your lovemaking, and what you**

can do to make it better. Never push any touch or sexual activity that she or he feels uncomfortable doing. If you do your mate will feel violated once again and your relationship will regress. It is also helpful if the couple sets dates for when they will have sex. A patient spouse deserves assurance that there will be times for sex. The important words to remember when helping your mate experience sexual healing are patience, respect, thoughtfulness and tenderness all which equates to a safe, trustworthy, loving partner.

In most cases of sexual abuse the victim's skin was violated and when anyone touches them or sees them naked they feel violated again. They don't want anyone to touch them or see them naked including their husbands so they will often hide their body. **Many victims hate their body because of what was done to it.** It is common for victims to gain weight and look unsexy so their mate won't want to have sex with them.

You can help your spouse get over their "not wanting to be seen naked" by reminding them again and again that they are lovely just as they are, and you see them as a person of beauty not an object to be used. **Remind them you do not think of them as dirty or used but a beautiful creation who you love very much. Be careful not to make any negative or cunning remarks about their body even in jest.** If your spouse wants it dark during dressing or intimate times ask if a candle or dim light could be used. Reassure your spouse of their loveliness and how lucky you are to have them in your life

The human touch is powerful and healing for it helps bonding to take place. Bonding is essential for intimacy to happen and bonding begins by touching. To help your spouse bond with you begin touching him or her in non sexual areas such as stroking their hair, holding hands, sitting close so arms rub, touching their cheek, and rubbing their calves or feet. **You can also touch your mate with loving eye contacts, affirming smiles, with tender words or romantic gestures.** If your mate truly resents being touched try feeding each other ice cream or spaghetti etc. Or, play games that require eye contact and conversation. **Do things that prove you are safe to be with and are respectful of their mind and body.**

One woman stated that bonding took place for her during the hours she and her husband spent laying on the couch. After the kids were in bed they would lay in the spoon position while watching TV or listening to music. And because her husband told her he was not expecting anything more **she felt safe and could relax and enjoy the closeness.** Touching also helps you to bond with your children, and children **need** your gentle loving touches to bond with you. Bonding is necessary for emotional and physical development.



During the intense healing period you can expect times of abstinence. Be patient and understanding, and do not push for sex at this time. Instead offer other forms of affection often such as hugs, holding hands, kisses and gentle non-sexual touches and **tell them up front there are no strings attached.** You are not expecting anything more. **Your mate will be more receptive to your affection if they know it will not lead to sex.** In fact, as she is healing let her be the one to initiate sex. Your love and patience will eventually make her want you.

Foreplay outside of the bedroom is important. They say "sex starts in the kitchen" for it's very sexy for a wife to see her husband helping in the kitchen or elsewhere.

Do your part so your spouse will enjoy sex as much as you do. **Sex is supposed to be mutual enjoyment. If you have sex only for your gratification she or he will resent it and feel used and a victim once again.**

(A hygiene tip: Intimacy requires cleanliness. To be intimate, a clean body and fresh mouth are necessary for both partners. Make sure you are pleasant to snuggle up with.)

As your relationship deepens and their healing progresses, victims often find they can participate in sexual activities that were once "off limits". If you do your part, in time, sexual intimacy will come and it will be more fulfilling than ever.

If your mate will not engage in any sexual activities including touching they are not doing their part to overcome their sexual intimacy issues. **It is not fair to the spouse if a victim will not work at sexual healing for they choose to be married and being married includes being sexually intimate.** A spouse should not have to pay the rest of their life for what the abuser did to their mate. Victims need to allow safe touches and then in time, progress into lovemaking. **They may need to “do it afraid” until they find they are safe in their spouse’s arms.** At first they may have flashbacks but if they refuse defeat, in time enjoyable sexual intimacy will happen.

I Prayed and asked Almighty God to remove my father’s face from my head as we made love and soon he was gone. I also explained to my husband what I was thinking as he touched me so he knew my struggles. His patience and tenderness helped me through the tough times. If the victim never engages in sexual intimacy they will never find sexual healing and they have allowed their abuser to steal a special gift and closeness from their marriage.



One husband stated “The greatest feeling or high in the world is having an orgasm with the one you love so deeply. I want my wife to experience what I do.” **Pray and ask God to enter your love making and to restore it to be the beautiful experience God made it to be.** God designed sex in marriage to be pleasurable, exciting and fulfilling, not dirty, ugly or painful.

There are some victims who experience physical damage from their abuse which makes sex very painful. When this is the case they need to see a doctor and perhaps have surgical repair work done so sexual intimacy will be possible. Lubrications and vibrators can also help the victim to relax and enjoy sex. Do not be embarrassed to use products that might help to make sex more enjoyable. **However, do not use pornography. Porn does not teach intimacy or love.** It only cheapens it and makes sex vulgar and many times repulsive. Porn also can cause flashbacks and nightmares for the victim. People who use porn are subjected to unnatural and sinful sexual activities which often become the viewers standards for lovemaking, and it is hurtful and NOT God’s standards. All sexual activities should be consensual, tender, natural, respectful and private.

