

Sixth Edition

**A Book for Men
Helping Female Partners
Deal with Childhood Sexual Abuse**

What About Me

**The Only Book Written
by a Partner of a Survivor**

By Grant Cameron

To my wife Liz, for choosing the right path

Published by Grant Cameron

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What About Me? A Book for Men Helping Female Partners Deal with Childhood Sexual Abuse

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What About Me?

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What About Me? is for the silent sufferers — the men who are helping female partners recover from the trauma of childhood sexual abuse. The book is unique because it's the end result of the traumatic and trying times Grant Cameron encountered while helping his wife, Liz, deal with her abusive past. If you are a partner of someone who was abused as a child, you will find this book enlightening. It takes you into the world of a child sexual abuse survivor and explains in laymen's terms how to help, deal and cope with the survivor's anger, grief and pain. Grant covers important subjects like the inner child, the necessity for breaks and how to be a support.

Foreword

I wrote this book for one purpose — to help the millions of men around the world who are trying to help their partner heal from the torment and trauma of childhood sexual abuse.

I am the husband of a woman who was sexually abused as a child. I therefore know what it's like to help someone deal with that horrid past.

As a result of my experience, I know most of the traps and pitfalls, the things to watch out for, and the best way to overcome difficulties.

I know first-hand how it feels to see someone heal. I also have some good ideas as to how you — and the survivor — can get through it all.

There wasn't much information around when I began the long and arduous journey with my wife Liz.

Men who are partners of childhood sexual abuse survivors are often left to their own devices. There are few places to turn to for help.

This book, then, is for the men who have searched but cannot find the answers.

It is for any male partner who suddenly finds himself thrust, without any guidance, into the dark, mysterious and problem-filled world of the adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse.

It does not, in any way, take the place of a good counselor. Nor does it answer every question you might have. However, it will give you some good solid insight on what to expect. I am not a therapist or counselor. But that is what makes this book different. It is written from the perspective of a husband and partner of a childhood sexual abuse survivor.

If the partner is able to better understand the healing process, it makes the survivor's job a little easier.

On these pages, I draw on my personal experiences as a husband and supporter of someone who has gone through the painful process of healing.

I talk openly about subjects like trust and anger, suicide, sex and nightmares. I try to educate, dispel myths and misconceptions, and offer advice on coping and whether to stay or go.

There are many good books on the market to help the survivor of childhood sexual abuse — and I am thankful for that. Liz turned to many of these resources during her healing process. However, there isn't much available for the men who are helping their partners heal. Often, they are accompanying the survivor on the healing journey with nowhere to turn for help.

This book will give you a greater understanding of the myriad issues surrounding childhood sexual abuse. It will help you to prepare for the rocky journey ahead. It will help you to understand why your partner says and does certain things while they're healing. It will also help you gain a better understanding of your own actions and feelings.

Introduction

Don't feel alone, embarrassed or ashamed. Many men have been through it. We're all vulnerable. Believe me.
You could be a labourer, salesman, businessman or carpenter. It doesn't matter. It can happen unexpectedly.

When it does, you'll feel like you've been hit by a knockout punch. It strikes with a force you've never felt before.

If you're lucky, you'll find the inner strength that it takes to shake it off, find your legs and get up from the canvas to fight.

Rest assured, though, your life will never be the same again. I can guarantee you that.

It happened to me several years ago. It seems like such a long time now, but it's a moment I'll never forget.

I was sitting on the couch in my apartment, watching some TV with Liz — who was then my girlfriend and is now my wife. We'd been dating for a while and I was comfortable around her.

I didn't think about it much at the time, but I'd noticed she was always a little distant. I couldn't put my finger on it, but sometimes when I'd try to get close to her she'd get uptight and move away. Other times, while spending time together, she'd just go very quiet and say nothing at all. A few times, for no apparent reason, she'd erupt like a volcano.

I figured it was just her personality.

That night, though, I learned that something else was bothering her — something that was deep inside her, something you couldn't see or touch, something she couldn't control, something which was ruining her life.

As I sat there watching TV, I noticed that I was being studied. Liz was staring at me with a very strange look, as though deep in thought.

"What's wrong?" I asked her, unaware that the answer would turn my world upside down.

In an instant, she blurted it out.

"I've been getting harassing phone calls," she said. "And I know who they're from — my stepfather."

"It's just one of the ways he tries to harass me," she added.

"He sexually abused me when I was a young child and now he is still trying to control me."

There was a long period of silence.

I searched for something intelligent to say. Here I was, suddenly presented with a very startling and unsettling revelation. I was dumbfounded. Inside, I felt like a bomb had just exploded.

Liz stared at me, waiting for some type of reaction.

I really didn't know what to think. I'd had a good upbringing. It hadn't entered my mind that such things happen in this world. As a child and adult, I'd lived a life sheltered from abuse. It was something I only read about — something I'd seen only on TV or the movies. I'd never really given the problem much thought. It didn't happen to people I knew.

Never in my wildest dreams did I think it happened to real people — especially a girl I was dating.

Questions began to flood my thoughts. I didn't know how to react.

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I sensed she was telling the truth, but I still found it hard to believe.

After several minutes of silence, I spoke up.

“What do you mean?” I asked. “Why would your stepfather do such a thing?”

Liz paused for a moment then went on to explain how her mother had caught him red-handed.

“So what’s your mother going to do about it?” I asked. “What has she done about it? Is she going to call the police? Is she going to leave him?”

The questions came flooding out. It all seemed perfectly logical to me that something would be done. How could somebody stay with a guy like that?

Liz was evasive.

“Well,” she said, “I don’t really know. My mother said she’d handle it.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Well, he’s always trying to harass me. One time, when I was younger, he put pubic hairs on my toothbrush.”

Suddenly I was enraged. How could somebody be so demented? How could a grown man do such a thing to his stepdaughter? What could I do to stop it? Why hasn’t Liz done something about it? I turned to ask her.

At that moment, though, I could see that Liz needed a listening ear, not a lecture. So for the next several hours she talked and I listened.

She told me about her childhood and how her stepfather sexually abused her. She told me how she’d wake up at night, to find him watching with a strange, mad look on his face.

She told me how he’d ruin her clothes, embarrass her in front of her friends and family and, in later years, get jealous when she dated boys.

She told me how he kept the family moving from house to house out of fear that one of the children would get close to neighbours and squeal on him.

She told me about the episodes in the bathtub, the attic, all of the times she tried to tell somebody and how nobody listened or did anything about it.

She told me what happened when she first told her mother about the abuse, how her mother listened, then told the stepfather, and how later, when the stepfather cornered Liz alone, he called her a dirty little bitch for telling on him.

She told me about the sleepless nights, the nightmares, flashbacks and feelings of hatred towards men that she’d kept locked inside for years.

She told me of how the stepfather continued to harass her, how in her older years he still abused her, not physically anymore, but emotionally — through comments and phone calls.

I didn’t realize it at the time, but while I listened to Liz recall memories of her childhood sexual abuse, I had taken the first steps on a long, arduous and rocky journey that would change my life forever. From that day on, I’d learn more about a strange and very distorted world — a world I didn’t know existed — the world of the childhood sexual abuse survivor.

I prefer the term survivor because any woman who has experienced childhood sexual abuse, incest or molestation truly is a survivor in every sense of the word.

In this book, the word “survivor” is used to refer to any woman who is healing from childhood sexual abuse — be it a wife, mate, lover or friend. I most often interchange the word “wife” and “survivor” merely because it fits more easily into the writing pattern. I use the term “supporter” to refer to the one who is trying to help a partner deal with the effects of childhood sexual abuse. A supporter can be any

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male partner, a husband, boyfriend or relative.

I have been asked if the advice I offer in this book can be applied to a homosexual relationship in which one partner was sexually abused as a child. My belief is that it certainly can.

The perpetrator, of course, is the person who committed the act of sexual abuse on a child.

In this book I draw on my own personal experiences and those of others to try to answer some of the questions you may have about childhood sexual abuse, explain how it affects the survivor in her life, and suggest what you can do to try to help her cope during this difficult period.

While I don't profess to be an expert, I do have first-hand knowledge. Having gone through the ordeal of helping a survivor heal from childhood sexual abuse, I believe my experiences will help you deal with some of the issues you may face as you help a survivor.

This book will give you some insight into the world of the survivor, why she feels certain things, why she says certain things and why she sometimes seems very detached while going through the healing process. Hopefully, I can enlighten you about your feelings and how to deal with them.

Childhood sexual abuse can have a devastating effect. It can cause deep-rooted and long-lasting emotional problems for the victim.

The abuse steals innocence from a child and never gives it back. It takes away a child's security, replacing it with horrid, terrifying experiences, memories of which will last a lifetime.

You'll understand what I mean as you begin to learn more about the roller-coaster world of the child abuse survivor and how it has affected her daily life in terms of lost opportunities.

If you're reading this, I suspect that you've already taken a step on that long, rocky road to helping a survivor heal the dark wounds of her past.

If you have, chances are you've already experienced some of the pain and anguish that goes with the healing. You're probably now searching for some new clues and solutions to this emotionally charged puzzle. It can be an overwhelming experience and you may be inundated with emotions and problems of your own as the survivor begins the healing process.

I don't know if it will be any consolation to you, but the fact of the matter is that you're not alone.

Millions of men around the world are helping survivors of childhood sexual abuse. More and more men are in the delicate position of dealing with female partners who've been abused.

The survivors could be wives, girlfriends, co-workers or family members.

The number of victims of childhood sexual abuse is larger than we ever imagined, as women of all ages confront and try to heal the wounds of their past. In recent years, women have been flocking to therapists, support groups, crisis and sexual assault centres.

These women are newlyweds and young mothers. They're also women who've raised families and are just now finding the time and energy to deal with the trauma of the past.

The statistics which have come to the forefront are overwhelming, to say the very least. They'll also make you sick.

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Surveys indicate that:

- A girl born today has a one-in-four chance of being sexually abused before she reaches the age of 10.
- The average age of an abused child is 11, but it is not uncommon for children three years old or younger to be sexually abused by someone.
- The problem directly affects 75 to 95 per cent of all families.

The statistics are all very sobering.

If you're helping someone heal from childhood sexual abuse, there's a good chance you'll need help. You'll need a roadmap to help you deal with and understand this new world.

When Liz told me about the harassing phone calls, and then the sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of her stepfather as a child, life as I knew it had changed.

I was suddenly in unfamiliar territory, with no training at all and no books to help me cope.

I found out quickly that once you are part of this new world, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to turn back. The peaceful, happy place you once lived in is now gone. In its place is a world full of problems, anguish, tough decisions and seemingly endless challenges.

It's difficult to work through this process without some guidance.

