CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child Survivors, Mothers, and Perpetrators Tell Their Stories
ALSO BY JANE GILGUN


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CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child Survivors, Mothers and Perpetrators Tell Their Stories

Jane Gilgun
Alankaar Sharma

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The stories and direct quotes in this book are from interviews the first author conducted with perpetrators, parents, and survivors of child sexual abuse. Their names and identifying information have been changed. The research was approved by the ethics committees of the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, USA and Syracuse University, USA.

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FOREWORD

This book is for people who want to understand child sexual abuse in new ways. A main feature is stories that survivors, perpetrators, and mothers of child survivors tell. Through stories, this book answers many questions about child sexual abuse. How can they do these things to children? Why don’t the children tell someone? Does the mother always know? Does the father? Do abused children become abusers? By answering these questions, this book challenges myths and clears up misunderstandings about child sexual abuse.

In their own words, perpetrators, survivors, and mothers answer important questions about child sexual abuse. They show that child sexual abuse is an abuse of power, where older, stronger, and more knowledgeable persons take advantage of children for their own sexual and emotional gratification and sometimes for financial gain.

Readers will learn what child sexual abuse means to perpetrators, to survivors, and to mothers of survivors, how afraid children are to tell someone, why perpetrators get away with child sexual abuse sometimes for years, and how to talk to children who have been sexually abused.

Survivors will see themselves in the stories and will gain insight and understanding into what happened to them as children. They will find that they are not alone. Other survivors have experiences similar to theirs. Through reading what perpetrators themselves say, they will realize that perpetrators are self-centered and have callous disregard for what child sexual abuse means to children. The only persons responsible for child sexual abuse are perpetrators.

Mothers of survivors will learn that shock, initial disbelief, fears of losing everything, and their willingness to do anything to protect their children are typical responses. Contrary to popular myths, mothers do not always know and only rarely do they collude and fail to protect.

Family members will learn how to be emotionally available to survivors, how to hold perpetrators accountable, and what to do when they suspect that someone is sexually abusing a child. They will see the wisdom of providing a kind of "holding environment" for children and families affected by sexual abuse; that is, they will provide support and compassion while assisting family members to deal constructively with child sexual abuse so that perpetrators will get help and survivors and other family members will cope with, adapt to, and overcome the effects of the sexual abuse.
Persons who have abused children sexually will have to face the truth: child sexual abuse is not a loving, selfless act. Child sexual abusers take advantage of children and hurt them. They will see that taking responsibility for their behaviors is a loving, selfless act that helps survivors recover from being sexually abused.

Professionals will find information that will increase their knowledge and effectiveness as therapists, case managers, and program administrators. This book will provide valuable information to educators and mental health professionals on which to base trainings and programs for prevention, not only to empower children to take care of themselves, but also to prevent the development of sexually abusive behaviors and to educate parents and professionals about what they can do to create safety for children and to promote their healthy development.

Policy makers will find new directions in their efforts to make families and communities safe for children. The straightforward information in this book challenges the myths that fuel debates about child sexual abuse. Judges, attorneys, and police will find fresh ideas that will help them get at the truth when confronted with allegations of child sexual abuse.
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Introduction
What Child Sexual Abuse Means to Abusers and Child Survivors

\textit{Child survivors think abuse is their fault; Perpetrators know otherwise}

Perpetrators rarely think of child sexual abuse as abuse. They believe sexual abuse is many other things, such as love, affection, play, comfort, a thrill, a high, a teaching moment, or payback.

For many, sexual abuse is love. These perpetrators say they have fallen in love, what they do is love, they are having a love affair with the children, they want to run away with the children, and they want to marry them. They make claims that the sex is mutually pleasing. They often become angry and disgusted when they hear that someone else is sexually abusing children. “String them up!” they say. In their minds, what they do is love while what others do is abuse.

Those who see sexual abuse as play giggle and joke about the sexual touching they do or have the children do to them. They may play games like “You show me yours, and I’ll show you mine.” Some feel like children themselves. Many men who abuse boys establish a kind of “buddy” relationship with the boys where wrestling and “horsing” around lead to sexual contact.

Sex abuse as comfort is common among perpetrators. Some say sex with children is a “fix”—it fixes them when they are feeling bad. Others say the only time they feel good is when they are have sexual contact with children.
Sometimes perpetrators see themselves and the children they victimize as soulmates. For them, life is hard, and they think it is hard for some children. They seek children who appear sad to them. In their way of thinking, their sexual behaviors comfort and soothe hurt, sad children. Sex abuse for them becomes an act of kindness.

Those who seek thrills and highs experience sex with children as the greatest feeling in the world. They would do anything to get the high that sex with children gives them.

Still others see themselves as teaching children, often their own biological children, how to make love. They would rather that their children learn from them rather than some scruffy teenager.

Some are rough and mean, deliberately hurting children. In their own minds, they believe children deserve to be hurt and damaged. They may confuse children with other people who have hurt them, and they think they have a right to take revenge on children. Children are scapegoats.

Here are the words of a father who could described what he did in some detail and stated how he felt. Absent is concern for his daughter’s well-being. He lived with his wife, three children, and a cat.

One night I was making my regular rounds through the house, making sure the kids were in bed, the doors were locked, the cat was in and stuff. I had gone down to my daughter’s room. It was very dark. I leaned over to give her a kiss goodnight. When I went to brace myself on her bed, I actually touched her breast when I kissed her on her cheek.

It was just like a shot of electricity through my body. I went upstairs and went to bed and tried to forget about it, but it was just racing in my head. I didn’t go back down in her room for several days after that. Eventually, I did go back down there and the same thing. Kiss her on the cheek, but this time when I touched her breast it was intentional.

Then progressively it got to the point where I went down there, and I would touch her breasts over and under her pajamas while she slept, or I believed she slept. I would touch her with one hand, and I would masturbate with the other.

Children Understand Sexual Behaviors Differently

Children do not understand sexual behaviors in the ways perpetrators do. Children do not have the experience, the emotional and cognitive development, and the brain development to do so.

For instance, a thirteen year-old girl believed that her uncle was trying to love her. She said, “I didn’t like him the way I like boys.”
Sexual acts are a mystery to children. A girl whose grandfather abused her for six years, starting when she was three, said.

Grandpa used to do it on the boat. He had sort of a grin on his face. White stuff came out.

Another girl, age 10, said her teenage babysitter sort of did push-ups on her.

A six year-old boy who was abused for a year and a half by a fourteen year-old neighbor told his mother that his body was made so the older boy’s penis could fit inside him.

These examples show that children do not understand sexuality and sexual abuse. They also do not understand that perpetrators take advantage of them for their own sexual gratification. Children become confused by sexual acts, whether done by people they love and trust, by acquaintances, or by strangers.

Some children take pleasure in the attention but the sexual contact makes them afraid and ashamed. Andy, a man in his mid-twenties, reflected on the sexual abuse his teenage uncle had perpetrated when Andy was between eight and eleven years old. He said.

I felt like he cared for me, and that was pleasurable to me. I don’t think specifically the sexual act was that pleasurable for me because it was more uncomfortable. I was scared, but I know it was probably the first time I felt there was an adult who really cared for me, and that made me feel good. That was pleasurable. So it may be that I wanted to—maybe not sought out, but enjoyed the time with him, but not specifically the sexual acts, but just feeling cared for by an adult. I think I liked that.

I’d never thought my parents did [love me], and in some ways today, I still don’t believe that my parents love me. He was the first person who like spent time with me and did things with me, made me feel like I was okay. That confuses things there and makes it worse, because I was scared and then I felt cared for and I was confused, and yet be made me feel better.

I mean in society it’s such a taboo thing. Sexuality as a whole when you’re such a small child, you don’t learn about that. You don’t know about it. You just know that it’s wrong because you don’t pull down your pants for someone, because you don’t expose your genitals. You know that that’s all wrong just from growing up.
Perpetrators Have Sole Responsibility

Children also do not realize that the only persons responsible for the abuse are perpetrators. A lot of non-offending adults do not realize this either, and children may be blamed and stigmatized for being sexually abused. There are many aspects of child sexual abuse that many parents and other non-offending adults do not understand.

Nothing about children causes sexual abuse. All children are vulnerable to being sexually abused. Those who are sexually abused have the misfortune to be in the presence of perpetrators, and there is no one there to protect them. Children with disabilities are especially vulnerable to sexual abuse.

In the long run, survivors benefit when others hold perpetrators responsible and accountable for their behaviors.

The Best Case Scenario

When children have been sexually abused, the best case scenario means that the children are surrounded by people who love them and who believe them when they say someone abused them sexually and do not blame them. The best case also includes parents who provide love, safety, accurate information, predictable routine, and access to therapy and to professionals who can help them deal with their power feelings of guilt, shame, and powerlessness. Children’s recovery depends upon empathy, understanding, predictability and a sense of safety, and accurate information.

Children’s recovery is given a big boost when perpetrators take responsibility for the abuse, accept the consequences for their actions, seek the help they require to stop themselves from sexually abusing again. Apologies in person or by letter to the children and other persons they have armed contribute to recovery. This should only be done when children are ready and are in safe situations that will protect them from any hint that the perpetrators blame the children.

When perpetrators have the courage to do this, child survivors are relieved from the guilt, shame, and stigma that are part of being sexually abused. The adults in their lives have evidence in the words and actions of perpetrators that perpetrators alone are responsible, not the children, and that the perpetrators’ behaviors hurt the children.

Over time, recovery means that the children understand that someone, often someone they loved and trusted, hurt them psychologically and sexually. Recovery also means that survivors have capacities to cope with, adapt to, and overcome the effects of the abuse. They know they are good persons who are worthy of the respect of others and self-respect, They
have confidence in themselves and have the love and support of family and friends.

They do not forget that they survived sexual abuse, but they have integrated the effects of the abuse into their understanding of themselves. They live full and rich lives based on their capacities to cope with, adapt to, and overcome the effects of the abuse.

Children can and do recover whether or not perpetrators take responsibility for their own actions if they have the support, love, and understanding of family members and other persons who are close to them.

Some survivors are well into adulthood before they find the empathy and understanding that enables them to tell others about being sexual abused. This brings them relief and emotional freedom. Some live their lifetimes hurt by the effects of child sexual abuse.
What Child Sexual Abuse Is and Is Not

*Perpetrators take advantage of children*

Child sexual abuse is an abuse of power, where older, stronger, and more knowledgeable persons take advantage of children for their own sexual and emotional gratification and sometimes for financial gain.

Child sexual abuse is a physical act and a psychological experience. As a physical act, child sexual abuse involves both touch and non-touch behaviors. As a psychological experience, child sexual abuse represents an abuse of power and authority, where perpetrators satisfy themselves emotionally and sexually and children are hurt and confused.

**Child Sexual Abuse as Touch Behaviors**

Sexual abuse that involves touch means that the abusers get children to perform sexual acts on them or they perform sexual acts on the children and often both. Perpetrators may force children to touch their penises, testicles, or other sexualized parts of their bodies. Perpetrators touch children on their breasts, buttocks, vulvas, penises, and testicles.

The sexual acts may also involve penetration of sexual body parts, such as the vagina, anus, or mouth with the penis, tongue, fingers, or objects, or can involve cunnilingus (mouth and tongue on vulva or vagina) and fellatio (mouth and tongue on penis). Some perpetrators, especially those who create pornography, may force children to perform sexual acts on each other or with adults.

Perpetrators get a thrill and a high out of sexual abuse, while the children are confused and afraid. Some children are so scared it is almost as if they are not there, and the sexual acts are being done to someone else. This is a psychological state called disassociation.
In some instances, children may feel a warmth or tingle in their sexual body parts and some have orgasms. This usually makes the children more afraid and confused. Bob, an adult male survivor, said about the abuse a teacher perpetrated when Bob was thirteen:

I remember hating it. I remember being scared of the sexual stuff. I do remember it felt pleasurable, too.

Often the same children experience tingly sensations and sexual stimulation in some instances of abuse and not in others. Other children feel only discomfort, stinging, or pain. Fear, shame, embarrassment, and feelings of being discounted and used are emotions that children experience.

**Child Sexual Abuse as Non-Touch Behaviors**

There are many types of non-touch sexual abuse, such as sexualized looks and talk, voyeurism, exhibitionism, child pornography, and child prostitution.

Sexual talk and sexualized looks create a sexualized atmosphere that children do not understand and that can confuse and hurt them. Voyeurism involves watching children as they get dressed or take showers. This is also called peeping. Another is showing their sexual body parts to children. This is called exhibitionism or flashing. Exhibitionists and voyeurs experience intense excitement and sometimes also describe warm sexual feelings that wash over them. These behaviors scare and confuse children.

Other form of non-touch sexual abuse occurs when adults treat children as sexual objects by dressing them in “sexy” clothes and rewarding children for imitating “sexy” adult behaviors.

Some people, including family members, do not themselves touch children in sexualized ways, but they allow others to do so, through making pornography, where they photograph or videotape children in sexual poses typically with other people, or through prostitution, where they collect money when others use children sexually.

**Sexual Abuse Harms Children**

Being forced into sexual activities harms children no matter how old or young perpetrators are. Through being sexually abused,
Children learn from their own experience that what they want does not count and that they themselves do not count. Thus, their autonomy and sense of self-worth are harmed. Their sexuality and sexual identities may be affected as well.

**What Child Sexual Abuse is Not**

Sexual play between age peers is not sexual abuse. Curiosity about sexual body parts is developmentally appropriate. Sexual play is spontaneous and brief, not pre-planned, and the children are about the same size and similar in physical strength. In sexual play, children have similar understandings of the meanings of their behaviors and the consequences if adults find them in states of undress and engaged in activities that involve sexual body parts. Children often are embarrassed and feel giggly and silly when they engage in sexual play.

What adults consider sexual play may not be sexual at all for the children. They experience a simple curiosity about body parts that arouse no other feelings but surprise and the satisfaction of curiosity.

Most children engage in sexual play during their childhoods and show interest in sexual matters by the time they are toddlers. Infants enjoy touching their genitals. Even before birth, boy fetuses have erections, and girl fetuses have genital swelling.

**Routine Care**

Sometimes parents touch their children’s sexual body parts in the course of routine care, but parents know in their own hearts when touching is a routine and not a sneaky way of getting a sexual and emotional charge. The same is true of nudity and of bathing or showering together. As long as these activities are routine and natural for both the children and the adults, then sexual abuse is not taking place.

As children grow older and are school-aged, adults eventually find that they and the children are no longer comfortable with this easy way with nudity. Privacy and modesty become the norm. If adults disrespect children’s growing sense of modesty and privacy, this becomes a form of child sexual abuse.

Sexuality is a natural part of being alive. Children’s understanding of sexuality depends on how other people
communicate about sex and upon children’s developmental level. When guided by adults who provide age-appropriate information and who behave in sexually appropriate ways, children develop in sexually healthy and responsible ways.
World-wide at least twenty percent of all girls and about ten percent of all boys are sexually abused. Children are a third of the world’s population of more than six and a half billion. These figures mean that hundreds of millions and perhaps more than a billion children, adolescents, and adults are survivors of child sexual abuse. These are enormous numbers that lead some people to wonder if child sexual abuse is so prevalent as to be almost a “normal” part of childhood.

These figures may be underestimations because many children do not tell about being sexually abused, perpetrators have reason to hide their behaviors, and families may not report sexual abuse to authorities when children tell. Shame, stigma, social ostracism, and other severe consequences for survivors, for families, and for perpetrators are reasons for not letting anyone know and for not reporting to governmental officials such as police or social services, if there are laws that sexual abuse must be reported.

Surveys May be Inaccurate

Surveys show wide variation in the occurrence of child sexual abuse, possibly because of survivors’ fears to state they have been sexually abused and perpetrators’ reluctance to tell others about their behaviors.

In addition, researchers define child sexual abuse in different ways. National, state and local level studies conducted in the United States over the past twenty-five years indicate a prevalence level of between two percent to sixty-two percent for females, and one percent to sixteen percent for males.

In terms of how many children are abused in one year’s time, the range is from between about seven per thousand for girls and a little more than two per thousand for boys. Other studies
show that eighty-two girls and boys per thousand are sexually abused each year.

Internationally, several studies report an average prevalence rate of twenty percent for females and five to ten percent for males. These rates vary by country. In China, for instance, the rate is about seventeen percent for females and more than ten percent for males, about twelve percent for females and more than four percent for males in Australia, sixteen percent for females and seven percent for males in Denmark, almost thirteen percent for females and more than four percent for males in Canada, twenty-six percent for females and twenty percent for males in Nicaragua, and more than fifty-three percent for females and sixty percent for males in South Africa.

Increase of NGO Studies

There has also been an increase in studies by non-government and voluntary sector organizations, reporting prevalence of child sexual abuse in their respective social, cultural and geographic contexts. Though these reports may not always be based on randomly selected participants, they provide valuable information that is indicative of the magnitude of sexual abuse of children within their contexts. Such studies have reported a prevalence of thirty-nine percent for females and forty-eight percent for males in India.

These large numbers do not indicate that there is more child sexual abuse in India than in other countries. Rather, it is likely that the surveys done in India had carefully crafted definitions of child sexual abuse that made it possible for survey respondents to understand the questions and respond accurately.
FOUR

Perpetrators are Trusted Family Members,

Friends, and Professionals

Child sexual abuse can be difficult to detect and may go on for years. Perpetrators get away with it because they are trusted family members, close family friends, acquaintances, or trusted professionals. They can be responsible and loving family members, helpful and friendly neighbors, and accomplished, competent professionals.

Some people think sexual abusers of children are dirty old men in overcoats who have weird looks on their faces and who may mumble to themselves as they stand in dark street corners or scurry down alleys. In fact, these false images protect perpetrators.

People do not expect perpetrators to look like everyone else and be someone they know, like or even love, and respect. If the thought crosses someone’s mind that such a person is sexually abusing children, this is immediately put aside as impossible because this person would never do such a thing. In fact, seemingly wonderful people sexually abuse children.

Denial that a respected, loved, competent person could sexually abuse children is a well-known phenomenon that has protected perpetrators for many years. Family members often do not know. Friends miss the signs. Professionals may not realize that a colleague or a client abuses children sexually. Bishops, archbishops, and cardinals misunderstood the danger posed by priests with histories of child molestation.

Shock Over Who Abuses Children Sexually

People who think they can tell that someone is a sexual abuser by looking at him or her or are often shocked when they learn that someone they know, respect, care about, and may love has abused children sexually. Perpetrators of child sexual abuse are family members, friends who are there for good times and bad, friendly and helpful neighbors, members of religious organizations, volunteers at the nursing home, and people who...
have coffee in the mornings with friends before work. Almost all marry and have children and have worries about money. In short, they live their lives like everyone else, except when they abuse children sexually or think about doing so.

There is no one body type for perpetrators. They may be tall, short, or in-between. They can be slim, overweight, or athletic. They may be handsome, beautiful, or average in looks. There is no one way to tell by looking at someone that she or he abuses children sexually.

Perpetrators come from every walk of life. Medical doctors, college professors, social workers, bus drivers, coaches, youth workers, teachers, politicians, machinists, clergy including rabbis, electricians, and book sellers are just some of the job categories that perpetrators fill.

Perpetrators are husbands and fathers, wives and mothers, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandfathers, grandmothers, cousins, and family friends. They are next door neighbors. They may perform community service, such as delivering food to the elderly or volunteering at a children’s home.

Perpetrators of child sexual abuse may be adults, teenagers, or other children. They are male and female, although males account for most known incidents. Perpetrators of child sexual abuse do not stand out in a crowd. There are like everyone else. Some even stand out in a crowd.

George, handsome, charismatic, and married to a high-salaried professional woman, explained how other people thought he was “great and wonderful.”

I was a stay at home father. We saved a ton of money on daycare and transportation and just all kinds of stuff. I was really into it. I volunteered at all the schools. I was a Cub Scout den leader and softball coach and would go to the schools and read and volunteer on the school play. I was really into being the stay at home dad. I loved it, absolutely loved it….

On the surface I was like, you know, just Joe wonder dad. I’d have neighbor kids come over in the morning because their parents would be leaving and so I would, “Yeah, sure, come on over.” We’d all hop in the minivan, and I’d take all kinds of kids. Everybody at the schools knew me on a first name basis. I volunteered for the national night out block parties. I was very instrumental in the church and all that. So everybody thought I was great and wonderful.
Difficult to Believe a Loved One is an Abuser

It can be difficult if not impossible to believe that a loved one could sexually abuse children. One mother said:

When my daughter told me her father was touching her sexually, I didn’t believe her. She was such a wise-ass kid, and this man was the love of my life. He was my high school sweetheart. We had been together twenty-two years.

Eventually, she believed her daughter and divorced her husband. She felt so terrible about not believing her daughter that she got training as a rape crisis counselor and got a job working at a rape crisis center. She felt understood and at home there.

Some survivors understand how hard it is to believe that someone you love abuses children sexually. A fourteen year-old girl said:

I don’t blame parents for not believing their kids. I could hardly believe it when my stepfather raped me. He is such a nice guy.

Andy said something similar about his father, who sexually abused him one time when he was a teenager and he and his father shared a bed in a motel while they were on vacation. His father masturbated him, after waking up in the middle of the night. Andy said:

My father is such a good person. How could he do that? It makes it harder for me to believe it, but I still know that it happened.

Even when loved ones admit what they sexually abused children, family members and friends may doubt the truth of the confession, blame the victims, or dismiss the significance of perpetrators’ behaviors.

Case Examples

Twenty two year-old Eddie, who abused much younger girls beginning when he was fourteen, was a seemingly model teenager who was tall, good-looking, a good school athlete and a
good student. He was surprised when other people blamed his victims. He said

I had a double life. Everybody thought I was good. When I got arrested a lot of people blamed my victims. Neighbors, family members, people that knew the victims. They said that the girls were promiscuous. He’s a good kid.

An attractive, educated, married man named Sam, father of two sons, told friends that he had sexually abused boys since he was a child himself. He said

I don’t think anybody really believed me. My behavior was quite exemplary in that I don’t think they believed what I was saying.

He told his wife before he married her. The two had pre-marital counseling. He said he felt relief in talking about his sexually abusive behaviors, but

it had nothing at all to do with changing my behavior. That was a real hard thing to accept.

His fiancée married him knowing his history of molesting children. They have been married for twenty-five years, raised three sons, and are still together.

Handsome, charming, and financially successful Dustin had a mother who did not believe that her son had committed incest. Even after Dustin pled guilty in court, was sentenced to sex offender treatment and thirty years probation, his mother denied he had sexually abused his daughter and her granddaughter. This is what Dustin said

She still thinks that this is all bullshit, and I should not have been locked away in jail forever and that the therapists are making it all up and it all didn’t happen and this type of thing.

The myths and misunderstanding about perpetrators of child sexual abuse are great barriers to detecting abuse and protecting children. They may lead to the disbelief of children and the
break-ups of families. Dustin’s mother, for example, broke off her relationship with her granddaughter and her son’s entire family.

**Professionals Abuse Children Sexually**

There are many documented cases where professionals get away with sexually abusing children for years because other people cannot believe that these persons would commit such acts. Often their victims are vulnerable children and teenagers in foster care, children’s homes, and residential settings. These children may have extensive histories of being abused and neglected, including being sexually abused.

In rare instances when these children report the abuse, other professionals in these settings may not believe them. Sometimes their reports are dismissed as fantasies and attention-seeking. Sometimes, one or two professionals believe the children but are shocked when other professionals think they see sexual abuse where it does not exist.

**Case Study: Denial of Abuse in Institutions**

A case of sexual abuse in a child care facility illustrates some of the complex issues that arise when professionals abuse children in their care. A social worker in a residential treatment facility noticed that one of the teachers spent a lot of time alone with a fourteen year-old girl who had an extensive history of being sexually abused and who had diagnoses of anxiety and dependency disorders. She was shapely and beautiful.

When the social worker asked the teacher about the time alone with the girl, the teacher said the girl is smart and he is giving her tutoring so she can go to college and fulfill her potential.

Another child reported to the social worker that the teacher and the student were kissing and touching each other in the teachers’ office. The child had walked in without warning.

The social worker immediately reported the incident and her own observations to the superintendent of the residential facility. The superintendent got very angry with the social worker and told her to stop making things up. The social worker was unsure about whether the superintendent was attempting to protect his own reputation or whether he really did not believe her.
At the next staff meeting, the superintendent told the entire staff about the social worker’s report, stating that this is an example of bad practice and seeing abuse where there is none. Almost all of the staff said the teacher is a wonderful person and would never do anything like this. One or two other staff members talked to the social worker privately and said they had their suspicions, too. They never voiced their suspicions to the superintendent.

The superintendent had given the teacher the day off, and thus the teacher was not at the meeting. Someone must have told him about the social worker’s concerns. From then on, the teacher refused to talk to the social worker.

The girl was transferred to another facility a few months later, but the teacher stayed on. At the other facility, the girl told a therapist that the teacher had sexually abused her. The girl was so ashamed that she said if the therapist told, then she would commit suicide. The therapist contacted the social worker at the other facility, and the two decided to wait to report the abuse until the girl was stabilized.

Within a few weeks, the girl was ready to let others know about the abuse. The therapist reported the abuse. The story appeared in the newspapers and in other media. The teacher was convicted of child sexual abuse.

The superintendent scolded the social worker for not telling him right away about the girl’s statement to the therapist at the other facility. He threatened to fire her. She told him that if he did, she would tell newspaper reporters that she had told him months earlier about the kissing incident and her own suspicions. The social worker still works at the facility, and the superintendent is talking about retiring.

Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church

The wide-spread sexual abuse that Roman Catholic priests perpetrated is another example of abusers getting away with abuse for years. As difficult as it is to understand, bishops, archbishops, and cardinals, who are the main authorities in this church, typically sent these priests for treatment, doctors declared them cured, and the priests were assigned to parishes where they had on-going contact with children. Some priests abused children for decades in several different parishes, shuttling between treatment and par-
ishes, and sometimes skipping treatment when they moved from one parish to another.

The children and their families looked up to these priests. As many survivors have said, children in the Catholic Church are taught from an early age that priests are God’s representatives on earth. They are the link between ordinary people and God. When Catholics go to confession, they talk to God through priests. When priests say Mass, God is there on the altar.

Children hold priests in awe. They can do no wrong. When priests abuse children, the children try to believe that this must be the right thing to do. Some priests and other clergy tell children that they are participating in God’s love. One priest sexually abused boys while he said the “Hail Mary,” which is a Catholic prayer to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

It is hard to understand how church authorities could allow sexually abusing priests to have on-going contact with children. Despite their spiritual authority, they apparently did not understand what child sexual abuse is, how it affects survivors, and that people they know and trust—even those they believe were called by God to be priests—would continue to abuse children after they received treatment, confessed their sins, and promised to stop.

Church authorities may have believed or wanted to believe that treatment, reprimand, repentance, and transfer to a new parish were enough. They might have seen only the many wonderful qualities these priests had and could not believe that such good men could abuse children sexually.

The priests could have been like other perpetrators, thinking they were doing no harm, that they were loving the children, and that they were entitled to a little pleasure because of all they gave up to be priests in the first place.

Protestant clergy and clergy from non-Christian faiths have abused children sexually, too. For example, when a bishop of the Church of England heard of yet another case of Roman Catholic priest’s sexual abuse, he said, “It’s not just them, you know. We have our problems too.” A notorious instance in the US was that of a Jewish rabbi caught on tape in a televised sting operation for child molesters.

A Case Example: Father John Geoghan
One case out of many illustrates how clergy get away with abuse for years. Father John Geoghan abused about one hundred and thirty boys for as many as thirty years in the Boston, Massachusetts, USA, area. Records show that Cardinal Bernard Law, head of the church in the Boston area, first knew of Geoghan’s sexually abusive behaviors the first year he was appointed Cardinal, twenty-two years before Geoghan was removed as a priest. Church authorities sent Geoghan to treatment many times, where he was declared cured. Then he was sent back to parishes, without informing the pastors of the parishes, where Geoghan abused boys again. He sometimes prayed as he molested the boys.

Parents, family members, and survivors wrote letters to church officials imploring them to do something. These letters were part of the court records at a civil trial where adult survivors received millions of dollars in damages. Cardinal Law retired as head of the Boston-area Church as a result of his mishandling of the Geoghan abuse case.

There are now indications that Catholic Church officials are quick to respond to allegations of priest sexual abuse.

Case Example: A Fifty-Year History of Child Molestation

Lack of response to allegations of child sexual abuse occur within many communities. In a recent case in Norway, a civic-minded businessman sexually abused children for fifty years. Some children told their parents, but nothing ever came of their reports. For example, he pulled down the pants of a five year-old girl who immediately told her parents. The parents reported the act to police who did not pursue the case because of what they said was lack of evidence. Many children reported similar incidents, and the police repeatedly declared lack of evidence.

After fifty years, times apparently had changed and children were more likely to be believed and people were more likely to understand that otherwise responsible and likeable persons could abuse children sexually. Also, the police may have received enough reports over the years to finally charge the man with crimes. When the charges became public, many more victims spoke up, some close to sixty years old. The man was convicted but because of his age, he did not serve prison time, but was fined and is on intensive supervision by probation officers. He retired from his business and lives a quiet life.
The Issues that Sexual Abuse Raise

The issues that sexual abuse raises are monumental. When incest comes to light, family members are stunned, shocked, and go through a whole range of very difficult emotions. Non-offending parents feel guilty and ashamed that they were unable to protect their children. Perpetrators may lose everything—jobs, families, and social standing. Families break apart. Children who are incest survivors not only have to live with the effects of the abuse itself, but they may be permanently separated from the offending parents or other loved family members.

Child survivors may feel responsible for the profound stress that disclosure of sexual abuse causes and guilty over family breakups and the difficulties that arise when child sexual comes to light. Many children wish they had never told after they experience the events that follow. No one ever told them that the only person responsible for incest and child sexual abuse and their consequences are those who perpetrated it. Children are not responsible for these outcomes.

Cases of Family Break-Up

A case study illustrates how difficult it can be to learn that loved family members have sexually abused children in the family.

After dinner and the theater, a mother and father returned home to find their fourteen year-old daughter Cynthia in tears and their fifteen year-old son Robert sulking in his bedroom. When they asked what was going on, Cynthia said Robert had just tried to rape her and that he had raped her several times before.

As the parents grappled with this, Cynthia told them that her grandfather had sexually abused her for seven years, and she had been too afraid to tell them.

Both parents were so overwhelmed that they thought they might explode into little pieces. They maintained some degree of rationality and let their daughter speak. Eventually, they talked to Robert who admitted that he had raped his sister several times.

Both children were star students and star athletes in school. Their mother was a pediatrician and their father an attorney. The grandfather headed the law office where the father was a partner. The parents sought professional help immediately to sort out these difficult issues.
This family had adored the grandfather with whom they had dinner every week, along with the grandmother, the grandfather’s wife, since the couple had married seventeen years earlier.

The abuser was dad who gave the couple the down payment on their first house and who was handy enough to install a new furnace for them. This was granddad who never showed up without peppermints in his pocket for his grandchildren and who had put aside thousands of dollars for his grandchildren’s college educations.

Imagine how shocked and traumatized the parents were when they learned that the man they loved and thought was wonderful had sexually abused their daughter.

Imagine how overwhelmed they were to learn of their son’s sexual assault of their daughter. The grandfather had not sexually abused this grandson, and he had not sexually abused his own son. Somehow, however, his grandson had carried on his grandfather’s legacy.

This family sought professional help from a rape crisis center that provided referrals to competent professionals for the entire family. The family had no desire for contact with their father, father-in-law, and grandfather who was fined, given a suspended sentence, probation, and a court order into sex offender treatment. He retired from his law practice. The state bar association revoked his license.

In another case, a man “spied” on his teenage stepdaughter as she used the bathroom to get ready for work in the morning. The daughter found him crouched beside the bathroom door masturbating. He promised not to do it again, and the girl did not tell her mother. Six months later, the girl stepped out of the shower and saw her stepfather looking at her through the bathroom window.

This time she “freaked out” and told her mother and the police. His wife decided to say with him so the daughter moved out of the home and lived with an aunt and uncle. The man was fined, given probation, and was ordered into a sex offender treatment program.

The judge also gave him a no contact order where he could not longer be in the presence of his stepdaughter. Whenever there were family gatherings, he could not go if the daughter was to be there. He would drive around alone or go to the movies, even on major U.S. holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Other family members shunned him, and they could not understand how his wife could stay with him.
Celia, mentioned earlier, was thirteen when she told a teacher that her older brother had molested her for eight years. She became homeless when her mother chose to allow her son to remain in the family home. The police had told the mother that the two children could no longer live together. Celia was crushed and stunned into disbelief.

Celia lived in foster care until age eighteen and reconnected with her mother when she was in her early twenties. During her first Christmas in care, she was when her mother did not give her the presents stored in the attic of the family home.

Such serious family disruptions occur in many families where incest occurs. Sometimes child survivors run away because even when the incest stops, the family situation is intolerable to them. Some wait until they are adults and then cut themselves off from their families. Rob, a survivor of father incest, really enjoyed family reunions of aunts, uncles, and cousins at Christmas, but he backed away from seeing any family members, including his family of origin for two years. He said

*We [meaning his wife and three children] weren’t there the last two Christmases. My mom doesn’t want me talking to her brothers and sisters, because they’re afraid I’m going to tell them what had happened, which I have no intentions of doing.*

The incest that Rob’s father committed on Rob when Rob was a boy is a family secret. Only he, his wife, his parents, and his therapists know.

When professionals and family friends abuse children who are members of loving families, the issues related to sexual abuse are difficult but families rarely break up. However, when clergy abuse children, this can affect family’s religious affiliation. Formerly devout church members can experience profound betrayal and lose what might have previously been deep religious faith and a source of community belonging and identity.

The issues raised here are serious and long-lasting. Family break-ups, permanent separations, life-long guilt and shame, and loss of trust and religious faith are profound effects and go to the core of what is important.
FIVE

Signs of Sexual Abuse

*Signs may be direct, indirect, chronic, and hidden*

How to know when children have been sexually abused poses special challenges. Some children make direct and clear statements, while others are more indirect in what they say. It is easy to attribute other meanings to their words. Still other children show the effects of their abuse through behaviors, which can be sexualized, but not necessarily. Children may also be withdrawn, moody, aggressive, restless, and anxious. Finally some children show no obvious signs at all.

Child Sexual Abuse and Trauma

Children frequently experience trauma as a result of being sexually abused. Trauma results from life events that overwhelm individuals’ coping capacities. Traumatized children relive distressing events over and over in their minds. Any reminders of the events can trigger re-experiencing the events.

Margaret, for example, now thirty-one years old, remembers her childhood sexual abuse whenever she hears heavy breathing, smells beer breath, or sees or feels the stubble of a man’s beard. Fortunately, she has had a lot of therapy, and these reminders do not cause her to experience high anxiety and panic as they did when she was a child. Her father used to sexually abuse her after a long night of drinking and many hours after his last shave. His breathing was heavy during the sexual abuse.