The most intimate form of affection is having sexual intercourse with the one you dearly love, and giving them pleaser as you receive pleasure. Sexual healing requires your mate to take the baby steps that will lead to experiencing sexual desire and pleasures.



Two important words “Adore” and “Respect”

Author and psychologist James Dobson states in his book “Love That Lasts”, that **women need to be adored, and men need to be respected.** For victims of sexual abuse **these needs are intensified.** Because sexual abuse makes one feel insignificant and often ugly, your mate needs to be told they are lovely, beautiful and adored often. Especially, when they look extra nice give them a compliment along with a smile or whistle. Women want to be complimented **outside of the bed room and know they are liked for more than their soft skin and vagina.** Female victims especially need to be noticed and adored. If you do not give them what they need and withhold compliments they may go searching for others to give it to them. Give compliments daily even if this is not easy for you. It is the same with affirmations. When your mate does something well, tell them and it is especially beneficial while in the presence of others.

As hard as it is for women to talk about their sexual abuse, it is even harder for men. **Males often have tremendous guilt and loathe their body for responding to sexual stimuli during the abuse.** Your mate needs to be reminded that it was not his fault that his body responded to the sexual abuse. It was a natural response. He was a victim and had no control. To help your man heal he needs to feel respected and significant. Tell him often you appreciate how he provides and contributes to the family, and/or his efforts to pitch in at home. Do not take him for granted or waste his hard earned money. Discuss your spending with him. Get his opinion on matters. When he does something you especially appreciate tell him with a kind word and a hug. Never demean each other in public. Save any corrections for the bedroom and address them courteously. Keep yourself attractive so he will be proud of you. Lift him up and praise him often and remind him the abuse was not his fault. Boys cannot stop

sexual abuse anymore than girls can. The sexual abuse was not his fault nor does it define him. **Sexual enticements often start with a child's natural curiosity.** He was not naughty, weak or bad. He probably was not told about sexual abuse. **The best prevention of sexual abuse is sexual abuse education.**



Why is my mate so emotional?

During the recovery process a victim's emotions may seem out of control. They may become numb, silent, very tearful, anxious and depressed. Or, they may become very talkative, angry, and agitated and want to escape. As you will learn later, victims hurt for many reasons not just from the act of sexual abuse, **and they will be affected emotionally.**

Victims are often confused and do not understand why they are so emotional or react as they do. It is because humans are emotional beings and the pain from abuse (or lack of love or protection) is reason to be very angry and emotional. A victim's heart has been deeply wounded and will cause them to react emotionally. Victims experienced pain and can relate to other's pain very easily which often causes them to be very emotional. Memories or triggers can cause them to be emotional. Victims can also have ongoing troubling issues that cause them to be emotional. Victims have a reason to cry and weep. **Crying should not be stifled or thought of as weak. Tears are a very normal and healthy response to pain and a great tension reliever.** During the healing and grieving time you can expect victims to be very emotional. Offer a Kleenex and tell them it is OK to cry and ask them to share what they are feeling. Victims have something to cry about. You may find yourself emotional and crying with them. **Crying together binds you together.**

There are other victims who are emotionally numbed by their abuse and cannot show emotions at all. **They have learned to stuff their tears and be tough to survive.** These victims do not feel normal and often wish they could cry. Healing allows the victim to get in touch with their emotions and eventually able to express them freely.



Victims feel a gambit of emotions such as worthlessness, incapable, inferior, and stupid and they need to reverse their thinking and develop a new mind set. As said earlier, **healing begins in the mind and victims need to reprogram their mind to believe what is true.** What we think becomes our reality even if it is wrong. Victims are worthy, capable, lovely and full of potential. **They did not want the abuse, cause the abuse, nor did the abuse change their value.** Once victims understand this they start to respect themselves more and begin acting like a person of value. They will also begin to require more out of their relationships.

Words Sexual Abuse Victims Need to Hear

Healing from sexual abuse can be an involved and lengthy process. The sooner your loved one receives the help they need, the sooner the healing will take place. Your words can help or hurt their recovery. The following are helpful and healing words.



- I am extremely sorry and I feel so badly this happened to you.
- I believe you and I'm here to help you work through this.
- It was not your fault no matter what you think or were told.
- I wish I was there to protect you. I am so sorry.
- I hate what was done to you.
- Sexual abuse is so evil and wrong. You were an innocent victim.
- I want to hear your story all of it, and anytime you want to share it.
- 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.