This book is about helping you to understand what the survivor is going through so you can be a help, rather than hindrance, on her journey.

As you're reading, please keep in mind that the expressions, opinions and advice in this book are based on my first-hand experience with my wife Liz. I hope to give you some insight into how you can best get through this healing process with a survivor. I cannot replace a good therapist or counselor. But this book may help answer some of the questions you might have. It might enable you to work through issues on your own and point you in the right direction by giving you the right perspective of someone who has been there.

As the spouse of husband of someone who went through the tumultuous process of healing from childhood sexual abuse, I have a good understanding of the problems you might encounter. I can't guarantee that the process will go smoothly if you read this book, but I can say it will make you better equipped to deal with the problems that may arise.

There is little doubt that finding your way around in this strange new world can be a tough task. At times, it will test you to the limits. But, hopefully, with the help of this book, you'll stay on the right path.

Chapter One — Buckle Up

It's been a long day at work and you're looking forward to spending a quiet evening at home with your wife.

Things haven't been too good between the two of you lately. She's been moody. She gets upset easily and always wants to know where you've been.

A couple of nights back, you had an argument. She'd threatened to leave. Things haven't been the same since.

As you approach the front door of the house your insides knot up and you silently wonder what today holds in store.

The drapes are drawn. The house is quiet. As you enter, you see she is lying on the sofa. The noise of you coming in wakes her. Immediately she springs to her feet. She appears angry, gives you a strange look, then snaps at you and quickly scurries away.

You're left standing there, dismayed and in despair, wondering what you've done wrong. You feel alone, desperate, left out. The weight of the world is on your shoulders. You're in a daze, puzzling about what you said or did that could have upset her this time.

Well guys, take heart. My experience is that you probably didn't do anything wrong at all. It's very likely that what took place was totally out of your control. It could have been the shirt you were wearing, it could have been the look on your face, it could have been the way you woke her. It could have been the way the light was shining behind you. It could have been any number of things.

Likely, you were just the wrong person in the wrong place at the wrong time.

This is the dark and mysterious world of the adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse. You've become part of this strange, odd and upsetting new world without even knowing it.

These types of mood swings, along with unprovoked fits of anger and rage, are very common among women who are trying to heal from the emotional trauma associated with childhood sexual abuse.

It's one of the many situations that you will have to learn how to deal with as the survivor begins to face up to the abuse of the past. It's not her fault and it's not yours. It's just something that happens.

I experienced such problems many times while Liz was healing. I'd walk in the door only to get lambasted for something, anything. At times during her healing process, coming home was my biggest fear.

I never quite knew what to expect. She could be in a great mood when I left for work in the morning, but changed completely when I returned at night.

Eventually, I figured out it had nothing to do with me. I'd let her calm down then go and talk to her about the problem.

Liz said she'd sometimes get a sinking feeling when she heard me at the door because it reminded her of her stepfather coming home from work. She knew I wasn't her stepfather, but so much anger welled up inside her it was difficult to control. As a result, I bore the brunt of her outbursts.

Liz didn't realize what the problem was until we got counseling. She constantly had to remind herself that it wasn't her stepfather that was coming home, it was me. She eventually learned how to control her emotions and feelings and now she no longer gets agitated when I come home.

The simple fact of the matter is that situations like this are just one of many

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that you're going to face if you're the key person the survivor is going to rely on for support.

So, you need to learn all you can about the subject of childhood sexual abuse and its ramifications very fast. The more you learn about it, the better.

Now that your partner is dealing with the past, you're going to have to be quick on your toes, really quick. Your going to need a crash course in something that the psychology books didn't tell you.

If your partner is already dealing with the trauma of the past, you can safely bet the ball won't stop rolling now. So buckle up and get ready for the ride of your life.

It's not going to be easy and you're going to have to prepare yourself quickly. But understanding what the survivor is going through and learning how you can help her will enable her to get through the process.

With some guidance, confidence in the process and a bit of knowledge about what to expect, you can be a real asset in her successful recovery. Without it, though, you can be a real hindrance. After all, a survivor of childhood sexual abuse needs all her energies to deal with the trauma of the past.

IT ISN'T EASY

Helping a survivor stay on the right path isn't easy. It takes a lot of everything — patience, understanding, compassion and guts. Yes, plain old intestinal fortitude, because you'll be tested to the extreme. Your emotions will be taken to the highest highs and the lowest lows.

At times you'll feel emotionally distant from the survivor. Then, she'll want you close. At times you'll argue with the survivor. Then she'll want your guidance. At times you'll laugh with her, then she'll want your shoulder to cry on.

Sound complicated? Sound confusing? Well, it is. So, if you've decided to help someone deal with the trauma of childhood sexual abuse you need to develop a healthy appetite for more knowledge on the subject.

Foremost, you must understand that the survivor is just that — a survivor. She never asked for something like this to happen, it found her.

She became a victim in one of the worst ways. What happened to her was a crime. Make no mistake about it. She wasn't a consenting adult when the abuse took place. She was an innocent child. She was a child who knew nothing about sex or sexuality. She just followed the orders of an adult.

Never, ever blame the survivor for what happened to her as a child. Her decision to confront the past deserves a badge of courage. Remember, she was young and vulnerable and had no control over the situation.

When she decides to confront the past, she needs your support, not your anger. Instead, the blame should be put squarely where it belongs — on the shoulders of the perpetrator. He's the only culprit here. He was probably much older than her, someone she really trusted, someone who knew what he was doing and knew it was a crime. The survivor was a child and much too young to understand what was happening to her.

Liz's case was typical. The assailant was her stepfather, a person in a position of trust who was much older than her. He abused that trust and tricked her into performing indecent acts. He'd convince her she was doing the right thing. Afterwards, he would act as if nothing had happened. As Liz got older, the stepfather would psychologically abuse her by insulting her in front of boyfriends and calling her retarded.

BELIEVE HER

Perpetrators usually control children by using coercion or threats. In one reported case, a seven-year-old girl testified that her abusive father said her mother would die if the child revealed their sexual secrets.

"I felt scared," the girl told a jury in explaining why she didn't talk about her father's petting and intercourse.

The girl also testified that she tried to phone someone to tell them about her situation, but her father stopped her by putting his hand over her mouth.

It's often, only later in life, when the survivor no longer feels threatened, that she feels safe enough to reveal the abuse.

So, when a woman comes forward and reveals that childhood sexual abuse occurred, it's likely she's not making it up.

After all, what does she have to gain?

There have been rare cases in which women have lied about the abuse. But it's usually in a child custody dispute where it served a purpose to concoct a lie.

There have also been reports of a phenomenon called false memory syndrome. This occurs when a person gets brainwashed by a therapist into thinking abuse occurred when, in fact, it did not.

However, these cases are few and far between.

You may be in shock when your partner tells you that abuse occurred. But it's extremely important to believe her.

When your partner tells you she's been abused as a child, you can bet she's thought long and hard about it.

Liz told me one of the toughest things about her healing was getting up the courage to let me know that she'd been abused. It tore her apart. She spent many sleepless nights just trying to figure out a way to get it out in the open.

She'd pluck up the courage only to back down. She even tried forgetting it ever happened because she wasn't sure how'd I'd react. Afterwards, she said, she was relieved that she told me. It was as if a weight had been lifted from her shoulders.

Admitting that the abuse occurred is of the toughest, most gut-wrenching steps for a survivor because once it's out in the open, there's no going back. The survivor can't just forget about it. It's awfully difficult to tell someone something so personal and traumatic and later deny it ever happened.

So, when the survivor tells you about her abusive past, rest assured she is not making it up — and be supportive.

Unfortunately, it doesn't always work out that way.

TRUTH IS TOUGH

The first time you hear about the abuse, you may be taken aback. After all, there's no nice way to learn some pervert molested your partner as a child. Suddenly, your whole life gets turned upside down.

It can tug on your emotions.

I clearly remember when Liz told me she'd been sexually abused as a child. It blew my mind. All of a sudden I was faced with something I knew nothing about. I was at a loss for words. It took time to digest.

Many people live with their partners for years with no knowledge that sexual abuse may have occurred. When the ugly truth comes out, it hurts.

So what do you do when confronted with it?

Well, I'd recommend waiting until your head stops spinning, then take a deep

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breath and start thinking and listening. It's the only way you're going to fully understand what your partner is going through.

Supporters often get taken aback when they first hear about the abuse. The thought of a partner being sexually abused as a child conjures up visually revolting images. It can be very unsettling. When confronted with it, a gnawing fear may creep in. We hear about it, read about it, and see it on TV, but it's often at a distance. It's always somebody else's problem. When it's yours, though, it hits home.

I don't know if it's any comfort, but try to remember that you're not alone in all of this. Many men are going through the same thing. It takes a lot of supporters by surprise even though they've known the survivor for quite some time.

If you weren't supportive when she told you about the abuse, don't be ashamed.

It's perfectly natural to clam up, pretend you didn't hear or just try to brush off the subject. It takes some time to digest this revelation. In some cases, supporters refuse to even talk about it. Others ask the survivor to forget about the whole thing and leave it in the past where they think it belongs. While these may be very natural first reactions for some people, they're really very wrong.

You're going to have to face up to the harsh reality of the situation. You're going to have to come to grips with this and deal with it head on.

There's no way to brush something like this under the carpet. It just doesn't work that way. Sorry, but it doesn't. If you try, it is a sure bet that sometime down the road, the dirt will come to the surface again.

The sooner you accept that the abuse occurred, and learn how to help your partner, the better off both of you will be.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Before you begin there are a few things you should know. Every survivor can use a supporter — a trusting individual who will share her pain and listen, but not judge her, when she has something to say.

That often falls to the husband, friend or any partner of the abused person. Problem is, few husbands and partners get any training in how to deal with this issue, not to mention all the trying little problems that crop up along the way. So, with little training and big lack of practical know-how, you find yourself thrust into a situation you have no control over, yet are expected to cope with.

It's not surprising, then, that supporters have such a tough time with all this. It's also no surprise that supporters need help themselves.

I believe that partners can play a big role in helping a survivor heal. But they have little in the way of resources.

While survivors often have access to support groups and counseling services, the supporter is often left out in the miserable cold. There's just not a lot out there for guys who painfully plod through the process with a survivor. Private therapists can be found, but they are often inexperienced in dealing with men in such sensitive predicaments — and they are often expensive.

I remember the problems Liz and I experienced in trying to find a counselor. We went through the phone book searching for one, but when we called they were all very busy and dealt primarily with people who had marriage and family counseling problems. Eventually, a friend referred us to a counselor who focused primarily on childhood sexual abuse. We stayed with her for more than a year.

Still, the counselor wasn't particularly worried about me, and any problems I was having coming to terms with the situation. The counselor, rightly so, was only

worried about Liz and her healing process.

