Childhood Sexual Abuse: The Facts

It is estimated that one in every three women and one in every six men in America are victims of childhood sexual abuse. In most cases, the perpetrator was a personal acquaintance or relative. Upwards of 90-95% of these cases are never reported to the police.

The emotional trauma caused by abuse can surface during childhood, late adolescence, or even adulthood, and the effects of sexual abuse can look different in each developmental stage. Survivors might repress or downplay their feelings, thinking their experience was not as traumatic as that of others or that they should have “gotten over it” by now. However, ignoring the “hidden bruises” of childhood sexual abuse limits the restoration and healing of mind, body, and soul that Christ intends for His children.

The Indications of Childhood Sexual Abuse

- Guilt and shame
- Feelings of sadness, depression, anxiety
- Flashbacks, nightmares, sleeping problems
- Hatred of body, eating disorders, self-abusive behaviors
- Passive, withdrawn, or clinging behavior
- Inability to trust oneself or others
- Fear of entering into new relationships or activities
- Fear of physical intimacy
- Using sex as a distraction from feelings of guilt, shame, or depression

Additional Resources

Hush: Moving from Silence to Healing After Childhood Sexual Abuse
By Nicole Braddock Bromley

On the Threshold of Hope
By Diane Mandt Langberg

Healing of Memories
By David Seamands

Woman, Thou Art Loosed!
By T.D. Jakes

Beauty for Ashes: Receiving Emotional Healing
By Joyce Meyer

Released from Shame: Moving Beyond the Pain of the Past
By Sandra Wilson

Related Scriptures

When earthly parents forsake
Psalm 27:7-14
John 14:18

Freedom from shame
Psalm 31
God’s restoration
Isaiah 51:3
God’s justice
Psalm 36
Psalm 50:6

A Quick Reference Guide

Provided by the Office of Student Life
How to Help a Friend

• If your friend carries some of the hidden bruises of childhood sexual abuse, believe what he or she shares and encourage him or her to talk with a specialized counselor, especially if self-abusive behaviors or signs of damaged physical health are evident.
• Consider helping your friend make the counseling appointment and then accompanying him or her to it.
• Encourage your friend to stay with treatment over time. Therapy will not erase the abuse or make the negative feelings magically disappear, but counseling can help survivors refashion their view of the world and of themselves and gradually restore their control over their feelings and lives.
• Offer emotional support through understanding, patience, and compassion.
• Respect your friend’s privacy. Don’t share his or her experience with other people. Instead, let your friend decide in whom she or he wishes to confide.
• Support your friend in making his or her own decisions regarding legal action or reconciliation with the abuser. Encourage your friend to get information about these options from advocates on campus in Counseling Services, Student Life, Campus Ministries, and/or Residence Life.

• Expect to go through a period of mourning. The innocence of your childhood was taken from you. So, part of your healing process will be accepting what happened during your childhood and reclaiming positive aspects of your childhood in order to become secure and happy as an adult.
• Seek professional counseling (see On- and Off-Campus Support).
• Place yourself in a setting where you can hear the stories of other survivors of childhood sexual abuse. This support and shared power over the offenders of your past can help provide a healthy vision for your future. Many churches offer caring ministries or support groups.
• Let your family and friends help you.
• Listen to comforting, inspirational or worship music, and meditate on Scripture. These activities can help remind you of God’s goodness and assure you of hope for the future.

On- and Off-Campus Support

On Campus
Office of Student Life: available to talk and pray with you as well as suggest options for further care; stop by or call for an appointment (BC252; ext. 6300)
Counseling Services: offers free support to students struggling with childhood sexual abuse (Townhouse H1; ext. 8540)
Office of Campus Ministries: provides spiritual support and mentoring (HC325; ext. 6372)
Health Services: provides medical assistance as well as referrals for information and care (Townhouse H1; ext. 6215)

Off Campus
Arden Woods Psychological Services (New Brighton): 651.482.9361
Midwest Center for Trauma and Emotional Healing (Minnetonka): 952.934.2555
Minnesota Renewal Center (Arden Hills): 651.486.4828

1 in 5 girls and 1 in 20 boys are victims of child sexual abuse. Some 20% of adult females and 5-10% of adult males can recall a childhood sexual assault or abuse incident.
—Crimes Against Children Research Center