- Please tell me what I do that hurts you, or triggers a memory.
- Sexual abuse causes one to do many things they regret. It is not your fault. Forgive yourself.
- I love you just the way you are.
- You are a fantastic person and that has not changed
- How can I be more helpful to you?
- Hang in there. Life will be better.

Never say...

- I can't believe you didn't stop it
- Why would you let them do that?
- Why didn't you tell someone?
- Are you sure about this? It happened a long time ago.
- Just forget about it and move on.
- Why did you have to tell me?
- Go get help and leave me out of this.
- I think you are overreacting.



It is natural for a victim to feel unloveable for they believe if a loved one or friend would use them or hurt them in this manner they must not be worth much, and certainly undeserving of your love. **Your mate may do things to test your love to see if it is real, or try to sabotage your relationship because they feel undeserving of it.** A victim must begin to see themselves as innocent and lovable before they are able to like themselves or feel worthy of your love.

Talking about their abuse needs to be ongoing until they do not need to talk about it anymore, and that time will come. Anytime you see your mate concerned or worried ask them to share what is on their mind. Victims have many questions and fears about the abuse they need to sort out and they can't do it if they don't talk about their abuse, so encourage them to talk. Female victims especially need to talk a lot about their abuse and may need to tell you their story again and again until they are done talking about it. Be patient and let them talk. You do not have to understand everything, just be a good listener. **Women gain clarity and understanding as they talk while most men prefer to think things through.**

Most victims do not want pity or attention. They just wish the whole ordeal would go away. However, hiding or stuffing their story keeps the pain inside which prohibits healing. They need to know that telling their story is very important for it helps to get the poison out so they can heal. **Someone needs to hear about the pain they have experienced and the dark road the abuse started them on.** The truth will set them free. We are to carry burdens for one another. By doing so burdens are lifted.

Victims often struggle with guilt for enjoying the sexual sensations. Our bodies are made to respond positively to sexual stimuli. Their reactions were normal, not bad. And it's natural to want attention especially if love and attention was not given to them. Sexual abuse is never the victims fault.

Victims need hope that their life will be better. You can be a giver of hope for them. **Many want to give up for they think they have no future.** Victims are not damaged for life and should never be told so. They are certainly challenged, but their life can be significantly better. **Healing begins in the mind. It requires replacing false beliefs with the truth and a determination to reclaim their life by doing what needs to be done to heal.**



Healing is a choice. One can remain a victim or become victorious over their situation. **We were created to rise above and overcome, not to be overcome by adversities.** However, **the ultimate decision to heal lies with the victim. You can't heal for them.** They have to begin and take that journey. Unfortunately, some victims take the "poor me", "I deserve to act out" attitude and never get help which only isolates them further and keeps them stuck in the victim mode.

As mentioned earlier, often victims do not remember all of their abuse, only bits and pieces and that's OK. Usually they will begin to remember more as time goes on and as they feel safe. Many begin to remember more when their children become the age when they were abused. It is not necessary to

know every detail to heal. Some never remember all of their abuse. **What you are trying to achieve is helping them unveil the truth and remove the lies they have believed for so long so their shame and low self worth will leave and they can move forward and find peace and wholeness.**

Questions to help your mate tell their story

Often a victim will open up and tell their story after you ask one question. If they cannot talk about the abuse tell them you will ask them later. Approach them again in a week or so, or offer to find a friend or counselor for them to talk with. **Remind them that you will not leave them or love them any less after they tell you their story.** As the victim sees your unconditional love, and believes you will act responsibly, they will be more willing to share their story with you.

Questions you may want to ask:

- Do you believe I care about you?
- Do you feel safe with me, and comfortable sharing?
(If they do not feel safe or comfortable they will not confide in you. If that is the case offer to find a good support person or counselor they can talk to. Do not be offended if they would rather talk to someone else. Often they are just too ashamed to tell you and don't want to burden you with their problem.)
- What is your greatest fear right now?
- Can you tell me what you are feeling?
- How did the abuse begin?
- Were you abused more than once?
- Did you have more than one abuser?
- Can you tell me who your abuser(s) were?
- When did the abuse start and end? How long did it last?
- What did your abuser do to you or make you do?
- Were you threatened? Lied to? Tricked? Bought off? Drugged? Confined?
- Do you feel safe now?
- Are you in any physical pain?
- Are you able to sleep?
- Do you have nightmares? Can you describe them?
- Do you want help in finding a support group or counselor?



As they tell their story, do not act shocked, interject words, stop them from crying, or avoid eye contact. **Be a good listener.** Once they tell you their story, be sure to comfort them with words that bring healing such as the ones listed previously.