So, I had to search for help on my own.

I quickly found out that there's not much out there for men in this type of situation. In fact, I could find no books written by men who've gone through the healing process with a survivor.

So, if you're a male supporter looking for help, don't expect to find much out there. The best you can do is pull yourself together and learn all you can about the subject of child abuse. You need to get hungry for information and read up on the issue. You can help by encouraging the survivor and giving her the time she needs to heal. But you need to prepare yourself, as it will be tiring and time-consuming.

If the survivor wants professional assistance, you should help her find a good counselor. There are many counselors around, but the best way to find a good one is word by mouth. Call a local sexual assault centre or women's shelter in your community to find out who has a good reputation. If that doesn't work, try your local police station or hospital. They often have people who handle sexual assaults and are in contact with people who deal with these types of situations. Although police are not a social agency, my experience has been that they don't mind referring people who are in legitimate need of help.

SAFEGUARD YOURSELF

While you obviously want to help the survivor heal, be careful not to get too caught up in the process yourself. Many supporters get overwhelmed by the healing process and aren't much of a help in the long run because they have too many of their own problems and feelings to deal with.

Occasionally, I'd get overwhelmed with problems caused by Liz's healing. I felt my head was going to explode. It was really difficult to handle things.

When I couldn't cope anymore, I scheduled a break for myself. Sometimes it meant taking a short vacation from work. Other times, it meant getting away with Liz to a cottage where we could relax. Being in a totally different environment really helped seemed to help. We were able to leave our problems behind.

You have a right to be concerned about the survivor as she goes through the healing process, but remember it's a job she must complete on her own. You can't do it for her. She must make her way through each stage of healing in her own way. And for heaven's sake, don't feel guilty when she's doing this. It's not your fault that this happened to her. Remember, you weren't around to prevent the abuse, so don't feel it was your fault. Don't take on the added burden.

But that doesn't mean you can't help in her future. This is your responsibility. This is where you can really make a big difference. You're in a position to be a real support to the survivor. You can play a major role in her recovery.

In the following chapters I'll talk about some of the problems you can expect to encounter. I'll also give you advice on how to help the survivor in a crisis and answer some common questions asked by partners helping a survivor. I'll talk about sex with the survivor, coping with anger and what to do if she talks about suicide.

Using the principles and information in this book will enable you to be a support to the survivor. You'll develop a greater understanding of what she is going through and learn the best way to effectively deal with her emotions.

If you have a working knowledge of the circumstances surrounding childhood sexual abuse and a greater insight into the problems it can cause, you can help the survivor set a goal and work with her to achieve it.

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It might seem like a lot of work and it is, but rest assured that – with your help – she can make it through the healing.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Don't blame your partner for what happened.
- The sooner you face the situation the better.
- The healing process isn't easy.
- Be prepared for mood swings.
- Find a good counselor.
- Don't get overwhelmed.

Chapter Two — The Decision to Heal

Healing is not an easy process by any means. The truth is that it's an extremely painful process to go through, both for a survivor and a supporter.

It can drain both of you, mentally as well as physically. It can disrupt your whole life and cause myriad unforeseen and difficult-to-solve problems. I remember waking up some mornings as though I'd never slept. I would toss and turn all night, thinking about the day before. Then I'd wake up in the morning too tired to face the day ahead. It catches up on you after a while. It can take its toll.

But healing from childhood sexual abuse is something that is necessary for the survivor — if she's ever to live a normal life, that is. It's something the survivor must go through if she's ever going to experience the true joy of living a life free from fear, anger and that ever-present demon, hatred.

Instead of dealing with the past, some survivors prefer to forget it even happened. I could see how that could work if the abuse was not severe, or if it was a one-off episode. But if the abuse was continual, if it was severe, or if the survivor was old enough to remember it happened, I think it's better to deal with that past.

I've spoken to women who've gone through their lives without ever healing from the past, but I've always found they have problems.

Unfortunately, childhood sexual abuse always leaves its mark. For most survivors, the memories continue to haunt their everyday lives. It's easy to see why. A child who doesn't heal from the torture and trauma of sexual abuse lives in a world that is very different from the one most of us know.

An abused child who grows up without getting help for her problems faces a number of difficulties. Her values can be distorted. Trust is non-existent. Happiness is something only other people feel.

Psychological effects are often greater when abuse has involved physical violence or if the child was abused by a trusted person. Brief periods of abuse usually have less of an impact than abuse that continues over a long period of time.

Also, children who were abused when they were very young usually show fewer psychological effects than children who were abused when they were older.

The reaction of family members and others to the child telling that abuse has occurred can also have an impact. Calm, supportive reactions from family members can reduce the effects of abuse, but disorganized, disruptive, extreme responses can create further psychological problems for the child who was abused.

Following are some other factors that affect the impact of sexual abuse on a child:

- Nature of the abuse.
- Frequency and duration of the abuse.
- Relationship between the child and the perpetrator.
- Gender of the child and of the adult.
- Age difference between the child and the perpetrator.
- Rewards offered to the child.

It gets very complicated, you see, by the fact that a child is not like an adult. When an adult is abused, the adult knows what is happening. The emotions of an adult are usually developed enough to get through traumatic times. When a child is sexually abused, the child doesn't know whether it's right or wrong. The child may feel that what she is doing is wrong, but the child often gets a reward and praise

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for what she's doing so she's confused by it all.

I remember Liz telling me how she'd let her stepfather abuse her because she was so terrified that he would get angry with her if she tried to stop him. Although she felt it was wrong, she let the abuse continue because she was so afraid of what would happen. She kept trying to convince herself that it was okay. When the stepfather had finished abusing Liz, he rewarded her, confusing her even more as to what was right and wrong. Her body felt it was wrong, but her stepfather told her it was right.

THE DEFENCE MECHANISM

It's only natural for a child to feel confused when she is being sexually abused. The child feels so many different emotions and has trouble sorting them out. The child may feel anger, fear, shame and guilt.

When the abuse occurs, something very strange happens to the child. Because her emotions can't handle what's happening, a sort of self-defence mechanism kicks in and the child disassociates from the abuse. The child might shut off the normal emotions and instead focus on something else — something that can be a comfort while the abuse is taking place. The child may distance the mind from all the conflicting emotions that are surfacing. The child may listen to music that's playing, focus on something else in the room or just plain daydream. Somehow, though, the child's mind is on something else while the abuse is taking place.

The emotional separation is the child's way of dealing with the abuse. As the child grows, all the hurt and anger she didn't vent and deal with then plays havoc with her emotional development. She's left with a very distorted view of the world around her.

Liz used to tell me how she hated men. She didn't really have a good reason. It was just something that was inside her. Her favourite lines were, "All men are the same," and, "You're just like all the other men."

The abuse had left her with a dysfunctional attitude towards men. She assumed that all men were the same as her abuser. She assumed they were all out to hurt her. As she grew older, Liz still held the belief that men were bad. I've since talked to many women who have been abused and found that most of them feel the same way. All the hurt and anger they didn't vent and deal with as a child is carried into the adult life of the survivor, and without proper therapy that's where the anger stays.

THE CHILD WITHIN

Sometimes the damage of childhood sexual abuse leads to the development of another personality within the child. Sounds crazy, but the unfortunate part is it's true. We call this personality the child within, or the inner child.

It's something you're going to have to learn more about and it's something I've devoted an entire chapter to later in this book. It's a concept that is strange, frightening and fascinating. It's something you can't see or touch, but I can assure you it's real to the survivor.

The child within can best be subscribed as a personality within a personality. It has its own thoughts and temperament. It has its own feelings and frustrations. It's like a little person living inside the adult survivor. The child within is really the entity or core ego that was abused and never healed from the abuse.

The child within has the same traits and personality as an abused child. The child within usually doesn't trust men or strangers and can erupt in fits of anger at

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any given moment. At times, she controls the adult and wants the adult to herself. She can be insatiable, never getting enough love and attention from the survivor. She can also be excessively needy.

As a supporter, you may have to take a step back and give the survivor some space and time to deal with this entity. If the survivor neglects the child within, the healing process may proceed at a slower pace or stall completely. It's very important for the survivor to take time out and help deal with the child's emotional wounds. When the child within is seeking attention, she needs and wants it right away. The child within is just like a baby — it won't rest until it gets the attention it demands.

Liz would often have to take time out to deal with the child within. She could always tell when the child was acting up because she'd have strange thoughts. She didn't actually talk out loud to the child — it was more like inner reflecting. If you asked her what the child within wanted, Liz would go silent for a bit, as though she was communicating through telepathy. Then, a few moments later, she'd respond to my question. She could actually picture the child sitting by herself or playing in her room. Buy try as she might, she could never see the child's face.

Yes, all this may sound rather strange, but it gives you some idea of how deep and complicated the healing process can be. It's good for you to have some knowledge of this so that you won't try to rush the survivor through her healing process. You don't have to fully understand the child within, but you should be fully aware that it's there, it's real and she's not making it up. It does exist.

I recall how relieved Liz was when the counselor told her about the child within. It all made sense to her. She had such great relief when she left the therapy session, realizing that she wasn't going crazy.

All this may be tough to take in. Right now, you may be wondering what you've got yourself into and how you'll ever deal with it all. Well, breathe a sigh of relief. It's perfectly natural to feel overwhelmed. If you're finding this a bit much — or just don't accept what I'm saying — put this book down and give yourself a break. Nobody said you had to learn everything overnight. It's better to learn a lot slowly than nothing fast.

It's important to understand what the survivor is going through in order for you to be able to help her. But it's no good to the survivor if you're overwhelmed yourself.

When you're comfortable again, pick up this book again and go on reading.

I hope by this point, though, you're convinced as to why it is so important for the survivor to heal. Hopefully, you also realize why it is so very important for the survivor to get really good professional help. If she doesn't, it can continue to affect her relationships, her attitudes and her behavior — all in a negative manner.

RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS

The abuse suffered as a child can surface in a number of ways as an adult. It can cause overeating, emotional problems, depression or abuse of alcohol and drugs. You've probably seen some telltale signs long before the survivor ever told you about the abuse she suffered as a child. You just didn't recognize them for what they were.

It might have been the time she walked out of a movie theatre when a scene indicated a child had been sexually abused. It might have been the time she got upset when you refused to take her for an ice cream. It might have been the time

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she flew off the handle when you talked about starting a family.

Often, these are common signs that somebody has been sexually abused as a child. Other signs are compulsive behaviors and inability to trust or form friendships. It's quite common for women who've been abused as children to get into trouble with the law, become prostitutes or get into a life or death type struggle with themselves.

Don't get me wrong here. This doesn't happen to all women who have been abused as children. This doesn't mean that all women that overeat have been abused. It doesn't mean that all women who get angry or throw a fit have been molested as youngsters. The point I'm trying to make is that the problem eventually does manifest itself in some way or another.