The signs of trauma in children can be sexual in nature, may involve emotional, behavioral, and cognitive dysregulation, or there may be no overt signs at all, but possibly an extraordinary effort to please and to be a “good kid.”

There is considerable evidence that traumatic events are encoded in brain circuits. Any number of circumstances can activate these brain circuits. When brain circuits are activated, survivors re-
live the trauma. With corrective interventions, such as therapy, education about sexual abuse, love, acceptance, and understanding from family and friends, survivors can cope with, adapt to, and overcome the trauma of child sexual abuse. In fact, they develop new brain circuits that help them manage the effects of child sexual abuse.

When children have other risk factors and traumas in addition to being sexually abused, the effects of child sexual abuse are difficult to sort out. Children with multiple risks that include sexual abuse can show a range of effects from severely anti-social to extremely withdrawn. The more trauma children experience, the more likely they are to have extreme reactions, when parents and others are unable to respond to them appropriately. Examples of other risks are deaths of close family members or friends, a history of other kinds of child abuse and neglect, serial foster care placements, and witnessing violence at home and in the community.

Children can cope with, adapt to, and overcome multiple risks if parents and other adults are psychologically, emotionally, and physically present and provide sensitive, responsive care. Children with multiple traumas also require structure, routine, and predictability in their lives. Parts Four and Five go into detail about what children need in order to thrive after being sexually abused.

**Direct Statements**

A previously shown, many children who have been sexually abused do not tell anyone. Some, however, make direct statements, such as

*He laid on top of me and rocked back and forth. I felt something hard against me. Then he moaned and groaned and jerked around.*

Younger children may say, *“She touched me on my pee-pee. She told me not to tell.”* Even when children make such clear statements, parents and other adults may fear that children are making up stories. This is especially possible when the alleged perpetrator is someone adults love and trust, which is almost always the case.

A few guidelines can help adults decide about whether children are telling the truth. These include

- **children’s affect.** Often when children disclose sexual abuse, it shows in their non-verbal behaviors, such as expressions of
embarrassment and fear on their faces, difficulty looking directly at others when talking about the abuse, and stiffness and tension in body posture. For example, when Jessica told her mother Serena, “Daddy touched me at night while I was asleep,” her face got red, her voice was soft, she could not look at her mother, there were tears in her eyes, and she clenched her fists.

- **details.** When child talk about being sexually abused, there often are details that they might not otherwise know, such as the moaning, groaning, and jerking movements mentioned above. Sometimes there are details in the setting in which the abuse took place. Vickie mentioned a flickering purple light in the bathroom where a perpetrator locked her when he had to answer the door in the midst of molesting her.

- **demonstrations on dolls.** Sometimes children can show adults what happened on dolls. Specialists recommend that parents and non-specialist professionals not ask children to show them but to allow the police and child protection to set up interviews with expert interviewers.

- **demonstration through drawings.** Sometimes children are able to describe sexual abuse through drawing. Helping children draw what they experienced requires expertise. Some guidelines are in Part Four of this book.

- **physical signs.** In some cases, there is physical evidence of child sexual abuse, but this is relatively rare. Much child sexual abuse does not cause physical trauma. However, sexually transmitted diseases in children are reliable signs of child sexual abuse.

**Indirect Statements**

Sometimes children do not communicate directly about being sexually abused, but they show effects of abuse in indirect ways. A child may say, “*He does things I don’t like*” or “*I don’t like him anymore*.” Parents, who trust the person a child may have reservations about, may assume that the child means something entirely different such as not liking that someone smokes or smacks his lips when he eats. When younger children say they don’t like older children anymore, it is easy to assume this is normal sibling stuff.
Children may be reluctant to visit a relative, or insist that a parent stay there with them. They may run and hide when someone comes into the room. Parents may insist that children show respect, not realizing that the child is afraid of a perpetrator of child sexual abuse.

**Sexualized Behaviors**

Sexualized behaviors can be signs of sexual abuse. The younger children are when they were sexually abused, the more likely they will have sexualized behaviors. As mentioned, some sexual play and childhood masturbation are part of sexual development, but at times sexual behaviors are not play but are the effects of sexual trauma. Children engaged in sexual play do not persist. Their curiosity satisfied, they move onto other things. Children not sexually traumatized will obey adult directives not to masturbate in public.

Children who are sexually traumatized continue the behaviors after adults request that they stop and after adults provide them with guidelines about appropriate sexual behaviors. Asking a child not to masturbate in public but to perform such behaviors in the privacy of the bedroom is an example. Sexually traumatized children may not be able to follow these guidelines.

Some sexually traumatized children are sexually preoccupied. This can involve having a stash of sexually explicit magazines and photographs, or spending hours at day viewing sexually explicit media on the internet or on cable television, or talking about sex indiscriminately with whomever is present. They may giggle and joke about women and girls they see on television, on other media, or in family and neighborhood settings. They may masturbate several times a day. They may sexually touch other children and persist even after being asked to stop.

Typically, these sexual behaviors occur in response to stress, possibly when traumatic memories are activated. Brook, for example, masturbated several times a day by the time he was ten years old. The abandoned chicken coop in his family’s backyard was his favorite spot. He masturbated so frequently that he got sores on his penis. Masturbation helped him feel better.

Harry, eight, sexually abused when he was a toddler, kept of stash of women’s lingerie magazines between his mattress and box spring and looked at them for hours almost every day. This lifted his mood and made him feel light and silly, better than the
heavy, sad feelings that he usually had. Whenever he saw a woman, he would comment on the size of her “titties” and the contours of her “ass.” Adults’ directives telling him to stop had no effect.

Margaret, four, pushed toilet paper in her vagina to re-experience the sensations she associated with her father’s sexual abuse. She did this whenever her parents scolded her. Her mother Regina, noticed that Margaret ran into the bathroom whenever reprimanded. Regina followed Margaret after a scolding and watched what Margaret did. She saw her little daughter pull toilet paper off the roll, wet it, shape it into a small hotdog, and stuff it in her vagina. She gently inquired what was going on and Margaret told her that her father gets in bed with her at night and presses his penis against her.

Both Margaret and Harry were sexually abused, and their sexualized behaviors could be a direct result, a way of coping with the effects of sexual trauma. Brook, however, could not recall being sexually abused. He did remember seeing his older brothers and sisters have sex with boyfriends and girlfriends in the home and in the woods in the back of the family home. In fact, he would follow his older siblings into the woods to see if they were going to have sex, or he would watch them through keyholes in the family home.

Brook also reported substantial physical abuse and emotional abuse and neglect at the hands of his mother and father. Brook, then, was probably traumatized through this abuse and neglect, and he found sexualized behaviors helped him cope with the effects of trauma. He himself appears not to have been sexually traumatized.

These examples show that sexualized behaviors often but not always indicate sexual abuse. Sexualized behaviors, whatever their origin, are highly like to be signs of trauma of some sort. Children with these behaviors require expert professional care.

Non-Sexualized Signs of Trauma

Sometimes children who have been sexually abused do not show sexualized behaviors, but do other signs of trauma. They act out themes of terror, entrapment, and life-threatening danger. Often the play is repetitious, such as using two dolls to fight each other over and over. Children may show anxiety and fear in
situations where they did not have such responses before, such as fear of the dark or fear of being alone in their bedrooms.

Their moods may change quickly, from light and gay to angry and withdrawn. They may show great stress at separating from a parent figure, where there was no stress before. They may start wetting the bed or having bowel movements in their pants, outside of the toilet, or in bed. They may have trouble sleeping, have nightmares, and refuse to sleep alone. They may become disruptive in social settings such as classrooms and aggressive toward others in school, in the family, or the neighborhood. Activities that used to interest them may no longer be pursued. This signs of trauma are marked changes from the children’s usual behaviors.

There are many other possible causes of these behaviors. Some of them could be developmentally expectable, while others may be signs of other kinds of traumas, such as domestic abuse, parental divorce, and deaths of pets or loved persons.

**Long-Term Issues**

If parents and other adults are unable to help children work through early signs of trauma, the trauma-related behavior may become part of long-term problems. Children who have been traumatized and who have not been helped to manage the effects of trauma later in their lives may be diagnosed with a variety of other disorders, such as conduct problems, social phobias, anxiety, hyperactivity, psychosomatic disorders, depression, and suicidal thinking and behaviors. They may believe that no one likes them, that they are bad, and that they want to die.

**No Apparent Signs**

Sometimes children have no apparent signs of child sexual abuse. Rob, for example, while in high school, did well in his courses, got along with peers, and participated in extra-curricular activities. He earned enough money mowing lawns and clearing snow that he could pay for vocational college. He consciously tried to be a “good kid” and not be the “little shit” his father said he was. His father sexually abused Rob when Rob was between the ages of eight and thirteen.
Donna was an honor student, a self-described teachers’ pet, and class vice-president. Her grandfather sexually abused her for several years, as did her older brother. She had no idea how to resist the sexual aggression of her best friend’s father. When her friend reported her father to the police, that is when Donna finally broke down and told her parents about the long-term abuse she had experienced.

Like Rob, she had no outward signs of being sexually abused. She had enough personal and social competencies and resources to carry on in prosocial ways, but both suffered internally. They struggled with both anxiety and depression, sometimes had trouble managing their anger. They believed they were bad people. In early adulthood, both Rob and Donna had extensive therapy where they learned to manage their traumas and developed new ways of thinking about themselves and acting in the world.

Children Who Receive Appropriate Responses

Some children, of course, receive immediate and appropriate responses to the sexual abuse they experienced. Through a combination of sensitive parental responses, expert therapy and psychoeducation, and on-going support, these children do well, and they learn to manage the hurt of being sexually abused. They are able to talk about the abuse with trusted family members and friends when they want to. Parents and other significant people expect them to carry on well in family, peer group, school, and community, while offering them empathy, love, consistency, routine, and structure. Typically, these children have many positive factors in their lives and few other risks and traumas.

Summary

Children may make direct and indirect statements about being sexually abused, or their behaviors can indicate that something is wrong. Children may show sexualized behaviors, but some children who have not been sexually abused may also behave in sexualized ways. Many children who have been sexually abused show non-sexualized signs of trauma, but children who have not been sexually abused but who have been traumatized otherwise also show sexualized behaviors.

It can be difficult to sort out the various signs of child sexual abuse if children have experienced other traumas as well.
Behaviors such as running away, suicidal acts, cutting, and sexual aggression typically arise when children have experienced other risks and traumas in addition to child sexual abuse. Finally, some children show no apparent effects, and their abuse is undetected for years. These children, for all the personal and family resources, suffer internally. In some cases, the abuse comes to light, children received immediate and appropriate responses and then long-term understanding and support. The latter is what we want for every child.
Gaining Access to Children

Most perpetrators have easy access to children.

Perpetrators use many different ways to get access to children, gain children’s trust, and create situations where they are alone with children. Family members, friends of the family, teachers, clergy, and professionals have easy access to children. Even strangers who use the internet find children quite easily. Some perpetrators enjoy setting up the situations for the abuse as much as the abuse itself.

Family members have easiest access of all. Fathers may abuse their children when the wives are out shopping. Some ask their wives to go to the store for them, or the women have night classes, club meetings, or regular outings with other women. One man abused his children when his wife took her daily walk.

In some situations one parent might work nights and the other days. A man who had this arrangement with his wife talked about how their schedule gave him opportunities to sexually abuse his daughters.

I was unhappy with my marriage. We had just arrived in a whole new city. I was switching jobs. It was hard to get off the ground. I didn’t have any savings to fall back on. My wife got a job as a waitress. She would leave before six in the morning to open the restaurant. I finally found a factory job working second shift, starting at four in the afternoon.

My wife and I passed in the night. We saw each other half an hour a day. I’d get back home at midnight, one in the morning and have to get up to get kids off to school when I was not quite wide awake. I was angry that I had to do that, cut into my sleep time to get the kids off to school. I told myself my wife is not meeting my needs. So I’ll do it another way. It was a hard summer.

Other family members, such as siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, also often are alone with children, have
children’s trust, and have authority over children. Those who are so inclined are well positioned to take sexual advantage over children.

Grooming

Perpetrators who are not family members have many different tactics to get the children to like them, or to coax children into situations where no one else is present. Tactics for inducing children to like them and to submit to sexual abuse is often called “grooming.”

In grooming, perpetrators cultivate an emotional connection with the child and gradually move toward sexual contact. Men who abuse boys often take them on outings, “horse around” through wrestling and playing touch football, or entertain them with videos, snack foods, and drinks. Some give drugs to the boys and show them sexually explicit DVDs and internet sites.

They may induce boys into posing for sexually explicit pictures. The adults tell the boys this is what men do together. They want to create a sense of masculine solidarity that they boys will enjoy.

Some abusers use the internet to get to know potential victims and tell them whatever they think the children want to hear in order to persuade the children to meet with them.

Still other perpetrators are on the lookout for children whose fathers are no longer with the family. They tell themselves that they will be father figures, and sometimes they are, at first. Eventually, these perpetrators take advantage of the trust and love the children have developed for them.

Case Study: Tim the Social Worker and Tony the Client

Tim, who a social worker and the head of a social service agency, purposefully looked for boys he thought would be hungry for an emotional connection with a man, such as boys with absent fathers and single mothers. He then assigned the cases to himself and engaged the boys in activities the boys enjoyed. This is how he discovered Tommy who was eleven years old.

*I’m sure that I was beginning to feel an attraction to him, but it wasn’t really until one day when one of the social workers who worked at the agency made a comment that she’d been over to Oak Bluffs, which is the
low-income area. Half our clients were in Oak Bluffs. She was talking, ‘I saw Tommy Woodson. That poor kid. He was over there dressed in short shorts and no shirt. He had on cowboy boots with short shorts on. He just looked like the queerest thing, looked like a little gay boy.’

I remember when she said that it was like switching on a light bulb. It just switched on this light bulb inside me, that he had gay or homosexual kinds of tendencies or characteristics or possibly could be that way or whatever. It’s almost like it solidified an attraction that was already there, but that’s like the first time I can really remember feeling sexual towards him.

He assigned Tommy to himself and learned that Tommy had been sexually abused by a teenage neighbor. On their first outing, he took the boy to a “hot tub place” where he said he “fondled” Tommy.

A Case Study: Mario and Father Murphy

Sometimes children who are abused have both parents at home, and the parents are delighted when a high status person takes an interest in their children. For example, a twelve-year old boy named Mario used to go on outings to the beach and to baseball games with the parish priest, Father Murphy, typically with other boys. Mario loved to be with Father Murphy, who was gave Mario his undivided attention. He even thought he wanted to be a priest like Father Murphy.

Sometimes Mario would sleep overnight in the priest’s house. The priest slept in another room. One night, Mario woke up when the priest fondled his genitals on top of his pajamas.

He was afraid to say anything and thought, “Father must really love me.” In the morning, the priest acted as if nothing had happened. Mario was confused about this sexual contact well into adulthood.

A trusted priest, Father Murphy had easy access to children. Mario never told anyone until other survivors filed lawsuits against the Catholic Church in the 1990s.

Case Study Computer Games and Grooming

Jesse, age thirty eight, went into the computer game business. He said, “I think I also thought that it would be a good way to
meet boys.” He abused one of the boys he met for four years. This is how Jesse described his access to the boy.

I’d known him for like two years before I abused him. He’d come into the store. One time he admitted that he stole something from me. Instead of pressing charges—I knew I was attracted to him—I allowed him to work for me and became more and more attracted to him over the years.

Jesse did many different things with this boy, such as taking him to the zoo, to the movies, on picnics, and doing drugs with him. The sexual abuse ended when he got in trouble, was arrested, and decided to move away on his own. He got arrested for drugs.

Untold numbers of perpetrators place themselves in job and recreational settings where they have easy access to children.

Case Study: Pigeon-Hunting

Sometimes children simply are part of the settings in which perpetrators have access to them. The following is an example. Skip overheard nine year-old Aria telling her friends that she would like to have pigeons. Skip worked at a lumberyard that Aria’s father owned. Aria sometimes was at the yard when her father had child care responsibilities but had to work.

When Skip was alone with Aria, he told her he knew where there were pigeons, and he would take her pigeon hunting. Aria was delighted. She thought she knew Skip well. He had worked for her father for more than two years, and she was often with her father at work. Skip was friendly, affable, fun to be around. He always had a joke or a peppermint candy for her.

Aria did not know that he thought of her as much older and that he had wanted to “take her cherry” for months. No one knew that Skip had sexually abused other children.

Skip took her to an isolated river bank. “I knew damned well there weren’t any pigeons there,” he said. He raped her, tearing her vagina and causing massive bleeding. He gave her forty dollars so she would not tell anyone. The next morning, her mother found blood on her bed sheets. Her father beat Skip. Skip left town with his wife before anything worse happened. Skip and his wife slept in a corn field their first night away from home.
Access to Children in Public Places

When strangers sexually abuse children, of course, there is no prior relationship. These abusers do little if anything to gain the trust of children. They simply abuse the children with no preliminary overtures at all. In extreme situations, stranger abusers use a gun to force children to go with them, as happened to Jacob Wetterling more than twenty years ago, when he was on his way to a convenience store with his brother and a friend, in St. Joseph, Minnesota.

Some abusers who are strangers play upon children’s trust and socialization to obey adults. They trick or manipulate children into going with them to a private location where they sexually abuse the children.

Many children have been persuaded to go with abusers who request their help. A favorite line is, “I can’t find my puppy. Would you help me find my puppy?” Such a line is hard for children to resist. Another line is for an adult to tell a child, “Your mother had an accident. She’s in the hospital. She asked me to take you to her.” Few children, especially younger children, see through this tactic.

Vickie, six, went with a stranger to his apartment. She had met him at a public park, and he had pushed her on a swing. When he said, “I have to go get my radio. Will you and your friend come with me to get my radio?” Vickie wrote about this episode when she was ten. This is what she wrote. The spelling is hers.

So he carried us to his house and undressed me. Then he put me on the toilet set and took the boy in the room for a half hour then it came time for me.

The man took me in his room and put me in the bed and he got in with me. Then he started to force his penis in me. I wondered what he was doing.

These stories and many others in this book are evidence that perpetrators take advantage of children and that child sexual abuse is an abuse of power. Children obey adults, often without question, even when they have no idea what is going on and they are afraid.

The Internet

Perpetrators who contact children through the internet are growing in numbers. Some are “lone rangers” who arrange to meet
children without the help of other perpetrators. Other perpetrators work together to help each other find children to have sex with. Both types of internet-based perpetrators typically download child pornography as well.

Carter, a forty year-old lone ranger, described how he became sexually involved with a sixteen year-old girl. A user of internet pornography, he eventually grew bored and sought new thrills. He began to visit chat rooms where he made contact with the girl. They lived in the same city in the eastern United States. After a few weeks, they began to have phone conversations. Carter then arranged to meet her at coffee house. He said he never lied to her about his age.

At the first meeting, they went for a ride in his car. They “made out” and engaged in petting. By the third time they met, they had sexual intercourse and continued until her parents put a stop to it and reported him to the police.

Jesse, thirty-seven, who had the computer store to “meet” boys, was a member of an internet group of men with whom he could talk about his sexual interest in boys, who helped each other find boys to have sex with, and who shared pornography and porn websites. Jesse made contact with other abusers through the internet and telephone chat lines for abusers. He said:

I would go on the internet and mention that I was looking for a young man. I would not specifically mention under eighteen…. I used these other men to meet boys….I had known my victim’s uncle for over a year before I even knew about his nephew.

Jesse said the uncle had sexually abused the boy for a couple of years and then introduced the boy to Jesse who not only sexually abused him but also took pictures of the boy in sexual poses.

**Street Corners and Organized Child Prostitution**

The hybrid hatchback with a baby seat strapped in the back seat is a sight that many youth workers see when they are on US city streets in the evenings working with runaway children and youth. These youth workers report that young family men routinely seek sex with street children. For just a few dollars, these men get a “quick fix” before heading home to their wives and children. They may seek boys or girls for sex. The children are desperately poor and often run away because of abuse and neglect in their families of origin, commonly including sexual abuse.
Sometimes access to children through prostitution is more organized, where pimps “run” young girls on the street, as call girls, or in brothels. In the US and internationally, organized child prostitution is a billion-dollar business. Many of the children are runaways, abductees, or slaves in the sense that parents have sold them, sometimes thinking the children will have good-paying safe jobs when in fact they become sexual slaves.

In some cultures, perpetrators find children in temples. Some religious sects allow child marriages when children are too young to give consent.

**Summary**

How perpetrators gain access to children is practically limitless. Families are a convenient setting and a great deal of sexual abuse takes place there. Other perpetrators find children in public places, through the internet, or through purchase as in prostitution. Adults take advantage of children’s natural trust, desire to please, and socialization to do what adults ask.

However perpetrators meet up with children, they take advantage of their power over children. They are bigger, stronger, and have authority. With street children, perpetrators also have economic power, and some homeless children see offering themselves sexually as a way of earning money. Organized child prostitution thrives internationally because parents may sell their children out of desperation to keep their families fed and sheltered.
Sexual abuse is the opposite of what children need to thrive. Children require sensitive, responsive care in order to develop in healthy ways. Sensitive care givers are emotionally available to children. They are responsive to children’s cues when, for example, children want to interact with adults or are hungry, lonely, sad, or tired. They help children to express their thoughts and feelings and soothe children when children are stressed.

Sensitive adults do not demand more from children than children are able to give, although they often give children challenging tasks in order to foster children’s development. What parents and other care providers expect from children fits with children’s levels of social, emotional, sexual, and physical development.

Sensitive care also means that adults provide clear guidelines for what they expect of children, adults provide predictable and stable routines in family life and in other settings, and adults recognize and acknowledge children’s efforts when children do what is expected of them and praise them appropriately. When adults discipline children, adults explain that what the children did is not acceptable, and children understand what adults tell them about their behaviors. Adults guide children to perform behaviors that are acceptable.

Sensitive care also means that adults praise children when children do what parents expect. In other words, parents catch children doing something right and praise them for specific behaviors.

Children can develop well in a wide range of socio-economic and ethnic settings. It is a myth that poverty automatically means inadequate care. A high income is not a predictor of good
developmental outcomes, nor is a low income a predictor of poor developmental outcomes. People who do not have much money love their children and can provide responsive care that promotes children’s optimal development.

**Children are Dependent on Adults**

Infants are dependent upon adults for their survival. Over time, they learn to walk, talk, feed and dress themselves. Sensitive adults provide support for children’s age-appropriate activities and are effective teachers. They structure tasks so children can learn how to do them. They are respectful of the developing child’s autonomy and allow children to explore and attempt tasks without adult interference. When children ask for help and require gentle supervision and guidance, sensitive care providers are there.

Sensitive, responsive care givers present children with new tasks that challenge children but that children can attain. Trust between children and care providers is the foundation for healthy development.

**Adults Have Power Over Children**

Adults and older children have power over children. Not only are adults bigger and stronger, they know more and their cognitive skills are more developed than those of children. In addition, social customs and tradition bestow authority on adults and older children. Children understand intuitively that they are smaller and weaker and are subject to the authority of others.

Effective parents and other caregivers exercise their authority with care. Their style of parenting is authoritative, where they give love and support but also consistent guidance and discipline. They are not authoritarian, meaning they do not exert harsh, blunt control over children, nor are they permissive, where anything goes and children can do what they want without guidance or consequences.

Finally, they avoid inconsistency, which is a style of parenting that can be harsh and punitive at times and then lax and detached at others. In this form of parenting, how parents respond depends more upon their ever-changing moods and less on what children need to thrive.

When adults are sensitive authoritative caregivers, pleasurable contact between adults and children in the forms of
touching, hugging, and kissing are mutually enjoyed but do not become sexual.

As children develop, they form attachments with persons who are generational equals while maintaining family ties. By adulthood, most people form intimate relationships that eventually become sexual within the contexts of committed relationships.

Child Sexual Abuse and Healthy Child Development

Child sexual abuse is a betrayal of the principles of healthy child development. Perpetrators are insensitive and non-responsive to children. They are out for what they want, and they abuse their power to get what they want. They overlook what children want and what they need to thrive.

Child sexual abusers betray the trust that children have in adults. As a father perpetrator said of his daughter

_She was so willing. It’s like the control that I had sense of power, or whatever. She trusted me._

This betrayal affects children’s capacities to trust others, including generational equals, and interferes with their capacities to form friendships and intimate relationships. They may be on guard for signs of betrayal or may be overly sensitive to perceived slights or have little idea of how to engage in light banter and the give and take that characterizes healthy relationships.
Stigma, Silence, and Not Telling

*Silence protects perpetrators*

Child sexual abuse is surrounded by silence. Fueled by societal myths and stereotypes, such as “Only strangers abuse children,” “Parents do not abuse their own children,” “Boys do not get abused,” “Women never abuse,” “Children don’t abuse other children,” and many others, child sexual abuse is an unfortunate reality that affects the lives of uncounted numbers of children and families.

Children many times do not tell anyone about their abusive experiences. This may arise out of their fears of being punished, stigmatized, and ostracized and fears of what will happen to their families and perpetrators if they disclose.

Children may fear that they will not be believed, or worse, blamed for their own abuse. Questions such as “Why didn’t you tell?” “What did you do to provoke the abuse?” “How could you let it go on for so long?” are automatic for many people when children say they have been sexually abused.

**Sexuality as Taboo**

In most culture, children receive little if any instruction about sexuality, sexual development, incest, and child sexual abuse except what they learn from other children, from observation, and from various electronic media. They are on their own to interpret sexual messages and how they are supposed to behave. Some children may learn to be ashamed of sexual body parts and sexual activities. Over time, many learn that talk about sexuality is taboo and that they are subject to shame and punishment if they show interest in sexual matters.

When someone sexually abuses them, children who receive little informed education from adults are at higher risk to remain silent than children who are well educated sexually. Un-
educated children do not have the vocabulary or permission of adults to describe sexual acts. The words they know are often not be used in “polite” company. Children’s lack of “proper” language and the taboos about using the words they know is yet another factor in children’s silence.

**Tony’s Lack of Words**

The taboo against the use of sexual terms is part of why children are silent. Tony, fourteen, a dynamic and talented young women who had the lead in the school play, was sexually assaulted by an older boy she knew from school. She found it impossible to use sexual terms, but she was so upset at being abused that she found other ways to express herself. This is how she described the assault:

*He took out his “oomph” and said, “You fat ‘oomph.’ You ‘oomph’ my ‘oomph.’”*

Depriving children of the language they require to talk about sexuality and sexual abuse sets them up to be victimized. Lack of language silences children and protects perpetrators.

**When Children Tell and Don’t Tell**

Young children who are molested by strangers are the most likely to tell about being sexually abused. They are too young to be worried about being blamed and stigmatized, and they may not have developed shame about sexual body parts and using words that describe sexual functions. Furthermore, they are not worried that someone they love will get in trouble and the family will break up.

As children grow older, they become more aware of taboos about sexuality and the stigmatization and shame associated with being sexually abused. For that reason alone, many do not tell.

**Children Sacrifice Themselves to Protect Perpetrators**

When the abusers are family member or other people they love or care about, their concern for consequences for abusers becomes another reason not to tell. For example, Brianna did not tell anyone about her father’s sexual abuse for fear of breaking up the
family. Another example is the case of Tommy, whose social worker molested him. This is how Tim, the social worker, described a conversation that took place after the first time Tim had molested him. Tim was driving Tommy home after the two of them spent time in “a hot tub place.”

He wouldn’t talk. I kept persisting. Finally he says, ‘I’m just worried.’ ‘Worried about what?’ ‘Worried about what could happen to you,’ or what can happen to you, something like that. In other words, he was concerned about me getting in trouble.

In this very matter of fact, calm way, I said, ‘No one has to know.’ And more or less let him know that he wasn’t to tell.

Many abusers say very little to keep the children from telling. They do not have to. Myths and beliefs about sexual abuse and sexuality are enough to silence children.

Children know intuitively that if they tell on family members, something bad might happen, such as Daddy going to jail and the family not having enough money, or the family being disgraced. Rosie, when she was sixteen and whose stepfather had abused her for ten years, told her mother that she never told because she once heard her mother tell her stepfather, “If I ever found you were touching the girls, I’ll kill you.” Rosie did not want her mother to kill her father. She stayed silent.

Sometimes perpetrators threaten victims with statements such as “You’ll get in trouble and so will I.” Others tell children the children will go to jail or a mental hospital if anyone finds out.

Such statements show how adults take advantage of children’s lack of knowledge to silence them. Andy, an adult male survivor, said

I was very scared. I can remember he told me that if I’d ever told anyone that we’d both go to jail. So I mean I was very scared about that.

He realized that he did not know much about sexuality and consequences of having an adult perform sex acts on him. Andy said

You didn’t really know much about sexual relationships altogether. If you told me, I may go to jail and you may go to the mental home or crazy house or something that I assumed is correct. I didn’t doubt it.
Olivia, eleven, abused for years by a neighbor who was father figure to her mother and grandfather figure to her, reported that he told her

*If you tell, I'll go to jail. That will make my wife unhappy. You don't want to make my wife unhappy, do you?*

She did not. She told her mother about the abuse on the day her mother told her the man had died. She knew if she told then, he could not go to jail and his wife would not be unhappy. The grandfather figure played on her desire not to hurt others.

Sometimes children are afraid their families will not love them if they find out about the sexual abuse. One young teenager said after she told her family about her stepfather’s sexual abuse, “*My family still loves me.*” She cried and hugged all of them, overwhelmed with joy and relief.

**Boys and Sexual Abuse**

Ideas about males and females have an influence on why children do not tell. As boys grow older, they become aware of gender role expectations. They may remain silent because they are afraid to show vulnerability and admit that someone abused them.

Boys roughly older than seven or eight sometimes do not believe they have been abused, since they think that males are supposed to enjoy sex, even sex forced on them.

Boys who are abused by men may fear that others will think they are gay. They themselves may wonder if they are gay if any part of the abuse was pleasurable. These fears about being gay are serious issues for male survivors. They often tell no one. Their fears make them silent.

When boys are abused by older girls or women, they often fail to recognize it as abuse. When they tell their peers, the friends may think the abused boys “scored” or “got lucky.” Celebratory reactions confuse abused boys. They may think there is something wrong with them for not enjoying or having mixed feelings about something they are supposed to enjoy. These reactions may convince them that what happened to them is not abuse.

In addition, boys expect to be in control and therefore to be in a position to stop anything from happening if they did not want
Child Sexual Abuse

it. However, children are typically not in control of whether or not they are abused.

This loss of control clashes with the how boys think boys are supposed to act. Boys may tend to blame themselves by thinking that they allowed it to happen. Other people may expect them to be in control at all times and blame them, too.

Girls and Sexual Abuse

Like boys, younger girls may not have expectations related to gender role, but as they grow older they do.

Girls have to deal with notions of feminine purity. They feel the pressure not to tell because they sometimes believe they are impure because of abuse. In some cultures, girls are expelled from their families if they report being sexually abused, while in other cultures they may be forced to marry the men who abused them.

In some cultures, sexual abuse is viewed as the loss of family honor. Girls are at risk to be beaten and even murdered by members of their own families.

It is not unusual for peers to label girl survivors as “whores” if they find out girls have been victimized sexually. Of course, in many instances, girls are not treated this way, but fears of such responses silence many girl survivors.

Girls have some of the same fears as boys, including fears of being labeled lesbian if another girl or woman abused them sexually. They also may worry about being blamed when women are the abusers because women are supposed to be easier to fight off than men.

Many counties throughout the world do not require that professionals report to local authorities that children are being sexually abused or are experiencing other forms of child abuse and neglect.

Most countries have laws against child sexual abuse and other forms of abuse and neglect, but often the enforcement is inconsistent or non-existent. In countries where there are reporting laws, professionals may be charged with a misdemeanor and fined for not reporting.

Social Class and Non-Reporting

Social class is a factor in non-reporting in countries that require it. Although child sexual abuse occurs in all social classes at
the same rates, poor people are more likely to be reported for child sexual abuse than more well-off individuals.

There are many possible reasons for this class bias in reporting. Poor families are more likely to be involved with social services and thus are under more scrutiny that wealthier parents. There is a wide-spread belief that poverty is a major factor in child sexual abuser. Professionals are therefore more likely to look for it among the poor. Poor people tend to have sporadic medical care with providers to whom they have no relationships.

Middle and upper class families are less likely to have such scrutiny, are under less suspicion, and are more likely to have continuity of medical care where they form relationships with providers.

Providers are less likely to resort to reporting instances of child sexual abuse because they know and might even identify with their middle- and upper-class patients. They may go into denial or minimize the impact of child sexual abuse when they view possible perpetrators as similar to them.

In summary, social customs, beliefs, and myths about child sexual abuse and sexuality enable perpetrators to carry on. As a result, children continue to suffer and when they speak out, much of their recovery involves working through the myths and distortions that surround child sexual abuse.
Sexual abuse is a world-wide problem of enormous proportions and has been a harsh reality for children since the dawn of history. Many forces account for the continued existence of child sexual abuse. Some of these forces are contradictory, but no matter how inconsistent, these forces silence victims and allow perpetrators to carry on.

These forces include

- **gratification**: the sexual and emotional gratification that sexual abuse has for perpetrators over-rides any concerns they have for children. Money drives a great deal of sexual abuse world-wide as in child pornography and child prostitution.
- **shame and stigma**: the shame and stigma associated with being sexually abused silences victims and allows perpetration to carry on.
- **blame the victim**: “She asked for it” or “He must have wanted it” are wide-spread beliefs, even for very young children.
- **sexual taboos**: taboos related to talking about sexuality and sexual abuse silence victims and allows perpetration to continue.
- **myths about perpetrators**: myths about perpetrators as “dirty old men” and not someone you know, love, and respect.
- **myths about mothers**: many people believe that mothers always know and that they collude. Mothers bear being blamed and often are.
- **dismissiveness**: some people believe child sexual abuse is no
big deal. Many of them are survivors themselves who believe that the sexual abuse did not affect them and does not affect other people either. These people are fooling themselves.

- **social customs**: social customs and traditions minimize the effects of sexual abuse on survivors, blames victims, and shifts attention away from perpetrators.

- **self-deception about what sexual abuse means**: perpetrators often believe that their motives are pure and sexual abuse is good for children.

- **self-deception about consequences**: perpetrators do not face up to the consequences of sexual abuse for the children, the children’s families, and themselves.

- **selfish pursuit of money**: the financial gain involved in the sexual abuse industries of child pornography, sex trafficking, and the maintenance of web sites for perpetrators are strong motivations for some to exploit children.

- **authority**: the authority that adults have over children sets children up to be exploited by adults who want to do so.

- **children’s status**: children have less power, knowledge, and physical strength than adults and older people and are socialized to trust and obey adults.

- **ideologies and practices**: beliefs that individuals can use any means to get what they want, including using others, forcing others to comply through manipulation, intimidation, and physical force.

- **social policies and programs**: that underfund educational, intervention, and prevention programs.

