

Lies people believe about sexual abuse

"You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

– John 8:32

1. Sexual abuse is uncommon.

Truth: *1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys are sexually abused as children. It is extremely common. Perpetrators can be men and women.*

2. Sexual abuse only happens to girls / women.

Truth: *Boys and men are also sexually abused, most often by other men and/or peers.*

3. Sexual abuse only happens in poor, uneducated communities.

Truth: *It occurs across all classes, ages, races, religions and professional groups.*

4. Sexual abuse is driven by a need for sexual fulfilment.

Truth: *The desire to control and overpower another person is sought through sexual means.*

5. The victim 'asked for it' / 'participated' and is therefore to blame.

Truth: *Various tactics are used to systematically render the victim powerless. The victim is never to blame.*

6. 'It was only a once-off, minor activity that I should just ignore.'

Truth: *Each situation is unique and seemingly 'minor' abuses can have devastating, long-term results.*

7. Sexual abusers are strangers.

Truth: *Most sexual abuse occurs by someone known to the victim.*

8. Sexual abuse affects the victim alone.

Truth: *Sexual abuse affects people around the victim, especially the sexual partner and other close relationships.*

Fact: The victim can feel 'sexual pleasure' due to involuntary physiological responses. This increases feelings of guilt.

What is sexual abuse?

Sexual abuse occurs when one person dominates and exploits another by means of sexual activity or suggestion. It can be violent or a process of gradual seduction / manipulation.

Types of sexual abuse could include:

- Showing sexually explicit material, speaking about sexual matters in an inappropriate manner or sexual verbal harassment.
- 'Flashing' or showing genitalia.
- Sexual touching: fondling, stroking, hugging and kissing in inappropriate ways etc.
- Sexual penetration: rape, date rape, marital/intimate partner rape, sometimes following seductive process or any sexual penetration without deliberate consent.

Effects of sexual abuse

- Psychological:
Victims of sexual abuse feel damaged, depressed, dirty, different and fearful, and sometimes struggle with a sense of being emotionally stuck. Sometimes a victim may experience gaps in their memory, and may constantly feel guilty or like a failure.
- Relational:
Being sexually abused affects relationships. Victims often experience a sense of social isolation and constantly battle the fears of intimacy or rejection. This may manifest itself in the need to please others all the time and/or the inability to trust others. Other harmful behavioral patterns may also develop.
- Physical:
Self destructive behaviours such as eating disorders and addictions, hyper-alertness, inability to receive nurture may develop.
- Sexual relationships:
Sexual problems are often the result of sexual abuse, and the partners of those who have been sexually abused may be secondary victims. Sometimes victims act out sexually or find engaging in sexual contact difficult.

▪Spiritual:

The spiritual life of victims is often affected by sexual abuse. He or she may feel a sense of spiritual contamination, unworthiness, shame or Divine disapproval. Questions about the loving nature of God arise and sometimes victims of sexual abuse even believe that God is punishing them through the difficulties they are experiencing.

Stages in the journey

Each person's healing pilgrimage is unique. Friends and partners are important people in the healing journey. Everyone needs help and support.

1. The Hidden Story:

The person has never told anyone. He or she will often feel alone, ashamed and fearful.

2. Speaking Out:

The story has been told, but it may be quickly covered up again or dismissed. Self-sabotaging beliefs and behaviours may influence daily life.

3. Processing:

This is where the healing begins: when the survivor of sexual abuse chooses to address the trauma. This can begin by reading a good self-help book, joining a chat forum or getting counselling and / or spiritual direction. This may be a difficult process at times, but it is very rewarding and life-affirming.

4. Integration:

Healing is not a single event but an ongoing story. It becomes part of the fabric of the life of the survivor. From time to time, some of the old patterns may resurface, and these need to be appropriately addressed. New freedom and new patterns of hope emerge. The abuse no longer defines the victim.



RESOURCES

Every effort has been made to check these resources but we cannot be responsible if there are changes to addresses or content. Please exercise discernment when using internet resources.



Websites

After Silence: www.aftersilence.org
Pandora's Project: www.pandys.org
Male Survivors: www.malesurvivor.org
Christian Survivors: www.christiansurvivors.com
(The journaling guide is excellent).
Child Abuse / Advocacy and related resource: www.abusewatch.info

Print Resources

- *Joy comes in the morning / Lag weer oor die dag wat kom*
by Yvonne Retief
- *The courage to heal: A guide for women survivors of child sexual abuse*
by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis
- *Victims No Longer: Men recovering from incest & other sexual child abuse* by Mike Lew
- *The Sexual Healing Journey: a guide for survivors of sexual abuse*
by Wendy Maltz
- *'Survivor to Thrive' Manual,*
available in pdf on www.ascasupport.org
- *The Artist's Way: a spiritual path to higher creativity*
by Julia Cameron

South African NGOs

- The Teddy Bear Clinic: for abused children: www.tbbc.org.za
- The Inter Trauma Nexus: www.itn.org.za

Specific Support in the Pretoria area

- Counselling & therapy:
Yvonne Retief: retief.yvonne@gmail.com
- Spiritual Direction & Retreats:
Lorraine Groenewald: lorraineg@telkomsa.net
- For more information or other support:
Ruth Loubser: ruth.loubser@gmail.com



*There is healing and hope
for survivors of sexual abuse.*

genesis
COMMUNITY

breaking silence around sexual abuse

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