With Liz, I noticed it was her self-confidence and how she perceived her body. She was always worried about her weight. Although she is by no means heavy she was always worried about her appearance.

It stemmed from the fact that her stepfather was obese and her inner conscience was worried about looking the same way. Her stepfather also used to tell her she was ugly and that nobody would ever want to be with her.

THREE STAGES

From my experience, there are three main stages in the healing process. They're the same three stages that anyone goes through when they suffer a significant loss. The first is the crisis stage, the second is the suffering stage and the third is the resolution stage.

This might seem a rather simplistic approach to some, but these are the three main stages that I witnessed as Liz was healing. This is also the order that she went through them.

Some experts in the area of childhood sexual abuse suggest the crisis stage does not always come before the suffering stage and I have no reason to dispute that. They also say everyone goes through all three stages. I have no reason to dispute that either. I merely want to give you some insight into what to expect during each stage, based on the experiences I had, in hopes that it might make you better prepared to help the survivor through it.

I found that the stages overlap, meaning the survivor might move onto another stage only to return to a previous stage to take care of some healing she may have missed. It can be a very frustrating experience to see the survivor regress to a previous stage, just when you thought she was past it. But don't get too upset when this happens. She probably just missed something and had to go back and work it out. It's better she do it now rather than later.

Before we move on, I want you to understand that the healing process is a very complicated and difficult process. I don't want to leave you with the impression that it's not. The information I present in this book is my view on the survivor's healing process and I'd encourage you to read additional material and find out what others have to say about the healing process.

The more information you have, the better off you are. Each case, each person, each relationship, each survivor and each partner is different and should be treated as such.

And in many situations, you'll just have to rely on your own ingenuity and good old-fashioned common sense to get through the tough times.

Having said all that, let's move on.

THE CRISIS STAGE

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, it's very important for the survivor to heal. In some way, the abuse always leaves its mark.

Before we get into the crisis stage, however, I have to assume that the survivor has decided to heal. I have to assume that she's started on her journey by admitting that abuse did occur. The healing process for a childhood sexual abuse survivor is, in many ways, similar to that of an alcoholic. The survivor must admit the abuse occurred before she can move on. Once that hurdle has been cleared the other stages are sure to follow.

The crisis stage is a particularly disturbing time for both you and the survivor because it's often the first time you see the survivor out of control. Until now, the survivor may have handled everything with relative calm. But in the crisis stage, she doesn't know where to turn for help. Everything closes around her fast. She may cry a lot, be unable to do things on her own and want to give up. She may also start to question whether she's doing the right thing.

In our case, the crisis stage started not long after Liz had started her healing. She was facing the painful truth and it began to overwhelm her. Shock set in and she started to panic. I started to panic too. Liz began to fall apart. She'd been doing so well until that point, but within a day she began drifting into a state of despair. She turned to me for help, a last-ditch effort to get out of her desperate state, but I didn't have any answers.

For the first time since she had started healing, I really felt lost and helpless. I didn't know what to do. In desperation, I phoned the mental health clinic at our local hospital and was put in touch with a counselor who explained to me what was happening. Just knowing it was normal to go through this stage was helpful. I watched Liz closely for a few days, talked to her about her feelings, then got her to her counselor the following week. It worked. She made it through the ordeal.

Supporters can be a big help in the crisis stage by reassuring the survivor that she's doing the right thing and making sure she's safe. You can also help take some of the load off her by taking on some of her responsibilities, whether it's grocery shopping or taking care of the finances. The point is to try to take the pressure off in some way, any way. The survivor has enough to worry about while she's in crisis, and relieving her of the other worries will help her tremendously.

There is one word of warning in all of this, though. Only take charge if the situation is desperate. It is important that the survivor retain control over her healing, even during the crisis stage. The survivor has to know that she got through the crisis on her own. You can help, but you also have to realize it's her fight in the end. The process of healing is also a process of re-empowerment for her.

The crisis stage is the time when most survivors think about suicide — something that is covered in greater detail in another chapter later in this book. When the survivor is in the crisis stage, remember that it won't last forever. In fact, it means that the survivor is on the road to recovery. Once the survivor has accepted the reality of her situation, she'll deal with it and move on to the next stage.

THE SUFFERING STAGE

The second or suffering stage is when the reality of everything that happened sinks in. It is usually the longest stage and can last for months as the survivor begins to deal with problems caused by the abuse.

Common problems during the suffering stage are nightmares, excessive fear,

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frequent memories of the abuse, and flashbacks as if the abuse is happening all over again. During this stage the survivor often has trouble with her memory, and has difficulty sleeping and concentrating on matters. The survivor might feel isolated from other people and lose her self-confidence. She may also feel guilt, shame and depression.

Liz went through the whole range of feelings and emotions during this stage. One day she'd be fine, the next she'd be in a state of despair. It was like a never-ending cycle. During this period, I felt as if I was walking on eggshells. Most of the time Liz didn't want to see anybody. She shunned friends and didn't want to socialize. I'd try to boost her self-confidence because she didn't feel good about herself. She even talked about moving to another city in order to escape having to deal with friends and workmates.

During this stage, you may get overwhelmed by constant talk of the abuse. But remember, the victim needs to talk in order to heal. This is a time when the survivor will go over and over the events of the abuse in her mind. One day, things seem to be going fine and the next all hell breaks loose. At times during this stage, you'll feel like you're on a roller coaster that you can't get off. In many ways you are, but like everything else in the healing process you'll just have to ride the roller coaster until it stops. While you can't put a time limit on this, keep in mind that it will end — someday.

The suffering stage could be a very long one for the survivor — especially if she's having trouble working things out. And, while you need to give the survivor time to get through this stage, you can help by watching to make sure that she doesn't get stuck in a rut. If the survivor isn't working out issues, or if she's beginning to blame you for all her troubles, then professional help should be sought right away.

Time is the only sure way to tell if you're safely through the suffering stage. It's only when you come across a prolonged period when the survivor is no longer trying to make sense out of all the childhood abuse that you can safely say you're at the end of the suffering stage.

THE RESOLUTION STAGE

The resolution stage is perhaps the best of the three stages. That's because it's the final stage.

But there are a few other reasons. Everything just seems to start coming together here, to the great satisfaction of both you and the survivor. Finally, you both get some rewards.

Although the survivor never forgets what happened to her, she does begin to put it in the right place — the past.

She may still refer to the abuse, but the pain and anger she feels about it is gone. The survivor begins to treat the abuse as an experience, like any other in her life.

If she hasn't confronted the perpetrator by this time, she'll probably want to soon. She'll have determined by now what relationship, if any, she will have with her family. She'll have her life on track and she'll want to start learning all she can.

In many ways, it is a joy to watch the survivor as she reaches this stage. She is in control and deciding what she wants out of life. She'll begin making decisions about her future. She'll talk about her aspirations and goals. She'll be thinking of the times to come instead of the bad times in the past.

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She may talk about making up for past losses, like school or work opportunities. She may contact old friends and try to re-establish relationships. She'll have a more positive outlook on life. She'll look towards challenges and might want to help others.

The survivor will be able to go to bed at night without having a fear of the dark. She'll be able to wake up in the morning without dreading the day ahead. She'll be able to go for a walk and truly enjoy the experience.

There will be no doubt in your mind when the survivor has reached this stage.

It will be unmistakable.

It will be remarkable.

She'll be the same person, yet different.

Her life — and yours — will improve.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Childhood sexual abuse always leaves its marks in some way.
- Healing is a necessary for the survivor.
- It takes time and courage to heal from childhood sexual abuse.
- There are three main stages in healing — the crisis, suffering and resolution stages.

Chapter Three — It's Everywhere

Make no mistake about it. Childhood sexual abuse does exist. It's out there. It does happen — probably more often than you care to imagine. So believe it when your wife says she's been sexual abused. It may make you sick. It may turn your stomach. But it's all around us.

Chances are you already know someone who's been abused — a friend, a co-worker or somebody at the gym. They just haven't told you.

Our newspapers are filled with the stories. Every day we hear more about these heinous crimes.

And the studies are confirming what the experts have been telling us for decades — that it's a societal problem of major proportions, and it isn't getting any better.

More and more women are coming forward to confront the problem and the perpetrator. In the past, many women used to push the problem aside, saying, "It was only once that it happened," or "He was drunk." But now, they're coming forward in ever-increasing numbers.

Society used to try to sweep such crimes under the rug. Rather than face the issue, many women used to keep their feelings bottled up inside. But now, as society's attitudes change from that of tolerance to abhorrence, more women are starting to report incidents to authorities. And the authorities are finally taking it seriously.

Reports of childhood sexual abuse have increased dramatically over the years. Yet, the experts agree we're only seeing the tip of the iceberg. A lot of people still don't come forward to report the problem. Often, women aren't comfortable disclosing that abuse occurred because families can have a very powerful influence on their lives and breaking the sanctity of the family is a taboo among many people.

For Liz, breaking the emotional ties with her family was one of the toughest things she's ever had to do. Although abuse had occurred, her family was still close-knit. Telling me of the abuse was a very unsettling experience for her. She was ostracized for stirring up trouble and taking her problems outside the family. But coming forward with the tale of abuse was her first real step towards freeing herself from the horrible past and unlocking all the anger that had kept her shackled.

ENDLESS NUMBER OF SURVIVORS

Ever so slowly and ever so painfully, more and more survivors like Liz are making their way from the shadows. They've started coming forward to tell their stories, to acknowledge the lost opportunities and the emotional damage that the years of abuse have caused.

It is difficult to gauge exactly how many women have been victims of childhood sexual abuse, molestation, gross indecency or incest. The statistics vary. But it is safe to say the number is in the millions. All the figures point to the fact that it's a problem of epidemic proportions.

One study found that one out of three girls and one out of six boys experience some form of unwanted sexual act by the time they reach the age of 18. The acts, according to the study, included witnessing an indecent exposure, being touched on a sexual part of the body, being sexually threatened or being subject to an attempted or actual sexual assault.

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The researchers also found:

- Two in 100 youth had experienced attempted or actual acts of unwanted anal penetration by a penis or by means of an object or finger.
- One in four assailants was a family member or a person in a position of trust. About half were friends or acquaintances and about one in six was a stranger.
- Nearly all the assailants were males. One in one hundred was a female.
- Although the abuse was not typically characterized by violence, in the instances where violence occurred, it was very serious.

The universally accepted figure is that one in every four women experience some form of sexual abuse at some point in their lives. That includes everything from touching, to incest, to rape.

But findings from other studies indicate the rate of sexual violation could be much higher.

A second study indicated that one in two females and one in three males has been the victim of one or more unwanted sexual acts. About 80 per cent of those in the study were children when the offences occurred.