Only in the last thirty years has there been a large-scale demand for action on child sexual abuse. This has resulted in more awareness and understanding of child sexual for survivors and their families and more policies and programs intended to prevent child sexual abuse. Much more, however, needs to be done.

In countries throughout the world, the movement against child sexual abuse is still in its beginning stages, and even the existence of child sexual abuse remains unacknowledged by large segments of the general public and professionals alike.

While most survivors suffer in silence out of fear of being stigmatized and blamed for their own abuse, perpetrators experience
sexual and emotional gratification. Those who sell children for sex earn and make and sell child pornography get rich.
PART TWO
TYPES OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Overview

Child sexual abuse takes many forms, all for the benefit of perpetrators

Sexual abuse of children takes different forms: incest, child molestation by persons children know, child molestation by strangers, pornography, child prostitution and trafficking. Sexual abuse that strangers commit gets the most publicity, especially if children are abducted, but more than ninety percent of all sexual abuse is perpetrated by family members, friends of the family, and other persons children know. It is important to identify child sexual abuse wherever it occurs and not be blinded by misleading assumptions.

Incest

Incest involves sexual abuse committed by family members or persons who have family-like roles. Perpetrators include fathers, mothers, stepfathers, stepmothers, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandfathers and grandmothers.

Child Molestation by Persons Children Know

Child molestation is sexual abuse that non-family members perpetrate. In almost all cases, child molesters are friends of the family and adults who have relationships with children such as neighbors, youth workers, teachers, coaches, and clergy. Perpetrators can be male or female, adults, teens, or children.

Child Molestation by Strangers

The general public is probably more aware of child molestation by strangers than other types of child sexual abuse. Perpetrators of this type of abuse are usually adult males,
occasionally with a woman accomplice. Other forms of child sexual abuse that strangers commit include child pornography, child prostitution, ritualized child prostitution, sex trafficking, and rape of children in war.

In the chapters that follow, each of these three general types are discussed in more detail.
Incest and Disturbances in Family Relationships

Incest disturbs a healthy balance of love, authority, and safety

In healthy families, parents share parenting roles and provide love, safety, and structure to family life. Family boundaries are clear. In healthy families parents love each other and their children. They treat each child fairly, not favoring one over another. Parents protect their children from harm and do not exploit them sexually or otherwise. Parents are co-equals in charge of the children, who obey family rules that include respect and consideration.

The children love their parents, and, though they may fight with siblings, siblings love each other. In healthy families, older children have some authority over younger children such as when they are called upon to take care of younger children when parents are not at home. Older children’s authority is limited and is under parental supervision. When children harm or threaten to harm each other, parents step in and enforce rules about safety, love, and respect.

When incest occurs, a healthy balance of love, authority, and protection is disturbed. Child victims may experience fears that mothers or other family members do not love them. They may believe they are responsible for holding the family together and that their mothers know about the incest and either approve or will not do anything to stop it, increasing their stress and conflict. Like Brianna, they may not tell out of fear of breaking up the family.

Afraid of the consequences of talking to anyone, including their mothers, victims can hold considerable resentment against their mothers for not protecting them. Some survivors blame their mothers more than the fathers who perpetrated the incest.
Other survivors, especially those in their teens, may feel as if they are somehow competitors with their mothers for the love and attention of fathers or stepfathers, which increases their guilt and fears that their mothers resent them and that they will lose their mothers’ love if they tell.

Discipline is an issue in incestuous families. Although in many incestuous families, child victims are compliant and terrified of what might happen if they tell, some children who are victimized may defy the parent who abused them out of anger at being sexually abused or as a kind of “turning the tables.” They resist parents’ efforts at discipline and guidance by threatening to tell someone about the incest. Some may be angry and defiant with their mothers when they think their mothers know and will do nothing.

Imbalance of roles and authority in families are apparent when perpetrators “play favorites” with the children they victimize and arouse justifiable jealousy in the other children, who do not realize that the so-called favorite is being sexually abused. Incest victims are at risk for sibling physical and emotional abuse, especially in families where parental supervision is inadequate.

When incest comes to light, families often break apart. In some cases, the separations are temporary. During the separation, perpetrators undergo treatment, and, if they succeed, they may be reunited with the families. The separation also gives other family members room to work through the deep issues that result from the incest.

**Favoritism and Siblings’ Responses**

Incest perpetrators may give special attention to or play favorites with the child being abused. This upsets a healthy balance in families where parents are in charge and siblings are on equal footing. Dick, a stepfather, said he favored the oldest stepdaughter in his family. He victimized her for more than ten years beginning when she was five. He would buy her clothes, take her out alone for treats and rides, and pay more attention to her than he did to the other children.

Dick noticed that the other children were jealous, but their jealousy had no impact on his behaviors. He said he was so obsessed with the child he victimized that it did not matter to him how much his actions hurt the other children.

Siblings of incest survivors may believe that are worthless and not valued because of the attention perpetrators may pay to the
victimized children and perpetrators’ inattention to them. Children who are favored may feel guilty about how their siblings are treated. Siblings might fight among each other because of jealousy, causing further emotional damage.

Roy took the side of the child he victimized when she had disputes with her younger sister. This is how his wife Loretta described Roy’s favoritism toward Rosella, the child victim, and her younger sister Peggy.

When Rosella and Peggy were in any kind of argument or were squabbling, Roy would always blame Peggy. I mean even from the time Peggy was six and Rosella was eleven. Peggy would say afterwards, “Dad always blames me. He never wants to blame Rosella.”

I could never understand why he acted like this. I thought, why doesn’t he give Peggy a chance? I could see what was going on, and I would tell him. I’d say, “Why do you always stick up for Resella?”

He goes, “Well, Peggy likes to be a stinker, and she likes to pick on her sister.” I says, “Not all the time. I can see that it’s not all the time.”

He goes, “Most of the time.” Peggy felt really bad. Then when Rosella was eleven, the abuse started. From that time on, Roy never tried to get really close to Peggy. He never was really nice to her as dad. It was like he still catered more to Rosella. I know Peggy could see that.

Years later, after completing a sex offender treatment program, Roy admitted that he had taken sides with Rosella against Peggy. He said he distanced himself from Peggy because he was afraid he would sexually abuse her.

Sibling Incest and Imbalance of Power

Imbalance of power between siblings may contribute to incest. Parents may favor one child over others or may find one child difficult to supervise. Such children appear to be more likely to sexually abuse siblings than children who parents are able to discipline each child in even-handed ways.

Greta and her husband Jim could not control their twelve year-old son Marcus who was defiant, hyperactive, moody and aggressive. Marcus was in treatment for anger management at the time
their daughter Sally, eight, told Greta that Marcus had been sexually abusive.

When the abuse came to light, Greta arranged a psychiatric evaluation for Marcus. The psychiatrist thought Marcus had a biologically based neurological disorder, perhaps a bipolar disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Greta said she herself has a diagnosis of bipolar disorder.

The psychiatrist helped Great and Jim to make a plan that provided for intensive supervision of Marcus. The children had to sleep on two separate floors, with Greta and her husband on the same floor as Sally. Marcus had an alarm on his door that was set after he went to bed. The alarm went off if anyone crossed the threshold from either direction. Marcus had to be supervised at all times and to never be alone with Sally. Finally, Greta and Jim enrolled Marcus in karate, hockey, and baseball, all activities in which Marcus did well. The activities were structured, the rules were clear, and Marcus excelled.

When siblings about other siblings, the abused children may not tell because they believe that the parents will take the side of the favored children or will not believe that the favored children would do such things. The abused siblings may fear that telling will do no good and the abusing child may retaliate and hurt them even more deeply.

For example, Celia, a thirteen year-old girl, remained silent about her brother’s sexual abuse that occurred from the time she was five years until she told her cousin when she was thirteen. She said that her mother favored her brother and often was harsh and cruel to her. She herself believed that she was her father’s favorite, but that her mother was the boss, including being the boss over her father.

Celia thought that if she told her parents about her brother’s abuse, her mother would not believe her, and, worse, that her mother would punish her and shun her. She did not believe that her father would protect her, but, apparently, her father made living in the family bearable for her. She also assumed that her mother knew about the incest and did not care.

When her father died unexpectedly, Celia was terrified of remaining in the family without him. Within two weeks of his death, she told her cousin about the abuse. Her cousin told a teacher who reported the abuse to child protection and Celia lived in foster care until she turned eighteen.
Perceptions of favoritism led Loretta to believe that her mother would not take her side if she told about her mother about her older brother Pete’s sexual abuse during the summer that Loretta turned twelve and her brother was fourteen. Loretta believed that her mother liked Pete more than they liked her. He did better in school than she did, her mother talked to him more, and her mother told others what a great boy he is.

Loretta’s perception of the favoritism influenced her decision not to tell about her brother’s sexual abuse. She also was afraid her brother would beat her if she did not do what he said, and her parents would not protect her. Complicating her perception of Pete as the favorite was her sense of their closeness as big brother and little sister united against a stepfather whom they thought did not like them. She said about not telling

I wanted to tell my mother. I told my girlfriend. It’s like our secret, and, like I say, I wanted to tell my mother but I knew my mother wouldn’t believe me because I was [did not finish sentence]. I know she would have taken my brother’s side because, like we were growing up she’d always take my brother’s side on things. My friends could see that too. It’s like she didn’t want to listen to me. He would lie about things and then I’d get the belt and stuff. I got the belt a lot.

When her brother threatened to beat her if she did not let him be sexual with her, she believed he would get away with that, too. Finally, she felt a strong bond to him. She said

We were really close. That’s probably why it would have been hard for me to blame him, hard for me to squeal on him, or whatever, to tell my mother what he was doing.

Loretta never told her mother even after she and her brother were adults.

This is something that my mother doesn’t even know after all these years. I just couldn’t tell her. I just couldn’t.

In summary, the complicated family dynamics that are characteristic of families where incest occurs were present in Loretta’s family of origin. These dynamics include her fear of her mother tak-
ing her brother’s side, her fear of being beaten and having her brother lie about that, and her loyalty to her brother.

**Split Loyalties**

Split loyalties are common in families where incest occurs. Sometimes families rally behind victims and stand united in their insistence that perpetrators leave and get the help they need. Other times, families split their loyalties, with some taking sides with perpetrators who deny they have committed incest. Legal authorities do not allow persons charged with sexual abuse to live in the home with victims. Non-offending parents often must choose who leaves the family.

In some cases, the child victim leaves, either because they run away or the parents ask them to leave. Sometimes public social services place children out of the home when they believe that the parents cannot protect the children against further abuse.

In Celia’s case, her mother chose her brother over her. Her mother’s response confirmed Celia’s fears about favoritism. When questioned by police, her brother immediately confessed. The police told her mother that the brother and sister could not live together in the family home. The mother said, “I will not deprive my son of a bed.” The son returned to the family home until his court hearing, and Celia went into foster care. Celia did not see her mother for more than two years and rarely for years after that.

Celia left foster care at eighteen, married a few years later, and began to see her mother on a more regular basis. They never discussed the brother’s abuse and the mother’s rejection. When her mother was dying of cancer, Celia took daily care of her until her mother died. Celia never had evidence that her mother knew about the incest, but she was certain that her father did not know.

When Roy’s abuse of Rosella came to light, Loretta chose to have Roy stay in the home. Rosella had told a teacher about her father’s incestuous behaviors. The teacher reported to child protection who came to school immediately. After an interview, they placed Rosella in foster care. On the day Rosella was placed in foster care, the child protection worker asked her

*Do you want your daughter to come back home or do you want your husband to leave?*
Loretta said she wanted Rosella home and Roy out. Later, she changed her mind. She explained what happened.

Roy was packing up his stuff, and he says, “I’m going to live in my van.” I says, “You’re not going to live in your van. You have to go some place.” He says, “I have got no place to go. I don’t have any money. No one’s going to want me after this.” So, I felt really bad.

Then I called up the social worker and told her, I says, “I changed my mind. I want Roy to stay, and I want Rosella to stay at a foster home.”

The social worker thought this was not a good idea. Loretta reported

The social worker said, “It’s only going to be a matter of time, and he’ll be arrested.” I says, “OK, but whatever time I have I want him to stay here. That’s the way I feel.” She says, “Well, you know you are making a big mistake. You really are making a big mistake.” I said, “Well, it’s my mistake. It’s my mistake. It’s my decision. That’s the way I feel right now.”

I just couldn’t help feeling that way. I don’t know how other women react, but that’s how I reacted.

When parents chose husbands over child victims, the parents risk permanent alienation from their children. Many children seem unable to get past the hurt of being sexually abused and then of being left in foster care in favor of the abusing parent. Rosie, for example, remained distant from her parents for many years after she disclosed Dick’s incest with her. She did so for many many reasons, but a major one was her mother June’s choice of allow her stepfather Dick back into the home and letting Rosie stay in foster care after Rosie ran away at sixteen to escape further abuse.

Cases of sibling incest are difficult because parents love the children involved, but for safety reasons, the children must be separated. Not only may their loyalties be divided, but they may be angry at the children who were aggressors and sometimes children who are victimized.
As Greta said about her split loyalties when she found that her twelve year-old son Marcus who had sexually abused her eight year-old daughter Sally.

*My heart broke. I had so much rage at Marcus and so afraid that Sally will suffer for the effects of the abuse for the rest of her life…. Talk about guilt as a parent…. The child comes first, the victim. Put your child first. Put aside all your own feelings of guilt, shame, and remorse and get that child help.*

*You have to be there for the other one, too. That’s really hard. I walked a very fine line and still do between accusing and letting Marcus know how much he is loved anyway.*

*You can’t choose one child over another. You’re setting that other child up for failure if you tell him he’s bad and tell him and everything’s rotten about him. That’s basically what you’re doing because you’re talking apart who he is. You just can’t do that.*

*That was a very fine line I walked last year when I found out. I think I’ve forgiven Marcus because I’ve been able to let go. That fine line, letting him know what he did was wrong, but you still love him. It’s the toughest thing I’ve ever had to do, one of the toughest.*

In summary, split loyalties are common in families where incest occurs. Some parents summarily reject their children in favor of a spouse or sibling, as did Celia’s mother. In most families, the decisions are more agonizing, as shown by Greta’s story. Rosie’s mother June said she felt compelled to allow Dick back into the home and to leave Rosie in foster care she had given birth to triplets the day Rosie had run away. June mother felt she could not handle three newborns and her other children without Dick’s help. She also did not know how she could be psychologically available to June when she had just given birth and was in shock about the incest. Eventually Dick was court-ordered out of the home, but by then Rosie no longer wanted to live at home.
“The mother always knows” is a phrase that many use to blame mothers of father/stepfather/partner incest. For many years, themes of the collusive mother and the participating victim dominated psychiatric views on incest. Much of the general public shared these views. Many people still do.

There are many documented cases where mothers did not know, as well as documented cases where fathers, siblings, and other relatives did not know when other family members committed incest.

In Celia’s case, her brother abused her in her bedroom at night while both parents and four other siblings were at home. The brother also molested another sibling, a boy, who was six years his junior. He also sexually abused a niece. The three children who were victimized did not know of the others’ victimization and no one else in the family did either.

In Lisa’s family, her grandfather molested all six of his grandchildren for fifteen years. Not only did each child not know the other children were being abused, but none of the parents knew either. The abuse took place while the families visited the grandfather and grandmother. Thus, the other families were in the vicinity but had no idea until Lisa, the youngest grandchild, told her mother about “Grandpa doing it on the boat.” Lisa was nine years old and remembered being abused starting when she was six.

Each case of incest must be assessed for whether mothers also should be held accountable for failure to protect, but it is unfair to assume that mothers always know.

In many families, when incest comes to light, after parents recover from their shock and self-blame, they consult with professionals and do whatever they must in order to heal their children and themselves.
Signs of Sexual Abuse in Families

As shown in Chapter Five, there are many signs of child sexual abuse, but except for direct statements, few signs are clear. Sometimes there are no signs at all.

In many cases, non-offending parents and siblings see no signs of sexual abuse in their families, or only know what some signs mean after the incest becomes known. For example, Alice noticed that her six year-old daughter’s hair was always clean and shiny. Only after she found out that her husband sexually abused their daughter in the shower every day did she realize why the child’s hair was clean all the time.

Non-offending family members often attribute relationship problems to many other plausible causes. For example, Betty said her marriage was strained at the time her husband sexually abused their granddaughter. She attributed the strain to her lack of interest in sex during menopause, her mood swings, and her desire to sleep alone because of hot flashes.

Suspicious but no Validation

Within families, there is a wide range of awareness that incest is taking place. Perhaps the most frustrating is when non-offending parents suspect sexual abuse, do what they can to find out if abuse is taking place, and run into brick walls. That is what happened to Alice, the mother of three children ages six to sixteen.

Alice was very concerned that her husband Bill was sexually abusing their children for several reasons, including her Bill’s daily viewing of internet porn and his masturbation in the family room while the family watched television. She had other reasons for concern as shown in the following quote. She said about the sexual abuse of her six year-old daughter Brittany.

Initially Brittany told me. I asked her. She was six at the time. I had asked her many times prior, and she had said no. I felt like he was doing that to them for quite some time. I’d say for a good couple of years because they were petrified of him. They were crying. At one time, Brittany did grab me in the breast, and I knew these are all warning signs of being molested because I had taught elementary school. Several kids in my classroom had been molested. So I knew all the warning signs.
I had asked her a couple times. The counselor I was seeing said to not ask her anymore. When she came home from kindergarten this particular day, this voice inside my head just said, “Ask her if she’s seen her dad naked.” She said yes, she had. I asked her if she had ever touched his penis. She said she had.

Before that, I had asked her about the good and bad touch that they kind of give you. “Has anyone touched you in your breast?” I knew to use that type of terminology—vagina, breast, but one thing that I’d never thought of was to ask her if she’d touched anyone’s penis. I had no clue that that was another way they molest kids. I’m really sorry I didn’t know.

I never asked Brittany about seeing her dad naked or touching his penis. She started talking after I asked her about that, about how she really did touch his penis. I had not thought of asking that. It’s really a big surprise.

I had suspected for some time. I told my counselor, who told me I was destroying my marriage with those kinds of thoughts, a licensed therapist, I will have you know.

I told people who were leaders in my church. I told my pastor’s wife, who didn’t know what to say to that. The leader of my group—I was in a group for women whose husbands did porn because that’s what I thought I was mostly dealing with was a man who did porn—she said, “Alice, it’s normal for you to feel like that because men who do pornography a lot of women feel like their husbands are molesting their children, and they’re not.”

The pastor’s wife didn’t know what to say. She was just like clueless on how to help me. I felt like I was going through a lot of people, and they were just not helping me at all. They were very clueless.

Alice suspected for a long time that Bill was sexually abusing Brittany. As an elementary school teacher, she believed she was well-trained in the signs of child sexual abuse. The children’s fear of Bill was a big clue, as was Brittany’s grab at her breast.

Yet, when she asked Brittany, the child denied anything sexual had happened. Apparently the child needed to be asked a specific, concrete question about penises and nakedness. “Have you ever seen your dad naked?” “Have you ever touched Daddy’s penis?” The child may not have understood more abstract questions like “Is Daddy touching you?” or “Is Daddy doing things to you you don’t like?”
The people Alice turned to for help did not help. Particularly unnerving to her was Bill’s preoccupation with pornography and masturbation. He was not obvious about the masturbation, but Alice saw clearly what he was doing and told him to stop. He did for a while, but he started again.

**Ambiguous Signs of Sexual Abuse in Families**

In contrast to Alice’s experience, the clues that Eve noticed were fleeting. Eve said she once, had an “intuition” that her husband Toby was sexually abusing their ten year-old daughter Brianna, but the behaviors stopped, and she thought she must have imagined things. Four years later, she found that her intuition was correct. She said

*I happened to driving my daughter Brianna to a friend’s house, and we were talking about safe touch. I don’t even remember why. I think it was really because I was a little nervous about thinking she was involved with a lot of things at church, and there was a male youth director there. I just wanted to make sure that we’d covered this topic.*

*We’re driving in the car, and I asked Brianna if she had ever had any experience with any inappropriate touch. Then she said, “Actually I don’t know, but I might have, or I might have dreamed it.” So we got into the conversation and kept driving.*

*We never did get to the party she was going to at her friend’s house. She told me that she had remembered her dad coming into her room at night and that he had touched her. That is how I found out. It was devastating, but I was glad she talked about it, finally.*

*It had been years before. It wasn’t like it had just happened. She said this was probably when she was ten…. The only indication I had had was a couple years before she told I’d made a comment to my friend saying, “I just feel like there’s maybe something sexual between Toby, the way he’s behaving around Brianna.” They’re like, “Oh, no, no, no ,no.” They all know Toby and love Toby, and know Brianna, and we’re great friends. I’m like, “Well, it just seems a little weird.”*

*It was totally intuition. Nothing specific. Maybe just like one time when she sat on his lap, something clicks in your little mother mind. I thought, well, it didn’t bother my friends, but still it was bothering me.*
Toby said he stopped when Eve asked him if he were being sexual with their daughter. He may have, but in many cases, such a question would have no effect. Most perpetrators would carry on with the sexual abuse and try harder to hide it.

No Clue

Some perpetrators are very good at covering up the abuse. They may not obviously pay more attention to one child than others in the family. The children may not be afraid of them, at least they do not show fear. Betty described how she saw her husband Jason’s relationship with their granddaughter Janine.

He never really would say, ”OK, Janine, let’s go to the store. I want to buy you some candy,” or ”Let’s go for a walk in the woods so we can see if there are any May flowers.” He didn’t do any of that.
The sexual abuse was all done in our home. When I look back, I think that he would take Jackie, she was the youngest grandchild and help her hide when they played hide and seek.
She could never shut up so it easy to find her. Janine was quiet. He’d help her hide. She was tiny. He’d get her into places where most kids couldn’t get. He helped the older child Janette find different places. So he helped all of them, but only sexually abused Janine.

Often parents think they should have known, but there may be no clue. Carla, for example, saw no signs of her grandson Michael’s sexual issues. She had temporary custody of Michael while his mother was in drug rehab for meth use.

Carla needed to have advanced training in child development and the development of sexually abusive behaviors in order to know that Michael’s life circumstances placed him in a high risk
category to act out sexually. Few parents and grandparents have that training.

Carla felt blindsided when she overheard seven year-old Michael ask her seven year-old daughter Morgan for one more time. The children had been playing in the backyard and were behind an upright inflatable pool. She said she heard Michael say

“Come on. Just one more time. Just one more time.” ‘My daughter said, “No, no. I don’t want to do it any more.”

Michael told her later that

*I was sucking on her boobies and licking her doo-doo*

Carla said she had no idea that anything sexual was going on with the children. There was no sign of sexual preoccupation. Both children were appropriate sexually, and they had no secret stash of sexually explicit material.

She was concerned about both children sexually abusing other children. The incident brought up a memory of Michael being sexually abused three or four years earlier when he told his grandmother that a boy three or four years older had tried to “put his penis in my butt.”

When she overheard Morgan and Michael arguing about further sexual contact and found the children undressed, she sought professional help right away. The first few professionals she contacted told her the behaviors were just sexual play.

Carla persisted. Finally, a sex specific treatment program did an evaluation and said that Michael was at risk to sexually abuse other children. Not only did he disclose two more incidents of being sexually abused, but the professionals said his mother’s history of meth addiction strongly suggests that she had neglected him, and he may also have been exposed to domestic abuse, which is common in families where a parent has an addiction to meth. The professionals noted that he erupts in rage and frustration at slight provocations and he tended to be distractable and hyperactive. He was also was relatively low in emotional expressiveness.

Further evaluation identified neurological issues that could be related to his mother’s drug addiction while pregnant with him and to his exposure to meth labs. Michael was diagnosed with ADHD and anxiety disorders.
The professionals assured Carla that Morgan was at decreased risk because she has few known risk factors and appears to be a well-adjusted, emotionally expressive, and trusting little girl.

To summarize Carla’s situation, she had no idea that her grandson had sexual issues that placed him at risk for sexually abusing other children. She knew about one incident of Michael being sexually abused, but she did not know that his age at being sexually abused, his history of trauma and neglect, and his neurological issues placed him in a higher risk category for acting out sexually and possibly sexually abusing other children.

It is not clear whether the sexual contact he had with his same-age aunt was sexual abuse, but the level of intrusiveness and his insistence that he continue when she wanted to stop are of concern.

Finally, Carla is not alone. Few parents and grandparents have the training to evaluate when children are at risk to act out sexually.

Clues That Make Sense in Retrospect

Once the incest comes to light, previously mysterious behaviors may make sense. On the day Brittany told Alice about seeing her father naked and touching his penis, she understood why her daughter expressed fear of showers and why her hair was always clean and shiny.

*Whenever I gave her a bath, she’d get really nervous and scared and say ‘Don’t give me a shower. Don’t give me a shower.’ I’m like, she’s five. When have I ever given her a shower? You don’t give a five year old a shower. You’re always doing the bath thing. I kept wondering, what is this? Why is she talking about a shower?*

*On that day, she told me, oh yeah, she’s taken all these showers with him. I thought, Well, that works really good because if you touch her, you can just say, “I was drying her off,” or “I was washing her.” That will fly in court, won’t it?*

*Then I noticed that her hair was always clean. We didn’t give baths every day. They weren’t messy girls. They weren’t tomboy girls. I’d go two, three days without a bath, but Brittany’s hair was immaculate. That’s because he’s giving her a shower every day behind my back when I was gone.*
Alice worked days and her husband worked nights and took care of Brittany, the youngest child for much of every day.

Loretta was mystified that, when Rosella was twelve, she “didn’t feel bad at all” when she told Rosella she was going to divorce Roy. Peggy, the other daughter, “felt really bad.”

Then after the abuse came out I could understand why Rosella felt like that. I bet she thought [did not finish the sentence]. I could understand that she thought, Well, finally, my dad’s going to be out of the house, and I won’t have to worry about him abusing me anymore.

Learning about the abuse also helped Laura understand why Rosella did not want to visit Roy when he was in the hospital for surgery.

While he was in the hospital, he was really sick, and he almost died. We got to go and see him and that. Rosella didn’t want to go. She says, “No I want to be with my girlfriends.” I says, “Rosella, your dad, he really wants to see you. He’s in a lot of pain and everything.” He had this tube down his throat, and he had this jar with all the mucous and junk in it, coming out, putting in this jar that was really gross. He couldn’t get out of bed or anything. He’s really weak and everything and she didn’t want to go and see him.

After the abuse was out in the open, I thought about this. I says, I know why she didn’t want to see her dad. She was probably hoping that her dad would die.

Fathers who commit incest with their daughters may be overly strict in allowing their daughters to wear make-up and date. When Dora told the parents of the family where she babysat for many years that her father had sexually abused her, she reported their responses as

When I told them, they went, oh, that makes so much sense. We never understood why your dad wouldn’t let you date, and your dad wouldn’t let you go to dances,

Loretta said

It seemed like when Rosella was growing up Roy tried to be protective of her. He didn’t like her having boyfriends. When she was fourteen, she
wanted to see this boy. They were going to meet at the mall. Roy says, “I
don’t want you going over there with a boy.” I says, “Why not?” He says,
“If she’s going to have boys over, she’s going to have them come over to the
house.” Well, this boy was real shy. Rosella asked him to come over. He
says, “No I can’t come over and meet your parents. I’m too afraid to do
that.” So he didn’t come over. Later on, she did meet him at the mall.

In some families, such behaviors or indicators are all there are to sug-
gest that incest is occurring. They can be difficult to link to incest.

Joan suspected that her husband Dick had affairs when he was on
the road doing his job of fixing main-frame computers. He would
be gone three weeks out of every month. She said

I didn’t know it was Rosie, but I knew that there was somebody. I’d say
that to him. I would just say that to him. It was kind of like he he could
remove himself from me, and he’d have this other person. Part of the
time it was Rosie.

Clear Signs that Parents do Not Recognize

Sometimes there are clear signs that incest is going on but
parents do not recognize the signs. No one really knows how this can
happen, but there are a couple of possibilities. In father incest, some-
times the mothers are beaten down psychologically and physically.
They come to believe that they and often their children cannot sur-
vive without the abusing parent. For the sake of what they consider,
survival, they talk themselves out of believing that their husbands or
male partners are sexually abusing the children.

Parents who are untreated incest survivors may not realize
that some behaviors are warning signs of child sexual abuse that
require their attention. These behaviors in their minds are part of
normal child development. Survivors who have had competent
professional help are much less likely to mistake problematic sex-
ual behaviors as normal.

In additiona, untreated incest survivors may create a sexu-
alized home without realizing it. Sexualized behavior may be so
routine that they do not recognize child sexual abuse. In some
families, parents may take sexual pleasure in touching, kissing, or
bathing their children. They may experience erotic sensations in
being nude or semi-nude in front of their children and in seeing their children in various stages of undress.

They may have erotic art and pornography on their walls and in books and magazines that are readily available to the children. They may act in sexualized ways with each other and engage in sexualized talk. This may be normal for incest survivors who had not had competent therapy and psychoeducation.

Dora and her husband Robert created a sexualized family life for their three children. Dora survived incest that her lawyer father committed on her from the time she could remember until she left home at eighteen. She never received treatment. She graduated from an exclusive private college and married Robert, a man who earned a high income as an engineer. Robert’s views are not known because he did not make himself available for an interview.

Dora said that neither she nor Robert realized that the older daughter had sexually abused her younger brother for ten years and that the younger brother had sexually abused his younger sister for four years.

The chances are good that there were many indicators of the sexual abuse, but the parents could not see them. When Dora talked about being in bed naked in a hotel bed with the three children to comfort them after a tornado had destroyed their home, it was clear that she did not understand how inappropriate that was. A further indicator of lack of understanding was her consternation that child protection had no empathy for her desire to comfort the children in that way. She reasoned that the children had been through trauma and needed comfort.

A few months before the abuse came to light, the youngest child told Dora that the nude drawings on the wall and the nude statues on the swings in the backyard of their home were “inappropriate.” Dora thought this was amusing and said with affection that the child is “weird little kid.” This is another indication that Dora did not realize that she and Robert had created a sexualized family life that set the stage for ten years of sexual abuse among the three children.

Known Abuse That is Not Reported

It is common, but unknown how common, that mothers and wives discover that incest is going on, and they attempt to han-
dle it themselves. They may confront the abuser, threaten divorce, and take steps to ensure the children are not alone with the abuser. They do not report the abuse to the authorities because they are afraid of what will happen if they do.

In some families, the non-offending parents do nothing to protect the children. This is serious failure to protect. In these situations it is possible that the non-sexually abusing parents are psychologically and physically battered.

Hedda Nussbaum’s situation is a classic example of a woman battered psychologically and physically and who did nothing to protect her daughter. A senior book editor in a major New York publishing company, Hedda was beaten and terrorized so badly by her partner Joel Steinberg that, in her own words,

_I was basically a zombie by then. My whole self was gone, was destroyed._

Joel killed their six year-old daughter Lisa in Hedda’s presence. Hedda was cleared of responsibility for Lisa’s death because, according to news reports, the prosecuting attorneys believed she had been battered to the point where she had no will of her own. Not only did Hedda’s own story convince the prosecutors, but her face was severely disfigured and swollen from being battered. She had several reconstructive surgeries to correct the damage.

In grand jury testimony, Hedda stated that she had observed bruising on Lisa. She said

_I guess I was changing her diaper. I observed a bruise on her vagina, a large bruise over her vaginal area. It was purplish, black and blue._

She did nothing. She and Joel blamed an acquaintance with whom they did drugs, and it was not clear who had assaulted her. The police and child protection were never involved.

Hedda wrote a book called Surviving Intimate Terrorism. This term is widely accepted as a form of domestic abuse results in serious psychological and physical deterioration of victims.

In some cases intimate terrorism may not be an issue. Martha did not report her husband Hugo for sexually abusing their
niece. She also put up with his womanizing, alcoholism, and beat-ings that happened a few times a year. Martha discovered her husband Hugo sexually abusing Martha’s four year-old niece Trudy.

*I caught him fondling her. I raised all kinds of hell. I told him I didn’t like what was going on….I told him I was real angry with him. Told him to stop. That I wouldn’t put up with it. I was very hurt. I told Trudy I didn’t like what was happening and that she was to come to me if ever he did anything again.*

Martha filed for divorce. The couple separated for a while, but they reconciled. Hugo began sexually abusing Trudy again. This time Martha did not find out.

*She was being threatened by Hugo. He would threaten with they would take him away. The police would get involved.*

The extended family knew of the abuse. Hugo said

*I was kind of like the family joke. “Hide the women and children. Here comes Hugo.”*

Martha, on the other hand, said no one in the family ever talked to her about the abuse. She said it seemed as if they treated the abuse “like a joke.”

Hugo abused other children who were not family members. As Hugo said after years of treatment, “*They didn’t do me any favors.*” Martha or other family members should have reported Hugo’s abuse of Trudy. Hugo might have been stopped from abusing other children.

A few years after Martha told Hugo to leave Trudy alone, a friend reported Hugo for molesting the friend’s daughter. Hugo went into therapy immediately and so did Martha. Earlier reporting would have resulted in earlier treatment.

Other women attempt to stop the abuse without help from professionals and law enforced. Ellen said she protected her daughter by locking her in her bedroom at night sho the child did not have to worry about somebody coming in. She did not think that her daughter would have to worry about being locked in if the house caught fire. Anna assured her daughter that the sexual abuse would stop
now that Anna had told the abuser to stop. However, the abuse continued.

Another variation includes mothers who know about the sexual abuse but sacrifice the well-being of their children in order to maintain the family the status quo. They could well be in a dream world, a state of denial, where they talk themselves into believing that the abuse is not taking place and that they are wonderful parents. Many survivors in this situation report that the family had a wonderful image in the community, and everyone thought the parents were doing a great job with their children.

Dora, who characterized her mother Dorothy as “just difficult and horrible” believed her mother and her brother knew about the father’s incest. She said

Oh, yes, my mother knew. She used to ask me on my birthday every year, How are things with you and your father? Like, well, we’re locked in a room together every night. What do you think? When I was sixteen, she left me in charge of everything for six weeks while she went to Sweden. I had to lock my door every night. My dad was “sleep walking.” I’d wake up in the morning and step over him, because he would be asleep on the floor in front of the door.

I think my brother kind of figured it out.

Finally, there are parents who know about the incest and do nothing because they believe child sexual abuse is no big deal. They are dismissive of the abuse and its effects. Typically, they are untreated survivors. Melissa, the mother of two, did not take her partner’s sexualized “horsing around” seriously, nor did she investigate why he sometimes was not in bed when she woke up in the middle of the night. When her daughters finally told a teacher about her father’s sexual abuse, her reaction was

What’s the big deal? I was sexually abused. I’m doing just fine.

Such behaviors and beliefs are probably rare, but they do occur.

In summary, sometimes there are clear signs of incest and parents respond immediately to protect their children and report the abuse themselves. Sometimes, parents attempt to protect the chil-
dren without outside help. In other cases, parents have reason to believe incest is taking place, but they cannot find firm evidence. In still other families, there are no clear signs, but the children may show signs of trauma.