A support group and counselor will not only help them tell their story but encourage them to write it out. **Writing their story and then reading it to a trusted friend is very therapeutic.** Many professional claim the heart is more accurately expressed through writing. Where as, in telling one's story, anxiety can take over thus causing confusion. **The ugly secret of sexual abuse works like poison in our bodies** and writing their story out gets the poison out so they can begin to heal. Give your loved one a notepad and pen and encourage them to write their story and when they have finished, ask them to read it to you. Also, journaling can be very helpful and should be encouraged. One victim was artistic and drew pictures of her story which was a unique way to journal. I wrote my story and put it in a book called "The Whisper". If you are interested in reading it you can contact me at Shirley@healingprivatewounds.org

If you have never been a victim of sexual abuse, and we hope you have not, it is hard to comprehend the significance sexual abuse has had upon your loved one. They have huge challenges. **Sexual abuse can affect every area of their existence and causes a variety of negative consequences and behaviors** which will last a lifetime if they do not work at overcoming them. That is why it is very important to encourage your loved one to talk to you about their abuse, fears, regrets and heartaches and encourage them to get into a support group and/or seek counseling. The use of medication and therapy is often needed for a time and should not be discouraged, but rather encouraged especially if they experience lingering depression and anxiety. For those who suffer with mental disorders medication may be required for a lifetime and they should not be ashamed because they need it. **The**

abuse was not their fault nor was the consequences.

Shame is a great enabler. Your spouse feels very shameful for what happened to them, as well as for the poor choices they have made and behaviors since the abuse. When they come to terms with just how badly the abuse has affected them, they often experience more worthlessness and depression.

That is why life on the “healing journey” often gets worse before it gets better and they are tempted to split and leave the whole mess behind.

A parent’s pain



One of the most painful realizations for a survivor is when she or he becomes aware of how their abuse has affected the parenting of their children. Victims are often relationally handicapped and unable to bond or relate on an emotional level with their children—or others. If they were not properly nurtured and protected they never learned how to nurture and protect their children. Abuse can stunt normal emotional growth and if not helped a victim can remain emotionally stunted at the age the abuse occurred. That is why many victims seem naive and ignorant for their age. 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 heal, and change 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, nor should they give up hope in restoring relationships with their children. They need to forgive themselves and realize they did the best they could at the time. One victim said she asked her children to forgive her for not being the mom they deserved and that she loves them so much that she is getting healthy to prove her love for them.

You can redeem your spouse

A few kind words can have a great effect on your spouse’s recovery. To help lift your spouse’s low self-esteem, give sincere compliments often. **Remind them often the abuse was not their fault**, and tell them you are proud of them for taking this journey. Remind them that the antidote for low self esteem and depression is being positive and proactive, by setting goals, doing what needs to be done to heal, forgiving themselves and others, and adopting a good will project. Doing for others greatly helps the “doer” to heal. It helps to build self esteem and gives them purpose.

Victims often do not have the insight or initiative to do what is best for them and your encouragement and assistance will help them greatly. Go for walks or bike hikes etc. together and encourage them to eat healthy foods. Warm baths, listening to soothing music, daily reading inspirational materials are also helpful. Remind them that **this is their time to get well** and they are certainly worth every effort.

Victims need to make a habit of counting their blessing and looking for the beauty in each day. They need to thank God for all the blessing they have received. If this is hard to do, they can start by being thankful for the fresh air, the ability to see the beauty around them, and taste delicious food, to smell fresh bread, for their pets and for the ability to heal. When we put our focus on God and his awesome gifts our heart is lifted. We can’t to be thankful and hateful at the same time. **Victims need to concentrate on what is good about their live and believe life will get better. They need to believe God is working in them, helping them to heal.**

Explain about other forms of abuse

When one becomes a victim of sexual abuse he or she has *usually* **experienced other forms of abuse as well** which adds to their challenges as they recover.

The following explains the types of abuse they may have experienced.



- **Emotional abuse**; being lied to, or forced to keep secrets, tricked, or mind games played on them, told they were dirty or bad, degraded or told they were the cause of the abuse, threatened bad things would happen to them or their family if they told or did not participate, told they were damaged goods, unlovable, no one would want them or would believe them, yelled at, called names, threatened with a knife or gun, deprived of love, protection, nurturing and security.

- **Physical abuse** includes; bodily harm, hit, beaten, hair pulled, kicked, drugged, privates parts damaged, abandonment, deprived of physical needs, proper shelter, nourishing food, clothing, or medical treatment.

- **Spiritual abuse**; **The use of the Bible or other materials to force submission**, or to confuse the victim, portraying a distorted view of God, told wrong information about spiritual matters, forced to participate in unhealthy or satanic rituals and acts which hurt the body or destroy ones faith or hope.