A third study reported similar findings, concluding that half of all women are sexually assaulted before the age of 18.

The actual figures vary, but they all point to the fact it is a widespread problem. What you, as a supporter, have to remember is that young children are being sexually abused at an alarming rate. Sexual abuse happens to male and female children of every class, culture, religion and race. The children are being abused by parents, stepmothers and stepfathers, family friends, babysitters, teachers and strangers. The other thing to remember is that not all victims report the crimes, so they're being abused in numbers much greater than we think.

Just imagine, then, how many women, how many families, how many husbands and boyfriends are affected by all of this. Imagine the toll in human suffering that it has taken, and will take, not only on the victims, but also on people like you — the supporters.

For the record, child sexual abuse can be any number of things.

It can be:

- Fondling or touching a child.
- Making sexual jokes or leering at a child.
- Masturbating or exposing in front of a child.
- Any type of sex with a child — oral, anal or intercourse.
- Stripping or sexually punishing a child.
- Taking naked pictures of a child or showing pornography to a child.
- Forcing children to have sex with each other.

Childhood sexual abuse has become a problem of major proportions in North America, evident by the lengthy waiting lists at counseling centres. Courts and child protection agencies are backlogged with cases of abuse. And the victims keep surfacing. Many don't even bother to come forward and report it to the authorities.

The whole issue isn't new, though. It's been around for years. Research shows that child sexual abuse first became an issue of concern in the late 19th century. Prostitution was flourishing in Paris and many of the women, most of whom were minors, began suffering from venereal disease, so politicians came up with laws

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aimed at putting a stop to the number of young girls being sexual abused.

Lately, with society's more liberal attitudes towards sex and talk about abuse, women's groups have begun pushing for acceptance of the fact that the crime exists and perpetrators should be punished severely. Their efforts have had some success and, as a result, the issue is finally receiving the attention that it truly deserves.

Rarely can you pick up a newspaper or turn on the television without hearing about it. Every day the media carry stories about children who have been abused. The media also provide us with court coverage of perpetrators being sentenced to jail time for their crimes. It's astounding some of the people who have been put under scrutiny lately — people we never imagined would do such things.

THE PERPETRATOR

It seems that with better support systems now available, more and more survivors of childhood sexual abuse feel they can come forward, confront the perpetrator and then deal with the problems they've had.

Although child sexual abuse can involve physical force, it is estimated that two-thirds of the time it does not. A perpetrator usually uses emotional or psychological pressure to coerce the child into submission. The child's view of the perpetrator as an authority figure makes it much more likely that she can be threatened, bribed or manipulated into following orders.

The perpetrator may say things like, "You're being a good girl if you do this," or "You know you'll get candy for doing such a good thing." Although children can sense what they are doing is wrong, they feel it is okay because they have assurances from the adult.

It may come as a shock that most child sexual abuse happens in so-called normal homes, but it's a fact supported by a number of studies. In fact, the image you may have of a typical perpetrator is probably wrong. In most cases he's not a monster. If you stood in a crowd and tried to pick out the perpetrators you probably wouldn't have any luck. They are different, but their differences are hidden. For starters, at least 85 per cent of them are trusted relatives or acquaintances. Seldom are they dirty old men lurking near schoolyards, giving out candy to unsuspecting children. Seldom are they weirdos or sex-crazed strangers.

They're anybody and everybody. They could be your neighbours, friends, family members, co-workers or sports buddies. They're ministers, professionals and teachers. And, according to numerous stories we're hearing from courts nowadays, the list does not stop there by any means.

At an orphanage in Newfoundland operated by the Christian Brothers, a Roman Catholic lay order, nine people were convicted of sex-related crimes after several orphans came forward with tales of abuse. In another case, a 71-year-old retired justice of the peace was charged with molesting two young people over a 30-year period.

A committee that studied the problem in Canada found that one in four perpetrators was a family member or a person in a position of trust. Half the assailants were friends of the victim and one in six was a stranger. Statistics show that most incidents of molestation occur when the child is between the ages of four and 13 because that's when they are most vulnerable. They are still learning the rights and wrongs of life, yet don't know what sex is and still have blind trust in their elders.

Most victims are girls, although we're hearing more stories about boys also

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being victimized. Few are physically injured, but there is little doubt that the ordeal leaves them emotionally scarred for life.

THE TYPICAL OFFENDER

Studies have found that the offenders are most often male. They may hold a white-collar job, blue-collar job or no job at all. Typically, they abuse their position of power in order to abuse the child.

Most offenders aren't strangers to the child. Most are known to them as a relative — father, uncle, brother, grandfather or stepfather. They can also be a neighbour, family friend or even the babysitter. Perpetrators often commit the abuse in their own homes or those of the children.

Studies have also found that child molestation doesn't just happen in impoverished families and in the geared-to-income housing subdivisions. It happens in the best of homes, and perpetrators are both rich and poor. It isn't limited to any social, economic or ethnic class. And there are no gender, cultural or religious boundaries.

About 95 per cent of the time perpetrators get that way because of the abuse or neglect they've suffered as a child. They are usually troubled people with shredded self-esteem who need to dominate and have little understanding of the limits of normal behavior.

There is some good news in all of this, however. The statistics show that more and more perpetrators are being put behind bars. In fact, the number of inmates serving time in a federal prison for sexual offences against children has risen dramatically in recent years. Prison authorities maintain it's because more and more women are sticking up for their rights and coming forward with their stories.

Currently, about 21 per cent of inmates in Canadian prisons for sex offences are behind bars because they committed acts against children. About six per cent of the sex offender inmates are in the prisons for incest convictions.

The statistics are startling. But one thing's for sure — the sexual assault of children will not go away because we ignore it. So, when your partner tells you she was victimized as a child — believe her. She's not making it up.

As a child, she probably didn't tell anybody because she was too afraid of what the perpetrator might do. It takes a lot of courage for a child to come forward and report sexual abuse. Over the years, she may have wanted to tell somebody about the frightening things that were happening to her, but she may have had the feeling she wouldn't be believed or protected.

So when she tells you what happened to her, don't confirm her worst fears and tell her to forget it. She can't and she won't. It's important that you believe her, show her you'll support her, and protect her through thick and thin.

Instead of ignoring the problem, we have to acknowledge the existence of this very prevalent social disease. We have to use all of our resources to prevent it from happening again. It's a responsibility we all must share.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Childhood sexual abuse is a major problem.
- Millions of women have been victimized.
- More women are coming forward.
- Perpetrators come from all backgrounds.
- Don't ignore the problem.

Chapter Four — The Crisis Stage

The time will come. You can bet on it. It's very unfortunate, but no woman who is healing from the trauma of childhood sexual abuse can avoid it. It's the crisis or emergency stage — a time in the healing process when everything in the survivor's life seems to come apart at the seams.

It can be one of the most gut wrenching and trying times for both you and the survivor. While she may experience feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, you may experience feelings of doubt and despair. It can be an especially frustrating period, as you may desperately want to help, but find there isn't much you can do to take away her pain. You may get disheartened during this stage because you feel like an outsider looking in. It feels as if you have no control over the situation.

The crisis, or emergency stage, can come suddenly and without warning. Sometimes during the healing process too much happens too fast. There's just too much activity at once. The survivor is unable to handle it and gets overwhelmed by the whole process.

It's not difficult to figure out why this happens. During the initial stages of a survivor's healing, she focuses all her energy on bringing back the haunting memories of the abuse. It's something she must do, an unfortunate process that most survivors have to go through methodically and painfully in order to sort things out in their own minds.

When she's at this point in her healing, the survivor wants to remember everything that happened to her. She has to remember everything that happened in order to move on. But bringing all the memories back can also be a very traumatic experience for her, not to mention totally overwhelming. During this period of remembering, the survivor has to face up to the truth. And if the perpetrator was somebody very close to the survivor, it can be an especially painful and trying experience for her.

It's a particularly difficult time for the survivor because she is trying to remember what she has tried to forget for so many years. The memories are something she tried to put into the back of her mind for a long time. Now, she must desperately seek the missing pieces to the puzzle so that she can put them together in her mind.

I remember how Liz used to talk for hours about her abuse. Once she got started, she wouldn't let it rest. In the early stages of her healing, the abuse seemed to haunt her everyday thoughts. It seemed as if she had to talk about it and get it out in the open in order to make some kind of sense of it all. It was like mulling over a problem. She had to bounce her ideas and thoughts off of me, then put all the pieces to the puzzle back together again, this time in the right order.

She had tried for so many years to forget the abuse. She had tried for so many years to bury it so deep inside her that it would never surface again. Once she started remembering, though, it seemed it would never stop. It was a difficult time for us because the counselor and I were the only ones she could talk to. We were her sole supporters and it made life particularly trying at times.

I found the best way to handle the situation was to take an interest in what she had to say. Rather than just wait for her to talk herself out, I got involved in conversations about her past and asked questions so I'd better understand it all. I think my taking an interest helped her make sense of it that much quicker. If she had to go through the process by herself and make sense of it all by herself, I strongly

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believe it would have taken her much longer. Because I listened, I mean really listened, to what she was dealing with, I also learned more about what she was going through and that helped too.

It's OVERWHELMING

The duration of the crisis stage depends on many things. For example, it depends on the severity and extent of the abuse, how old the survivor was when it happened and how clearly she can recall the acts of abuse. There are other factors, too, like whether the perpetrator was in a position of trust and how often the abuse occurred.

The crisis stage can be overwhelming because the survivor is suddenly flooded with memories, but she may not yet have the skills to cope with all the problems that also come with remembering the past. She may not yet have learned how to control her emotions, how to deal with them and still live a normal life. Sometimes the emotional trauma that accompanies the recollections can be just too much.

It's not surprising then, that you don't know how to react. All of a sudden the survivor is overwhelmed. It may be the first time you really see her out of control and you don't know how to help. It may also be the first time you find yourself without any real answers.

When the pressure gets too much, the survivor might panic and even talk about suicide. She might also suggest not going any further with the healing or even ending her relationship with you.

I heard all three in the early days when Liz was healing. She'd get so upset with everything that she'd threaten to leave me. She'd vow never to see her counselor again. She'd say it was better to suffer in silence than go through the pain of healing from the abuse. She'd get so overwhelmed that she'd talk about running away from it all, starting a new life away from me and everybody else who knew about her situation.

Liz would go through a whole range of emotions. At times, she questioned whether the abuse really happened. Other times, she'd do everything she could to remember all the incidents. There was no way you could tell on any given day how she'd feel.