Parents who are untreated incest survivors are at risk not to recognize signs of sexual abuse or they do not realize that incestuous behaviors must be taken seriously and stopped.

Some family members do not report, but do all they can can to protect children in their families from the perpetrator. However, they do not realize that incest perpetrators are at high risk to abuse children outside of the family. In fact, many do even when they are getting away with committing incest with children in the family.
Mother’s Reactions to Finding Out About Father Incest

Despite wide-spread beliefs that mothers collude with fathers and that mothers always know, many mothers have strong, protective reactions when they find out family members have committed incest. Shock, disbelief, and rage are common.

These stories also provide guidelines about what to do when the incest comes to light. Effective responses are to protect the children, seek professional help, confide in trusted friends and family, and cooperate with legal authorities.

Protecting children involves separating perpetrators from the children. Parents who report the abuse often have already created the separation. Child protection and judges typically order no contact. The separations can become permanent through divorce, but some perpetrators take responsibility for their behaviors, plead guilty, and successfully complete treatment. In these cases, some women decide not to go through with a divorce.

When Betty’s daughter-in-law and son told her that her husband Jason had sexually abused Janine, their daughter and Betty’s granddaughter, many times, Betty went into a rage. When Jason came home, she said,

“You son of a bitch, what have you been doing?” I was very angry. I said, “What have you been doing to Janine? Larry and and Benita had been over, and they told me what Janine had told them.”

Jason denied it for the first, oh, I suppose the first half hour, and then he kind of admitted some, but he just wasn’t really comfortable with it.

It was, I would say, those two weeks in our life were pure hell. I didn’t know if I was gonna stay with him because I love kids. I have grandchildren, and I wasn’t going to let anybody hurt them, but then in turn, I knew what a good man he really, really was.
I thought there had to have been something. He asked me to give him a chance, if we would get into counseling and stuff. He was the one that really wanted the counseling. He wanted to find someone. He went and talked to our minister at the time. My son and daughter-in-law did not report it, but our minister did. I mean, he had to. My husband knew that, even as he talked to him. So, he was arrested, and then we went through that. We got in with a sex offender treatment program. That’s where our lives were for about three years.

Loretta described in detail the many emotions she experienced during the first weeks she knew about Roy’s incestuous behaviors with Rosella. She found out about the abuse when she discovered a note taped to her back door. It said

“Rosella Martin has been taken to a temporary foster home due to incestuous behavior.” At the time, I didn’t really know what “incestuous behavior” was. I mean I knew what incest was, but I wasn’t sure of that big long word.” It was signed by a child protection worker.

Loretta said, “I was just totally shocked.” She continued

I thought to myself, Oh, my God. So I get on the phone, I called the social worker. The receptionist said she’s gone for the day. I says, “I’ve got to talk to somebody.” This is a Friday. What am I going to do? It means shes going to be gone the whole weekend. I’m not going to be able to even contact her and find out what’s going on.

I was a real nervous wreck. I told her about this note. She says, “OK. There’s somebody here you can talk to.”

So I talked to this woman who told me, “She’s being held at this foster home, but you can’t see her. You can’t have the phone number. You can’t talk to her.”

I says, “OK.” No, in fact, this was a Thursday because then she say, “At nine o’clock tomorrow morning, I want you to come to social services.”…I thought I am not going to survive for another hour. I’ve got to talk to somebody. I can’t sit here like this wondering what’s going on. At first, I didn’t believe it.

I called my mother-in-law who was at a going away party. “Minnie,” I says, “Something’s happened. I was wondering if you can get out of that party and come over because I really got to talk to somebody. Just drive carefully.” She says, “I will.”
She was all upset, too. She just couldn’t believe it. Her and I sat and talked. When Roy came home, I told him what happened, and I told him about the note. He says, “Yeah, it probably one of her darned boyfriends. He denied it of course, which I suppose most guys do.” I was really in shock. I just couldn’t believe it.

She, Roy and her mother-in-law Minnie went to social services the next morning. Roy had to talk to police officers. Loretta talked to a social worker. Minnie waited in the lobby. Loretta said the social worker had a report on Rosella’s interview with the social worker.

The day before, Rosella had viewed a film on child sexual abuse during home economics class. She left in the middle of the film to talk to the school principal. She told the principal that her father has sexually abused her for two years, starting when she was twelve. She said the film made her afraid that her father would sexually abuse her young sister Peggy, and she did not want that to happen. Loretta said

I just didn’t believe it. She says, “Is there anything I can do for you?” I says, “I didn’t even want to be sitting in this room. I just want to get out of here. I just want to get away from it. I don’t want to believe it.

Loretta told the social worker that she wanted Minnie to come in. She explained that Minnie lived with them and that she and Minnie are close. Loretta told the social worker.

She’s got to know. She might as well know from you what happened. She came in there. I thought she was going to have a heart attack. She doesn’t have a very good heart, and she has high blood pressure. “I can’t believe it,” she says. “No, that’s not my son,” just like what I had to say. I kept saying, “No, no.” Then her and I we both started sitting there crying….I said, “It’s like you’re reading a book about somebody else.”

The police arrested Roy, booked him, and put him in jail pending a hearing. Loretta visited him right away, explaining, “No matter what happened, I’m still his wife.” Minnie was” not up to” seeing her son. Then Loretta did not want to see him. He would call her from jail, asking her to visit.
I made excuses. I said, “It’s too cold. I got things to do around the house.” He could kind of feel that something was up. He had mentioned that to me. I just said, “Well, I’ll come and visit you maybe next week. It just kind of hit me. I thought I don’t want to see him for a while.

Sometimes mothers report their husband’s abusive behaviors. They realize a great deal is at stake, but they report anyway. Alice said

I knew it instinctively that once I picked up that phone and called child protection that I’d probably lose my house, the car, my friends, my church, everything. I would lose everything. I thought, is it worth it? You better damn well believe it’s worth it. I will not have my kid be molested. I would rather be on the street poor and have my freedom. I know that better than anybody. I know that better than anybody. You will. You will lose everything when you do this. You will lose your marriage. You will lose everything. To me, that’s worth it, if she doesn’t have to be molested anymore. I’d rather have it that way.

These things came to pass. I couldn’t afford the house. It was hard to find a job. Even though I had a degree and I tried to go back into teaching, it just so happened that that year they had laid off three hundred teachers. When I tried to substitute, I didn’t get called. So, eventually I got this job for this start-up internet company.

Alice and her children went through some very hard times. She divorced her husband who was sentenced to a year in the work house and twenty years probation. Eventually, her life got better. She said

I have a car now. I have a job. We have a place to live. I did find a place to live. You lose it all, but you can get stuff back. Absolutely. I have a new marriage now that is 10 million times better.

My daughters aren’t being molested anymore. So we have freedom. We’re not rich, but I feel like we’ve accomplished something, and we’re better for it.

You are going to risk everything. You may lose everything, but it doesn’t mean it’s permanent. It’s worth it. You’d rather live on the streets than see your child molested.
Alice did all she could to protect her children. She knew she was risking losing a lot of things, but she put the well-being of her children first. Eventually, her life got better. Alice’s responses are guidelines about what to do when incest occurs.

Case Study: Family Separation and Reconciliation

Eve’s response provides additional guidelines about what to do. When Eve’s daughter Brianna told Eve that her father had touched her sexually while she was in bed at night, Eve believed her daughter, talked to her husband Toby immediately, separated from Toby the same day, sought the counsel of her pastor, and got the help, information, and support she needed. This is what she said.

I happened to be driving my fourteen year-old daughter Brianna to a friend’s house for a party. We were talking about safe touch because I was a little nervous about thinking she was involved with a lot of things at church, and there was a male youth director there. I just wanted to make sure that we’d covered this topic.

I asked her if she had ever had any experience with inappropriate touch. She said, “Actually, I have.” So we got into the conversation and we kept driving. She never did get to the party she was going to at her friend’s house.

She told me that she remembered her dad, my husband Toby, coming into her room at night and that he had touched her.

It was devastating, but I was glad she talked about it. It had been years before. It wasn’t like it had just happened. She said this was probably when she was ten. I dropped her off at my sister’s, spent some time there with her and my siter, and I went home.

I asked my husband, “Is this true? Brianna remembers this. She’s not sure if it’s a dream or if it’s real.”

Toby admitted that it was true, and that he had had problems ever since he was a child, since before he could remember, with exposing himself.

I had no idea. I said, “OK. You need help, and she needs help, and I’m going to my sister’s, and I’m taking the kids with me.” We had two other children.

Toby got help right away. He admitted that he had a problem. I went to my sister’s, and called my pastor, and asked, “What do we do? What does Toby need to do? What do people do?”
He gave us a name of a counselor. He said he would have to report the sexual abuse. I already knew that. I was as prepared as I could be for that.

I talked to the counselor right away. She recommended that Toby go to Transition Human Services. Toby was very willing to get help, which, according to what everybody said, was very unusual for him to admit it and to be willing to say, “I’ve got a problem.” So, I guess I was really thankful that he did.

We separated. A few days later he moved back to his mom and dad’s house so I could be back home with the kids and create a little semblance of normality for them. It was summer, so there wasn’t school, and I was home. I could just be there with the kids.

Eve reported that Toby sought counseling at Transition. She, Brianna, and the other two children started counseling with the professional the pastor had recommended. Eve and Toby also did couples counseling at Transition Services. That started right away, too.

After about a year of counseling, Brianna and Eve did some brief individual therapy and psychoeducation at Transition Services. They also had six sessions of family therapy with Toby. Only one of the other children participated, while their oldest child, a boy, stopped going.

Toby was sentenced to ten years probation which would be revoked and he would have to serve that time in prison if he sexually abused again. He had a no contact order for Brianna for six months. This was hard for her because she missed him and felt guilty that she had broken up the family. Counseling helped her with both of these issues.

Brianna and Eve went out to lunch every week for a year after that. They talked in depth about the sexual abuse and all it meant. We grew closer than ever.

Toby completed sex offender treatment. During the family therapy, Toby apologized and took full responsibility for his actions. He assured Brianna that none of what happened was her fault. He had acted badly. His actions led to the family separation. Eve said, “I’m sad to say that Brianna still has some guilt about breaking up the family.”

On the recommendation of the treatment professionals, the judge lifted the no contact order. Toby moved back into the house after two years apart. He also had four months of supervised
visits with Brianna before he moved home. Toby continues to see his probation officer once a month.

Eve felt that their older son who refused much of the family work is remote and distant from the family. She and Toby wish they could do something about it. They believe they have done all they can to reach out to him and hope that things work out for him in the future.

The other two children are doing well in school and in extracurricular activities. Brianna has forgiven her father, trusts him, and appears to feel close to him. Toby never missed a day of work in his executive position. Eve went back to work a year after Briana told her about the sexual abuse.

Eve believes their family came through some very terrible times. She said, “There has to be a reason for this. Maybe our story can help other families and children.” She said she, Toby, and Brianna volunteer at a sexual abuse prevention program where they participate in the education of the general public about child sexual abuse.

This family’s story shows what can happen when mothers act forthright, perpetrators take responsibility, clergy and helping professionals are well-informed, and families have resources to maintain themselves during what can be years of separation. For some families, the separations are permanent. Divorce is the most common outcome when fathers and stepfathers commit incest.

Outcomes like those of Brianna, Eve, and Toby, sadly, are rare. Even Brianna with the help and support she received, still lives with the guilt related to her belief that she broke up the family. This is testimony to the unwritten and unacknowledged society-wide assumptions about incest survivors as being at fault. They should have put up with it for the sake of the family.

**Cases of Family Break-Up Other Than Divorce**

Families may break up when perpetrators are other family members. Celia, victimized by an older brother for several years, stayed in foster care after the abuse came to light. Other families, too, break apart. In the stories below, a grandfather who sexually abused his granddaughter was exiled from the family, a teenage girl left home to live with her sister to get away from her abusive stepfather and a young husband and father distanced himself away from his
family of origin when they did not believe him when he said his father had sexually abused him for five years.

A Grandfather Exiled From the Family

After dinner and the theater, Martin and Deborah returned home to find their fourteen year-old daughter Donna in tears and their fifteen year-old son Robert sulking in his bedroom. When they asked what was going on, Donna said Robert had just tried to rape her and that he had raped her several times before.

As the parents grappled with this, Donna told them that her grandfather Joe had sexually abused her for seven years, and she had been too afraid to tell them.

Both Deborah and Martin were so overwhelmed that they thought they might explode into little pieces. They maintained some degree of rationality and let their daughter speak. Eventually, they talked to Robert who admitted that he had raped his sister several times.

Both children were star students and star athletes in school. Deborah was a pediatrician and Martin an attorney. Grandfather Joe headed the law office where Martin was a partner. The parents sought professional help immediately to sort out these difficult issues.

This family had adored the grandfather with whom they had dinner every week, along with the grandmother, the grandfather’s wife, since the couple had married seventeen years earlier.

The abuser was dad who gave the couple the down payment on their first house and who was handy enough to install a new furnace for them. This was granddad who never showed up without peppermints in his pocket for his grandchildren and who had put aside thousands of dollars for his grandchildren’s college educations.

Imagine how shocked and traumatized Martin and Deborah were when they learned that the man they loved and thought was wonderful had sexually abused their daughter.

Imagine how overwhelmed they were to learn of their son’s sexual assault of their daughter. The grandfather had not sexually abused this grandson, and he had not sexually abused his own son. Somehow, however, his grandson had carried on his grandfather’s legacy.

This family sought professional help from a rape crisis center that provided referrals to competent professionals for the entire family. The family had no desire for contact with their father, father-in-law, and grandfather who was fined, given a suspended
sentence, probation, and a court order into sex offender treatment. He retired from his law practice. The state bar associated revoked his license.

In another case, a man “spied” on his teenage stepdaughter as she used the bathroom to get ready for work in the morning. The daughter found him crouched beside the bathroom door masturbating. He promised not to do it again, and the girl did not tell her mother. Six months later, the girl stepped out of the shower and saw her stepfather looking at her through the bathroom window.

This time she “freaked out” and told her mother and the police. His wife decided to say with him so the daughter moved out of the home and lived with an aunt and uncle. The man was fined, given probation, and was ordered into a sex offender treatment program.

The judge also gave him a no contact order where he could not longer be in the presence of his stepdaughter. Whenever there were family gatherings, he could not go if the daughter was to be there. He would drive around alone or go to the movies, even on major U.S. holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Other family members shunned him, and they could not understand how his wife could stay with him.

Such serious family disruptions occur in many families where incest occurs. Child survivors may run away because, the family situation is intolerable to them. Rosie, for example, at sixteen, ran on the night her mother was in the hospital giving birth to twins. She never returned to the family home. Married and the mother of her own child, Rosie told her mother

You had no problem asking me to do what your part was in the house. So what’s the difference?. I did your part in everything else. Why not the sex part?

Rob, a survivor of father incest, really enjoyed family reunions of aunts, uncles, and cousins at Christmas, but he backed away from seeing any family members, including his family or origin for two years. He said

We [meaning his wife and child] weren’t there the last two Christmases. My mom doesn’t want me talking to her brothers and sisters, because
The incest that Rob’s father committed on Rob when Rob was a boy is a family secret. Only he, his wife, his parents, and his therapists know.

they’re afraid I’m going to tell them what had happened, which I have no intentions of doing.
CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

THIRTEEN

Children’s Long-Term Confusion

Incest can cause long-term confusion in child survivors. Perpetrators can appear to be loving and kind at times, and then cruel and unfeeling at others. Lisa drew a picture of her grandfather, who abused her for six years, starting when she was three.

She drew two pictures, one of a man who was smiling and looked kind. The other was of a man with a devil-like look on his face, complete with horns and a tail. In her mind, her grandfather was like two different people, one good and one bad. She was too young to put the two sides of her grandfather’s behaviors into a single, integrated person.

Another example of the contradictory behaviors that confuse children comes from the story of Honora and Grace, mentioned earlier, whose Uncle Emmett abused both of them at the same time. They said that their uncle would make pancakes for them in the morning after he had sexually abused them. They, too, could not put together the two sides of this man’s behaviors.

Yet, the girls loved him. They enjoyed the picnics at the lake with him. He told them stories and jokes. They missed him when a judge ordered him out of the home and into sex offender treatment because of the sexual abuse. They did not want the abuse and wanted him to get help so he could return to the family.

Perpetrators Own Words Show Why Children are Confused

In their own words, perpetrators describe behaviors that any child would find confusing. Dustin, who perpetrated incest on his daughter, said

I wanted so badly for my daughter to love me. I would beat my daughter, too. I'd neglect my daughter. I emotionally abused my daughter, tell her she's stupid and dumb and all this.
He would try to make up for his mistreatment through sexually abusing her. In his mind, sexualizing her was a way of making up of reconnecting. These contradictory, inappropriate behaviors are confusing to children and are harmful.

**Case Study: Marty and his Stepdaughter Sophie**

In their own words, perpetrators describe scenarios that show how confusing their behaviors are to children. Marty, an adult abuser, talked about how much he loved his stepdaughter Sophie and praised her for being a good kid. He said

*Sophie was just a good kid. She fit into our family. She was good for our family. She was a lot like her mother as far as neatness and stuff went. She was probably the neatest one of the kids as far as cleaning up her room and very caring…. I love Sophie. I know she loves me.*

On the other hand, when he forced her to undress and to masturbate him, he detached from her and looked on her as a thing, not a person. This is what he said.

*When it was going on, she certainly wasn’t a stepdaughter. I didn’t have that at all. It was, oh, let me see, a thing. I could never look at her while she was doing it, not at her face. I could look at her breasts because when I was looking at those, that’s something that turns me on. I can remember some times when she was masturbatiing me. Somehow I’d make eye contact with her, and I’d lose my erection.*

Another time, he described Sophie as a “hand on my penis.”

*Once the physical contact started, it was in my mind that Sophie was no longer my stepdaughter. I mean I saw a hand on my penis. I’d have her pull up her bra, and I would just look at her breasts and that’s it until it was done. Then, I just walked away. There was no sharing.*

Imagine how Sophie viewed this man whom she may have loved and who was loving to her at times and then demanding, unfeeling, and sexually inappropriate with her. It’s ironic that he appeared to be concerned that he did not turn the sexual abuse into an experience of sharing.
Incest Survivors’ Guilt and Shame

Survivors of childhood sexual abuse may have life-long guilt and shame. As a nine year-old girl said, “It was my fault. I didn’t tell him not to do it.”

Children who are being victimized believe they initiated the sexual contact. Mary, an adult survivor, said about incest where her father was the perpetrator

*What I did was react more assertively with him and more participatory, and then he ended the relationship with me. It was kind of a weird thing, that somehow I took control and, and then that didn’t work for him anymore. So, you know, taking control worked in a good way, but I have a lot of shame about it.*

Not only did she feel ashamed of her attempts to gain control, but she felt guilty that her father sexually abused her younger sister for many years after his abuse of her ended. Ashamed and feeling guilty, she has had therapy since she was a teenager and participated in self-help groups for many years.

Bargaining for Material Goods

Martha’s story provides another example of the complex issues involved in incest. As a child and teenager, Martha submitted to her stepfather’s sexual behaviors in exchange for money, clothes, and, when she was older, a car. As she got into her teens, she demanded more and more material goods from him. He became afraid of her, because she told him that if he did not give her what she wanted, she will tell her mother about the incest. She did not seek professional help.

As Martha matured into adulthood, she began to have serious anxiety, depression, and guilt over her relationship with her stepfather. She felt shameful, dirty, and worthless, profoundly affecting her quality of life. As untreated incest survivors often do, she married a man who beat her, went out with other women, and who sexually abused her niece. As mentioned earlier, Martha did all she could to make sure that her husband Hugo was never alone with her niece but did not report him because of fear of public disgrace, what would happen to her husband, and what would happen to her.
When a family friend reported Hugo for molesting the friend's granddaughter, Martha entered therapy and then became involved in self-help groups. She was active in these groups for twenty years and counting.

Summary
SECTION TWO
Child Sexual Abuse
by Persons Children Know

FOURTEEN
Known Persons as Perpetrators

Perpetrators gain and then betray children’s trust

In child sexual abuse by persons children know, perpetrators typically gain children’s trust and then betray it, although in some cases, gaining trust is not an issue. Perpetrators who do little to gain children’s trust depend more upon their authority over children and children’s lack of knowledge. They often threaten children with dire consequences if they tell.

For children abused in this way, however, trust and its betrayal remain issues because until then they may have had a generalized trust in adults and older children. The experience of being sexually abused may damage their trust in others.

When perpetrators work to gain children’s trust, children often are unaware that people they like, admire, and even love can take advantage of them and will gradually work up to sexually abusive episodes. For example, when male coaches or youth workers invite young males to their homes, the young people are flattered and pleased.

The young people already enjoy being with the adults, may admire them and want to be like them, and may accept their authority as adults. If the adults talk about sex, show sexually explicit videos, and make it seem as if this is what men do, many young males may accept this as being okay because they trust the adults, whom they assume know what they are talking about. The boys enjoy some of the sexualized camaraderie that arises from such occasions.
When the adults move on to sexual contact with the young people, the boys may continue to accept adults’ authority but also become confused, even when they believe they are having fun.

The young people may have had no education about sexual abuse and they have no idea how to respond to people they know, like, and sometimes love, when these people engage them in sexual activities.

For example, Bob, the adult male survivor mentioned earlier, was too afraid to resist when his teacher placed Bob’s hand on his penis and moved Bob’s hand up and down. Bob said,

*I remember how I didn’t want to do it. He kept my hand on his penis to where he would ejaculate.*

Young people may not know they have the right to say they do not want to do this, or this is too confusing for them and they want to get more information about sex between boys and men. They could say they want to talk to their parents or religious leader about having sex with adults. Because of a lack of education, these words do not come to children who are about to be abused sexually.

It is the responsibility of parents and other adults to give young people the language and understanding they require if they are to resist the attractive ways that people they know and trust engage them in sexual activities.

Older males and female also engage girls and boys in relationships that gradually become sexual. Examples are fathers who sexually abuse the teenage girls who take care of their children, child care workers who become sexually involved with vulnerable teenage clients, and teachers who sexualize their girl or boy students. Often these young people enjoy the attention of the adults and enjoy being treated as if they were adults, but they also may feel used, confused, and guilty.

**Sexual Abuse of Young Teen Girls by Older Males**

Older boys and men are responsible frequently are the fathers of children born to young teens, some ages twelve and thirteen. The girls have little education or experience in how to figure out whether these older males are simply trying to take advantage of them so they can “score.” Young girls can be swept away by the attention, the sweet talk, and the gifts that older boys and men may shower on them.

Fancy clothes, jewelry, money in their pockets, and fast cars makes these older males attractive to young girls, which is what the males intend by their displays of finery.
They are raised to believe boyfriends are central to their status, and the more attractive he is and the more money he has, they more status they have as girlfriends of high status males. Joan had such a male in her life. She said:

_It seems like the things my mother taught me weren’t working. That summer was the summer I was really abused. The best way to describe him was that he was like Fonzie on “Happy Days.” He was exactly like him. I was thirteen, and he was twenty-two. I felt real important, real big going out with him. He had a brand new car. He was good-looking. First he started to fondle my breasts. There wasn’t any control on my part. It seems like if I wanted him to stop, he wouldn’t. There wasn’t that mutual respect. That abuse continued the whole summer. That seemed to be the thing on his mind, the only thing he wanted to do. When I stopped it, then he didn’t come around anymore._

Joan thought she was in love, as do many girls who go out with older boys and men. The may talk themselves into believing that the love is mutual, and sex means that the men are committed to them exclusively, will have no other girlfriends, and will stay with them in case of pregnancy. For girls, sex can be a sign of love.

Girls may not know that many boys and men think that “real men” have as much sex as they can and that they will say or do whatever it takes to persuade girls to have sex with them, including making false promises of love and commitment. Sometimes they do not bother to do that. Yvette described the night she was raped.

_Yvette, thirteen, was excited that a cool-looking boy in her class named Jessie asked her out. She had just moved into town and was new at the school. Jessie said it was a river party. She asked him what that was. He said, “Oh, a bunch of kids get together on the beach.” When he picked her up, he had what she thought was a radio and commented on how cool-looking it was. He laughed. She said:_

_only to find out later that it was a contained to hold liquor, or to hold beer. He had beer in it._

_She explained what happened next._

_Once I got to this river party, I couldn’t admit that I didn’t drink. It didn’t take much to get me drunk….I almost walked off a cliff. It got dark. We left the party. We were going along this one footpath. Another guy I_
didn’t know was with us. Jessie turned to his friend and said, “You can have her for fifteen minutes.” Then he left.

I didn’t fight. I didn’t cooperate. He actually committed penetration. All I can remember thinking was, “If I don’t go through with this, he won’t show me the way home.” He was real surprised. He asked me if it was the first time that that had ever happened. It said yes.

I can remember that all I said to him, “Are you going to take me home? Are you going to take me home?”

Yvette was totally unprepared to handle this situation. Not only was she raped, but she did not realize that the boys had taken advantage of her and that having sex was a badge of honor and a competitive sport. She did not catch on that Jessie behaved as if he owned her when the told the other boy, “You can have her for fifteen minutes.” Yvette blamed herself. “I asked for it,” she said. “I should have known better.” these boys did not care about Yvette.

Two Different Ways of Thinking About Sex

Young girls and older males, then, think about sex in two different ways. Young girls have romantic ideas about sex as love while many older boys and men think sex is about having as much of it as they can. They more sex they have, the more of a man they are.

Girls have no idea how to negotiate the sexual parts of relationship so that the men cannot take advantage of them and use them. A favorite “line” is, “If you love me, you will have sex with me.” Girls do not have the education to know that if the men loved them, they would not try to talk them into having sex or into anything else that they do not want to do.

Girls require explicit education about what love between women and men is. While love can mean many different things, a core idea is that love is the active commitment to the welfare of another. Love is gentle. Love is kind. Love means wanting to understand and know what is important to the other.

Girls do not know that they must judge their relationships with men who want sex with them by these ideas. They jump into the arms of older boys and men with the naïve assumption that these males have the same beliefs about love and sex that they do.

In these cases of young girls under sixteen and males who are from three to ten or more years older, sexual contact is a form of child sexual abuse. The girls are unable to give informed consent and the older age of the males represents an imbalance of power in favor of the males.
Just as girls typically have little education about how to know when older males and adults really do love them, so males have little education about love and the unfairness of lying to girls about their intentions. Education about what love is and what abuse is needed to counteract beliefs about sexual conquests as the mark of masculinity and manhood.

**Date Rape**

Date rape is a sport for many men, similar to hunting—at least in their talk about how to have sex with women. Such talk strips women and girls of their humanity and their dignity as persons worthy of respect. Instead of living human beings like them, women become like pawns on a chessboard. They challenge themselves and each other about whether or not they can “score,” which is a term from sports or “get in her pants,” which trivializes rape. Such talk focuses on body parts and male triumphalism and not as the woman as person.

In fact, date rapists are not interested in relationships with the girls and women they hunt. How could they be? In their minds, the women and girls are not persons but prey.

This is what one man said about his date rapes. He was a handsome teenager, a James Dean look-alike, in bright yellow BMW convertible. He would drive down the main street of his small Southern town, flashing a smile. His favorite pick-up sport was the Dairy Queen. This is what he said:

*I think I didn’t want to go through the trouble of, ah, building a relationship, having two or three dates and then have sex. I didn’t want a relationship. I would talk to these girls. Back where I came from, people cruised around, and they have these little drive-ins where you stop at, and if you got a, ah, it depends on what kind of car you got. You know, I always had a sports car, and I could always pick these girls up, and I guess in my mind I was telling myself if they get in the car, it’s okay to have sex with them.*

**Summary**

To summarize, in nine out of ten instances of child sexual abuse, children know perpetrators. Victims may love the perpetrators and want a relationship with them, one of mutual care and
respects. They do not know that during the sexual abuse in the eyes of perpetrators they are not human beings at all but kind of a thing, or body parts, or a projection of perpetrators’ fantasies, a means for perpetrators to satisfy a variety of their own needs. What victims need and want is not even in the minds of perpetrators.
FIFTEEN

Strangers as Perpetrators

Strange child molestation takes many different forms, all for the gain of perpetrators

As far as anyone knows, children are more likely to be abused by family members and other people they know than by strangers. Yet, how strangers abuse children takes many different forms. Abduction, rape, and murder of children make headlines nationally and internationally. The horrific nature of these crimes stirs public outrage.

Yet, other forms of stranger sexual abuse get little notice and thus takes place below the surface of most people’s awareness. This lack of awareness and lack of public outrage permits sexual abusers to carry on.

Children are abused by individuals who act alone and molest children in public parks, movie theaters, neighborhoods, and through the internet. Yet, there is an enormous amount of organized stranger sexual abuse world-wide that laws and customs permit. Child pornography, child prostitution, temple prostitution, and child marriage are examples.

Many people think child molestation by strangers is the most common form of child sexual abuse. Prevention efforts commonly are based on the idea of sexual abuse by strangers. It is far easier to imagine strangers sexually abusing children than family members or friends of the family. Focusing on stranger abuse in child sexual abuse prevention programs is important to do, but ignoring abuse by family members and friends of the family is short-sighted and harmful to children.

Abduction, Rape, and Murder of Children

Child Pornography

Pornography is a form of child sexual abuse because the children depicted have been manipulated and forced into sexual acts whose only purpose is profit and gratification of those who exploit them. Adults and adolescents who use child pornography in this way believe they do no harm to children. As Andy, a high school teacher said
Watching porn doesn’t hurt anybody, but me touching a young girl hurts a ton of other people.

Andy and other users of child pornography do not see that they are financially supporting a multi-billion dollar industry that injures children world-wide.

Child pornographers appear to have no conscience. Mike though he was headed that way. This is what he said.

I eventually think I would have run off with her. I thought about that. I would someday. That’s where a lot of pornography and stuff comes in with people like child molesting and stuff, that they control - it controls their life so much that they finally get involved with child pornography and stuff like that, where they can manipulate the kids into doing things to make money for them. I think that was the road I was traveling.

Child Prostitution

Some adults control children to the point where they earn money in exchange for sexual access to children. Throughout the world, children are used for the purpose of financial gain by pimps and madams and for emotional and sexual gratification of the adults, primarily men, who have the money and the desire for sexual behaviors with children. Boy as well as girl children are used in this way. Parents may prostitute their children in their own homes. Street pimps often manipulate homeless children and youth into prostitution.

Dustin, who ran a bar and house of prostitution in the Philippines for many years saw sex with children as routine. He also abused underage girls. He said

I had sexual relationships in the Philippines with many girls who were fourteen, fifteen.

He was so casual about sex with underage girls that he molested his first wife’s two daughters starting when they were about nine years old, and married the older daughter when she was sixteen and he was thirty-two.

Young children who have not been previously abused are highly sought as prostitutes because they do have the HIV virus or other sexually transmitted diseases. Myths such as sex with a virgin cures sexually transmitted diseases further fuels this problem. Some even believe that the younger the child the more likely the cure.
Child Sexual Abuse

Sex Trafficking

Dustin knew from first-hand experience that men come from all over the world to have sex with children in poor Asian countries. Men from Europe and North America charter planes to have open access to sex with children. Poor families may sell their children into prostitution, or may hand them over to other people who say they have good jobs for the children in the cities. Sometimes sex traffickers abduct children. Buying and selling children for the purposes of prostitution is a big business that gratifies the sexual and emotional desires of pedophiles world-wide.

Ritualized Child Prostitution

Ritualized prostitution is connected to some religious practices where girls are “married” to a god and assigned to a “religious order” that is part of a temple. Within months, the girls learn that they must have sex with men who request it. Temple prostitutes are highly paid and many contact sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, which is almost always fatal. If girls ask their parents for help, parents inform them that it is their duty to be sexual with men. Such practices are outlawed, but still happen in several different countries throughout the world.

_Devadasi_ system is a centuries old system in India in which young girls and women are ‘dedicated’ to the gods for their service. _Devadasi_ literally means servants of gods (Dev = God; Dasi = Servant). In centuries past, _Devadasis_ were considered as married to the deities, and they held positions of religious and spiritual significance in the society. They performed various temple duties, and a part of their duties was to provide sexual services to temple priests and other male patrons. Gradually, their religious duties decreased and their work became centered around providing sexual services.

Even though this practice is now prohibited by law, it continues to remain in existence even today, especially in southern parts of India. However, this practice exists more as prostitution than for religious or spiritual reasons. At the same time, some of its fundamental socio-religious features remain.

Typically, young girls between the age of five and ten are dedicated to the deities with their parents’ blessing. They begin their sexual duties once they reach puberty. Sometimes older girls are dedicated as well. They often live in identified sex work areas in cities and villages. Pimps and brothel owners take most of their earnings. Male clients are often willing to pay large sums of money and other gifts to have sex with a virgin _Devadasi_, as she enters prostitution.
Child Marriage

Sometimes children are “married” at young ages. In some countries, laws state that children under age twelve can be married as long as the marriage is not consummated before age twelve. Other countries allow children to marry at age twelve or older. When such marriages are legal, the rationale is the cultural traditions of ethnic groups. Many countries do not allow children to be married until they are sixteen and between the ages of sixteen and seventeen, they must have parental consent.

Within the United States, Utah, a western state, allows marriages of children age fourteen and up. These marriages require parental consent and about forty percent of the spouses are four or more years older than the children. In some cases, the children are twenty or thirty years younger, being married to men in their thirties, forties, and fifties. Most of the children married before the age of sixteen are girls.

Some religious groups routinely practice child marriage, even when it is against the law. For example, in the fall of 2007, the leader of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (FLDS) Church was convicted of two counts of aiding child rape after he ordered a thirteen year-old girl to marry a man in his late twenties. The man who married her was also convicted of child rape.

The FLDS Church practices polygamy, and the church leader claims divine revelation as his guide when he decides which girls marry which men. Other cases members of the FLDS have brought to court including a suit by a boy who alleged that he had been a victim of sexual abuse by church members. A fall-out from polygamy, which means men can have several wives, is the expulsion of teenage boys from this community, some as young as thirteen.

In the spring of 2007, a thirteen year-old girl clutching a teddy bear testified about her marriage to a forty eight year-old man. The prosecuting attorney asked her if she had made up stories about having sex with old men. She said, “There’s no way my imagination could make up what I went through.” Her father had consented to this illegal “marriage.”

Rape of Girls in War

During war, fighters rape, abduct, and force girls into sexual slavery. Girls may be beaten and tortured as well as raped. Reports from many different countries state that girls and women are raped in public, often in front of family members and next to the bodies of family members that fighters have killed. Families and husbands may stigmatize survivors and believe it is a matter of honor to abandon them.
Wide-spread international condemnation of these crimes would go a long way toward prevention, but international moral leadership is lacking. Non-governmental human rights organizations create programs for these survivors, but these workers are targets of violence to intimidate them into abandoning their work.