Victims often notice that the abuser's life seems to be trouble free and blissful. And it does not seem fair for the victim to suffer and carry the shame and pain. You are right. It is not fair and life is not fair. I believe someday they will be in **deep trouble**, for their sins will be known to all and they will have to explain their actions and pay the price. I would not want to be them on judgment day! The same is true for those who did not protect your mate.

"Nothing is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him whom we must give account" Hebrews 4:13

Reversing evil and pain

For those who experienced spiritual abuse, gaining faith and trust in God can be the most difficult aspect in their recovery for many felt abandoned by God and question, "If God is all powerful why did God allow it." God hates sin and grieves with us. Yet, we all are given choices and it is men and women who chose to do wrong not God. God specializes in reversing evil and pain so evil will not win in our lives. God is our restorer, friend, and savior. Restoring their faith in God is the most important part of their recovery, for I believe when a victim has lost their faith they have lost all hope of fully recovering. **Without faith, a victim has to rely on their own strength to recover, which is never enough.**

Each form of abuse is damaging in its self and when you add sexual abuse to the mix the damage is compounded. **Victims of sexual abuse are often numb, depressed, distant, and suicidal.** Or, they can develop risky behaviors, become promiscuous, over bearing, and have a "don't care attitude". Others may become isolated, withdrawn, over spiritual, controlling or phobic. Most victims experience insomnia and live with great fear. Sexual abuse is extremely damaging and can mess up the victim in many ways.

Understanding the significance of sexual abuse helps one to understand that, though it might have happened a long time ago, **it greatly affects the quality of their life today and leaves a huge impact that takes time to repair.** And if one has not dealt with their sexual abuse early on, the consequences continue to affect them throughout their life. **Time does not soften its blow.** For those who keep silent, time usually magnifies their problems.

As you assist your love one, keep in mind that **healing takes time.** You can't hurry the process. Victims may be working on many areas of their woundedness such as; breaking addictions, personal health issues, resolving shame issues, learning to trust God, and how to set limits, family issues and working at trust and intimacy issues. Because of their low self worth and neediness they may have made poor choices in friends or mates and need to work at getting out of negative or abusive relationships. **You will need an abundance of patience, and support as well.** Seek out help for yourself for recovery is not easy on the spouse!

The big question “Why?”



Victims struggle with the three big “Why” questions.

- 1-Why were they abused?
- 2- Why were they not protected?
- 3-And why did God allow it?

You may be struggling with these same questions.

There are no reasons to justify sexual abuse. Your mate was wronged, and it was **evil and sin that caused them harm**. They were an innocent victim trapped in unfortunate circumstances.

In my search to understand “why” I learned that my mother was also a victim and never dealt with her own abuse, consequently, she lived in denial about mine. Even though she saw my father in bed with me she could not allow herself to think anything wrong was happening. And when I asked her for help, she told me to never talk about it. **Because she was not rescued so she did not know how to rescue me**. She was spiritual and believed you are to forgive and never talk about offences. Her reasoning did not help me or make sense.

Your mate was not protected or rescued either. People and perhaps the legal or social system also let your mate down and caused them more pain. All for which I am so sorry. **There was absolutely nothing wrong with your mate. She or he did not deserve to be hurt. She was an innocent victim.**

As much as you want your spouse healthy, the victim must choose to recover. **It has to be their choice and time. A victim cannot be forced into dealing with their abuse.**

God gave us the freedom of choice. God loves choice, and hopes we will choose to love and honor him. God wants us to come to him because we want to, because we believe in him and are grateful for all of God’s blessings. God’s blessings include healing, freedom, wisdom, relationship, hope, restoration, forgiveness, grace, peace, salvation and eternal life in heaven. Evil will not have the last word with God! Though we may never understand all of the “Why’s” rest knowing **God is a God of justice**. God wants to make up for the loss and pain your spouse experienced. My “why’s” eventually turned into gratitude and praise to God for the healing I’ve experienced.

Ask the “Why’s” and seek guidance and I believe you will find the answers you need.

Should my spouse report the abuse?



This is a good question. Sexual abuse is a crime and I believe it should be reported. Reporting could save others from becoming a victim. Even if the victim cannot prove the sexual abuse happened, (her word against his) there will be a record of the complaint on file. And if another victim reports a similar assault your spouse’s record could help them to get a conviction. **If your mate decides to press charges they**

should talk to the prosecuting attorney’s office in the county they were abused in and/or get a good sexual assault lawyer and he or she will walk the victim through the steps needed to begin prosecuting. To get a conviction the victim needs convincing evidence.

Reporting the sexual abuse can be a very hard decision because many victims love their abuser and do not want to get them into trouble, but statistics prove abusers will not stop abusing unless we stop them. 58% of abusers will repeat the offence and a pedophile will abuse over 120 children before they get caught. www.usa.gov.com/sexualassaultstatistics

What about confronting?