On several occasions, I was at my wit's end. I got tired of hearing her continually threaten to leave. It just wasn't fair to me. When she started talking like that I used to leave her alone to gather her thoughts. I didn't argue with her. I didn't run away from it either. I just gave her the time and space she needed to sort things out. It always worked out in the end. She knew she really didn't want to leave and that I wasn't the problem. The problem was inside her self and she just needed the time alone to come to grips with that.

Once she was ready to talk again, we'd sit and discuss the problems she had. The key here, as is so often the case with the healing process, is to try to remember it's all part and parcel of her getting better. Like all the other steps in the healing process, look upon the crisis or emergency stage as a step forward. It's something that is necessary for the survivor to go through. Any time someone heals from a traumatic experience, they go through a stage where they get overwhelmed by all the problems.

DON'T PANIC

It is important to remember that it's quite natural for a person who is healing from childhood sexual abuse to go through this type of emotional upheaval. It's not

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out of the ordinary for a survivor to have very different thoughts and feelings on different days.

During the crisis stage, the survivor might be unable to cope with her feelings or she might act in a very disoriented manner.

She may have very strong emotions or none at all. She might suffer physical symptoms like loss of appetite. But, once again, it is a progression for her. The survivor has to go through the crisis stage in order to deal with her past, sort it out and go on with her future. You might want to remind yourself of that when things get tough.

Try not to panic during the emergency stage. Two panicky people won't do any good. You've got a very important role here. It's not much use having two people unable to cope. Remember, you're supposed to be helping her. You can be a steadying influence. You can see that she gets through this stage safely and without causing any harm to herself.

It can be really tough, there's no doubt about it. Although the survivor may be a strong person, it's likely that her defenses will be very low at this point. The crisis or emergency stage can be the time when she needs your help the most. It's so important to her. Don't be surprised to find the survivor leaning on you a lot during this stage.

This is also the time when the survivor may be in dire need of help from a professional. It's best to try to talk about this before it happens. It's best if the survivor has agreed to let you seek help for her if she gets to a point where she can't cope. But it doesn't always work out that way. Often survivors and supporters haven't laid out the ground rules. If you get to this point and find the survivor is in real trouble, ask the survivor if she wants help. If she does, don't wait. Seek that help for her right away.

I was lucky during this stage. Liz had already been seeing a counselor and when times got tough all she had to do was book another appointment. She'd average one session a week during the initial stages of her healing. Eventually, it tapered off to once a month as she progressed in her healing until one day we went to the counselor and had nothing to talk about. We knew it was time to go it alone.

We visited the counselor together. She had a few sessions on her own, but for the most part we agreed it would be better if I knew exactly what was going on. I also found that I better understood how to deal with the situation if I had more knowledge of the healing process she was going through.

Survivors should never be worried or embarrassed at being unable to handle the healing process by themselves. A survivor shouldn't hesitate to go to a counselor, mental health clinic or a nearby sexual assault centre if they need the help. That's what they're there for. Once there, a survivor will probably find them very helpful. The professionals at clinics and sexual assault centres are very caring people.

It's my experience that the professionals at sexual assault centres are well-qualified and very willing to help survivors who may find themselves in crisis. They've usually been trained clinically and also have years of on-the-job training in how to deal with such matters. Their advice and help can prove invaluable.

Liz and I rarely told anybody we were seeing a counselor. I didn't want our problems to be known far and wide and Liz didn't want people feeling sorry for her. That's not her way. It's strange how people's opinions of you change once they

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find out you're seeking help. But there's another very good reason. It seems when people find out you're seeing a counselor, that's all they want to talk about. Others may begin laying their problems on you. They feel they can share their similar experiences with you, something that doesn't help when you and a survivor are trying to deal with the after-effect of abuse.

You know the survivor better than anybody, so there's little doubt that you're in the best position to offer assistance if she's having trouble deciding whether or not she needs professional help. The survivor might have a tough time deciding on her own. Either she is hesitant to trust anyone she doesn't know or she thinks she's weak or a failure if she gives in to professional help. That's nonsense, however, and you know it. Survivors shouldn't be expected to get through the healing process by themselves. If the survivor appears to need professional help, discuss it with her. Don't hesitate to talk to her about it if you think she's ready to reach out.

GOOD COUNSELOR

Finding a good counselor is one of the most important jobs that you, as a supporter, can help with. Word of mouth is the best way of finding someone who can do the job, someone whom you can trust to help the survivor heal.

If you know someone who has been through the process, don't be afraid to ask them for the name of a counselor. They'll likely be more than helpful in pointing you in the right direction.

Failing that, try the yellow pages. Look under marriage and family therapists. That's where most of them are listed. Call the local family counseling centre or sexual assault centre. They'll also have names of counselors available. However, don't do anything without the survivor's permission. It wouldn't be any use for the survivor to go somewhere she doesn't want to be or see someone she doesn't particularly like. Make sure that you do everything in consultation with the survivor.

A counselor is like a good friend. The survivor has to trust the counselor. Remember, that doesn't happen in one visit. It takes time for the counselor to earn the survivor's trust. Give the counselor a chance to earn that friendship. If, after several visits, a survivor doesn't like the counselor, the two of you should not be afraid to change to another. If the survivor does want to change counselors, however, make sure she's doing it for the right reasons.

Some of the right reasons might include:

- The survivor can't seem to open up to the counselor.
- The counselor doesn't seem interested in what the survivor has to say.
- The counselor seems to be going too fast for the survivor.
- The counselor is abusive to the survivor.
- The counselor has so many clients the survivor can't book regular appointments.
- The survivor gets a bad feeling from the counselor.

Suffice it to say, it's better to err on the side of caution if you think the survivor needs professional help. In other words, strongly suggest getting help. If she refuses, try talking to her about the situation. Keep a close eye on her all this time and, if she does get to the point again where you can suggest the option, try and see what the response is. Keep trying, but don't keep nagging her every five minutes. That won't do either of you any good. She'll get too used to refusing and eventually she won't even think about what you're asking.

In most cases, though, if a survivor is at a real loss as to where to turn for help,

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she will see a professional if you suggest that option to her, but not too forcefully. Remember, she doesn't need anybody pushing her around at this stage. Suggest, but don't order her. Somebody who is in real emotional pain will jump at any opportunity to rid themselves of the anguish and suffering they're feeling if the option is presented to them in the right manner. It's certainly better if she goes of her own free will. She'll get more out of the advice from the professionals.

IT WILL END

There is no set time for a survivor to remain in the emergency or crisis stage. As with the rest of the healing, the survivor may work through a crisis, and go on to another stage of her healing, only to find herself one day thrust back unmercifully into the crisis stage. Sure, it's disappointing to you and her, but each time she takes a step back she'll likely end up taking two steps forward in the long run. Be ready for this to happen because it does often, especially near the beginning of the process.

Liz would go through a period where everything would be going smooth. Her recovery seemed imminent. But the bubble would eventually burst. Something would happen that would trigger a relapse. She'd be doing so well, then just as quickly slip back into a world filled with problems. It was frustrating to watch, equally frustrating to experience, but it was all part of the process, as she'd eventually get on the right track again and move forward.

The crisis stage can be worse for some survivors than others. Some can get through it merely with the support of someone like yourself. Others require lengthy periods of professional help. How much professional help a survivor needs and for how long depends on the emotional state of the survivor, how clearly she remembers the abuse, the type of job she might have, how much time she can devote to healing, whether she has a family and has to devote a lot of her time to others, what type of supports she has and how much natural ability she has to cope with hard times.

When a survivor begins to remember all the abuse that occurred in the past, it consumes her thoughts, all her waking hours — and sometimes her sleeping hours as well. It can flood a survivor's memory. She may never get a rest without thinking about it. Her thoughts and feelings may suddenly overwhelm her to the point where she can't cope.

The best thing you, as a supporter, can do during this stage is to try to keep things as stable as possible. Give her a solid base to work from. Sounds simple, but it's not an easy task by any means, especially when your world looks as if it's going to fall apart at the seams.

It isn't easy to remain level-headed when you can't find answers and you can't see any improvements in the way things are going.

The crisis stage is a very tough stage for all these reasons. In fact, it's likely the toughest stage in the whole healing process because it comes upon the two of you so quickly, so suddenly.

You're eased gradually into the various stages of healing. When the survivor was having flashbacks, you knew she was having flashbacks and were ready to comfort her. You got a chance to feel comfortable. But it just doesn't happen that way in the crisis stage. The crisis stage hits you without warning.

You really have to be on your toes because you'll have to deal with a lot fast. Although the healing process looks like it has taken a turn for the worse at this

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stage, really try to think of it as a step forward. The survivor has to go through this stage in order to heal. The sooner the better — for both of you.

GETTING THROUGH IT

Perhaps the best weapons you have to deal with the crisis stage are foresight and knowledge. Sometimes just knowing the stage will come and go makes it easier for both of you. Knowing you will make it through this stage is a big help. Talking with the survivor and lending her your supportive ear are the best things you can do during the crisis stage. Often the survivor just needs someone to talk to, someone who will sit and listen to her story. It may sound rather simple, but it is perhaps the best medicine for what's on her mind.

It's so important for the survivor to get the bad feelings out of her so she can replace them with good experiences. During the crisis stage, that's exactly what's happening. She's remembering the bad. And, with proper help and counseling, the survivor will be able to have the effects of those bad memories drawn out of her in a safe manner. Eventually, that void will be replaced with positive, good experiences, normal experiences.

I remember the counselor telling Liz and I that she'd eventually replace all the bad experiences with good ones. When Liz first started healing all she had was anger and bitterness inside her. Now that she's healed, however, she can truly enjoy life. She has the ability to give love to others now that she knows what it truly is.

As a supporter, you might find it a challenge going through the crisis stage, but try to keep in mind — once again — that it's a very positive step. It's a traumatic but very important stage in the healing process, and the survivor has a better chance of getting through it if you are totally committed to going the distance with her and giving her the proper support, encouragement and help that she needs.

You can't be angry here. And you can't be sad or impatient. The survivor won't be able to hurry herself through this period just for your sake. So relax and take a deep breath. You'll need some patience, real patience, understanding and a lot of compassion.

Talk to the survivor. Remember, she's going through a tough time in her healing and you know by now that it doesn't come to pass overnight.

A lot of survivors lose control during the crisis stage. They can make a lot of mistakes, alienating loved ones or friends because they're angry. It's normal for her to be angry about the past. But it isn't right for her to take it out on loved ones. When the time is right, try to talk her into seeking professional help. Also let her know that you're there for her, even if she is really angry.

It's not an easy task by any means. Then again, nobody said it was. So don't panic. She'll pull through this stage. And so will you.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- The crisis stage comes on suddenly.
- It's a traumatic but very important stage in the recovery process.
- Suggest counseling if you feel your partner needs it.
- Don't panic — the crisis stage will pass.