Discussion

Whatever forms child sexual abuse takes, children experience an abuse of power, where older, stronger, and often more knowledgeable persons take advantage of them for their own sexual gratification. Children need empathy, understanding, and education about what happened to them. One of the most helpful words children can hear when they are sexually abused is the words that a mother said to her child who had been sexually abused: “I'm so sorry this happened to you.”

Perpetrators require clear messages that what they do harms children for their life times. There is no justification for the use of children for sexual and emotional gratification. It is exploitation pure and simple. Children require protection from those who would harm them.

Non-offending parents, persons children know, and the general public all have parts to play in prevention and in helping children recover. Simply understanding that perpetrators take advantage of children, that sexual abuse harms children, and that perpetrators have full and sole responsibility for children sexual abuse is a start. Throughout this book are stories and ideas that will stimulate thinking about what to do about child sexual abuse.
Children have a lot to say about their own sexual abuse. Their stories show that they are aware of the power that adults have over them, and they are afraid to resist. They are taught to obey adults or older people, especially people with authority, such as parents, grandparents, teachers, babysitters, and social service professionals. They dread consequences if they refuse to obey.

As discussed in the previous chapter, children may lack vocabulary to talk about sexual abuse, and they understand taboos and shame associated with sexual abuse and sexuality.

Many understand the consequences for themselves and for their families if they tell others that they have been sexually abused. In some cases, their fears are unfounded, but in many others, they have reason to be afraid.

Children Believe They Must Obey

Children think they have to obey persons in authority. Randy, ten, was sexually abused by a teenage boy who was her babysitter. She thought she had to do what he said. He told her, “Go to the bathroom.” She said, “I went to the bathroom.” He jumped out from behind a shower curtain, pulled her off the toilet, placed her on the floor, and sexually abused her.

Olivia, eleven, abused between the ages of five and eight by a man who was a father figure to her mother and a grandfather figure to her said, “I thought there were laws about adults and children.”
Lisa, nine, abused from the age of three to age nine, said of the abuser who was her grandfather, “He was big. I was little. I had to do what he said.”

Vickie, as shown earlier, refused to go home for supper when her brother and sister found her in the park. She told them, “I’m waiting for someone.” She was waiting for the man who had sexually abused her twice. She said she waited “because he told me to. I listened. I was small.”

**Children Think the Abuse is Their Fault**

Many child survivors blame themselves for the abuse, even when they recognize that the perpetrators forced them. Lisa said

*My grandfather forced me. He unzipped his pants. He put his hand on mine and put my hand on his penis. He held my hand there until he was done. I took my hand off when he let go of me.*

The abuse took place on a boat. Lisa said, “I felt like jumping off the boat and swimming to shore, but I can’t swim.” Despite Lisa’s recognition of being forced, she said, “It was my fault. I didn’t tell him not to do it.”

Randy, the girl who was assaulted in the bathroom, said the abuse was “sort of” her fault “because I went into the bathroom and was sitting on the toilet.” Randy could not put the pieces of her experience together. She went into the bathroom because the older boy who abused her told her to, but she could not see that the assault and the directive to go into the bathroom make the abuse his responsibility and not hers.

Donna, fifteen, assaulted by her brother, sexually abused by her grandfather, and the victim of an attempted rape by her best friend’s father, thought she must be at fault. She said, “My judgment must be impaired.” She was confused, hurt, and ashamed that she was abused by three different males.

Children blame themselves because so many adults blame them. For example, in the case of Donna, a county attorney who prosecuted the case against her best friend’s father, said to her in her mother’s presence, “Why didn’t you get out of the car when that guy went after you? I think you really wanted it.”

Carla ran away from home because she felt blamed for the incest her father committed. She said

*My father was bitching. I asked my mother what he was bitching about. She said, ‘He said it was all your fault.’ I’m breaking up the family. I couldn’t take it. I took off.*
Carla was thirteen and lived on the streets for six months.

Not all children think sexual abuse is their fault, but it is a common reaction. Caring adults can gently ask the children, “Do you think you did something wrong?” or “Sometimes kids think the abuse is their fault. Do you?” It is surprising how eagerly some children answer questions like these. Their answers also can be surprising, such as Lisa’s who said it was her fault because she never told her grandfather not to do it.

It is important for adults to give children opportunities to talk about whether they were at fault. It is also important for children to be able to express themselves in their own ways.

Adults, maybe because of their own anxieties, want to reassure children by saying, “It’s not your fault.” Of course it is not children’s fault, but if they believe it is, such a statement can invalidate their experience. The timing of “It’s not your fault” can make a difference in children’s recovery.

Children Do Not Understand Sexual Behaviors

Children do not understand sexual behaviors. Randy, who went into the bathroom after her babysitter told her to, described what the teenager did

He pulled me off the toilet seat, and he dripped something. I was on the ground of the bathroom, and he sort of did push ups on me.

Lisa, abused for six years, said, “Grandpa used to do it on the boat until stuff came out. He had sort of a grin on his face.” Nan, eleven, said, “I never heard of any of the things he did like that.” Olivia said

It’s hard, what he did to me. I couldn’t stand to do it to anybody. All the germs and stuff you get.

Older children do not understand sexual behaviors, either. Emily said she thought her great uncle was trying to love her. When asked when she thought of that, she said, “It felt kind of weird. I didn’t like him the
way I liked boys.” Carla, also thirteen, said about a conversation she had with a girlfriend.

We were just talking one day. She was talking about her boyfriend. She thought she was big. She had sex with a seventeen year-old. I said to her, ‘That’s nothing. I go to bed with a thirty-four year-old.’ She said, ‘You do? Who is he?’ I said, ‘My father.’ ‘You don’t do that,’ she said.

Carla was ashamed. When her mother said her father blamed her, she had to get away from her family. She ran away. Carla believed her father when he told her this is what fathers and daughters do, but she also somehow this could not be right. When her girlfriend told her that her father is not supposed to do that, the girlfriend struck a cord. She knew immediately that the girlfriend was right.

Ursula, fourteen, said

My father never explained sex to me. I had to learn by myself. I learned on the street. My father told me last year. Too late.

Ursula had been molested since she was seven and had become sexualized. Her father was worried because Ursula walked the streets at night looking for men to have sex with. He was a single parent.

**Children Do Not Understand Sexual Abuse**

Many children do not know what sexual abuse is. Katie, thirteen, said, “I didn’t know grown-ups did it to kids.” Olivia said about a fourteen year-old boy who molested her

My mother never told me about molestation. I was confused when he did it. He should have been more mature.

Even when parents warn their children about family members who sexually abuse children, they may not understand. Emily said about her great uncle who sexually abused her

My mother told me something about him. I didn’t know what he did to me was the same thing.
Sometimes children learn about molestation by strangers but do not know that people they know abuse children sexually. Nan, eleven, was molested by her babysitter when she was eight. She had no idea that people she knew could sexually abuse her. She said

*My mother never told me about this. She told me about strangers. She called it ‘stranger danger.’*

School programs that inform children about sexual abuse often are helpful, but not always. Vickie, ten, was molested by a stranger when she was six. She said about a police-sponsored prevention program featuring Office Friendly

*Officer Friendly came too late. If he would’ve come sooner, this wouldn’t have happened.*

Vickie said that when the molester pressed his penis against her she went “blank.” She continued

*I didn’t think of anything. I was wondering, just regular wondering what it meant. What he was doing and stuff. I wondered what was going to happen.*

Older children may not understand child sexual abuse, either. Carla believed her father when he told her that what they are doing is what all fathers and daughters do. She said

*I loved my father and I still do, but he still ruined my life. He should have told me what we were doing was wrong.*

Education about sexuality sometimes is less complete than parents think it is. Donna said about being victimized by three different males

*My mother always told me that sex with love was beautiful. I didn’t love those men, so what I did was dirty and awful.*

**Sexual Pleasure as Confusing**

Children may experience sexual pleasure. Olivia said, “Sometimes it felt good, but that made me feel guilty. Sometimes it stung. Why is
that?” Pat, a woman survivor, said about the sexual abuse her father perpetrated

When I was real, real young, he would put his penis between my legs. And I would come. I mean I would feel pleasure. I don’t know it would be come back then. Do you know what I’m saying?

Some children take pleasure in the attention but the sexual contact is confusing and unwanted. Andy said of his uncle

I felt like he cared for me, and that was pleasurable to me. I don’t think specifically the sexual act was that pleasurable for me because it was more uncomfortable. I was scared, but I know it was probably the first time I felt there was an adult who really cared for me, and that made me feel good. That was pleasurable. So it may be that I wanted to—maybe not sought out, but enjoyed the time with him, but not specifically the sexual acts, but just feeling cared for by an adult. I think I liked that.

He continued

I’d never thought my parents did [love me], and in some ways today, I still don’t believe that my parents love me. He was the first person who like spent time with me and did things with me, made me feel like I was okay. That confuses things there and makes it worse, because I was scared and then I felt cared for and I was confused, and yet he made me feel better.

Andy summed up a lot about how children understand sexuality and sexual abuse. He said

I mean in society it’s such a taboo thing. Sexuality as a whole when you’re such a small child, you don’t learn about that. You don’t know about it. You just know that it’s wrong because you don’t pull down your pants for someone, because you don’t expose your genitals. You know that that’s all wrong just from growing up.

Some people think the children wanted the abuse if they seem to have found it physically pleasurable, or if there was orgasm and/or ejaculation involved. In actuality, human bodies, including young children, respond to sexual stimulation, which is pleasurable to the body. Children
may feel dirty and ashamed about any pleasure they feel. They do not
want or understand the sexual acts, but their bodies may respond with
pleasant sensations. Physical pleasure from sexual abuse is confusing to
children.

Many adults are unprepared to deal with the reality that children
may feel sexual pleasure while they are being sexually abused. This sim-
ply is too hard emotionally for many adults to handle, and so they divert
their attention away from children when they children bring up the issue
and they do not follow up or inquire about any possible pleasure the
children may want to discuss. Children thus are left without adult guid-
ance and understanding, which is serious neglect of children’s emotional
and psychological well-being.

Children’s Descriptions

Children can provide vivid descriptions of what happens during
abuse. These descriptions bring to life the power differences between adults
and children. Each incident is unique.

In their own words, children show how little and powerless they
felt when in the presence of adults and older people who wanted to sexu-
ally abuse them. They felt compelled to obey and were fearful of
consequences if they did not.

Randy, ten, described the teenage babysitter named Hank who
had abused her three years before. She still sees him because he lives in
the neighborhood. She said

*I mean, he’s a super gross-out. He has long hair and sort of a beard, too, like
an ape. He doesn’t have any class or anything. He looks like he probably
drools all the time. He’s a gag. He’s a gross barf-out.*

Randy said she could never forget what Hank did because “I was scared.
That guy was really tall. He was scary looking.” Hank assaulted Randy
twice. She said

*The first day he did the thing in the bathroom with me, and the second day
he pulled down my pants and kissed me on the fanny. He’s really sick.*
She described how he got her into the bathroom.

*He had this puppet. He had it say, ‘Go into the bathroom.’ So I did. I don’t know how he got there before me.*

Hank had hidden behind the shower curtain. When he stepped out from behind it, Randy said, “I almost had a heart attack. I was sitting on the toilet.” Hank made no attempt to persuade Randy to cooperate. As he stepped from behind the shower curtain, he said, “Shhh. Don’t say anything.”

Then, as described earlier, he sexually assaulted her. Randy said “he dripped something” out of his penis. She also said she only had her shirt on. Randy protested: “I asked him what he was doing. I said, ‘Get out of here.’ He said, ‘Don’t you dare scream.’”

She had no idea what he was doing. She said, “I was scared.” Randy told her mother right away. The mother phoned the police, and the boy was charged with sexual assault and court-ordered into adolescent sex offender treatment.

Randy was not able to explain why she went into the bathroom when he told her to. When asked if she would have obeyed a six year-old who told her to go into the bathroom, she said, “No,” as if the answer were self-evident.

Randy was in the gifted program at school, as was Olivia who was much clearer about why she obeyed the man who molested her. Olivia is the child who thought there were laws about adults and children that children had to obey. She said that meant “Someone older than me I had to obey them.”

She had several other reasons why she did not actively resist and tell her mother. Some of these reasons were mentioned earlier. The abuser told her that if she told anyone he would have to go to jail and that would make his wife unhappy. He asked her, “You don’t want to make my wife unhappy, do you?”

Olivia gave other reasons that had to do with fear, self-sacrifice, and confusion.

*I was scared. I didn’t know what to do. He was doing this, and I didn’t want him to do it. At that stage, I didn’t say ‘no’ to people. I always knew there was somebody who was worse off than I was. He played on that.*

He also told her, “Doing this make me feel good. You like to make people feel good, don’t you?” She did, of course. Olivia had some fear about what he would do to her if she resisted, even though she believed he liked her. This is what she said.
He did like me. He was probably senile. I did what he wanted. I felt he would do something to me. I didn’t know why. I didn’t know what. I guess I didn’t understand.

The sexual abuse consisted of masturbation and oral sex.

I used to rub his penis outside his pants. I did it right on his front porch. Sometimes he put his hands in my pants and rubbed me. He made me put his penis in my mouth. He did it a lot of times. I didn’t like that.

Olivia thought her mother used to see her with the man on his front porch, “but my mother never said anything to me.” She was too young and too naïve to know what their behaviors meant, except that she did not like them. For two and a half years, whenever this man called her over, she went. One day, she was playing with a girlfriend. When the man called her over, she and her girlfriend went. The man took the two girls into his living room. Olivia said

He had us sit down, and he put his hands in my pants. He said to my friend, ‘Come on over. It feels nice.’ My friend ran out the door.

She talked to her friend about the incident.

I said I was sorry. I knew what was going to happen, and it did. I was scared to say anything to her.

Her friend gave her an idea of what to do: “The next time he started it. I cried and told him I didn’t want to do it. He didn’t do it again.”

Soon afterward, she and her family moved from the neighborhood. She visited the man and his wife several times with her mother. When the man died, she told her mother about the sexual abuse. She said

I figured that he had died. He couldn’t go to jail if I told. I wouldn’t make his wife unhappy if I told my mother.

He mother was deeply shocked. This man had been a father figure to her for ten years. She arranged for professional help for Olivia, for herself, and for the rest of the family.
Many incidents of sexual abuse do not involve physical violence, but some do. For example, some children witness physical abuse of their mothers. When their fathers begin to touch them sexually, they are afraid to resist. Alberta was eleven when her father first sexually abused her. He told her to take her clothes off. She said:

*I don’t know why I just didn’t leave. The idea didn’t occur to me….My mother tried to stop him. She got between us. What could she do? He just pushed her away and beat her up.*

Her father told her that what he was doing to her was “an everyday thing. People do it every day.” He tried to have intercourse with her that first time. She said:

*I felt sick to my stomach. I didn’t want him to do it. I wanted him to stop. I hated it.*

She did not tell him to stop because “I would get hit with a belt. So I did what he said every time.” While he was abusing her,

*My father told me I was jealous of my mother. He said I wanted to have sex with him the way my mother did, but I wasn’t jealous of that. I didn’t even think of it.*

Adults can be helpful to children who have been sexually abused if they understand that each child’s experience is unique. Adults must, however, be ready for anything. What children say can be surprising and even shocking. The stories in this book can prepare adults to be open and receptive to whatever children have to say.

**Perpetrators Have Sole Responsibility**

Perpetrators have sole responsibility for child sexual abuse. Typically, they are older, stronger, and can overcome the children’s resistance through their physical strength, authority, and superior knowledge and experience. They may lie, intimidate, and manipulate children.

Some children have been sexualized by being sexually abused. They may attempt to touch the genitals of others or rub their own genitals against other people. Some and teens adults think these children want to be sexual and are happy to be sexual with the children. If children behave this way, it is the adult’s—and teen’s—job to teach the child ap-
propriate sexual behaviors, not take advantage of children. Other children can be taught to back away from peers’ sexualized behaviors.
SEVENTEEN

What Child Sexual Abuse Means to Perpetrators

The stories perpetrators tell about child sexual abuse make it clear that they alone are responsible. Sexual abuse means many different things to perpetrators, but the core of these meanings appears to be emotional and sexual gratification. They describe sexual abuse as love, a thrill, a fix, play, a conquest, or revenge, but sexual and emotional gratification is what they want and get. Sexual abusers take what they want and harm children.

Sexual Abuse as Sexual Gratification

For abusers, child sexual abuse is an intense, highly erotic, highly gratifying sexual pleasure. David, in his early thirties and who had sexually abused his toddler sons and daughters, said about sexual contact with his two year-old daughter

*I remember that high, and, boy, I wanted it. I wanted it. The high came after I ejaculated. That’s the high I was after. I didn’t get a high out of fondling her or that.*

Beau said about the abuse of his thirteen year-old daughter and another unrelated thirteen year-old girl

*To me, it’s not the same as having an orgasm. I mean, it was thrilling, and it was exciting, but it wasn’t what I was looking for....Bliss is the word that I would identify with that. There’s a really satisfying feeling of everything is kind of relaxed. There doesn’t seem to be any pressure. It’s a real nice place to be.*

Matt, in his early thirties, had sexually abused more than two hundred children, both children he knew and did not know. He said about fellatio by a child
It would feel like being on top of the world. Up until now there’s no greater feeling that I can experience than having somebody perform oral sex on me. That is my ultimate feeling.

Henry, a man who exhibited his penis to young girls and women, beginning when he was about eight years old, said

“I’ve been doing it for forty years. It’s really got a groove in my mind. It’s the highest excitement that I know.”

He was “infatuated with all the excitement.” His first victims were his sisters. He said, “I practiced on my sisters at home.”

Angus said about sexually abusing his young teenage daughters

“The attraction was the sexual feelings. It felt good. Good feelings. Pretty powerful. The good feelings were worth looking forward to.

Josh, 21 and pudgy-faced, said about his sexual abuse of children who ranged in age from six months to seven years old

“I’m worried about myself because a lot of people say I did it because I was abused, I did it because I was angry, and I wanted to take it out on them sexually. I did it because of this. I did it because of that. I don’t understand that. I just felt like I just wanted to sexualize them. By sexualize I mean just get your rocks off or whatever in a different way, a sexual high.

Herb had intense sexual fantasies about boys. He said

“I would masturbate to fantasies. I’d be looking at the boy’s face, and he’ll be smiling and stuff like that. I’ll just focus on that moment. The more I look at his face, or the more I’m humping him or whatever, the excitement just goes up and up and up. When I decided to masturbate it just make it that much more thrilling to me. When I ejaculate it just makes it, to me, it makes it just feel twice as good.

“I’m with this individual and the individual with me, we with each other. There was no denial in anything. Whatever I wanted to do, the other person was willing to do it. It just took me to some heights sometimes that I never believed that I can get that high.”

Sexual Abuse as Mutual Sexual Pleasure
Many perpetrators earnestly want the child victims to enjoy the sex as much as they do. Tim, for example, said

_"I like things to be mutual in my relationships. I like to get what I give. I think that's true in my marriage. I think that's true with my victims. I did the same thing. I always expected them to give me what I gave them."

_"I've read in books where some molesters it's more important that they get their own gratification, and for others it's more important that they give the child gratification. For me I'd say it was equal, fifty-fifty. Without one or the other, I would have felt really crummy, really shitty about it."

_"If I would have had orgasm and the kid didn't get any pleasure or vice versa, if I'd given it all to the kid, and he wouldn't return it to me, either way it would feel really bad for me."

_"It was real important to establish a relationship with my victims where they would give as much to me as I would give to them. They would want as much from me as I would want from them. So it was all very sort of even or equal."

Christian described the sexual abuse of his stepson Seth as “a pleasing relationship, trying to please each other on both sides.” Christian said that Seth told him, “I want to make you feel good, Dad.” Christian said Seth also asked the stepfather to do the kinds of sexual touching that the boy enjoyed.

Dick felt bad when there was no mutual pleasure. He said about his stepdaughter Rosie

_Sometimes I would feel guilty because I don’t think that Rosie had an orgasm. I’d think it as if I was her husband._

**Sexual Abuse and Emotional Gratification**

Some men describe sex with children as the pursuit of good feelings. Dick saw sex with his stepdaughter Rosie as a fix, that is, an activity that fixed how he was feeling. He said

_"That’s what I was thinking--I need a fix because I was feeling crappy. Maybe I didn’t get the contract I bid for, or my wife and I had a fight about something where I’d rather go spend some time by myself but I can’t. How can I tell my wife I wanted to spend time by myself?"

He found sexually abusing Rosie to be a more comfortable solution.
Beau used his biological daughter Michelle in similar ways. He said

For anything that bothered me, I knew that I could go to Michelle and get sexual gratification. That climax makes you feel really good. It was easy for me to offend against her like that, to go to her. I didn’t really care from much about her feelings at that time. I just cared about getting myself satisfied.

Sometimes the sexual abuse is so gratifying that it temporarily transforms how perpetrators feel about themselves. Pete, a man in his early twenties who was a youth worker specialist in outdoor recreation, found that the only time he felt loveable and worthy was

When I was being shown affection from a young male, wrestling, hugs, doing things together intimate, intimately, then I felt loveable. I felt worthy. I felt all of these things that I didn’t feel the rest of my life, and the ultimate act of that is sex. There was sex. It was always leading to sex.

Even if it never got there with every child with whom I interacted, it was always leading that way. The good feelings lasted, I want to say, probably a week or so. It probably would’ve gotten shorter and shorter had I continued on.

George said something similar about sexually abusing his daughter while he thought she was asleep. He was thirty-two, and she was twelve.

The only time I really felt good was when I was acting out sexually. It was safe for me. It was like everything around me was so dark. I wasn’t getting any good feelings from anywhere. I had convinced myself that I didn’t deserve them. No one really knows me. They just know the image. They didn’t love me. They loved the façade. I just felt miserable.

Sexual Abuse as Comfort

These stories suggest how thrilling and comforting sexual abuse is for perpetrators. Some believed that the comfort was mutual, while others who thought of sexual abuse as a way of comforting children actually were actually comforting themselves. This is what Ben said
I honestly believe that during the abuse that I was showing, that I was feeling sorry for Beth, because of the way Margaret [Beth’s mother and his wife] used to nag and bitch at her all the time, and it was like I was comforting her at the same time she was comforting me. That, oh, I was showing her a type of love.

Sexual Abuse as Infatuation

Some perpetrators describe feelings of infatuation with child victims. Tim said about the first time he laid eyes one of the boys he victimized

I remember thinking, ‘That’s a kid I want to have sex with.’ It’s sort of like seeing a beautiful model. From then on I was, like, infatuated with that kid…. It was more of a feeling of excitement and arousal and infatuation.

He used the language of male-female courtship to talk about his experiences with boys.

All of a sudden, you seen someone across the room that you’re attracted to, and then if you’re able to somehow fulfill that fantasy, go meet the person. Ask her out for a date, she accepts, and you go.

Jesse was so infatuated with a boy he molested for several years that he did not think of consequences. He said

I felt so much in love with him that I didn’t think that I was doing anything wrong, illegal or otherwise.

Sexual Abuse as Love

Perpetrators often talked about love. David wanted his three year-old daughter to understand what he was doing was love. He said

The feeling was, it’s not a feeling—it’s a thought. The thought was so dog-gone strong about making that connection with my daughter, that she understand that this is love…Wow. It was strong….I meant it with every fiber in my body. It was really important that she understand, and I make some connection from her to me, too.

Some described sexual abuse as falling in love. George experienced a powerful rush, a deep love, and a sense of how simple the
relationship was compared to the complexities of his relationship with his wife. He said

*It was so powerful, so strong. It was such a rush. It was so powerful and so strong. It was such a rush because there was like that emotional element to it. It wasn’t just a sexual thing. It was almost like my daughter was my girlfriend. It was almost like I was falling in love with her. It felt simple to love her.*

*Our relationship was, it was comfortable and it was easy. It wasn’t all complicated. My relationship with my wife was so difficult and so complicated and arguments and the whole deal. My daughter just loved me. She just thought I was great and she thought I was fantastic. It was very, it was just comfortable. It wasn’t complicated.*

The sexual abuse took place while his daughter was asleep or she pretended to be. Little wonder that the relationship was uncomplicated.

Christian, in his early fifties, described the sexual abuse of his thirteen year-old stepson, Seth as a love affair.

*I didn’t call it molesting. It was making love to my son….*

*When I was having my relationship with my son it was like a love affair. It really was. It was real.*

Beau, thirty-seven, viewed his relationship with his thirteen year-old daughter as that of a girlfriend and boyfriend, and stated, “It was almost like I was falling in love with her.” He dressed her up in women’s clothes and put make up on her when he took her to dinner in restaurants. Like many other perpetrators, he had a dream of marrying her when she was older.

*My ultimate fantasy with Michelle was when she got to be of age, which was twenty-one to me, that we would be married. It would be easy because our names would remain the same. We would have children together, and that they’d be beautiful children. They’d be all blond-headed, and they’d all have real deep blue eyes. We’d live happily ever after. I’ve never told anyone except my therapist and you. I loved her very, very much.*

Chad, as a teenager, was so in love with his younger sister that he wanted to marry her. He redefined the sexual abuse as mutual love.
It wasn’t really abuse. I didn’t look at it as that way because it was both ways. It was like neither of us felt secure or, important, I guess, except to each other. I remember saying, ‘Boy, if we weren’t brother and sister, I’d marry you.’

Unexamined Contradictions

Perpetrators who talked about love did not examine the contradictions in their behaviors. For example, perpetrators did not seem to realize that love is not love if coercion is involved. Coercion can be fear related to threats of harm, related to size, and related to compliance with authority. Love that is expressed through sexual behaviors does not involve one person being asleep or pretending to be, or one person having a wonderful time while the other is full of fear. Mike’s story shows some of these contradictions.

Mike, not only dreamed of running away with June, his stepdaughter, but he thought he could turn her into a model and make money from selling pornographic photos of her. He said,

I eventually think I would have run off with her. I thought about that. I would someday. That’s where a lot of pornography and stuff comes in with people like child molesting and stuff, that they control - it controls their life so much that they finally get involved with child pornography and stuff like that, where they can manipulate the kids into doing things to make money for them. I think that was the road I was traveling.

Many of the men who talked about incest and sexual abuse as love contradicted their avowals. Ben, for example, said “what was between Beth and I was real, real special. Yet, he admitted that his daughter may have only wanted love and affection and not the sexual acts. Sometimes she did not want to go with him into his bed, but he picked her up and carried her there anyway. This is how Ben described what he did

I’d go into Beth’s room at night, you know, and I’d ask if she’d want to come in to watch TV in my room. Sometimes she’d say, ‘Yes,’ and she’d come. Sometimes she’d say, ‘Well, I don’t know.’ I’d tickle her, and goof around with her a little bit, and then I’d pick her up and carry her into our room.

This man was as huge as a sumo wrestler. He looked like a walking haystack. Imagine how his nine year-old daughter saw him.
Christian, referred to earlier, was crushed when his stepson Seth testified against him in court. This man was clueless about what child sexual abuse means to children.

Sometimes perpetrators did not carry out their sexual desires, they spent a great deal of time thinking and planning. Twenty three year-old Mark, for example, wanted to rape his younger stepsister when he was between the ages of thirteen and sixteen. He would peek in on her when she was in her bedroom or bathroom and sometimes he would watch her through her bedroom window. He said

*I masturbated and fantasized about me raping her and then giving her her first orgasm. She was going to love me and just adore me.*

He did not understand that his stepsister was unlikely to love and adore him if he raped her, but he derived a great deal of sexual pleasure through masturbating to these fantasies.

**Not Incest but Love**

For many perpetrators, when other fathers had sex with their children that was incest, but what they were doing was something else. Christian said

*What I was doing was different. I was making love to my daughter...to my son.*

Another man said

*We never had penile intercourse. I don’t know why. I had it stuck in my brain that I couldn’t have that. That was incest to me.*

In addition, some abusers are outraged when they hear about other instances of child sexual abuse. Mike man said

*I used to sit there and watch TV or I’d read something in the paper. I’d say, ‘Look at this son of a bitch. He ought to get twenty years,’ but I was doing the same thing. Mine wasn’t that way. See, mine was love. There’s a difference, you know.*

Ben said
The guy next door was a police officer, and he abused his daughter. It came out in treatment that he abused another daughter in a previous marriage, too. I found it real disgusting.

Finally, some perpetrators have fragmented responses when they think about other men who commit incest. Dustin, a father incest perpetrator mentioned earlier, had at least three disconnected thoughts about a story about father incest that he watched on television. He said

You feel disgusted. You feel disgusted at the men that are doing this on TV. At the same time you have a kind of a sexual thing going towards the girl that’s getting raped. You’re sexualizing it.

A few moments later, he said

He’s a piece of crap for raping his daughter. She’s kind of cute, I wouldn’t mind raping her, or making love to her. Never rape. It’s always make love.

He said these contradictory thoughts and images did not flow together and he did not keep these various perspectives in mind at the same time. Instead, he jumped from thought to thought, image to image with no connection between them.

**Child Sexual Abusers as Takers**

There are exceptions to perpetrators’ views of child sexual abuse as love. Some distance themselves from the children and depersonalize them. They take what they want, which is sexual pleasure and release, and have no sense that the children are human beings. Love and tenderness are not part of the experience for them.

Marty said about his abuse of Sophie

When it was going on, she certainly wasn’t a stepdaughter. I didn’t have that at all. It was, oh, let me see, a thing. I could never look at her while she was doing it, not at her face. I could look at her breasts because when I was looking at those, that’s something that turns me on. I can remember some times when she was masturbating me. Somehow I’d make eye contact with her, and I’d lose my erection.

Other men look for a quick sexual thrill that has nothing to do with love, as for example, a man who molested thousands of children in a twenty-five mile radius from his home beginning at about age eight and
continuing until he was caught in his mid-fifties. He did not know the children and sought them in neighborhoods where no one knew him.

The man quoted earlier about how much he wanted the high said about his three year-old sister

*She was just there as a, I don’t want to say object. She was there to stimulate me and get me an erection so that I could masturbate.*

Other men, too, state that the children are not children during the abuse, but as objects who satisfy them sexually.

**Sexual Abuse as Vengeance**

When vengeance motivates sexual abusers, they want to hurt the children or someone else, sometimes family members who love the children. Some decide who the children are and then act on their views.

Juice, in his late twenties, wanted out of a relationship he had with his live-in girlfriend, Marguerite, who was the mother of three children with her former husband. Juice sexually abused Marguerite’s seven year-old daughter and enjoyed thinking how much he had hurt Marguerite and her family. He said

*I knew that Marguerite loved her kids with all her heart. I knew she loved her kids more than anything. I knew that right there would take the cake. It hurt her, way that I thought it would. I wanted to. Like I said when I stepped into the house the day after I abused Petal and she had told her grandma. When I saw everybody crying I felt kind of good at that moment. Seeing everybody falling out the way I thought they would, expected it to be.*

Skip decided who is nine year-old victim Aria was, and he acted on that. He saw Aria as a “prick teaser,” who in his mind “asked for it” and deserved to be raped. He said prick teasers “get you all worked up and they go jump someone else.”

Skip based his case on flimsy evidence. Aria was a “prick teaser” because when she bent over he could see her lace panties. He also overheard her telling other children that she “still had her cherry.”

Skip considered these actions an “invitation.” His interpretations of Aria’s behaviors meant one thing to Skip: This girl deserved to be raped. He enjoyed himself with doing so. He said
I shoved it in, tearing her vagina.... I get the best ejaculation when I'm inflicting pain.

Marty was angry at his mother-in-law, whom he thought loved her granddaughter Sophie and Marty's stepdaughter better than any of the other grandchildren. He said about his mother-in-law. He said

There's been two women in my whole life who treatment me this way [verbally abusive] and that I loved and wanted to love me but didn't. That was my mother and my mother-in-law.....I got to the point where I would do anything to hurt her [mother-in-law]. I did.

He sexually abused Sophie. The first time he connected abusing Sophie with getting back at his mother-in-law was when Sophie asked Marty for permission to visit her grandmother. He said

The first time it happened I was pissed off. I usually when these things happened. I was mad at, at my mother-in-law. When I would get hot, and she wanted to go stay over there, my exact words were, when she said 'Can I go over there?' I said, 'Yeah, if you suck my dick.' That's what I said.

Skip and Marty, enjoyed the sexual contact, but they also enjoyed inflicting pain. This is sadistic, because sadism means just that—inflicting pain.

Both men used common ideas about women as reasons for their behaviors. Many people believe that prick teasers deserve what they get. Ideas of revenge for perceived wrongs is wide-spread throughout the world, justifying rape, physical assault, murder, terrorism, and war. These men took these common ideas and applied them to children.

Sexual Abuse as Play

Another pattern that characterized how perpetrators thought about sexual abuse was sexual abuse as play. A father, also in mid-thirties, confused sexual behaviors with play. He said about the abuse of his eight year-old daughter:

To me it was like slipping right back into childhood. I didn't masturbate until later, when she wasn't around.

It is doubtful that the daughter saw her father as an eight year-old.
George, who molested thousands of children, said about his abusive behaviors:

*I thought that it was like a show and tell. I wasn’t doing any harm. I figured the girls were young enough. They’ll forget about it. The way some of them acted, like they didn’t mind. They didn’t care. I felt like I wasn’t doing anything really wrong because I wasn’t really physically hurting them.*

Hugo, a man who acted out sexually since he was a young child, said about the first time he molested a child as an adult:

*The first one was just more like seven year-old do: I’ll show you mine, and you show me yours. Two kids were involved, and here one is 31 or 32 or 34. She was seven.*

As he continued to talk he described her not only as wanting the sexual contact and enjoying it but also as having control over when the contact would happen:

*I would fondle her. She acted like she enjoyed it. I says, ‘Would you like to see my penis?’ She said, ‘Yes.’ Actually I said, ‘Would you like to see me?’ She shook her head ‘Yes.’ I showed her my penis, erection. She reached out and grabbed it and stroked it.*

As Hugo continued to talk, it became clear how complicated sexual abuse is. It can be hard to follow the logic of some perpetrators thoughts. Hugo said:

*I figured she knew more about sex than I did—a seven year-old girl. After that we tried to get together once in a while. I tried to make contact with her but she had total control over the sexual sessions. If she didn’t want to be fondled she told me, and that was it. She had control over me over that. I never pushed her any more than she didn’t want.*

In Hugo’s mind, the child changed from child to adult, to knowledgeable about sex, to being in charge. Throughout, Hugo thought of himself as a gentleman, never pushy, as a adult who got together with another adult, to a child.
It was like I brought myself down to her level, back down to a kid, because I did not feel like an adult, like I would with my wife. Do you love me? It was like I was a little kid talking.

Sexual Abuse as Entitlement

Some perpetrators had a sense of ownership over the children they abuse. Mike said about his stepdaughter June

She was a pretty girl—no question. I mean, other people say that, too. I looked at her at her other than just an object—also as a pretty girl. Then it would run in my head that she's not just a girl. She's mine and always will be. It would run in my head that she always will be mine.