As a victim works through their recovery they will be more decisive about reporting and confronting. A victim does not have to confront their abuser to heal. However, **many victims want to confront their**

abuser and those who did not protect them, and they have a right to do so. Sexual abuse is a crime. They were wronged, and confronting can help to retrieve their self worth and gain power over their abuser.

Be aware that confronting can be dangerous and cause the victim more pain. **Most abusers will deny the abuse because they do not want to go to jail. Victims deserve to hear “I’m sorry. I wrong you and I am so sorry. Will you please forgive me? I will do anything to help you heal.” But they seldom hear those words.** If the victim chooses to confront they will need to practice what they want to say and confront knowing **they will probably not hear what they deserve.** Yet, confronting gives the perpetrator a chance to tell the victim they are sorry and ask for forgiveness. If this happens there is a great chance for both the victim and abuser to heal and move on. **Even if the abuser never admits to the abuse the victims can move on if they choose to do so.** However, healing becomes much easier when the abuser admits to the abuse.

Some victims prefer to write a letter to their abuser instead of confronting in person. If they do, they need to make a copy of their letter and be ready for any possible reactions. Victims have rights and many options but they also need to be made aware of the possible consequences.

If your mate chooses to confront, make sure they take someone with them. Volunteer to go with your spouse. Many victims ask their counselor to accompany them. You, nor the victim should ever confront alone and always do it in a open safe place. **Be prepared for denial and anger and if you confront never do it without your mates approval. It needs to be their decision.**

When an abuser has died, writing letters can be a way to help them heal. They may need to write more than one letter as they progress in their healing. Some victims have buried the note at their abuser’s grave site. Others have had a grieving/letting go ceremony and burned the letter. Both can help the victim move past the abuse.

Acknowledging the sexual abuse, the depth of pain it has caused, and grieving over what was lost is very necessary to heal. Give your mate grieving time and understand grieving can affect their emotional and physical health. Once they grieve they can arise and begin to see the possibilities of a new future ahead for them. **Relief will come.**

It is interesting to note that in an unhealthy family system, the victim is usually the first to seek help, the closest to the truth, and the healthiest in the family.

The greatest tool in helping your loved one heal is love. You can love them whole. Love includes showing respect, letting them make decisions, sharing information, and giving encouragement, being patient and a good listener, helping with meals and household chores, going for a walk or taking them to coffee or shopping or fishing, sending them notes, and praying for them.

Victims **do not have to remain in a state of hopelessness and self loathing.** Recovery is a process and a wonderful discovery about themselves and their future. I hope they discovery they are a unique lovely person with great potential and gifts to share. The more your mate can learn about their situation and their family history, the easier it is for them to fit the pieces together and put the abuse behind them. **Incest is often a generational sin. This does not make it a lesser sin or excuse it** but it does help to take the burden of guilt off the victim, and answer the “Why? question”.

As I stated earlier, recovery is a journey of self discovery. On their journey your loved one may discovery that all their problems are not caused by their sexual abuse and/or lack of protection. **Childhood trauma such as bullying, rejection, loneliness, divorce, illness or death in a family and etc. are serious issues that often linger into adulthood.** Be aware that victims are often dealing with many different wounds and issues beside sexual abuse as they heal.

The skeptic and faith teachings



A Christian therapist once told me that she believed that some victims can heal without having a faith in God but not without using the laws or principles God gave us such as; “we reap what we sow,” “give and it will be given to you”, “do unto others as you would have them do to you” “be slow to anger and live in peace” “respect authority and render to it.” “forgive” etc. **Victims need hope their life will be better. Faith gives them that hope. Faith believes in things that are hoped for, those which are not yet seen.** Faith is a powerful healing factor. Begin believing your life will be better and that healing is happening.

I began my faith journey in God by confessing I had many questions and doubts. I prayed “Lord I believe. But help me with my unbelief” hundreds of times before the glass ceiling finally broke and there was a “knowing” that God was real and there for me.

The power of love

If you ask me what is the most important element that contributed to my healing from sexual abuse I would tell you it was love. Love from others and from God. **I believe love is the most powerful force in the world. We victims suffer from a broken heart and pure love is what can mend it.** We can have all the knowledge in the world about sexual abuse but if we do not have someone to show us love we are still empty and needy. **Love gave me back my dignity, self worth, and gave me courage to pursue healing.** My husband was extremely instrumental in loving me whole. And I also have many others to thank for filling my love tank. Love came in the form of compassion, truth, patience, knowledge, understanding and hugs. But before they could love me whole **I had to be willing to tell them my story so they would know why I was hurting, messed up and needed their love.**