Chapter Five — The Hidden Taboo

Suddenly, pangs of fear grip your body. The survivor is talking about suicide — the hidden taboo — and you have no idea how to react.

You never talked about it. You never thought about it. The survivor might have had depressions, but suicide never crossed her mind. It's no wonder then, that you're a little taken aback when the word is mentioned.

Just the mere mention of suicide is enough to strike fear into the heart of a supporter. After all, you've probably worked long and hard with the survivor for some time now, been through tough times, only to see her start making threats about taking her own life. It's little wonder that you're upset. You might even have thought the survivor was making some headway in her healing, when, suddenly, here she is talking about ending her life.

Liz mentioned suicide many times during her healing process and each time she did, my stomach would go into knots. She worked so hard on her healing, and then suddenly she would say she just wanted to end it all. I recall feeling angry when she mentioned taking her own life. She was just overwhelmed about everything going on around her. It was her way of saying she needed to try to get rid of the pain she was feeling.

The lesson here is not to take it personally. Don't get angry with the survivor for thinking about suicide. It won't do any good. Keep things in perspective here. Remember, your priority is to support the survivor through the ordeal and worry about your feelings later. There will be time enough afterwards to talk and work out your feelings on this issue when the danger of her taking her own life has passed.

REACHING OUT FOR HELP

When a survivor tells you she is thinking about suicide, keep in mind that what she's really doing is reaching out for help.

She's probably reached the stage in her healing process when she's given up everything — a time when it seems there will never be an end to it all.

When Liz was suicidal, she'd have such a dismal outlook on life, and there was very little I could do to cheer her up. She'd tell me that nothing mattered. She'd say there was nothing good in the world. She'd say life wasn't worth living. She'd say how nice it would be to die and go to a place where there were no problems. She didn't really care what I, or anybody else, thought about her at that point.

It was very traumatic to see her like this, but I'd keep the conversation going and eventually we'd get into discussions about the people and things that were important to us in life. The longer we talked, the more she'd begin to appreciate life again.

Supporters should do their best not to get too upset when the subject of suicide is raised. Talk of suicide is often an act to avoid the pain of living as much as it is a desire to die. It's common for survivors to have thoughts of suicide when they're trying to deal with the traumatic loss of their childhood. It's like grieving for someone who has passed away.

Often people who have lost someone get depressed after the reality of the loss sinks in. It's the same way with the survivor. Once she starts dealing with the loss of her childhood, she can become sad and depressed. It's quite normal behavior for a survivor.

The survivor needs time to feel and deal with the pain of her own loss. Remember, she has lost her childhood. She needs time to grieve that loss. So when she

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tells you she doesn't want to live, she's not delusional. She doesn't need someone telling her she shouldn't feel that way. What she needs is someone who will sit and listen to her and not judge her.

It would be more dangerous for her to deny that the thoughts of suicide ever existed. They'd continue to haunt her if she pushed them away and didn't deal with or talk about them.

TAKE IT SERIOUSLY

While it's not out of the norm for survivors to think suicidal thoughts, they should always be taken seriously when they bring up the subject. Don't brush your partner off if she tells you she's thinking about taking her own life. Telling you she has suicidal thoughts doesn't necessarily mean she really wants to take her own life. It might be that she merely wants someone to take away the awful pain that she is feeling.

Talk of suicide is often an extension or consequence of feeling miserable, lonely, depressed and in despair. Believe, however, that the survivor is having trouble dealing with some type of loss. Never ignore the conversation and think the thoughts will pass. Don't, for example, say, "Okay, honey. Just get some sleep and we'll talk about it in the morning when you're feeling better."

You can bet she won't be feeling any better in the morning, and you can bet you'll be the last person she ever comes to if she needs help again.

When the window of opportunity is there, you have to keep it open. When the survivor tells you she has suicidal thoughts, she really needs someone to talk to.

I clearly remember one night when Liz broke down in tears and told me how she had thought it might be better if she wasn't around. She said she had been fighting an inner battle for weeks and didn't want to tell me about it because she didn't want to mess up my life. It was clear she was in dire straits, so I got out a pen and paper and asked her to list the reasons she should continue on and the reasons she should not, and I would do the same.

At first she was reluctant to make out a list, but eventually she agreed. It wasn't the list that was important — it was the fact that we were talking about the things in life that were important to her and the reasons she should live. Even now, that night is clearly etched in her memory.

When a survivor tells you she is suicidal, think of yourself as a lifeguard. She's really trying to tell you that she's drowning and needs help to stay afloat.

YOU KNOW HER BEST

Deciding how serious a survivor is about committing suicide can be difficult for any partner. But you're in a good position to judge her intentions. You know her better than most people. You know what she's like when she's normal and you can probably be a good judge of how disturbed and serious she is about the whole thing when she's upset.

People who are seriously thinking about committing suicide usually communicate their plans, either directly or indirectly, through hints and clues. Some of the warning signs include:

- Talking about suicide.
- A deep or prolonged depression
- Feelings of helplessness or hopelessness.
- Extreme mood changes or odd behavior.
- Saying things like, "You'll be better off without me," or, "All my problems

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- will soon be gone.”
- Giving away prized possessions and getting affairs in order.
 - Loss of interest in work and hobbies.
 - Isolation from friends and colleagues.
 - Loss of appetite or sexual desire.
 - Disturbed sleep periods.
 - Lack of interest in appearance.

If you think the survivor is suicidal but she hasn't come out and told you, it's best to simply ask her. If you're picking up signals from her, it's the best way to clear the air. Don't be afraid of putting thoughts in her head. Asking the survivor to tell you the truth won't make her decide to commit suicide.

And once the truth is out, don't be surprised by what you hear. Healing from childhood sexual abuse is a traumatic experience and, in many cases, it's accompanied by overwhelming feelings of loss, anxiety and frustration — the perfect mix to cause someone to think about suicide.

In most cases, a survivor who is thinking about suicide just wants to be dead for the time being. So, when you're first confronted with it, don't panic. This is a chance to really help the survivor. Don't be afraid of what she's telling you. If you feel her suicidal intentions are strong, seek consent from her to get her professional help right away.

If you have any reason to believe the survivor might actually commit suicide, keep a close eye on her so that she's unable to carry it out.

One way to judge the seriousness of the situation is to ask her if she has a plan. If she does, she's probably serious. In such desperate situations, do your best to convince her to seek professional help right away.

Always respect her wishes and feelings. If she resists professional help, listen to her and try to figure out what is triggering her suicidal thoughts. Ask her why she won't see a professional. It could very well be that she has a fear or distrust of counselors. She might have had a bad experience in the past.

Whatever the reason, it's best to listen to her and empathize with her pain. Don't take sides. Just listen and keep her talking about her thoughts. As long as you're listening she's not going to take her own life.

There are a number of other ways to determine how serious a survivor is about taking her own life. For example, consider if anyone in the survivor's family has committed suicide or whether the survivor has made previous suicide attempts. Even a mild suicide attempt, such as swallowing a bottle of sleeping tablets, indicates a desperate need for understanding.

Psychiatrists use a number of criteria to determine whether a person is at risk of committing suicide. Their list assesses whether the person has dreams of catastrophes, whether they are unemployed and whether they are depressed or have a tendency to complain continuously.

Of course, it goes without saying that it is wise to err on the side of caution if you think a survivor may be serious about taking her own life.

One thing you should do, whether you believe her or not, is to enter a pact with her. Ask the survivor to agree she won't harm herself until she's got some professional help.

By making a deal with her, you've alleviated the immediate threat until someone with more experience in these matters can deal with the survivor.

HOW TO HELP

If the survivor confirms she is considering suicide then get in touch with the police or a suicide hotline or call your local hospital. Remember, you won't get in trouble for trying to help. You're trying to save the survivor's life.

If you begin to feel yourself getting angry with the survivor, try to remember she's not doing this intentionally to harm or hurt you in any way. All she's trying to do is find a way to get rid of some of the pain she's feeling. The survivor is dealing with a tremendous loss at this stage. She could be dealing with the loss of childhood, the loss of a family, or the loss of her innocence — all significant and painful experiences.

Whatever the case, you can bet she's feeling a significant loss, something that tugs on her emotions and is leaving her with a sense of helplessness, hopelessness and frustration.

To help the survivor, try to listen to what she's really saying. Don't just nod your head, but really listen and get involved in the conversation. If the survivor feels you really do care and are willing to help her work through her feelings then she won't feel so alone and will realize she truly has someone on her side.

It's important to try to communicate at this stage, but don't give any advice. Let the survivor figure things out. You can talk with her and open her mind to possibilities, but don't make the decision for her. She has to come to the conclusion on her own. It's the only way she'll truly get the feelings out of her system.

When you talk to a survivor who is contemplating suicide, try to help her realize that life is worth living. Talk about the things that are important to her, the things that interest her. Ask her what she'd like to do or talk about. Perhaps she'll want to set some goals for herself. Perhaps she'll just want to vent her frustrations.

You'll have to use your intuition here. There is no strict set of guidelines to follow which will make a survivor start feeling better. As a supporter, though, you're in a good position to notice the signs of distress and help the survivor get over her crisis. You know her better than anybody. You're the person she trusts. Rest assured that with your help, she will make it through.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Don't get upset when suicide is mentioned.
- Always take it seriously.
- Watch for the warning signs.
- Always err on the side of caution.
- Empathize with her.
- Seek professional help if she wants it.
- Don't be angry with her.

Chapter Six — To Stay or Go

It's been a difficult day. The survivor is crying. You're feeling pretty bad about yourself. The two of you have just had a real blowout. You've said some nasty things. So did she. Now, you're angry, frustrated and left wondering what to do. She's feeling the same.

Just last week, the same thing happened. You sat there with the same questions going through your mind. How did you get into such a mess? How are you going to see it all through? Should you try to make up? Or should you just get your things and leave?

Yes, it's a tough decision. You may have tried to work things out, only to see the relationship crumble before your eyes. At this point it may seem as if there's nothing you can do. The unfortunate part is that it's a situation many supporters find themselves in.

This is one of the toughest decisions that a supporter will have to make. Only you and you alone can come up with the final answer. Only you can dig deep, really deep, reflect inside yourself, and then determine whether helping the survivor heal is what you really want to do.

Helping a survivor heal is a truly noble cause, but it also takes a lot of time, commitment and energy, lots of energy.

Whether you stay or leave the relationship is strictly your own decision. Nobody else can decide this one for you, nor should they try. It's a very personal decision.

Make no mistake. Helping someone recover from the effects of childhood sexual abuse is taxing. You'll need all of your resources. It's a process that will draw heavily on all your strengths. It's time-consuming, it's exhausting, and the rewards are few and far between. Just when you think you've made some headway, the problem will rear its head again. It can wear you down. It can be frustrating. It can make life downright miserable.