Tim, the social worker mentioned earlier, felt entitled to sex with boys, not because he was their father or stepfather, but because he had earned it. This is what he said.

When I see children, people that are vulnerable and in need that I have concern and a desire to help and take care of this person, to give him what he needs materially or emotionally. That somehow that either gets expressed sexually. It certainly arouses sexual feelings in me. Maybe it’s that I feel that that’s my payback for taking care of others, that I in turn get sex.

Damien, who worked in a public non-profit social service agency, said he got so much praise for his work that he began to feel he “deserved a little something” for himself. He felt “omnipotent,” all powerful. He had sex with a teenage girl who was a client of the agency. He believe this was a “perk” for a job well-done.

Physical Violence and Child Sexual Abuse

Some perpetrators feel so entitled that they use physical violence to ensure compliance. Herb, mentioned earlier, said, “I’ll go to the extreme to do it.” When his desires were not met, not only did he feel unloved and unwanted, but he typically went into a rage and beat the boys into submission. He described the beginning of an on-going abuse of a ten year-old boy:

he was there by himself on his bike. I pulled him down by the back of his shirt. I didn’t know whether or not he was going to holler, run or scream or whatever. So I punched him in the stomach. I told him what I wanted. He
gave it to me. Ever since then it’s more or less, I’m not going to maybe it wasn’t on a volunteer basis. It had a lot to do with the fact that maybe he was scared of me.

Herb, who was quoted earlier about how he “never believed he could get that high” went into murderous rages when the boys he was abusing in real time did not enjoy the sex as they did in his fantasies.

He said

I can see my hands around the victims’ throats. I see those eyes bugging and the disbelief and the fear of knowing that they’re going to die.

He described what appeared to be an out-of-body experience when he was about to kill children. He said

As I was choking him, his face looked like David’s, the person [a child] that I wanted so bad. This kid said to me, ‘Herbie, why are you doing this? I’m going to do it. Don’t choke me. Don’t kill me.’ That’s when I came back to myself. I said, ‘Damn, boy, what are you doing?’

It’s scary because it’s like I’m totally outside myself. I’m totally somebody else. I can see myself doing this. When I come back and, and I catch myself, what I’m doing, and I say, ‘Damn, what you doing?’ It’s like something has just completely took control of me and saying, ‘I’m going to destroy this completely.’

Final Thoughts

Child sexual abuse is different from what most people think it is. Few people realize about what sexual abuse means to perpetrators. As we learn more about perpetrators, we have even more reason to believe that it is unfair that child survivors feel stigmatized and ashamed of being sexually abused. Only perpetrators are responsible for acts of sexual abuse, as their own words show.
PART FOUR

EFFECTS AND RECOVERY

EIGHTEEN

Effects of Child Sexual Abuse

The negative effects of child sexual abuse are well-known. The impact varies from survivor to survivor, depending upon the other risks and adversities children have experienced and the resources that children and their families are able to access once abuse is disclosed.

Children with few other negative life events and many resources to help them to cope with, adapt to, and overcome the effects of child sexual abuse can do quite well. Survivors who have other risks and few resources to help them deal with the abuse may have a difficult time in life. Sometimes the abuse is so traumatic that even children with many people to help them have a very difficult time.

The effects of child sexual abuse can be long-term, short-term or both, and can affect children physically and/or psychologically. Sexual abuse can cause physical injury and sexually transmitted diseases. Some of the more common psychological effects are post traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, drug and alcohol abuse, and negative self concept. Survivors may be so traumatized that they develop dissociative disorders.

Physical Effects

When children are sexually abused, children may be injured or have sexually transmitted diseases. Girls may have vaginal or anal tears, or even injuries to their uterus that can cause sterility. Survivors may have anal trauma as well. Some survivors of child sexual abuse who were anally penetrated have permanent injury to the sphincter muscles and have fecal leakage.

Boys and girls may have sexually transmitted diseases, such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, and HIV. In fact, sometimes the first sign of child sexual abuse in children too afraid to tell is a vaginal infection or bloody
underwear. Some of these diseases cause sterility. Genital warts and herpes not only are physically painful, but cause life-long stigma. HIV can lead to death.

When child sexual abuse comes to light, parents may not request a medical examination for the children, but this is important for several different reasons. First, children may feel cared for that the parents are arranging an exam to make sure they are all right. If parents and medical personnel explain the mechanics of the exam to the children, this gives children some confidence. If the equipment is child size and the medical people well-trained for work with children, then the exam is likely to involve little if any physical discomfort.

A second reason for a medical exam is to collect physical evidence if the abuse was recent and the child has not bathed or showered. Physical evidence is an important part of court proceedings.

A third reason for medical exams is for children to receive immediate medical treatment if they have physical injuries or diseases.

**Lovability and Worthiness**

Child sexual abuse may affect survivors’ sense of themselves as loveable, worthy human beings. They may feel guilt and shame and believe they are bad persons. Some believe they are “damaged goods” and can never be part of respectable society. They may therefore be overly sensitive to perceived slights or not have the interpersonal skills to clarify ambiguous situations. This can lead to difficulties in developing and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships.

Depression about personal inadequacies can lead to suicidal thinking and behaviors and attempt to self-medicate through the use of alcohol and drugs. Reckless behaviors and cutting can also be directly linked to attempts at coping, self-soothing, or distancing oneself from the emotional pain of being a survivor of child sexual abuse.

**Psychological Trauma**

Child sexual abuse almost always results in psychological trauma. Trauma results from the direct experience of or witnessing of an event that threatens persons’ psychological and physical well-being or that threatens the lives of the self or others.
Traumas cause psychic wounds, which individuals experience as “hot spots” or “hot buttons” that when triggered call up memories of the events that led to the trauma in the first place.

Triggering of memories of the trauma can lead to dysregulation. When dysregulated, survivors may become anxious, fearful, hyperactive, withdrawn, depressed, lethargic, and experience emotional outbursts, bed wetting, sleep disturbances, and oppositional behaviors.

Persons who have been traumatized avoid reminders of the original trauma out of fear reliving the event. Thus, sights, sounds, tastes, sensations, and smells that they associated with the trauma may bring the trauma into memory.

Persons who have been traumatized often are hypervigilant, meaning they are on the lookout for other situations that might lead to another traumatic experience. Often persons who have been traumatized develop chronic anxiety and sometimes depression. Their inability to rid themselves of fear, their sense of themselves as defective and bad, and hopelessness that anything will change contribute to their depression.

There is growing evidence that the impact of trauma can change brain structures. Changes in the brain lead to automatic responses to reminders of the trauma, typically of panic or other strong emotions.

Persons who have been traumatized are continually worried that something will trigger their memories and they will relive the trauma all over again. They have reason to be worried because any number of events can stir up traumatic memories and emotions associated with the memories.

With professional help and other corrective experiences, child, adolescent, and adult survivors learn too understand the trauma and come to terms with it. In this way, they develop new brain structures that counteract their previously automatic responses to reminders of traumatic events.

Other Signs of Trauma

Young children traumatized by sexual abuse show many signs of trauma, such as regression to earlier behaviors including bedwetting, bowel problems, nightmares, or anxiety and withdrawn behaviors such as fearfulness, hypervigilance, fear responses, self-harming behaviors, or aggression toward others. These are symptoms of the dysregulation that is linked to psychological trauma.

Some fears, including nightmares, are developmentally appropriate. When children cannot be reassured or they cannot control aggressive behaviors, parents require professional advice.
Older children may become angry and withdrawn or show no interest in schoolwork or other activities they may have enjoyed previously. Some changes in behavior are simply part of growing up, but gentle inquiry and expressions of caring may help some older children and teens open up about being sexually abused. If they have not been sexually abused, they may want to talk to a kind adult about other things that bother them.

Some survivors who become parents have difficulty distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate intimacy with children and fear that others may perceive their behaviors as inappropriate when they are appropriate. These individuals can benefit from professional consultations, where professionals can provide them with information and other resources such as books and websites to help them understand boundaries in parenting.

Parents may require therapy to help them to deal with their anxieties about parenting. Parent support groups and early childhood family education groups may be helpful.

**Effects on Sexuality**

Being sexually abused can affect survivors’ sexuality, including avoidance, disinterest, or fear of sexual contact and touching. In their efforts to cope with trauma, survivors may engage in sexually risky behaviors that may include multiple partners with whom survivors have little or no relationship.

Unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and feeling sexually used are unintended consequences of these attempt at coping and shows that such solutions become part of a bigger problem.

Adult survivors may have difficulties with medical examinations that involve sexual body parts. Some women relive the trauma of sexual abuse after giving birth to children. Even massage or simple touches can trigger memories of trauma in some persons. Marriages may become troubled or end because of sexual difficulties linked to the trauma of sexual abuse.

**Young Children and Sexualized Behaviors**

Young children, often, but not always, show signs of being sexually abused through their actions. They may insert objects into their anuses or vaginas or attempt to do so with other children. They may
simulate intercourse and “hump” pillows, stuffed animals, other children, and even older persons and adults.

In addition, they may use sexual terms they would not be expected to know, appearing to have sexual preoccupations beyond that which is typical of children their age, having stashes of pornographic material, and being sexually aggressive toward age peers or older persons, including adults. Touching or grabbing breasts, buttocks, and genitals of others are typical aggressive behaviors.

These behaviors are attempts to cope with being sexually abused, although some children who have not been sexually abused may have these behaviors, too. Much thought and gentle inquiry must go into the determination of whether these behaviors are responses to being sexually abused.

Some children may exhibit these behaviors because they are exposed to sexualized environments where adults around them engage in sexual talk on a routine basis, engage in sexual behaviors in the children’s presence, and view and pornographic media that are readily available to children.

Children exposed to sexualized environments have experienced a form of child sexual abuse and require sensitive care such as education, gentle limit-setting, and opportunities to talk about their experiences in their own way in their own time with support and encouragement from adults.

**Sexualized Behaviors as a Way of Coping**

Children may behave in sexualized ways in response to stress and not because they have been sexually abused. Some children in highly stressed families learn at early age that sexual stimulation through masturbation helps them to feel better. Some children masturbate several times a day to cope with anxiety. For these children, masturbation is a way for them to re-regulate their thoughts and emotions.

Some of them may learn that viewing sexually explicit media also helps them to cope. Children whose sexual behaviors are linked to anxiety and not to sexual abuse also require education, gentle limit-setting, and the help of adults to learn other ways of coping with anxiety.

**Sexual Behaviors as Developmentally Appropriate**

Finally, some sexual behaviors are part of sexual development and therefore are typical of young children. Typical behaviors include fondling genitals, rubbing genitals against other people or objects, exhib-
iting genitals, and attempting to touch or see the sexual body parts of others. Many children have some of these behaviors, but they gradually learn appropriate behaviors under adult guidance.

Children who have these behaviors will respond to parents telling which behaviors are not acceptable and which must be done in private. Masturbation, for example, must be done in private, but touching others or exhibiting genitals must not be done at all.

If, however, sexual behaviors persist after some education and limit-setting, then parents would do well to seek professional advice. The children may require an evaluation to discover whether the children have been sexually abused or whether their sexual behaviors are a way for them to cope with stress.

**Sexual Identity Confusion**

Issues of gender and sexual identity can be significant. In case of male children, abuse by another male is likely to have an impact on survivors’ sexual beliefs and gender role identity. These boys may have concerns and worries that they were abused because they were gay, that the abuse probably made them gay, or that others might view them as gay. They can be confused about whether they are gay or straight, especially if they experienced physical pleasure, erections, and ejaculations.

Boy survivors can become fearful that they are gay. A twenty-eight year-old adult survivor named Rob said that when he did not get erections as his father masturbated him or showed him pictures of naked women, his father asked him what was wrong with him and called him a faggot.

Rob’s father accused his son of being gay in another circumstance as well. His response to the boys drawing of flowers was to call him a faggot and say "Only girls like to draw pictures like that." This name-calling and the fact that Rob started dating later than many of his friends, sometimes led him to wonder whether he might be gay.

Bob, a male survivor mentioned earlier, reported exclusive sexual interests in girls until a male teacher sexually abused him during the summer he had turned twelve years old. After that, he did not know if he was gay or straight. This caused him a great deal of emotional stress and interfered with his abilities to perform well in his job, although he coped well enough to graduate from college. He was lonely, afraid of intimacy with women and other men.

On the other hand, most boys who were developing straight, gay, or bisexual orientations before the sexual abuse occurred have the
same sexual orientations after the abuse. These boys typically did not find pleasure in the abuse, or the pleasure did not upset them. Furthermore, no one accused them of being gay, and they did not worry about their sexual orientation following the abuse.

An example is Andy, the adult male survivor quoted earlier, who said he knew he was attracted to other boys by the time he was five years old. He had no problem with this. Being sexually abused by his uncle did not affect his sense of himself as gay.

Rob, the man who feared he was gay gradually got over his fears. He was not attracted to other men and when he had sex for the first time on his wedding night, he was thrilled with the experience. He said, “No wonder no one tells you about how good it feels. There would be babies all over the place.”

**Gender Identity Confusion**

Some male survivors of male sexual abuse wonder if they are boys or girls. It is not necessarily clear if they would have been confused about their gender identity had they not been sexually abused. Each situation has to be looked at individually.

The following example describes a case of man who was confused about whether he was a boy or girl and who was a cross dresser. It is not clear that being sexually abused had anything to do with his cross-dressing. He stated that being sexually abused made him think he could be a girl.

An adult male survivor thought he was a girl for a few years after being gang raped by three men. He reasoned he must be a girl because sex is what men do to girls. As a young boy, he took on female roles, such as cooking and doing housework for his family.

He also was a cross-dresser from his teenage years on. He was an excellent high school athlete and his peers had no idea about his cross-dressing, his confusion about his gender, or being a survivor of child sexual abuse. Throughout his adulthood, he had a stash of women’s clothes and enjoyed wearing them. He married three times and had several children, but sometimes had sex with other men, although he said he much preferred women.

He may have become a cross-dresser even if he had not been sexually abused. His bisexuality may or may not be linked to being a sexual abuse survivor.

Each case requires careful assessment on an individual basis. Preconceptions must be tested for fit on individual cases. Each person is
unique. There is a lot more to know about effects of sexual abuse on
gender and sexual identity.
Masculinity, Sexual Abuse, and Violence

Some adult male survivors may be concerned about whether or not they are sufficiently masculine, and a few, especially those who grow up in families and communities that equate violence with masculinity, may be at higher risk to act out in violent ways as a way of showing themselves and others that they are “real men.”

Men often use violence when they think that others do not think they are “man enough.” Fist fights, gang wars, and even murder for revenge motives have broken out over issues of male honor. Survivors of child sexual abuse may believe their honor as men has been tarnished. They may look for excuses to be violent in order to restore their honor. They may act “tough” to maintain their honor.

Girls and Their Identities

Girls, too, may require adult attention regarding their beliefs about their gender role and sexual identities. Sexual abuse by males reinforces the oppressive gendered ideologies that are prevalent in cultures throughout the world. These ideologies view women as passive and men as aggressive.

Girls who survive sexual abuse committed by males are at risk to learn to be passive and to avoid directly dealing with situations where they are being treated unfairly. These are girls and women who some others perceive as “easy to push around.”

Some women survivors, on the other hand, may believe that physical and sexual aggression are honorable ways of responding to being sexually abused. They may think such aggression as just desserts and want others to hurt as they have been hurt. Some male survivors may believe this, too.

Typically, self-injurious and aggression behaviors as responses to sexual abuse also are associated with other unresolved trauma besides being sexually abused alone. Pro-violence beliefs and ideologies play a part as well. These issues will be discussed more fully in the chapters on whether sexually abused children become abusers (Chapter 12), on recovery (Chapter 13), and on recovery and quality of attachment (Chapter 14).

In cultures throughout the world, ideologies place the man in charge of women, even to the point of directing how they dress, what they eat, who they socialize with, the educations they are allowed to have, whom they marry, how many children they have, and whether they may
work outside the home. Social customs and ideologies may permit and encourage men to punish women who do not comply, even to beat and murder them.

Within the context of gender, child sexual abuse is one of many other oppressions that millions and perhaps billions of girls contend with on a daily basis. Boys, too, are sexually violated in every country throughout the world.

**Summary**

In summary, child sexual abuse affects survivors in many different ways, both physical and psychological. Child sexual abuse may affect core identities; that is, the deep-seated sense that individuals have of who they are, what their self-worth is, and what they are entitled to. Survivors often require therapy on and off throughout their lives as they encounter new life stages and events.

Children can recover and live fulfilling lives only if the adults around are available to them to help them work through their understandable fears, worries, and self-doubts. Children require safe havens. Acceptance, love, accurate information, patience—these help children recover.

Above all, each child’s response is unique. Parents are unlikely to be able to be responsive to their children without the help of other family members, friends, and professionals. Thanks to the internet, there is more information available to parents of survivors and survivors themselves than ever before.

When professionals are involved, they must test their ideas on each case to see how their ideas fit. They must actively look for information that contradicts their ideas and be ready to change their ideas as new information emerges.
NINETEEN

Recovery

Recovery from child sexual abuse depends upon several factors. They include

- The intensity and duration of the sexual abuse;
- The relationship with perpetrators;
- Quality of attachments to parents and other protective processes that help survivors to cope with, adapt to, and overcome risks; and
- The number and seriousness of the other risks survivors have experienced.

While parents and professionals can expect that children’s responses to different types of sexual abuse will differ depending on the characteristics of the abuse and the abusers, any incident is potentially traumatic, no matter how minor the incident may appear to be from the viewpoints of others.

In general, a one-time incident is different from years of abuse. Abuse by a stranger is less traumatic than abuse by fathers or father figures. An incident of touching by a stranger at a park is likely to be less destructive than abduction, confinement for months, and sexual abuse while confined.

Child survivors are the experts on their own responses to being sexually abused. Effective responses connect with children’s experiences and what the abuse means to them.

Luckily, many children have effective coping mechanisms. Children who have experienced adversities in the past and who have had adults who helped them to cope with, adapt to, and overcome these adversities, already have many of the skills they will need to cope with sexual abuse. These children have developed capacities for resilience, or capacities to recover from adversities.

Children with capacities for resilience know from experience that they can trust that adults will help them deal with being sexually abused. When adults are there for them, adults help them understand what has happened to them and help them to place the abuse in its proper perspectives.
Some older children get help from friends who are compassionate and understanding. Children who are have capacities for trust and who have show resilience in the past are likely to trust professionals who can play an important part in recovery from child sexual abuse.

Whether through friends, family members, or professional, survivors need help to realize that the responsibility is with perpetrators alone, perpetrators took advantage of them, and survivors are good people who had something bad done to them.

When Children Do Not Tell

Some children who tell no one do well in many ways, such as continuing to do good work in school and apparently having good peer relationships. However, such children typically have an ache in their bodies and sense that there is something not quite right about them and their lives. They can live a lifetime with this nagging sense of something being wrong.

Other children who tell no one do not do well in their lives. These are children where sexual abuse becomes part of a risk “pile-up” where children experienced many other risks to their optimal development.

In these situations, adults have been ineffective in helping children deal with these other risks. Thus, the effects of being sexually abused may be compounded by children’s other unresolved traumas related to adversity.

For example, children who have experienced long-term, extensive incest and who also have had multiple foster placements, parents who were emotionally unavailable and insensitive to them, and parents who have unregulated mental illness or chemical dependency issues are high risks for poor outcomes.

Children whose parents are emotionally and physically available to them and who have fewer traumas are more likely to develop well in terms of relationships with others, success in school, and competencies in a range of activities.

Many survivors wait until they are adults before they tell someone. They seek therapy and are reassured and grateful when friends and family express love, concern, and joy that they finally let others know.
Do Sexually Abused Children Become Abusers?

An important question is whether sexually abused children become sexual abusers. Most survivors of childhood sexual abuse do not perpetrate child sexual abuse. This includes boy survivors of child sexual abuse as well as girls. They have protective factors in place that help them to avoid such outcomes.

Many persons assume that survivors of child sexual abuse, especially males, will sooner or later end up as abusers. This is discriminatory, unjust and oppressive towards the victims.

Persons who do not become abusers have protective factors in their lives that help them to cope with, adapt to, and overcome adversities. Child sexual abuse is an adversity and for many children it is a trauma that may affect their quality of life into adulthood and old age.

Protective factors include emotional expressiveness, desire not to perpetrate child sexual abuse, positive relationships with parents, pro-social peers and adults, both the desire and resources to be emulate these pro-social persons, avoidance of relationships with anti-social peers, competencies in school, athletics or other activities, and a sense of a positive future. Persons who cope successfully with adversities are said to be resilient.

Research has shown that most perpetrators of child sexual abuse were not sexually abused in childhood. Since most perpetrators were not sexually abused, being sexually abused is not by itself a risk to become a perpetrator.

Research has shown that one of the most consistent negative factors in the lives of adult perpetrators are histories of physical and psychological abuse that, combined with other risks, are associated with being sexual abusers of children.

These other risks are emotional inexpressiveness, social isolation, sexualized family and peer cultures, a sense of entitlement to take what they wants regardless of consequences, and lack of empathy for others. Being male can be considered a risk factor because most perpetrators of child sexual abuse are boys and men.
No one risk leads to the perpetration of child sexual abuse. Rather, each perpetrator has several risks and few protective factors that help them to avoid being sexual abusers of children. A combination of risks and relatively few resources are linked to the perpetration of child sexual abuse.

Perpetrators of child sexual abuse want to abuse children sexually, and they take active pleasure in this perpetration. A few may give the appearance of having protective factors in place, but because they desire and actively seek sexual contact with children, they are out of touch with the meanings of their behaviors for the children, themselves, and their families and friends. At their core, they are as alienated from their deepest values and emotions as perpetrators who have more obvious signs of risks.

Case Studies

Some survivors have many risks for becoming sexual abusers of children, but they also have enough protective factors that they do not. These persons can be thought of as the wounded well. Some survivors have a few risks and many protective factors, but abuse children once or twice as teenagers and then stop. These persons can be thought of as naïve experimenters.

The following are case studies of adult survivors. They had several risks for poor outcomes, but each had the essential protective factors: emotionally expressiveness and lack of interest in sexually abusing children. Two did not abuse children sexually, and one abused two children one time when she was in her early teens.

Wounded Well

Both Rob and Alice were sexually abused in childhood. Rob’s abuser was his father, who abused him while they went on camping trips in the summer when Rob was between the ages of eight and thirteen. The abuse consisted of Rob’s father masturbating him and showing him pictures from Playboy magazine. Rob hated these episodes and came to hate his father.

Alice was abused in toddlerhood by her father a few times and by two other men one time each. Both men were family acquaintances. She hardly remembered her father’s sexual abuse, but can recall the smell of beer on his breath, his sense of urgency and fear, his breathing, and the pressure of his penis against her vagina.
The second time she was abused, she was about six and the abuse involved a man who lived across the street from her putting her hand on his erect penis through his pants pocket and rolling her hand around his penis. She was afraid to tell anyone.

The third time, she was about twelve, when another man fondled her breasts. She was too ashamed and embarrassed to tell him to stop or to tell anyone what he had done. She simply avoided him, as she had avoided the man who put her hand on his penis.

The fathers of both Rob and Alice were alcoholics and were emotionally abusive. Neither of their mothers did much to stop the emotional abuse and were often neglectful themselves. They did not, for example, comfort the children after their fathers berated them but instead told them to stay away from their fathers.

Rob’s father was physically abusive and often hit Rob. He made fun of Rob’s interests in writing, poetry, music, and drawing, saying they were girls’ interests.

Rob suffered at least two episodes of depression when he was a teenager and attempted suicide. The first time, he took all the pills in the medicine cabinet, but woke up the next day. The second time, he drove his car—that he bought with his own money—into a bridge abutment. He totaled the car but walked away without injury.

Both attempts were responses to his rage and despair when his parents told him he had to break up with girlfriends they thought were not good enough for him. He obeyed them, but at great personal cost.

Alice’s father was not physically abusive and was proud of her accomplishments in music, sports, and schoolwork. When he was in a good mood, he was a funny, attentive father.

Alice felt very close to her mother, older sister, and two friends whom she knew all her life from early childhood to adulthood. She could talk to her sister, mother, and friends about what was troubling her, and she often did. These family members and friends encouraged Alice in pursuing her interests and were themselves good at many things and popular with their own friends, as with Alice.

Alice did not have major issues with depression and anxiety and had the resources to imagine a positive future and to achieve her dreams. Sexually abusing children did not cross her mind, but as a young adult, she had a series of problems with jobs and boyfriends and sought therapy for several years and then spent three years in self-help groups for adult children of alcoholics.

As a result of her participation in therapy and self-help groups, Alice gained even more confidence in herself, went to medical school, and is a well-known academic physician, specializing in child neurology.
She remains unmarried at age forty-three but has a long-term relationship with a man who is a college professor.

Rob did not feel close to anyone in his family. He said, “We never touched, and we never hugged.” His mother, however, did step between him and his father when his father was hitting him. The father would stop. When Rob was thirteen, he refused to go on any more camping trips with his father, and his mother backed him up. The camping trips stopped.

The mother also was a well-organized homemaker, keeping the house clean, the children well-clothed, and making nourishing meals. The parents kept the family on a regular schedule for mealtimes, homework, bedtime, and waking up.

The father had a steady, well-paying job. The family owned their own home in a pleasant neighborhood, where they lived since the parents were married. Both parents when to church each Sunday with the children.

When Rob was a teenager, his father used to ask Rob to take walks with him. Rob went because he thought he had to, but he did not enjoy himself. He would not talk to his father and would walk behind him.

Rob did not confide in any family members, but he had other outlets for his emotions. When upset, he listened to music that soothed him. He also wrote in a diary for several years where he expressed his most private thoughts and feelings. He stopped writing when his mother read his journal and made fun of him about it.

He had a life-long best friend named Pete and was a second son to the friend’s parents. This family lived across the street. Rob spent as much time as he could with them. He talked freely to Pete and Pete’s family about his family issues, although he did not tell them about the sexual abuse. Rob loved being with this family because they seemed to like and respect each other and liked and respected him.

Rob and Pete used to take Rob’s drunk father home from the bars on occasion and Rob was home more than once with Pete when his father came home drunk. Pete simply accepted this situation and never gave Rob cause to be ashamed.

Pete’s father spent a lot of time with the two boys, teaching them how to repair small appliances and motors. Rob also talked to his Pete and Pete’s father about relationships and how to get along with others. Rob received his sex education from his Pete’s father.
This man also loaned Rob money to buy his first lawn mower so that Rob could set up a lawn mowing service. Rob built up a good business and expanded to clearing snow in the winter.

Rob did well in school and was a particularly good chess player. He thought he did not have enough money for college but had saved enough from his business to go to trade school where he learned to be an electrician, building on the skills and knowledge Pete’s father had given him. Rob is now thirty, has a thriving electrical business, is married and has a son and daughter.

At age twenty-six, he realized that he had a problem. He never hit his wife, but he yelled at her loudly enough that she would become frightened and leave the home. She used to tell him they need to get some marriage counseling but he refused.

One day, after she left with the children, he saw that he had broken one of his children’s toys. He then realized that he had had a tantrum, similar to the tantrums he used to hate in his own father. He cried for a long time and then phoned his wife to tell her that he would get therapy.

After a few sessions, he remembered being sexually abused. Right before the session, he had seen a television show on incest. He thought the show in combination with the counseling triggered memories that he had long ago put out of his mind.

He sought therapy for being a survivor of child sexual abuse, which he successfully completed. While in marriage counseling and survivor therapy, he realized that he was also physically abusive to his toddler children. He used to spank them over their diapers starting when they were less than a year old.

He thought his wife was crazy when she told him that you don’t hit babies. He realized how wrong he was, joined Parents Anonymous, and became a national leader in the organization.

Both Alice and Rob had risks for becoming perpetrators of child sexual abuse. The thought never crossed their minds. They apparently had many positive factors in their lives that helped them to overcome some of the effects of their own childhood sexual abuse and other traumas. They both had confidants and were able to express a range of emotions appropriately. They had many friends, did well in school, and did many things well.

In adulthood, both of them engaged in therapy and self-help to see themselves through to a fulfilling careers and adult lives.

Wounded by childhood sexual abuse and other negative life events, they demonstrate capacities for coping with, adapting to, and overcoming adversities. They are examples of adults who show resilience.
Naïve Experimenter

The following is a case example of Mary, a woman survivor who sexually abused two children she babysat when she was in her early teens. She abused them one time. She had many protective factors in her life that helped her see that what she had done was wrong.

At the time of her abuse, Mary said she was “numb,” depressed, anxious, and alienated from her father who had sexually abused her. Her parents were upper class and prominent socially. She did not tell her mother or other adults about the sexual abuse because she thought no one would believe her because her father was so popular with others and because she was afraid she would be blamed.

Although she had many of the protective factors discussed earlier, she required therapy throughout much of her life to help her work through her issues related to being an incest survivor and someone who had molested children.

She might have been a life-long abuser, but she did not want to hurt children and she took steps to ensure that she did not.

Mary first disclosed to her boyfriend when she was 14 that her father had sexually abused her. She also told girlfriends, her therapist in college, and her husband about the incest.

She and her husband were highly educated and established an upper class lifestyle themselves, including many friends, social activities, and civic engagement in terms of contributions of money and time to social welfare organizations.

Yet, her husband told her, “You need help.” He was concerned about her level of anxiety, her hypersensitivity, and her mood swings, although she excelled in her profession and socially. She went into therapy and joined a self-help group modeled after Alcoholics Anonymous.

Mary did well in the group and then decided to see a psychotherapist. She remained in therapy for several years. She continued her civic activities and is well-known in the region in which she lives.

She learned in therapy that she had made her father out to be a monster and cut herself off from him when she was a child.

She said

*A big part of my surviving abuse is to make him be the bad guy. What do you do when you do the same thing?*
Mary is a naïve experimenter who had many protective processes that helped her to never again sexually abuse children. As discussed, naïve experimenters touch children sexually one or twice and then quit.

**Discussion**

These three survivors of child sexual abuse confided in others, and in Rob’s case to a diary as well, about personal, private life events, and they also did not believe that sexual contact with children was something they could do, nor did they want to. For two of them, the thought never crossed their minds. Mary acted out one time with two children and was filled with such guilt and remorse that she never did it again.

Some survivors like Rob have many risk factors but they also have many protective factors that offset the effects of the risks. Others, like Mary, have fewer risks, but the risks they do have are very difficult to manage.

Mary’s main risk was her profound disgust with her father to the point where she no longer thought of him as human. She also realized that she was capable of doing what she hated in him, namely sexually abusing children.

While some people shut down emotionally as a way of coping with emotional pain, Mary had had close friends and told them her most shameful secrets.

Alice had several risks as well, but many protective factors, including the essential two: emotionally expressiveness and never having a thought about sexually abusing children. The thought never crossed her mind.

**Do sexually abused children become abusers?** Most do not because they have protective factors in their lives that help them to cope with, adapt to, and overcome the effects of being sexually abused. They are emotionally expressive and do not believe that sex with children will soothe, comfort, and gratify them.

Most survivors are like Alice and Rob and do not sexually abuse children at all. If they are abusive in other ways, as Rob was, they eventually realize it and seek help. They have the resources and the will to live their lives the best way they can and they have the personal competences and emotional resources to do no harm to children. They are emotionally expressive, and they do not believe that sex with children is a means of emotional and sexual gratification.

Some survivors may abuse children sexually one time, as Mary did. It is almost as if they are trying to work out the meanings of their own trauma. Ashamed at their sexually abusive behaviors, they stop and
never abuse again. As of yet, little attention is paid to people like Mary who struggle with guilt and shame for their lifetimes for a one-time incident of child sexual abuse.

In summary, these three survivors were emotionally expressive and rejected the idea that sex with children is something they are entitled to do. These two factors are the essential features of persons sexually abused in childhood who do not become perpetrators.
TWENTY-ONE

Risks for Becoming Abusers

Persons who abuse children sexually typically were not sexually abused in childhood. Much more commonly, they were physically and psychologically abused, but some do not have these risk factors, either.

As shown in the earlier chapter, the two risks associated with child sexual abuse are emotional inexpressiveness and perpetrators’ beliefs that they are entitled to have sex with children. Sex with children feels good to them, and they will do this whenever they create opportunities to do so.

Emotional Expressiveness

Emotional expressiveness means that persons experience and express a range of emotions that are appropriate to the situations they are in, they can handle their own emotions in ways that do not hurt themselves and others, they have capacities for identifying and understanding the emotions of others and for empathize with others, and they behave in ways that accommodate the emotions and wants of others.

They confide in others about any problems they have, and they find that talking to others helps them to feel better and to handle their problems more effectively.

Emotional inexpressiveness means that individuals are unable to connect with and express a range of emotions and are unable to connect with and empathize with the emotions of others.

The emotions they identify and express in themselves typically are anger, outrage, rage, and sexual emotions. Some recognize sadness in self and others but have no idea how to work through the issues that cause them to feel sad. So they remain stuck in their emotions.

Persons who are emotionally inexpressive rarely if ever talk over any problems they have in their lives. Some may have tried to do so as young people, but felt betrayed by those they confided in. Therefore, they learned not to trust others with sensitive, personal material.

Perpetrators of child sexual abuse have particular issues related to how they view and interact with children. Rather than accommodate in kind and gentle ways to the emotions and wants of children, they seek to
trick, manipulate, or force others to accommodate to their sexual demands.

They do not recognize that they have an obligation to accommodate to children who, because they are children, have special vulnerabilities related to lack of knowledge and experience as well as ways of thinking that are different from how adults think.

Two Types

There are two general types of emotional inexpressiveness. In the first type, individuals are emotionally inexpressive over time and situations, while the second kind individuals' emotion expression depends upon the situation. In other words, the first type is consistently emotionally inexpressive and the second type is inconsistently emotionally expressive.

Persons who are consistently emotionally inexpressive may not know what they are feeling at any time, if they feel anything at all. It is possible that persons who are emotionally inexpressive do not have the brain structures and brain circuits that encode and transmit awareness of the range of emotions that other people experience.

It is possible and even likely that they really do not feel what others feel. The emotions of others are mysteries to them because they do not feel these emotions themselves. Their states of emotional inexpressiveness are consistent at various times in their lives and in various situations with a range of different people.

The second type of emotional inexpressiveness is inconsistent and situational. Many persons who sexually abuse children sexually give the appearance of being emotionally expressive and some may be emotionally expressive in certain situations with certain people. At times, they may feel the emotions the way others do, and they may have capacities to identify the emotions of others, empathize with others, and behave in ways that accommodate the emotions and wants of others.

However, when they think about, plan for, and then sexually abuse children, they detach from their emotions and the emotions of the children. They no longer behave in ways that accommodate the emotions and wishes of others and children in particular.