In my search for truth I know now that love **comes from God for God is a spirit of love.** Love is his idea and knows the power in it. That is why I believe we are commanded to love one another. Love allowed me to trust again-even God. **For me, trusting in God was a huge turn in my recover. I began to trust that God cared about me and would make good come out of my disaster.**

Before, I never understood that God loved me in a personal way or that he wanted a spiritual, intimate relationship with me. Because of my father’s iron hand I believed God must be the same. Was I ever wrong! **God is interested in the here and now, and manifests his love in many ways.**

When I read the New Testament I began to understand just how much God loves us. God wants us to find our way to him for **God has so much to give us such as love, hope, peace, health, strength and a future. God loves to help us heal and wants to be a part of our life. He is waiting for an invitation.**

I believe we cannot and should not push a belief in God on anyone. It has to be a personal decision. And one must want it. **Yet, I believe the most important turn in a victim’s recovery is when they choose to believe in our loving creator God and surrender their lives and the whole mess to God;** when they can finally lay their shame and burdens down and **pick up the grace and love that God offers.** Following God’s laws for healing which are laid out in the Bible, and allowing God to do what we cannot, **allows the victim to experience the miracles they need to heal.** Loved ones, friends, counselors, support people can help us greatly for they can be GOD with skin on. I believe God will use anyone who is willing, and anything including our pets, music, art and all creation to help us heal. God loves us that much. **Victims need to tell their story to a safe person or group so they can be loved whole.**

Does a victim have to forgive to heal?

I told myself I would never forgive my abuser and I lived by that decision for many years until I was sick

of being “sick and consumed by my abuse. I finally came to the point where I would rethink and consider anything if it would help me heal.

I believe that forgiving ones abuser is one of the toughest hurdles for victims to overcome. But once the victim understands that forgiveness is for their benefit, it becomes easier to jump that hurdle. The world does not always understand this reasoning **but those (and I am now one of those) who have experienced the freedom and peace forgiving gives can testify to the power in it.**



Victims often **believe that if they give in to forgiveness it nullifies the sin and allows the abusers to go scot free. They need to understand that** forgiveness releases the power their abuser has over them and **sets the victim free.** Abusers do not go scot free. There is a judgment day. And forgiveness does not mean the abuser is off the hook with the law. There are serious consequences for sexual abuse and the abuser may have to go to jail.

One victim stated “I can’t forgive him for then I can’t be angry at him anymore.” We should always be very angry about the sin of sexual abuse. The energy from our anger needs to be channeled so it produces good. Healing is an excellent channel for it, as is, promoting sexual abuse awareness and prevention, and helping others to recover. **Choosing to forgive does not erase the memory or change the past but gives new life to the victim.** Those who choose not to forgive offences often have a sharp edge, and “a look of distrust” about them. They are not easy people to be around. Unforgiveness wears heavily on the victim more than they realizes.

We do not imply or suggest abusers deserve forgiveness, but we do know hate and unforgiveness breeds unrest, depression, and illness and can keep the victim tied to the pain of their past. Victims deserve better. They deserve freedom.

Forgiving hideous crimes as sexual abuse is unnatural and often impossible but when we surrender our will to God, God makes it possible. **God gives us the grace and ability to do what we cannot do.** God tells us to forgive so can also be forgiven. Forgiveness is between the victim and God. The abuser does not need to know what has transpired in your heart. **Victims no longer have to hold on to the sharp razor of revenge.** When we forgive God will take it from here. God hates sexual sins. **God is a God of justice and will preside wisely and severely over sexual sins especially those committed against children.** When a victim is stuck in their recovery it is often because they refuse to forgive. But once the victim understands the purpose and benefits of forgiving it is more easily embraced.

The wounds of sexual abuse are too deep for victims to heal by themselves. They need to be encouraged to take that step of faith and trust God to help them for no one loves them more and can do more for them than God. God is our redeemer and restorer! **Thankfully, God provides grace and peace from all of life’s hurts even those we inflict upon ourselves.**

Many victims suffer from tremendous guilt and shame from the sinful life-style the abuse created. **Many 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.** Once she understood it was her abuse that caused her to react and behave as she did, she was more able to forgive herself. Again, accepting God’s grace and forgiveness is vital for ones healing. The great song writer John Newton has it right. God’s grace is amazing... and healing. **God loves us and does NOT condemn. God understand our actions, and is there to wipe away our shame and tears.** Victims need to except God’s love and receive the gift of “grace” that is offered to them. **As they do, and in time, they will feel the beautiful release of shame and guilt, and peace will come.**

The Bible tells us to forgive others and to **forgive ourselves.** (Mathew 6:8 and Colossians 3:13.) We must forgive ourselves for our sins so we can let our guilt and shame go and experience peace. Whatever you feel bad or guilty about, **ask God to forgive you and then forgive yourself.** We each know what our sins are-past and present. And when possible, go to the persons you have hurt and ask them to forgive you. Make saying “forgive me” a habit to those you have hurt and then stop doing the offence. **God forgives and forgets our sins when we come to him, and we too need to let our past**

mistakes go. Each day is a fresh start to do better and change our ways. That is true repentance.

What changes can I expect as my spouse is healing?



Healing will bring about many changes and you may be surprised with them. Your mate may become more assertive, vocal, independent, driven, accomplished, out spoken, demanding, sets goals, cares more for his or her body and spirit, and requires more out of your relationship. Healing should eventually bring a healthy balance to all of the above. As your mate is making positive changes you will need to grow and adjust also. Your relationship will not be the same. In fact it will be new and different. Be willing to make the necessary changes in yourself to improve your relationship. **You will need to grow as your mates does otherwise she or he may think they have out grown you.** They do not want the “same o-same o”. They want a new, respectful, love relationship, with better communication- and no secrets. Talk about what changes need to be made in your relationship to make it better, and it is helpful to write down what changes each agrees to make.

Every year my husband and I make a New Year’s Resolution to each other. We ask what we can do to make the other happier in our relationship for the coming year and then make that change. Every New Year we revisit this opportunity and make a change if needed. We have been married 47 years now and have made many changes that have made living together much more pleasant.

I have spoken about how important open truthful communication is in a marriage. My husband and I had to learn to communication from the heart and we keep working at improving our communication skills. I am a talker and have learned to condense my stories. Jim is a quiet man and is turned off by too much talking so I have learned to say what I mean and get to the point early on. When I need to talk more I go to my girlfriends and we chat as long as we want. Women understand that talking is important for it helps us work things out. In turn, Jim has learned to give me his full attention while I am talking, and responds to me in a kind way, and respects me for my opinions even though he may disagree.

As healing takes place your mate is becoming stronger, more knowledgeable, capable, confident and one you will be able to rely on and draw strength from. **They are growing up and becoming a new person. Old ways and thoughts are going, and a new life is emerging.** Spouses are not always please with these changes and can feel threatened by them. If this is you, explain your concerns with your mate. It will take time to adjust to these new changes. Unfortunately some mates do not want their spouses to change and grow up. They liked them as they were, and preferred to run the household and make all the decisions. **But when change and growth does not happen marriages fall apart.** Love is lost. As I said in the beginning, it takes an unselfish person to help a mate heal. **A marriage takes two unselfish people working together to make it work.**

What does recovery look like?



You can tell when a victim is well into recovery when he or she no longer sees themselves as a victim, has no guilt or shame from their abuse, has courage to speak up against wrongs, has forgiven themselves and others, is no longer afraid of emotional or physical intimacy, is easily able to talk about their experience especially to help another victim, and has made peace with themselves and their Almighty Heavenly Father. 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.

Victims who choose to heal are incredible people. They are courageous and strong for they take on challenges most refuse to tackle. It takes “guts” to admit to being a victim, and to pick up the pieces of a shattered life and make something valuable from it. **I am proud to be associated with survivors and consider many of them to be my closest friends.** I can count on them to be authentic and

trustworthy. They have my back and I have theirs. **We know how low one can feel and how great freedom feels and we celebrate our recovery. Life is good. God is good!**

I have taken the time to write this booklet because I want every couple to experience healing in their marriage. But even more, I want each reader to search for a spiritual relationship with our loving creator God for then I know they will find the help they need and the peace they yearn for. **Jesus came to teach us “the way” so we could overcome the world and experience life “abundantly”. No one should remain a victim. Encourage your loved one to find the life they deserve. It is there for them.**

Written by Shirley Jo Petersen, Founder and Director of Healing Private Wounds
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Healing Private Wounds offers counseling services to victims, spouses and families
Have a question? Need to talk to someone? Call Teri Fall 231-667-0388 or email
office@healingprivatewounds.org We are here for you!

Recommended reading

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 Whisper- by Shirley Petersen
The Holy Bible- NIV or Message version
Why People Don't Heal and How They Can-by Caroline Myss

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Our 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, counseling, services and education that will promote health and wholeness to victims and their families. We also provide Sexual Abuse Awareness and Prevention Education to sexual abuse from reaching our next generation.

What is love?

It is giving even when you have little to give.
It is taking time to listen even though you are weary.
It is helping another even though you could use some help.
It is hanging in there even though you feel like giving up.
It is speaking out for truth even though you are afraid.
It is being patient even though patience is not your virtue.
It is doing the hard stuff with a good attitude
because you “love” and know that is the right thing to do.

“In all the world there is nothing more powerful or
valuable than the gift of unconditional love.”

Life has taught me that all things are mentionable,
for anything mentionable is then manageable.

Shirley Petersen