It is as if they throw a switch, and they no longer recognize the emotions of others and only recognize a few in themselves. At these times, they have tunnel vision, where that matters is what they want. In the case of child sexual abuse, what they want is to satisfy and gratify themselves through sexual means.
Adam had such tunnel vision that he did not think about whether his sexual abuse of boys was illegal. He said,

*I felt so much in love with him that I didn’t think that I was doing anything wrong, illegal or otherwise.*

He was so out of touch with the illegality of his sexual abuse that he though he would get in trouble for using drugs but not about sex with boys. He said,

*I thought that I would get caught more for the, for the drugs, actually. And I was arrested with victim and several of his friends for smoking marijuana.*

Herb also showed tunnel vision, or the capacity to distance himself from important aspects of his behaviors. He said,

*When I was in that situation, one’s mind is pretty powerful, and you can cut things out that you don’t want to admit, like getting caught or hurting someone. I don’t even consider the people that I’ve hurt.*

George also was able to cut out of his awareness things he did not want to consider. He said,

*That sense of compassion or empathy was not strong enough for me to not do what I did. I was able to turn that off.*

Child sexual abusers, as well as other violent people, are out of touch with full awareness of what they are doing. Murderers, rapists, and persons who physically assault others also have tunnel vision and capacities to detach from the emotions and wishes of others. What matters to them is what they want as they plan and then act out in violent ways.

Typically, those who give the appearance of being emotionally
expressive but also have capacities for throwing a switch to shut off their emotions and their awareness of the emotions of others, do not confide in other people about painful, personal issues. Instead, they may skate across the surface of their deepest hurts and fears, strangers to themselves as well as to others.

**Gender and Emotional Inexpressiveness**

Men appear to be at much more risk to be emotionally inexpressive than women because many boys and men believe that emotional pain such as sadness and hurt are signs of weakness and affronts to their dignity as males. When they experience hurt and sadness, they may ignore these feelings and do many different things not to feel them, such as covering up emotions with anger, getting drunk, using drugs, or hurting someone else.

Some men who prefer not to share painful feelings know what they are feeling and take constructive steps at dealing with them, such as writing down their thoughts, talking to the guys at the health club, seeing a counselor or therapist, exercising vigorously, or watching a film or engaging other recreational activities. Men who have these positive coping responses are probably not truly emotionally inexpressive. They chose to be careful about how and with whom they deal with their emotions.

**Beliefs and Child Sexual Abuse**

Emotional inexpressiveness by itself does not lead to child sexual abuse. What is required for perpetrators to sexually abuse children is for persons to believe they are entitled to be sexual with children. They believe they can do what they want to satisfy their own desires and wants.

As discussed earlier, some may talk themselves into believing that sexual abuse is love or some kind of game, while others know they are abusing and using children but this either does not matter to them or adds to their enjoyment. What matters is what they want. A small percentage use sex with children as a way of soothing their emotional pain. The soul mate type of abuser has these beliefs.

Alice, Rob, and Mary were emotionally expressive. Alice confided in her sister, her two best friends, and her mother about personal, private life events and emotions. Rob kept a diary and had confidants in his best friend and his best friend’s parents, especially his father. Mary
confided to others about the incest her father perpetrated and worked hard over her lifetime to understand and manage their feelings.

They knew what they were feeling and had high capacities for emotional expressiveness in a variety of situations.

None of them saw sex with children as a means of emotional and sexual gratification. The thought of sexually abusing children never crossed the minds of Rob and Alice. Mary sexually abused two children one time and was appalled at herself and guilty and ashamed for the rest of her life.

All three are survivors of child sexual abuse. All were hurt by being sexually abused. They had capacities to cope with, adapt to, and overcome most of the effects.

A Case Example of a Man Who Perpetrated

Mike’s life story is an example of a man who was not sexually, physically, or psychologically abused and neglected in childhood and who described a happy childhood. Despite this, he sexually abused his stepdaughter for several years, beginning when she was three. He also raped his wife many times.

He had both qualities identified earlier as characteristic of persons who abuse children sexually. He appeared to have capacities to detach from his emotions and the emotions of others and he believed he was entitled to be sexual with his stepdaughter, whom abused for about nine years, starting when she was four. He never discussed personal, painful problems with others because he believed he had none.

The youngest child of five children and the only son of a working class, two-parent family, Mike was smart, handsome, and personable. His older sisters and his parents doted on him.

He went to church every week with his parents, and he liked going. His friends were other children from the church and from his neighborhood. His parents did not drink alcohol, and they socialized with other families. They were married for thirty-seven years. The marriage ended when Mike’s father died at age seventy-five.

Mike spent a lot of time with his father who taught him how to repair cars, how to build houses, and how to care for the house and yard which Mike said was “immaculate.” Mike appeared to respect his father.

He said

\[I\text{ learned a lot of stuff from him. A lot of it I didn’t use later on. He gave me a good example, but I chose not to follow it.}\]
His father as always busy, always doing something for work or around the house and yard. “The only time he wasn’t working, he was sleeping,” he said.

Mike did not like to talk about his father who died when Mike was in his early twenties. He regretted that he had not gotten to know his father better. He said, “I still have a lot of pain about talking about him.”

Mike’s mother was a homemaker who occasionally worked part-time. She was an excellent cook and an organized homemaker. She and her husband were married for thirty-seven years. She never remarried and bought her own home in a neighborhood close to Mike and his family and to two daughters and their families.

Mike said that he felt like he was an only child because his sisters all were married and out of the home by the time he was in his early teens. A sister six years older than him was like his second mother. She would take care of him when his mother was working.

Things changed for Mike when he was an early teen. He got into drugs and alcohol, no longer wanted to go to church, and began to disobey his parents. He dropped out of school and worked at low-paying jobs. In one job, he became angry at the boss and vandalized the workplace as revenge.

He said he abused his stepdaughter because he liked doing it. His description of the abuse illustrates many of the points made earlier about what perpetrators say about child sexual abuse. This is what Mike said in his own words.

_I don’t think about why I did it too much. There’s lot of different reasons why I did it. Number one was because I liked it. I liked the control and what I felt was intimacy or whatever. Her and I didn’t have anybody else._

_It was like a challenge, too, to get her alone. That part was almost more exciting than actually having sex with her, setting everything up just to get her alone. It took a lot of my time and a lot of my energy to do that, a lot of preoccupation, a lot of planning involved in it._

_I had to think what time her mother gets home for sure. She worked part-time. So she got off different times. Knowing if I had to pick her up or if she is getting a ride some. So she may come walking in._

_Keeping June scared, more or less. What’s going to happen to her if she tells. A lot of awareness of where the kids are. I always knew where they were at. I used a lot of verbal threats. Mom would leave or something._

_At the beginning I guess I used to think that it was good to do this. She was younger. She believed me then. When she started to resist, it turned into_
threats and manipulation with money. Or “You’re grounded,” or “You’re not going to get anything.” “You can’t go there. You can’t go here, if you don’t do this for me.” That nobody would want her, stuff like that. I used a lot of sham-

So it went from caring, what I felt was caring, down to more stronger forcing, towards the last three or four years, actually. June was convenient. She was always there.

There’s no stopping once, I started. There was no turning back after that. I just figured that I enjoyed it and why stop. Why tell anybody because I’d get thrown in prison then.

The actual sex — I liked that. Then the control, being in control of her life completely was a thrill for me. I thought about it more than I thought about my wife. She occupied a lot of my time.

I don’t think of people’s feelings. I still have a hard time with that. I’m pretty insensitive about other people. I’m really self-centered. It’s just selfish, sexual gratification and that’s all. That’s about all there is to it.

She was a pretty girl—no question. I mean, other people say that, too. I looked at her at her other than just an object—also as a pretty girl. Then it would run in my head that she’s not just a girl. She’s mine and always will be. It would run in my head that she always will be mine. I eventually think I would have run off with her. I thought about that. I would someday.

That’s where a lot of pornography and stuff comes in with people like child molesting and stuff, that they control - it controls their life so much that they finally get involved with child pornography and stuff like that, where they can manipulate the kids into doing things to make money for them. I think that was the road I was traveling.

We’d talk about sex abuse all the time at work, stories on TV and all that stuff. We talked about that. Here I was doing the same thing. Anyway, I took a real hard line on it with him, that they weren’t fit to be alive, stuff like that. I was doing the same thing.

Mike’s mother and sisters stayed in close touch with him while he was in prison for sexually abusing his stepdaughter. All but one sister visited him regularly, at least twice a month, with phone calls and letters in between. One sister thought his sexual abuse of his stepdaughter had crossed a line, and she did not want to see him because of it.

He had no contact with June, the child he sexually abused. June’s mother divorced Mike and the judge ordered no-contact with the family.
Abusers with Histories of Being Sexually Abused

Skip and Sam, both discussed earlier, are perpetrators of child sexual abuse who were sexually abused in childhood. Skip was gang-raped when he was about eleven, and his older brother and his brother’s friends sexually abused him on and off throughout his childhood and teenage years, although Skip could not say when this sexual abuse began. Skip described himself as a “sexual slave” to these boys.

Sam was sexually abused when he was in kindergarten and then again when he was in second and third grades.

They both began sexually acting out with other children immediately after being sexually abused. Their sexualized behaviors could have been reactions to being sexually abused. Both had sexual relationships with peers when they were in high school, Sam with another boy for several years and Skip with both boys and girls. Skip also was sexual with farm animals, such as chickens, sheep, and cows.

Sam did not report any other sexualized behaviors except those with other children. During some of his teenage years, he did not abuse children sexually, but thought about sex with children constantly and masturbated frequently to pictures of children. He said he did not act out sexually with children as a teen because he had a male sexual partner.

Skip told his parents about the gang rape, while Sam did not tell anyone about being sexually abused. When Skip told his parents, they yelled that he had brought it on himself. He called his mother a “liar.” His father beat him with a razor strap and sent him to bed with no supper.

The family’s minister found out and told Skip’s father that Skip was no longer welcome at the church. Skip’s father explained, “The church had kind of problem with kids who would go around and let other people fuck them.” Skip tried to defend himself, saying “That’s not right.” His protests made no difference. He was banned from church and his parents agreed with the ban.

After this experience, Skip no longer trusted his parents or his minister. He said,

*I think from then on I just decided whatever I said they weren’t going to believe me anyway.*

He tried hard to please his parents by becoming overly compliant, even doing cooking and housework for the family as well as working hard on the farm.
Sam did not tell his parents, not out of fear of the kind of punishment that Skip received but because he did not want to destroy their image of him as a “perfect child.” This is what he said.

_I was abused by several people, either family or people I knew. I began acting out in sexual ways right then. I mean it wasn’t something I waited until a teenager to do. I think there was more guilt about the deceit than there was about the acts._

_My parents had always thought of me as the perfect child. I was deceiving myself, pretending that the abuse didn’t really matter. Maybe I thought it didn’t matter. I’m not sure._

_Why didn’t I tell my parents? Those kinds of things we just didn’t talk about. My relationship with my dad was minimal. I knew Dad loved me and cared about me but I didn’t have much contact with him. I had all the contact with my mother. I think I was afraid of hurting them. I was afraid of hurting them._

_I think I was afraid of talking about something like that. I had no idea what, what it was. It was just a whole area of my life that I had no clue about except that it was attractive and it was pleasurable._

Sam had far fewer risks factors than Skip. Sam’s parents were college educated, well-off financially, and appropriately involved with their children’s activities and school work. The family owned their own home in an upper-class neighborhood that had many recreational activities available to residents. The household was well-organized, with the family meals and activities on regular schedules, and the home well-furnished and tidy. Sam had one sister, his own room, and his own car when he was sixteen.

The distance he felt from his father is not unusual with men of his generation, but he did believe his father loved him and he respected his father. As mentioned earlier, Sam was an attractive, well-mannered man with many friends. Those whom he told about his sexual interest in children either did not believe him or minimized the importance of his sexually abusive behaviors.

_Skip had many risks and experienced risk pile-up_ from an early age. His father abused him physically and emotionally and both parents neglected him emotionally. “The first disappointment,” Skip said, “was I came out a boy and not a girl.” His father had wanted a daughter after having had three sons. Furthermore, Skip’s father thought Skip was his brother’s son and not his own.

Skip believed his father did not love or want him. At the age of ten, Skip developed rheumatic fever when he was ten. He believed that
his father thought he was “an extra expense. The doctor kept telling him that I wasn’t going to live anyway.”

When Skip expressed resentment of his father to his mother, his mother told him

_We did have a good father. He took good care of us. He was a hard worker, and he loved us and all of that. But that gets me every time she ever told me that, ‘Yeah, with a fucking razor strap’ is what I told her._

His mother defended her husband’s use of the strap: “He has to make us mind.”

As a child, Sam was sexual with many other children, while hiding his behaviors from adults. From the age of about twelve to seventeen he did not act out with children, but wanted to.

At seventeen, he volunteered to be a camp counselor for his church’s overnight camp. There he sexually abused boys while they were asleep. Well into adulthood, he also sexually abused boys as a volunteer for various child-centered activities. No child ever reported him.

Skip’s older brother victimized Skip soon after Skip was gang raped. His brother explained that sex with men was not supposed to hurt. He demonstrated this on Skip and indeed it did not hurt. It was then that Skip became his brother’s and his brother’s friends “sex slave.”

Skip enjoyed the older boy’s attention, and the sex provided him with good feelings too. He sought sexual stimulation many different ways, such as through masturbation, sex with chicken, sheep, and cows, and through sex with other boys and also with girls.

The first time he sexually abused a child was when he was twenty-six. He continued to abuse for twenty-five years, until he was caught and put in prison.

Typically he fondled girls and boys and had orgasms later. With Aria, he penetrated her and caused her considerable bleeding. The assault took place on a river bank, perhaps doing to her what had been done to him.

He said the reason he was so brutal to her was because he thought she was a tease. She used to wear lacy panties that Skip sometimes could see. One time, he overheard her “bragging” that she still had her cherry. As he assaulted her, he said, “You’re not going to take your cherry home.”
Three Different Life Histories

Skip, Sam, and Mike enjoyed being sexual with children and believed they were entitled to do so. Skip stopped trusting people with sensitive information about himself after his parents punished him so severely for being sexually abused. He had no capacity for confidant relationships and emotional expressiveness.

Mike also had no capacity for emotional expressiveness. It is as if he had no emotions to express.

Sam had the most capacity for emotional expressiveness and probably was quite emotionally connected to his wife, his sons, and his friends. As mentioned, he was an attractive, well-mannered man who had the appearance of having great capacities for empathy and compassion. His one blind spot was the life-long pleasure he took in having sex with kids. He even confided in others about his sexual behaviors, but they appeared to have minimized its significance. Sharing this sensitive information did nothing to help Sam see that he had to stop because he was hurting kids.

Discussion

Mike’s story shows perpetrators can sexually abuse children without being sexually abused themselves. Mike seemed to believe that he was entitled to satisfy himself by using his stepdaughter, whom he professed to love. He admitted that he was emotionally inexpressive and detached from others. Mike’s story is typical of perpetrators of child sexual abuse.

As mentioned earlier, researchers have identified many factors associated with sexually abusing children, such as childhood histories of being physical and emotionally abused, social isolation, sexualized family and peer cultures, and beliefs about the rightness of sex with children. Being male can also be considered a risk factor because men more than women abuse children sexually.

These well-known risks contribute to the essential two risk factors. For example, being physically and emotionally abused can be traumatic and lead to emotional pain and distorted thinking about being bad, unworthy of respect, and deserving of such treatment.

These are thoughts that few people are proud of and in fact have a great deal of pain about. Some people are too ashamed to talk others about such issues. Some, especially boys and men, think it is unmanly to admit to feelings of hurt and shame.

So, some people become emotionally closed and isolated from other people. They may reach the point where they no longer know
what they are feeling. If they do, they also lose touch with the emotional states of others. They have little if any capacity for empathy, and they cannot accommodate their behaviors to what others feel and want because they do not know.

Some perpetrators say that their sexual abuse is a means of easing the emotional pain associated with unresolved histories of abuse and neglect. Others state they are sexual with children because it feels good. Their abuse has nothing to do with self-soothing or unresolved trauma and hurt.

Being emotionally cut off from others and having deep emotional pain, however, are not enough to become a sexual abuser of children. The belief that it is okay to have sexual contact with children must be present and the desire to do so must be present. These beliefs and desires are likely to be linked to sexualized environments or exposure to such beliefs through the Internet or other media or through persons that potential abusers know and respect.

In addition, some abusers are sexualized through experiences of being sexually abused when they were children. Not all persons sexualized through being sexually abused go on to abuse children. They have other ways of coping with being sexualized.

The one essential feature associated with sexually abusing children is the desire to do so and the lack of any considerations as to why this is not good for children, for children’s families, and for perpetrators themselves.

The desire to soothe emotional pain and believing that it is okay to abuse children sexually to do so are factors in some sexual abuse. In other cases, perpetrators report and experience no emotional pain but only report beliefs that sex with children is okay.
Quality of Attachment and Recovery

Resources that help children cope with child sexual abuse fall into the general category of quality of attachments to others. Children who have secure attachments are more likely to trust that others will believe them, comfort them, and help them understand what happened to them. The adults who love them and care for them, however, must understand child sexual abuse and respond to children’s distress in constructive ways.

Children who believe they have no one to turn to may become confused about what happened and may think they somehow are at fault. They are left isolated with their own fears.

Adults Create Safety for Children

Adults are responsible for the creation of safety for children. Being sensitive, responsive care providers is the first step. In terms of sexuality and sexual abuse, adults are helpful when they provide children with age-appropriate sex education, which, among other things, gives children a vocabulary with which to describe sexual acts.

Sex education also demystifies sexuality and creates the sense that sexual body parts and sexual expression are simply part of life and can be discussed with as much freedom as any other intimate topic. Parents can be clear about what are appropriate and inappropriate sexual behaviors at different life stages.

For example, parents and other adults often have difficulties when children masturbate. Masturbation is normal and natural and is in fact an important sexual developmental milestone. Children need to learn what the social expectations are for masturbation and it is adults who teach them.

So, a toddler who masturbates in public can be asked to masturbate in private because masturbation is a private act. Setting such a limit on masturbation is appropriate, just as parents tell children not to stick their hands into fire.

Parents and other adults can also provide children with direct instruction about what to do if someone wants to see or touch their private parts or wants them to look at the private parts or touch the private parts of
others. It is important that children learn that they have rights to privacy and that adults do not have the right to do anything they want to children.

Children often learn better if they have a chance to practice behaviors. Prevention programs that are effective have this kind of behavior rehearsal component. Informally, parents can practice with children in the home.

The more specific the instructions the better. Children will benefit if parents rehearse with them what to do if what to do if anyone, no matter who it is, wants to see or touch children’s private parts or wants the children to touch or look at theirs, or wants the children to look at photographs, videos, or any other depiction of sexual behaviors.

A Case Example: How Children Learn

The girl whose grandfather figure molested her, discussed earlier, illustrates how important it is for children to see exactly what they are entitled to do. One day, the man called her and a little girlfriend over to his house. He invited the two girls in. He went to put his hands down her girlfriend’s pants. The little girl yelled, “No” and ran out the door. The girl who had been abused all those years was astonished.

She did not know kids could do that. She ran out the door. She never went to the man’s house again, no matter how hard he tried to get here there. She is the child who said she thought there were laws about kids and adults.

Children can learn the exceptions to the general rule that other people do not have the right to touch or see private parts or to expect children to look at and touch theirs. Doctors and nurses may have to inspect their genitals, but they can only do so with parental permission. Young children can learn that parents and other care providers may see their genitals in order to help them dress and undress and to help them bathe or shower. That is probably the extent of the rights of others to view and touch children’s private body parts.

Children are capable of understanding circumstances under which it is permissible for others to touch and to see their genitals and when they are not.

Parents Provide Models of Conduct

Parents also provide models of conduct. When adults experience stressful events, children learn from example how to cope. Healthy parents
cope by talking to other people about harsh realities and to consider several possible ways to respond to stressors. Children will do the same.

When children understand human sexuality in age-appropriate ways and have learned that adults will be available to them when they have difficulties, it is more likely that children will seek help when adults approach them for sexual contact.

If children do not understand human sexuality, if they do not know that adults have no sexual rights to them, and if they do not believe that adults will help them, then children are vulnerable, not only to perpetrators of children sexual abuse, but they are vulnerable to poor developmental outcomes in general.

In some cultures, children are viewed as the property of their parents. Children in these situations may have little if any opportunity to express their own preferences and wants and may be punished if they do. In order to ensure children’s safety, children must have permission and instruction to refuse to comply with adult requests that harm children.
Emotional availability is the key phrase for adults when children tell them about being sexually abused. Adults are helpful only when they respond to the children with empathy and compassion. The focus is the children.

No matter how emotionally upset adults may be, they must under-react. Afterward, adults can scream and cry and do what they want to do, but in the presence of the children, their demeanor is one of alert concern.

Children are more likely to talk when adults allow children to express themselves in their own words in their own ways. It is important for adults not to show a great deal of emotion, such as shock, disbelief, horror, gushes of sympathy and compassion. What works is to be calm, quietly compassionate, and above all, to listen.

If adults communicate, verbally or non-verbally, that sexual abuse is the most horrible thing and the abused person is damaged and hurt forever, this is harmful. In addition, adults harm children if adults blame themselves for not protecting children.

Many children will become concerned about the adults’ suffering and push their own to the side. Such adult reactions hurt children and can make the sexual abuse a more serious liability than it already is.

Furthermore, in their concern for the children or their own guilt, adults sometimes quiz the children, or give them the “third degree,” which is a series of poorly-timed questions that demand immediate responses.
It is important not to insist that the children talk, but rather give them a safe place in which to talk about their experiences and to explore the meanings and implications of their experiences.

Adults often cannot help child survivors who experienced bodily sensations or have had erections, ejaculations, and orgasm because adults are unprepared to deal with the reality that children’s bodies may respond to sexual stimulation that children do not want or seek.

A balanced message is that sexual abuse is a painful, difficult situation that children can learn to manage well with the help of adults. Finding an askable, available, kind and listening other person to talk to helps children work out the trauma.

Children need to know what the legal implications are and the police may expect them to do. If children are assured that adults will be with them every step of the way, then this becomes an important part of the children’s recovery. Children can cope with adversity when adults are consistently there for them.

Guidelines for Listening to Children

1. Sit on the same level with the child.
2. Speak in a calm voice.
3. Regulate eye contact: Don’t stare or avoid the eyes, although in some cultures not looking into the eyes of others is a form of respect.
4. Sit at a comfortable distance from the child
5. Echo the last word of the child’s statement
6. Reflect back what you just heard to check to see if you heard correctly
7. Use the 80/20 formula--adults do 20% of the talking
8. Repeat a key word
9. Nod your head when you agree.
10. Use the words the child uses, not only the slang but other words, too. This is an example of using the same word:
    Child: “He put his thing in my craphole.”
    Adult: “He put his thing in your craphole.”
Here is another example: A 9 year-old girl, whose grandfather sexually abused her for six years, cringed every time she used the word “wiener,” which was the term she knew for “penis.” the interviewer used the word in a matter of fact way. Eventually, the little girl relaxed as she used the word.
11. Don’t put words in the child’s mouth.
12. Be warm and accepting.
13. Use simple, concrete language.

Adults can improve their skills in talking to children about sexual abuse by using their imaginations. They can imagine how they would feel if they had been used and abused, if they can imagine what it is like to trust someone and have that trust betrayed, to feel shamed and stigmatized by events over which you had not control but thought you should have had control, or even believe that you did have control. Child sexual abuse is a major traumatic life event that requires sensitive responsiveness.

What to Say to Children

The following are some examples of what to say when children are talking to adults about being sexually abused. Adults can adapt these examples to fit their own situations. Children test adults and often being by telling them just a little bit. If adults pass the early tests, then children are likely to say more.

- “Sexual abuse is hard to talk about. I’m glad you can trust me.” Children already know how hard it is to talk about sexual abuse. When an adult acknowledges this, children typically feel encouraged to go on.

- “Uh huh” and “I see.” In conversations with you, children may be testing the reality of their experiences. As a general principle, anything a particular feels is valid for that child. So, a simple “Uh huh” or “I see” could suffice to validate the child’s experience and encourage the child to go on.

- “You seem to be uncomfortable. Would you like to stop now?” When children start to talk about the abuse, there is a point at which it may be wise to stop. Children sometimes become overwhelmed with emotion. They might want to be held, or go to a playground, or spend time alone at the computer. The pacing depends upon the children. When adults encourage children to take breaks, trust can grow.

- “It is ok to love the person who abused you.” Many children have long-term relationships with the persons who sexually abuse them. They feel attached to these persons, may have happy memories of the good times together, and they may have enjoyed the attention. This is an important part of children’s experience of abuse, and children benefit when adults acknowledge such experiences.
• “Yes, what happened is confusing. I understand that you didn’t like the sexual parts of what happened. You liked the person but not what he or she did to you.” With some possible exceptions, children did not like the sexual abuse, even if they experienced physical pleasure. Children, however, need to make these statements with little or no prompting for adults.

• “You may have heard sexual abuse is not your fault, but a lot of kids think it is. What do you think?” Most children believe the sexual abuse is their fault. One little girl said of six years of abuse that her grandfather perpetrated, “I never told him not to do it.”

   If adults attempt to assure children that the abuse is not their fault when the children believe it is their fault, then adults are ignoring children’s perspectives and invalidating their perspectives. Helping children see where the fault lies requires careful, sensitive conversations over time.

• “The perpetrator took advantage of you.” This is a message most sexually abused children can benefit from hearing, but the timing of when to let children know this is important. There is no set of rules or procedures that pinpoint the absolutely right time. Adults must depend upon their judgments about children’s readiness to hear such an important message.

• “Is there anything else?” Often children will say only parts of their stories. When the conversations appear to be ending, adults can ask, “Is there anything else?” Often children then disclose a great deal more.

Talking to children about their own sexual abuse is a set of skills that adults can learn only if they understand child sexual abuse and have capacities for empathy and for the regulation of their own emotions.

**Forensic Interviewing**

Forensic interviewing a formal interview that trained professionals conduct with children for the purposes of providing evidence to the police and court to determine if child sexual abuse has occurred. Any hint that the interviewer suggested answers to the children threatens the quality of the evidence.

Effective interviews build upon children’s levels of development and thus are concrete and specific. They are structured interviews, designed to move progressively from

• building rapport
• to constructing the place or places where the sexual abuse occurred,
• to drawing pictures of who is in the children’s families,
• to identifying sexual body parts, and
• to describing the abuse itself.

As part of rapport building and evidence-gathering, interviewers typically use drawings. The interviewers do the drawing. For example, in obtaining information about who is in the children’s family, a usual question is, “Does Mommy have short, medium short, or long hair? Straight, wavy, or curly?” The interviewers immediately draws the correct kind of hair on the drawing of the mother.

As children answer simple, concrete questions and the interviewers draws what the children describe, children typically are caught up in the process and share a great deal.

When the time comes to describe the sexual abuse incidents, many children have enough of a sense of safety to provide concrete details, such as the flashing purple light that Annie saw when the perpetrator locked her in his bathroom, or a scar an alleged perpetrator has in a private area of the body. Such details often determine the outcome of a case because it is hard to make them up.

Some interviewers also use anatomically detailed dolls so that the children can show what kinds of sexual acts constitute the abuse. Some jurisdictions fund agencies whose sole purpose is to interview children who have been sexually abused. The children are interviewed in a child-friendly space with comfortable seating and where the interviews are at the same level as the children.

In some forms of forensic child interviewing, the interview is videotaped while police, child protection social workers, and prosecuting attorneys observe the interview in another room through close-circuit television. These observers can phone interviewers to ask for further detail.

The purpose of such agencies is to ensure that the interviewers are trained professionals and to minimize the number of times children are interviewed.

Closure

Closure is important in child forensic interviewing. Children have just described to interviewers personal, private information. The interviews show sensitivity to children when they help children make plans of action as
to what they can do to help protect themselves in the future. Possible questions include

1. If this happens again, who can you talk to?

2. Is there anything you would like to say to ____[use name of the abuser]?

Children feel supported and encouraged when adults take them seriously, pay attention to what they say, and give them some guidelines about what to do in other possible abuse situations.

This interview can be adapted to other kinds of interviewing with children, such as for determining child physical abuse, sexual harassment, sibling teasing or other forms of verbal abuse, witnessing domestic abuse or other trauma such as seeing a friend shot.
CHAPTER 17

Professional Help for Survivors,
Perpetrators, and Families

Survivors of child sexual abuse and their families often seek professional help to deal with the shock and trauma of the abuse and to educate themselves about the myths and realities of child sexual abuse. The trauma of being sexually abused is difficult in itself, but abuse is made even more complex because of the common misunderstandings about child sexual abuse discussed in this book.

Well-trained professionals can help survivors and their families understand child sexual abuse for what it is—an abuse of power where someone who is older, stronger, and more knowledgeable takes advantage of children for sexual and emotional gratification. Sometimes the motivation is greed where older people use children for their own financial gain.

At its best, therapy teaches survivors and their families that they are worthy human beings, that someone they trusted and may have loved hurt and betrayed them, and that any human being would be hurt by such treatment. Therapy helps survivors and families deal with their numerous conflicting and painful thoughts and emotions.

Therapy teaches that child sexual abuse has nothing to do with the worth or worthiness of children and has everything to do with the self-centeredness of perpetrators.

Much of the work that survivors and their families do with professionals is dedicated to education about the nature of the abuse. It is not easy to undo beliefs that children are at fault and something must be wrong with children who are sexually abused.

Non-offending parents often need a great deal of support to work through what can be deep and enduring guilt about their inability to protect their children. Some parents need help working through their own blame of the children.

The issues related to sexual abuse are monumental. Recovery from the effects of child sexual abuse is facilitated by competent professional help. Despite this, some survivors and their families resist seeking professional help. The parents believe they can make it on their own and the child
survivors resist because they are afraid if they get professional help, this means they are crazy. Emily, a thirteen year-old discussed earlier, refused therapy with these words, “I ain’t crazy.”

Indeed she was not crazy. She might accept professional help if the adults in her life could help her to see how important this is. Not only do survivors feel better but they have a much greater chance achieving their own life goals if they talk about the abuse with professionals. Of course, Emily’s parents would have to believe that therapy helps and perhaps model these behaviors by seeking professional consultation themselves.

In cultures where survivors are stigmatized to the point where their families expel them, recovery is much more complex. Recovery depends upon satisfaction of basic human needs for shelter, clothing, and food. Once basic human needs are met, children can be helped to work through the effects of being sexually abused.

Choosing Therapists for Survivors

Parents and adult survivors benefit from guidelines on how to choose therapists who are best suited for their situations. The first step is to find out which therapists specialize in sexual abuse issues. In the United States, state-wide associations of social workers or psychologists have this information. Social workers at sexual assault clinics or medical doctors can provide referrals.

In other countries, local authorities often have this information. Unfortunately, in some areas, there may be few resources for survivors who have to depend upon internet resources or sympathetic friends and family.

When there are professionals available, the next step is for parents or adult survivors to interview therapists. Sometimes, they can obtain preliminary information through a phone conversation. Often, they will continue this conversation through an office visit. The following are the kinds of questions to ask.

Where did you obtain your training?
How long have you worked with survivors of child sexual abuse?
Is child sexual abuse a specialty?
Do you have other specialties?
Do you have a license to practice therapy?
What kinds of therapy do you do?
What kinds of insurance do you take?

Competent professionals have training in working with survivors of child sexual abuse. Often, much of the training is through attendance at workshops and conferences and through supervised training with
knowledgeable professionals. While there are some training programs at colleges and universities, there is a need for many more.

Professionals who have training and experience in child sexual abuse may have other specialties as well, but beware of therapist who claim competence in several different areas. They may not be spread too thin to have the multiple competencies they claim.

Being licensed as a social worker, psychologist, or psychiatrist is important because such licenses mean that the professional has met minimal standards for advanced graduate study as well as for on-going continuing education where they update their skills on a regular basis.

There are many different forms of therapy for survivors. For children and adolescents, the key elements are work with parents as well as with the children, group treatment or pair therapy with the children, and psychoeducation. A combination of emotion-focused, cognitive-behavioral therapy is typical, and, when the therapists are competent, have been found to be effective. The key element in success appears to be the relationships clients form with competent therapists.

Adult survivors may work with therapists on an individual basis, although it is common that some sessions could be held with spouses and partners, with parents, siblings, and other relatives. This can be important for building family relationships in new ways, based on honesty and clear communication. Survivors may find the love and support they have longed for. In some cases, however, family members may not be able to move beyond blame of survivors. When this happens, survivors may find they must detach from these family members for their own mental health.

Paying for therapy can be a major barrier. Most therapists accept health insurance. Some insurance, however, will only cover short-term therapy and may even require certain types of therapy. Once the insurance runs out, therapy may no longer be a option. It is important, therefore, to know before treatment begins how many sessions will take place so that the therapy can be planned accordingly.

There are several types of treatment for survivors: family incest treatment, individual therapy, and group therapy.

**Family Incest Treatment**

Family incest treatment is designed to bring family members back together in new and healthy ways. The goal is to foster the recovery of all family members, but the focus is on family safety. Perpetrators in family incest treatment programs are fathers and stepfathers. They are not allowed
to live with their families and they cannot have unsupervised visits with family members. Perpetrators can only return to their families when the treatment specialists recommend this to courts, and then the judge allows the perpetrators’ return. Few families participate in these programs because most couples break up permanently once incest is disclosed. Family incest treatment can be very helpful when parents want to stay married and the children want relationships to the perpetrators, but want the abuse to stop.

This type of treatment is for families where the children have been victimized and the children are still children. Family incest treatment provides opportunities for all family members to participate. Participation in these programs is voluntary for family members, but perpetrators are almost always in treatment because of court orders.

There are groups for perpetrators, for non-offending spouses, for survivors, and for siblings who were not sexually abused. Couples therapy, individual therapy, family therapy, multiple family therapy, and family life education are other components of family incest treatment programs.

Family incest treatment programs can be intensive, lasting three to four hours every week. Typically, the groups take place weekly for about ninety minutes. On alternative weeks, there are multiple family groups and family life education groups. Couple and individual therapy may take place on another day on a regular basis or occasionally.

Multiple family groups are just that—two to three families meet on a regular basis to discuss their issues. Psychoeducation provides information about human sexuality, sexual development, sexual abuse, and recovery from sexual abuse. Guest speakers, often graduates of the family incest treatment program, are regular features of the psychoeducation.

A Case Example

In some programs, survivors or perpetrators are the sole family members who attend. Individuals who attend on their own benefit from hearing about the experiences of non-related family members. As one example, a bright college-bound survivor named Sarah was the sole member of her family to participate in a family incest treatment program. Her father had sexually abused her, and he was in prison. Her mother and siblings chose not to participate.

In a multiple-family group, a father perpetrator who was a member of another family said to Sarah, “I took advantage of my children. Your father took advantage of you. It is important for you to understand this so you can go on with your life and have a good life.”

This was a transforming moment for Sarah. She felt a tremendous relief, as if a huge weight had been taken from her. She had felt guilty and responsible. To hear these words from a man who had sexually abused his
own children was powerful, much more powerful than hearing the same thing from a professional or from anyone else.

**Therapy for Survivors**

Group treatment is important for survivors of child sexual abuse, whether the treatment takes place in childhood, during the teenage years, or during adulthood. Group treatment is an opportunity for survivors to interact with other people who have had similar experiences. The groups usually meet once a week for ninety minutes. They may be limited to six to twelve sessions or they could be on-going.

When survivors have a chance to get to know other survivors, they often are astonished at how normal other survivors are. There then begin to see themselves in a new light. Survivors also receive the understanding and support they need to make sense out of their experiences.

Survivors may be in such a state of anxiety and shame when they begin treatment that they will not at first benefit from group therapy, and they may not want group work anyway. They therefore have individual therapy sessions. Once survivors feel ready for group work, such groups can be beneficial.

**Special Issues for Child Survivors**

In child survivor groups, often the session are time-limited to about eight to ten sessions and each session is structured around a theme. Typical themes are feelings, boundaries, healthy sexual expression, and who to talk to when something is bothering you. In child groups and in many adolescent groups, there may be two therapists because young people may require more attention and supervision than adults.

When children are in treatment, it is important that parents be involved as well. Parents are key to children’s recovery, and they must be able to provide the acceptance, love, education, and structure that child survivors require to thrive. Parents benefit from supportive counseling and from education about parenting children who have been sexually abused.

Some parents, however, over-react to the children’s sexual abuse or dismiss its significance. An example of over-reacting are parents who are preoccupied with the effects of the abuse on the children to the point where their reactions become part of the problem. These parents share their worries with children: “You are ruined for life.” “I want to kill the perpetrator.” “How will you ever get over it?” These expressions of fear do not help children. Parents are entitled to meltdowns, but for the sake of
children they should have them with other adults out of range of the children. In the presence of their children, they are most helpful when they are calm, attentive, and emotionally available to listen to the children.

An example of a dismissive statement is Katie’s mother who said, “Sexual abuse? What’s the big deal? It happens all the time.” Such statements make things worse for children. Therefore, parents may have to have their own therapy to work through their own traumas, if they have them. Parents who cannot help their children usually are survivors of childhood abuse themselves, and they have never been able to deal with their own issues.

To work through the effects of their own traumas, parents must feel safe and have a great deal of support from family members, friends, and professionals. Often parents do not have this support and thus their own traumas go unaddressed. Their children therefore do not receive adequate help from their parents. Dismissive and preoccupied responses of parents are signs of trauma.

**Treatment for Teenage and Adult Survivors**

With teenagers and adults, family therapy greatly enhances recovery. When family members are unwilling or unable to participate, survivors can and do recover. As mentioned, after some individual therapy and possibly family therapy, survivors enter group treatment. The group begins with a brief check-in where participants give an overview of the past week and can ask for time to discuss a particular issue.

Then, one-by-one participants share what is on with them, usually a troubling incident that they want help with. Other group member share their insights. Therapists provide some guidance, may summarize what clients have said, and offer suggestions about how to cope with or think about troubling issues.

**Core Issues for Survivors**

Core issues for survivors are self-worth, autonomy, emotional expressiveness, gender identity, and sexuality. More specifically, these issues include:

- developing a steady sense of self-worth and letting go of their sense of themselves as worthless and shamed,
- setting boundaries on the behaviors of others such as learning to say no when they do not want to do something or asking sometime to stop a particular behavior and do something else instead,
- standing up to others who want to bully them or boss them
around,

• developing capacities to identify, regulate, and express emotion in ways that are appropriate to the situation,

• having a strong sense of self and not be talked into doing things they regret later, while still being open to what others want,

• establishing intimacy which often involves learning to manage slights and not being swallowed up by hurt and shame when slighted or hurt,

• as parents, being authoritative and not authoritarian or permissive with children,

• negotiating cooperative relationships with others in the workplace,

• accepting themselves as females and males and no longer feeling as if they do not measure up to what they think are ideal standards for their genders,

• coming to terms with and working through any affects that the sexual abuse may have had on their sexual identities and sexual expression, and

• learning to understand sex as an expression of love and intimacy.

Treatment for Children who are Sexually Aggressive

Some children act out sexually in ways that hurt other children and sometimes older children and adults. Some have been sexualized through being sexually abused while others have no known history of being sexually abused. Whatever the origin of their sexual behaviors, they are sexually aggressive and their behaviors hurt other people.

Their sexually aggressive behaviors include those mentioned earlier, such as inserting objects into other children’s vaginas or anuses, grabbing breasts, buttocks, and genitals, and sexual penetration, either alone or a part of a group. There are many documented cases of children under ten committing gang rapes of other children. Many people want to brush off childhood sexual aggression as simple child’s play, while others over-react and are far more punitive than is called for.

Children need help to manage their sexually abusive behaviors. The key building blocks for this help are structure, boundary setting, and rewards when children responds to structure and boundaries. Structure means that the family has a routine such as regular mealtimes, bedtimes, and waking up times. Parents ensure that children have healthy after-school and weekend activities.
In terms of boundaries, children know what is expected of them and parents help them to restrain their behaviors so that they do not infringe of the physical and emotional space of others. In other words, children learn to keep their hands to themselves, not to snoop in the private possessions of others, and not to walk in on people when they are in the bathroom.

Sexual assault is a crime in the United States and most other countries. In almost all states in the United States, children under ten years of age are too young to appear in court. When they commit crimes that would lead to charges of delinquency in older children or to criminal charges as adults, governmental authorities can recommend professional help when such help is available. Typically, however, the children and their families receive no services.

Many adult and adolescent perpetrators of child sexual abuse report that they began sexually abusing others as children. It stands to reason that early intervention with children and their families when the children act out sexually may prevent the development of sexually abusive behaviors in their teen and adult years.

Programs for children with sexual aggression issues have a similar structure to those designed for family incest treatment. These programs involve individual therapy, group psychoeducation for the children, family therapy, and couples therapy for two-parent families, or individual therapy for single-parent families. Partners in two-parent families may also participate in individual therapy.

At the beginning of treatment, some parents and children are willing and able to engage fully in treatment. The children and remorseful and have capacities to reflect upon their behaviors, explain the circumstances of their behaviors, and seek direction from therapists about how to manage these behaviors.

Children with these qualities have parents who are concerned about their children and concerned about any parts they may have played in the children’s behaviors. They are eager to learn what they can do to help their children manage these behaviors.

Typically, however, both parents and children are angry, anxious, ashamed, disorganized, blaming, depressed, or so withdrawn they appear hollow. They may also show remorse and desire to take responsibility but they are inconsistent in this. Parents and particularly children may move back and forth between these states.

Therapists show empathy and understanding while they also are clear that the sexual behaviors are inappropriate. Therapists speak frankly about the children’s sexual behaviors.

The children often experience great relief that adults are finally talking to them directly about sex and that the adults expect them to do
the same. Their prior experiences have taught them that sexual topics are naughty, nasty, dangerous, and taboo.

The group experience for children who have sexually aggressive behaviors typically is time-limited, up to twelve weeks long, with five to six children and two therapists. As described earlier in the discussion of group treatment of child and adolescent survivors, each session has a theme that includes information on the topic and then practice in using what they learned.

The topics are sex specific, meaning that each of them is connected to sexual expression and these connections are made explicit in the groups. For example, on sessions dealing with feelings, children participate in sessions that help them to connect their sexual behaviors with their emotional states. In sessions on boundaries, children do exercises that help them to understand sexual boundaries, such as when, where, and with whom sexual behaviors are important.

Parents are invited into the last ten or fifteen minutes of the group so that the children can show them what they learned during the session.

In family work, therapists assess and work with the family processes that contribute to the children’s sexual issues. Professionals rely upon parental commitment to their children and their willingness to address issues that have negative effects on children.

Treatment is challenging under any conditions, but when the families are well-organized with relatively few stressors, therapists are optimistic. Treatment becomes more complicated and the outcome less likely to be optimal when families have multiple stressors.

The identification of family strengths and resources is important in building working and their willingness and ability to be of help to the children. Thus, the identification of family strengths and affirmation of family members for their strengths may be pivotal in developing working alliances with families.

Guilt and shame associated with having a child who acts out sexually can be a barrier to parent’s full participant in treatment programs for their children. Feeling affirmed for what they do well and avoidance of stigmatization and blaming are important to building working alliances.

Often long-term family relationships are factors in children’s sexual acting out. For example, in two parent families with marital conflict, the parents often are too preoccupied to be emotionally available to their children. In such instances, parents must deal with their own issues before they can be helpful to their children.
Case Examples

The following cases illustrate treatment issues in two different families. In one family, the child learned to control his sexually aggressive behaviors and the other child did not. Child and family willingness and capacities to engage in therapy are key to success in learning to manage sexually aggressive child behaviors. The more risks children have and the fewer resources, the more difficult it will be for them to manage their sexually aggressive behaviors.

Chuck, for example, at age nine had so many risks and so few resources that treatment did not work and he had to live in a locked residential treatment facility. His mother Patricia first tried treatment in a community mental health center. When the therapists did the assessment, they were not optimistic that they could help Chuck. He had multiple mental health issues, some related to a history of trauma but many apparently related to neurological issues that included attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, intermittent explosive disorder, and conduct disorder. Chuck was on three different medications for his behaviors and had had one psychiatric hospitalization.

Chuck had multiple instances of sexually acting out, including at school, in the neighborhood, and in the psychiatric hospital. His sexual preoccupation was pervasive. These behaviors included grabbing and fondling the genitals of other children, masturbating in public places, and numerous instances of trying to see his mother naked. He displayed other behavioral problems that included violent behaviors, fire-setting, wetting his bed nightly, difficulties controlling his bowels, and generally presenting as uncontrollable. He had never met his biological father. All he knew was that he is African-American. Patricia was white.

Patricia was a single mother who worked at low-paying jobs and had to take three buses to get him to treatment. She was concerned about her son and provided him with enriching experiences such as summer camp and Boys’ and Girls’ Club. She used respite foster care that seems to help her to tolerate Chuck’s difficult behaviors. Being poor, she and Chuck lived in a high crime neighborhood where Chuck had been sexually abused many times.

Patricia had a history of incest victimization by her brother, and her family never believed her. She had never had treatment for her incest and did not want it. She resisted the therapists’ observation that her personal issues could affect Chuck. She allowed Chuck to be with her in the bathroom when she used the toilet, and she let him use the bathtub as his toilet.
Patricia had few friends and often felt neighbors took advantage of her. She was estranged from her own family. She also had a series of boyfriends who beat her, often in the presence of Chuck.

Finally, Patricia did not follow through with the therapists’ recommendation for individual therapy for Chuck or family/parent therapy for herself.

Chuck learned a great deal in the group portion of the treatment, but he had so many behavioral issues that Patricia could not care for him in her home, and she had him placed in a residential treatment facility.

In contrast to Chuck, therapists were optimistic that they could help John who came to their attention when he was six. John and his family had more resources than Chuck and his family. His parents were cooperative. Unlike Patricia, they had no histories of sexual abuse or other childhood traumas and no parental physical abuse. They had close relationships with their extended families. They both worked and had good paying jobs. They owned their own home in a pleasant residential neighborhood.

John was remorseful. Besides his sexually abusive behaviors, he had no other behavioral issues except anxiety, which the therapists attributed to family stressors and his history of being molested by the husband of his daycare provider. He also witnessed the sexual abuse of other children. The sexual abuse took place when he was about four years old. Soon afterward, John began acting out sexually with other children in the neighborhood. His parents could not persuade him to stop. John wanted to stop, but apparently could not.

John was sad and lonely. Neighborhood parents stopped their children from playing with John. John believed his father did not love him because he father was very quiet at home and rarely interacted with anyone in his family.

While John participated in group, individual, and family therapy, his parents did couples and individual therapy. John’s father admitted that he drank too much, was depressed, and was having an affair on the internet, though he had not met the woman. His mother realized that she also was depressed. Both of them agreed to go on antidepressants for a trial period of six months while they did therapeutic work.

John’s father stopped drinking, broke off his affair, and spent more time with John and the rest of his family. John’s mother found that she felt much better. The two parents fell in love again and got married. Through family therapy, John realized that his father loved him.
After four months of group, individual, and family therapy and the improvement in his parents’ relationship, John became a relaxed and happy boy. He had quickly grasped and applied concepts he learned in individual, family, and group treatment and learned how to cope with his anxiety and other emotional stress. He had stopped trying to talk other children in sexual activities and he had grabbing other children’s sexual body parts. He developed friends at school, and parents in his neighborhood once again allowed their children to play with him.

This case had a “happily ever after” ending. John and his family successfully completed treatment. The therapists recommended that John return to treatment should issues arise as he reached various developmental stages.

When John was about twelve, he told his parents he needed a “tune-up,” meaning he wanted to see his therapists again because he had been thinking about being sexual with other children. At different points in children’s development, whether they are survivors only but also children who act out, they often require professional help at various times throughout the years.

**Treatment of Adolescent Perpetrators**

As shown by the stories that child survivors told earlier in this book, adolescents sometimes perpetrate child sexual abuse. Boys more than girls perpetrate, but it is important to recognize that some girls perpetrate as well. Otherwise, girl perpetrators will not get the interventions they require and the experiences of the children they victimize may be minimized. Girls perpetrate against other girls as well as against boys. Boy perpetrate against other boys and against girls. As in other types of child sexual abuse, For the purposes of this discussion, adolescents are young people between the ages of thirteen and seventeen years old.

In the United States, children ten and older are legally accountable for sex acts that are against the law in almost all jurisdictions. When these children are convicted of sexual abuse, they are sentenced to a correctional facility or to community-based treatment. Young people whom the courts judge to be at low risk are sentenced to community-based treatment while higher risk young people go into juvenile facilities. Young people in community-base programs have probation officers who may recommend to the courts that the young people be remanded to a correctional facility if they resist treatment.

Young people commit a wide variety of sexual offenses against children that come to the attention of the law. Underwear stealing, flashing, peeping, one-time sexual touches, repeated episodes of sexual abuse, date rape, sexually aggressive behaviors in groups, and instances of lone sexual
assaults that involve penetration and often personal injury. Many programs tailor their programs to fit the seriousness of the offenses and the young peoples’ degree of risk.

Community-based programs often are structured in similar ways to family incest treatment and other programs already discussed, including individual, group, family, and couples therapy for parents in combination with psychoeducation for the young people and their parents. Programs may require low-risk offenders, such as naïve experimenters, to attend the program for a relatively short period of time. Psychoeducation and discussion of what they did and why their behaviors were inappropriate and abusive are main topics of their treatment. They successfully complete treatment when they appear to understand that what they did was wrong and that they now know what is appropriate or not. Often these children have high resource, low risk families, like John’s, discussed earlier.

Young people who commit more serious offenses stay in community-based treatment for up to a year. They receive prolonged psychoeducation and long-term therapy. To the extent possible, parents are involved in the treatment program. Some parents are unwilling or unable to participate because of their own trauma histories and histories of mental illness and chemical dependency. Children with a limited degree of family support are at higher risk to reoffend. When families are willing to deal with issues that might contribute to young people’s acting out, the young people are at lower risk to reoffend.

Sex offender treatment also takes place in juvenile correctional facilities. Some of these programs appear to work well while the young people are in the programs. Once the young people return home, many of the gains of treatment can be lost. While there is little hard evidence, programs that are effective in preventing future sex offenses work with young people and their families and help families change their ways so that they can be of help to the young people when they return home.

Most young people who have perpetrated child sexual abuse return to the family home. In order to ensure the safety of other children in the family and in the community, some programs have several different strategies for rehabilitating perpetrators, for repairing family relationships, and for ensuring child safety. These strategies include apology letters, impact sessions, and apology and reconciliation sessions.

Apology Letters

Apology letters are routine in many adolescent treatment programs. The young people may work for weeks and months before they can produce
a statement that shows they understand and accept full responsibility for the sexual abuse. Therapists and members of their therapy groups help these young people figure out what to say and then decide whether the letter is adequate.

The letter is not sent unless the therapists know for sure that survivors and families are ready to receive it. Therefore, the family and the child survivors may be in therapy themselves when these letters are sent.

**Impact Sessions**

Some programs have impact sessions, where survivors and other family members meet with adolescent perpetrators to tell perpetrators what the abuse has meant to them. Such sessions are best done with a great deal of preparation, when treatment professionals believe that perpetrators are ready to hear what people they victimized have to say.

Survivors and family members also require preparation and support so that these sessions do not have unintended consequences of leading to more hurt, guilt and shame. If perpetrators hear directly from survivors about the impact of their sexually abusive behaviors, this could be a strong motivation for perpetrators to change.

Survivors and other family members have an opportunity to tell perpetrators directly what the abuse has meant. This can be empowering as providing a boost in confidence and self-worth.

**Apologies and Reconciliation**

If impact sessions go well, programs may then move on to apology and reconciliation sessions. This takes a great deal of preparation and cannot be done unless the child survivors are completely prepared to deal directly with the abusers and the abusers are completely prepared to take total responsibility for their behaviors. In addition, family members must be prepared to support and encourage children throughout the process.

Apology and reconciliation sessions are rare and require highly skilled and competent professionals. At least two professionals plan and coordinate these sessions: professionals who work with perpetrators and those who work with survivors and families.

There are a couple of reasons why such sessions are rare. First, the discovery of child sexual abuse often results in families ending relationships with perpetrators, as already discussed. Second, relatively few professionals are competent to do these sessions, and some believe that cut-off from perpetrators is the best course. However, when children want relationships with the persons who abused them, then this should be taken into consideration.
As strongly as adults may feel about no contact, children often are deeply attached to perpetrators, want the perpetrators to get help, and certainly do not sexual contact with them. Ideally, apologies and reconciliation sessions would be available to all persons who would want them.

Treatment of Adult Perpetrators

Adult perpetrators of children sexual abuse rarely seek treatment voluntarily because they are afraid of the consequences. Not only do they fear social disgrace, loss of jobs, and loss of families, but they also fear prison terms and the prospects of being labeled as sex offenders for the rest of their lives. These are the consequences of sexually abusing children.

Therapists often prefer that sex offenders be court-ordered into treatment and that they serve prison time if they do not cooperate with treatment. They have found that many cannot motivate themselves to do the hard work that is required in treatment unless they have serious consequences hanging over their heads.

Advantages of Accountability

Perpetrators are more likely to avoid prison time if they take responsibility for their sexually abusive behaviors. Judges and prosecuting attorneys see this as indicators of remorse and wishes to reform. Some perpetrators turn themselves in, with full knowledge of the consequences. Others, upon arrest, admit their crimes and plead guilty. When perpetrators take responsibility for their behaviors, the result can be suspended sentences, probation, and court-ordered sex offender treatment. If they fail treatment, they serve time in prison for what had been probation time.

Some sentences combine jail time, community-based treatment, and probation. Offenders may spend six months to a year in jail before they enter community treatment programs. Sometimes the “jail” time is time in a workhouse where perpetrators are on work release. They therefore can send support payments to their families.

A few community programs are in-patient, meaning that the offenders are under twenty-four hour supervision and have intensive treatment for several hours a day. These offenders live together, eat together, and have various treatment sessions and educational programs together. These are therapeutic environments in which participants may live for up to two years.
After successful completion of the residential program, offenders may enter another less supervised phase of treatment where they live near the treatment facility but in apartments that the facility owns. The offenders work every day, pay rent, and in general support themselves and their families, but they also participate in several hours of treatment a week. The next phase involves aftercare, where offenders live in their own residences, work, and attend support groups for up to a year or more. They typically are on probation for the length of the residential treatment and for years afterward.

These programs may offer family sessions, marriage counseling, and encourage apology letters, and reconciliation sessions, again carefully done with close attention to the wishes and well-being of child survivors. These sessions are done for the benefit of survivors first and foremost and their safety is paramount. If there is little possibility of benefit to survivors, none of these activities take place.

These activities may promote offender awareness of the impact of what they did. After Juice had been in community-based sex offender treatment for a year, he had an impact session with his stepdaughter and wife. He said:

*I told myself I was just going to listen and not respond unless they asked for a response. It was hard sitting in that session listening.*

What made it hard for Juice was “feeling the shame and guilt for doing it to her.” Juice said the session made a big impression on him:

*A lot of the stuff she said still sticks with me right now, today. That's where I get my motivation from, to, to try to change some of the behaviors that I engaged in.*

For Juice, however, the impact was not immediate. He failed the community-based treatment program for drinking alcohol, breaking curfew, and having a hunting knife for a weapon. He made his statement about the impact statement two years after the session, when he was in a prison-based incest treatment program. Whether he really meant what he said is hard to know. If it is possibly true, this could be therapeutic to his stepdaughter.

**Other community treatment programs** are not in-patient and the offenders live in the community on their own. They may have therapy for a few hours a week or more and are able to go to work every day. Judges order the offenders not to live with their families, but most often the families do not want the offenders living with them anyway.
Sentences to community-based treatment are conditional. If these individuals fail treatment, they go to prison for the length of their probation. Owen, mentioned earlier, failed a community-based program and had to serve what had been a ten-year probation as a ten-year prison sentence.

Judges sentence offenders to community-based programs when they think offenders are at low risk to re-offend or to commit other anti-social acts. Typically, this means that they have no criminal record, a stable work history, and ties to family and community.

When judges have evidence that offenders are at high risk to re-offend because of criminal records and instability in work and family, offenders typically are sentenced to prison.

Treatment may be available in prison-based programs. Often prison officials give incentives for participation in treatment, such as earlier release time and housing in units where offenders do not have to worry about their physical safety. Other inmates may detest men convicted of sex offenses against children, whom they consider “baby rapists.”

Both prison-based and community-based treatment use group treatment models that includes psychoeducation about emotions, grief and loss, and critical thinking. Sex offender group treatment typically is based on cognitive-behavioral approaches, where participants learn to identify the thoughts and emotions connected with their sexually abusive behaviors and then learn how to manage their thoughts and emotions before they get to the point where they act out sexually. Many programs work with perpetrators on their beliefs that enable them to perpetrate against children and with any childhood traumas that may be factors in their sex offending behaviors.

Like other treatment models, prison-based sex offender treatment programs sometimes offer sessions with spouses and child survivors, typically with great attention be paid to the preparation of all parties involved in order to avoid further harm to children and their families.

There is debate whether or not treatment works for perpetrators of child sexual abuse. Studies show that persons who complete sex abuse treatment are far less likely to abuse children sexually than those who do not complete treatment or do not participate in treatment at all.

In general, treatment is effective for most perpetrators. Since most perpetrators live in families and communities, safety for children is more likely if these individuals have gone through treatment.

Other Policies and Programs
Treatment professionals believe that a small percentage of perpetrators of child sexual abuse are unable to respond to treatment and are such high risk to sexually abuse in the future that they must be committed to locked mental health hospitals as sexually dangerous and psychopathic.

Thousands of men and a few women are now so confined. The condition of their release is completion of treatment. Few individuals who are committed under mental health laws have been released.

There are other strategies meant to keep children safe, such as community notification, sex offender registries, and laws that prevent convicted sex offenders from living near schools, daycare centers, and playgrounds.

Community notification involves public meetings where officials from departments of corrections provide information about on offenders classified at highest risk and who is moving into the neighborhood. Not all sex offenders are subject to community notification, but only those at highest risk.

Sex offender registries are a means of keeping track of where sex offenders live. In addition to adults, some states require adolescents and even children under the age of twelve and who are adjudicated as sex offenders are required to register. Adult sex offender registries can be helpful to law enforcement, but they also are available to the general public.

Many states in the United States forbid registered sex offenders from living anywhere from 500 to 2500 hundred feet away from where children congregate, such as daycare centers, schools, and playgrounds.

There is concern about the fairness and wisdom of labeling children and adolescents as sex offenders. Although it is true that most adult perpetrators of child sexual abuse began their abusive behaviors in childhood and adolescence, many more young people stop their sexually abusive behaviors for any number of reasons and are no longer a threat.

The earlier example Mary, the teenage girl who abused the children she babysat is typical of the kinds of sexual abuse that young people commit and then stop doing. These are not chronic offenders, but young people who can be considered “naïve experimenters,” a term used for persons whose behaviors that cross the line but are unlikely to ever act this way again.

Responsible social policy and practice take into consideration the many risk and protective factors that perpetrators of child sexual abuse show over their lifetimes. Decisions about treatment, prison time, reconciliation, registries, community notification must be based on accurate, reliable information about risks and factors that suggest that those who have perpetrated are capable of changing their behaviors.
In the fall of 2007, Human Rights Watch published a report on sex offender policy. The report stated that the protection of children is paramount but it also asked whether the sweep of some of the laws actually made children less safe. Researchers found that some registered offenders pose no risk. An example is a man who lives in California and who was arrested for urinating in public twenty-two years ago. He is on the California sex offender registry.

Other registered sex offenders have lived law-abiding lives for many years and have long histories of public service. The report asked whether persons who have shown strong evidence of reform should be on registries where there is public access.

Patty Wetterling, whose son Jacob was abducted and never heard from again almost twenty years ago, is concerned that the implementation of some of these laws make children less safe rather than more safe. She wrote:

*Human Rights Watch found that many laws may not prevent sexual attacks on children, but do lead to harassment, ostracism and even violence against former offenders. That makes it nearly impossible to rehabilitate those people and reintegrate them safely into their communities—and that may actually increase the risk that they’ll repeat their crime.*

We need to keep sight of the goal: no more victims. We need to be realistic. Not all sex offenders are the same. Not all sex offenders are the same. We need to ask tougher questions: What can we do to help those who have offended so that they will not do it again? What are the social factors contributing to sexual violence and how can we turn things around? None of us want our loved ones to be victims of sexual violence. None of us want to be the parent or sibling or child of a sex offender. But since the vast majority of sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the family, sexual violence becomes personal very quickly. If affects all of us.

In this book, Patty Wetterling has the last word about sex offender policy.
CHAPTER 18

Public Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

The stories in this book provide guidelines for the prevention of childhood sexual abuse.

Child sexual abuse is an epidemic in the United States and throughout the world. If children were infected with a crippling physical disease, there would be world-wide support for its eradication. Indeed, medical science has eradicated or practically eradicated many childhood diseases, such as whooping cough, measles, and mumps. Meanwhile, perpetrators abuse children in the millions each year.

It is time that child sexual abuse rises to the top of the social agenda. An informed public is a key element in the prevention of child sexual abuse.

Unfortunately, the general public is greatly influenced by myths and taboos about sexual abuse and sexuality. Well-publicized cases of child abduction, rape, and murder may represent in the minds of many the true nature of child sexual abuse. The general public may believe that these are isolated incidents and have little awareness that most perpetrators are family members and friends of families.

In many cases, people cannot connect the dots. They are horrified at reports of child sexual abuse, but many also believe that victims are responsible for their own sexual abuse. Rather than a helping attitude and an insistence that public institutions be responsive to survivors and their families, there is silence.

The child protection system in the United States is a case in point. Public child protection agencies are in the front line for dealing with child sexual abuse. These agencies are underfunded to the point where social workers have so many cases that they are unable to provide adequate services. Many child protection workers burn out because they are cannot protect children from situations where they are being sexually abused.

Often they do not have the necessary evidence, but sometimes children remain in abusive homes because child protection social workers or the professionals with whom they collaborate do not have the time, training, and resources to do a thorough investigation, nor do they appreciate the seriousness of child sexual abuse.
The success of social workers in protecting children depends on the quality of the work of other professionals such as police, attorneys, judges, psychologists, teachers, and medical doctors. These professionals may not understand child sexual abuse and may not respond to what some social workers believe is compelling evidence.

Medical personnel and teachers often are unfamiliar with the signs and symptoms of child sexual abuse. Many are reluctant to testify in court because of the time required to do so. Some teachers punish children when children are reliving or acting out traumas associated with being sexual abuse survivors.

Few professional training programs offer courses on child sexual abuse. Therefore, when professionals are confronted with cases involving child sexual abuse they often are unprepared to respond knowledgeably. Some of the most competent professionals working today obtained good general training in graduate schools throughout the country, but for their specific training in child sexual abuse they depend upon training they receive at workshops and conferences and also through on-the-job training.

Public responses to child sexual abuse are fragmented. On the one hand, there may be horror and terror when children are sexually abused. Some countries have enacted policies that in many cases are helpful but often make the problem worse, such as allowing public access to sex offender registries when those named are at low risk to reoffend. On the other hand, public social services are underprepared and unfunded to provide the services required to be truly responsive to survivors and their families.

Efforts at Prevention

Short-term prevention programs that are designed to help children avoid being sexually abused are generally available to children through schools and religious organizations. These programs can and do help prevent some sexual abuse, and they encourage children being sexually abused to tell someone. Often, the programs come too late, as Vickie’s story shows, or the children do not understand sexual abuse even when they have been educated, as several children’s stories show.

Children on the whole are ignorant about sexuality and child sexual abuse. Taboos and stigma silence children when they are sexually abused. If overnight adults woke up and provided children with healthy
sex education, most child sexual abuse would be eradicated. Sadly, the general public is not concerned enough to insist on this and frighten them into silence.

In addition, there is a great need for programs that teach children not to sexually abuse others. Focusing on victims as a way to prevent child sexual abuse is important, but prevention efforts are incomplete if they also do not include prevention of sexual perpetration. Focusing only on what victims can do places far too much responsibility on children and shifts attention away from those truly responsible and that is perpetrators.

The stories in this book provide guidelines for preventing perpetration. They show that some people believe that they are entitled to obtain social and emotional gratification from children. They show that some people have callous disregard for children and for human life when they stand to gain financially from the sexual exploitation of children.

The stories show that perpetrators once were children. They were exposed to beliefs, behaviors, and practices that tell them that it is okay to use other children sexually to make themselves feel better. They have learned that they can use their physical size, strength, and authority to take what they want from children. They put themselves first. They take advantage of children. They abuse their power.

Males are much more at risk to use and abuse children sexually. This attests to the existence of socially acceptable male entitlement to take what they want regardless of consequences for children. All men to some extent are exposed to male privilege. The men who use this privilege to sexually abuse children appear to have stunted emotional development. They simply cannot understand that children are separate human beings with rights and privileges that decent people do not violate.

The gender imbalance also suggests there are wide-spread problems in how adults foster or do not foster the emotional development of boys. Boys at high risk to sexually abuse children do not become perpetrators when they find people to confide in and when they positive role models they want to emulate. Emotionally isolated persons, person who have disconnected emotionally from themselves and from others are at highest risk to abuse children sexually.

The women perpetrators who told their stories show how when they abused children sexually, they were overly focused on soothing themselves and making themselves feel better that they disconnected from the children.

The promotion of healthy emotional development and rejection of entitlements are key elements in child sexual abuse prevention efforts.
StopItNow!

A noteworthy prevention effort is StopItNow! The original intent of StopItNow! was to provide resources for persons who are thinking about sexually abusing children or who already are. The organization still has this as one of its purposes but so many survivors and family members use the website that StopItNow! has become a resource for families and survivors.

Sometimes family members, friends of the family, acquaintances, and colleagues suspect that someone they respect and care about is sexually abusing a child. It is common that they dismiss such thoughts immediately. Their denial can be based upon disbelief that someone they know and respect could sexually abuse children. Denial may also be an evasion of the difficulties of dealing with the issue. Family members, friends, and colleagues also may be afraid of the consequences if they are wrong.

StopItNow! provides information for those concerned about individuals who may be sexually abusing children. The service is free, anonymous, and easily accessible through Stopitnow.com. The website has information and resources to help family members, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances to decide how to respond to their suspicions.

StopItNow! also has a great deal of information for survivors and their families about sexual abuse, including effects on victims, sources of help, and what sexual abuse means to perpetrators.

The information for abusers or those thinking of abusing is intended to help them to stop abusing now. The website guides individuals through the processes of seeking professional help. For persons who have abused children sexually, there is encouragement to take responsibility for their behaviors and to turn themselves into the police. The website also provides case studies of perpetrators who have done this.

The internet is a great source of information about child sexual abuse. A list of internet resources is in the Appendix.

Summary

Child sexual abuse is a serious social problem that affects the quality of life and life chances of uncounted millions of survivors in the United States and internationally. Child sexual abuse hurts all who are
victimized, but some children learn to cope with, adapt to, and overcome its affects because they have people in their lives who understand the true nature of child sexual abuse and who provide them with the information and support they need to recover.

The more adversities survivors have experienced, the more difficult recovery is. In these conditions, child sexual abuse becomes one more threat to their optimal development.

The myths, misunderstandings, and victim-blaming associated with child sexual abuse shifts attention away from perpetrators and silences survivors. Much more public attention needs to be paid to child sexual abuse so that the general public is better educated, that professionals are prepared, and that programs designed to prevent sexual abuse in the first place or to work with survivors when abuse has occurred actually are effective.
REFERENCES


FURTHER READINGS


INTERNET RESOURCES


Institute of Child Development, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, USA: http://www.education.umn.edu/ICD


MaleSurvivor, USA: http://www.malesurvivor.org

Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse: http://ssw.che.umn.edu/Connections/MINCAVA.html


Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, USA: http://www.rainn.org

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, USA: http://www.siecus.org

Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) www.snapnetwork.org

Stop It Now!, USA: http://www.stopitnow.org
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Jane F. Gilgun, Ph.D., LICSW, is professor, School of Social Work, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, USA. She has done research on child sexual abuse for more than twenty-five years, focusing on perpetrators and survivors in order to discover what child sexual abuse means to them and why some people sexually abuse children while persons with similar risks do not.

She has had many other research projects, including documenting client change in a program for children at risk to enter the juvenile justice system, children in treatment foster care, and adoption of children with special needs.

Her primary practice experience has been with abused and neglected children and their families at Rhode Island (USA) Child Welfare Services.

She has published widely, most recently on a new approach to child and family assessment that includes resilience, cognitive schemas, gender issues, and neuropsychology and on the four cornerstones of evidence-based practice. She has presented locally, nationally, and internationally on child sexual abuse, other forms of violence, resilience, and treatment approaches that build on client strengths.

She has many publications available at janegilgun.com, helium.com, fionaspeaks.blogspot.com, and ssw.che.umn.edu/Faculty_Profiles/Gilgun_Jane.html Many of these publications are free.

Professor Gilgun has a Ph.D. in child and family studies from Syracuse University, USA, a master’s in social work from the University of Chicago, and a licentiate in family studies and sexuality from the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium. In addition, she has a bachelor’s and master’s degree in English literature.
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His work as a social work practitioner, researcher, activist, and trainer in the area of child sexual abuse, child labor, sex-selective feticide, and violence against women has taken him to different parts of India and other countries such as Afghanistan, Singapore and Philippines.

In India, he helped start Tulir, a non-profit organization committed to preventing and addressing child sexual abuse. He has also contributed towards developing resources for children, parents, families and schools aimed at building awareness and generating sensitive response on child rights and child sexual abuse.

He likes listening to folk music from around the world, reading fiction, scribbling poetry, and dreaming of traveling to Iceland.