Helping a survivor heal is a process that is painful, frightening and infuriating, to say the least. The survivor's mood can swing unpredictably. You never know what to expect. One minute things are fine, the next all hell breaks loose. The emotions you experience go from happiness to sadness, from hope to helplessness.

It shouldn't come as a surprise, then, that most supporters think about leaving a relationship many times during the healing process. It also shouldn't come as a surprise that many relationships in which a spouse has chosen to deal with the sexual abuse of her past ends up in a separation. The pressure it can bring is tremendous.

I remember Liz telling me about the survivors in her support group. One of their biggest complaints was about their partners. Most of the women felt their supporters weren't doing enough to help them. They were more bother than help. They felt the men weren't listening, and they weren't able to cope with the problems the survivors were going through. They were demanding too much from the survivors.

Most of the women in the group felt their relationships were on the rocks. They didn't expect their unions to last much longer. The men, it seems, just didn't understand their predicaments. The survivors said the men were giving them so many problems they really didn't care whether they stayed or left.

DON'T FEEL GUILTY

Every relationship has its problems at times. Even under normal circumstances it's difficult to get two people to agree on everything all the time. So, under

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more difficult circumstances, you can see why it can be even more trying. With the divorce rate looming around 50 per cent, it doesn't take a genius to figure out that not all marriages are working out — even under optimal conditions.

Don't feel guilty, then, if you find yourself thinking about leaving a relationship with a survivor. It's not out of the ordinary.

After all, so much changes when you're dealing with someone who is healing from childhood sexual abuse. Your life is radically different than before.

It might be wise to take a good, hard look at this question early in the healing process, before you get in too deep. It's a question you'll probably also want to think about many times as you go through the healing process. Whatever you decide, you will feel better about it in the long run.

This might sound a little confusing to you so let me explain. If you've given yourself the time to think about the situation and you decide to stay, then you're doing so with a clear conscience. You're ready, with that same clear conscience — having freely decided to stay — to tackle problems associated with the healing. If, by the same token, you decide to leave, it will also be with a clear conscience, because you've thoroughly examined all the options.

Either decision then — no matter how difficult and painful it may seem — will be for the betterment of both parties. There's no point staying if you're not going to help the survivor, is there?

While only you can weigh the options and decide, it's important to know there are both good and bad reasons to leave.

Following are some good reasons to leave:

- The survivor has become abusive herself or has turned to dependency on alcohol or drugs to get her through the trauma of the ordeal.
- You have grown so far apart and have such different interests that you know in your heart that even when the survivor heals from the abuse of her childhood, you won't have any desire to stay.
- You no longer trust each other.
- You've found someone else in your life.

Following are some bad reasons to leave:

- Your partner is spending so much time in therapy and taking care of her own problems that she doesn't have time for you and your problems.
- Your partner is changing and just isn't the same person she used to be.
- You're tired of talking about abuse all the time.

It's a good idea to think about some of these questions as you make your final decision. Don't try to stay in a relationship in which the survivor tries to harm you or her. It won't do either of you any good to stay together under those circumstances. It will only lead to bitterness, hostility and more violence between the two of you. It's best to walk away if something like that happens. Your own welfare is important here too.

Whatever you do, though, take your time to make the decision. Don't rush into anything. Remember that emotions are running rampant and there are a lot of outside pressures.

I remember countless times when I felt absolutely lousy about my predicament. It wasn't any one thing that caused me to feel like this. All the small problems associated with the healing process just built up every so often and it was important for me to sit and reflect on what I really wanted out of life. I'd make a list, write down

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the good and bad reasons to stay and good and bad reasons to leave. It must have been in the cards to stay, because I always came to the conclusion that I wanted to stay with Liz and support her during the healing process.

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When you're thinking about all this, you have to be cautious about what I call the "why me" syndrome. It can creep into a relationship as you go through the healing process with a survivor.

You know it's there when you start wondering why all this is happening to you, why you've been put in this situation. Friends and family can add to that pressure. They may start to reinforce the "why me" syndrome by asking, "Why is this happening to you? Why are you in this situation?"

All this can weigh on your conscience, and coping with all the pressure can be devastating. You can't avoid feeling sorry for yourself at times. But you can be aware of it so when it happens you know it's there and you're ready to deal with it effectively and move on.

I can't list a specific set of rules that will determine whether you should stay or leave a relationship. Nobody can do that. No rules can be set in stone as to what determines whether a relationship will work. Each person and relationship is different. That's what makes life so interesting. Each person has his or her own limits. You'll have to decide yours.

But there are some general guidelines you can follow in deciding whether to stay or leave. First, you're going to have to be very honest with yourself during this phase. You're going to have to take some time out for yourself and truly decide if you want to go through the process of helping a survivor heal herself, whether it's really worth your while to stay in a relationship with a survivor who is healing, and what's at the end of it for you.

Should you weather the punches or throw in the towel? It's a tough question. But you have to determine whether you have the patience, love and sheer willpower to go through the healing with the survivor. You've got to be honest with yourself. But you have to decide.

When I found these thoughts entering my mind, I'd tell Liz I was going out for a few hours to think. Usually, I'd just get in the car and drive to a spot near the river where I would sit with my coffee and do some serious reflecting. With nobody around to distract me, I was in a totally relaxed environment where I could ponder my options.

It's good to get away sometimes and do this because it helps you put everything in perspective. Often you can get so wrapped up in the healing process, you can't take an objective look at yourself and the way things are going. Getting away for some quiet time by myself, even if it was only for a couple of hours, helped me find answers to the questions.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

There are a number of things you should consider when you're pondering all this. You should think about whether you can take rejection from your partner and, at times, from your family, friends and co-workers. Are you strong and willing enough to keep going on your own?

There's still a stigma attached to childhood sexual abuse. Many people feel it shouldn't be talked about, that it should be kept within the family. The issue shakes the very roots of morality and many people don't want to face it. A lot of people

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simply don't want to admit such things happen. It's important that you think about that now, rather than later.

Deciding if you have the time and patience to handle it all is one of the tough decisions you're going to have to make. You may have other commitments that prevent you from putting all your efforts and energies into helping your partner heal. You may not be the type of person who can deal with more pressure. You may simply not want to go through it. Whatever the case, though, be honest with yourself.

Don't rush this decision. And don't make it when you're angry. If you're thinking about leaving, be honest with the survivor. When things cool down, tell her you have to talk to her about the relationship. Don't leave her in the dark. She has enough to think about without trying to guess what's happening with you.

Be honest with her about your feelings. If you need time to think about it, book some time by yourself. Give yourself an opportunity to make a decision and then act on that decision. And, as soon as you know what you want to do, tell her.

If you're going to go, then go. But if you decide to stay, then stay. Don't threaten her. Don't say things like, "I'll stay if you straighten up your act," or, "If you don't get things together, I'm leaving." She probably won't respond to threats, nor should she. Remember that what she's feeling inside controls her and nothing you say or do is going to speed that process.

If, after careful thought, you decide you must leave, tell the survivor directly. After all, you owe that much to her. You wouldn't like to be left in the dark over such an important matter. She deserves the same respect.

And if you're leaving, don't give her a false impression about why you're leaving. Make sure you're honest and forthright with her. Don't stay in the relationship just because she's dealing with the abuse. That's a bad move. A bad relationship won't help her in the long run. Take solace in the fact you've probably helped her in some small way already.

If you leave, she may miss you and mourn the loss. But rest assured that the survivor won't fall apart. She will survive. She may have tough times ahead, but once she has started on the road to recovery, it's very difficult for her to stop. She may take a few wrong turns, but for the most part she'll press forward with or without your help.

And if you're leaving, do it with a clean conscience, knowing that you've done your best. You've probably even gained from the experience, as you now know what the world of the child abuse survivor is like.

If you decide to stay, though, make sure you're full committed to going through the healing process with the survivor. It may take time, but you'll be glad you did.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- It's normal to think about leaving.
- The decision is yours and yours alone.
- Be absolutely honest with yourself.
- Take the time to make a proper decision.
- If you decide to stay, then stay. If you decide to go, then go.
- Don't feel guilty about the situation.

Chapter Seven — The Child Within

It's a strange concept. Bizarre to say the least. You'll be sitting there, talking to the survivor, when all of a sudden you realize she isn't even listening. Instead, she's staring at some faraway object as though deep in thought.

At that moment, you wonder if she's losing her marbles. But, she's not. And neither are you. The survivor is merely getting in touch with a part of herself that hasn't healed. It's something deep inside her called the child within — something that's been with her for years.

She's never seen it, probably never talked to it and likely didn't know it existed. But, it's probably always been there — locked somewhere in the crevices of her mind. And now that she's started the healing process, it's come to the forefront. It wants attention and it wants it now.

The child within is one of the most difficult things for supporters to understand, but it's also something you'll probably have to come to grips with.

For the survivor, the child is a real thing, although not in the physical sense. The survivor is able to feel what the child feels, talk to it, even console it. Sometimes, the survivor can picture the child inside her. She can see her sitting in a room, playing with her things.

Usually, the child resembles what the survivor thinks she looked like as a child. At times, the survivor will be totally in touch with the child within. Other times, she'll be completely at its mercy.

I've been told by some therapists that survivors sometimes don't have a child within. In other cases, the child just doesn't come out. It depends a lot on the severity and nature of the abuse. Usually, a survivor can only be put in touch with the feelings of the child through therapy.

One time Liz was having such trouble dealing with the child within that she got angry and literally yelled at it. She just wanted the child to go away and never bother her again. The child did disappear but only for a while. I remember how worried we were at what had happened. Liz and I both knew that the child within would return. We just weren't sure what damage we had caused. We were worried what would happen when it did return. Sure enough, the child did come back with a vengeance. Like a spoiled child, it demanded more attention than ever.

ACCEPTING THE CHILD

Supporters might have trouble accepting this strange phenomenon. It's no small wonder, though. If you ever told anybody about it, they'd think you're crazy, to say the least. They'd probably think the survivor is crazy too.

For them, it may conjure up images of Sybil, the girl with umpteen different personalities. It doesn't exactly work that way, but try and tell that to those who don't know much else about child sexual abuse. They won't understand.

I remember countless times when Liz would be dealing with the child within. At first, I just shied away from the whole thing and trusted her to deal with the situation. But eventually, she began to trust me enough that she'd let me in on what was going on. If Liz was in the process of dealing with the child within, she'd talk to me about it and ask for my opinion. I was always careful not to pass judgment. After all, this was an entity that had been abused and there was no point in ridiculing the child for something that wasn't her fault.

The child eventually grew such trust for me that I could communicate with it. Sounds a bit nuts, doesn't it? But, I'd talk to Liz who would relay the message to

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the child and give me an answer. I wouldn't recommend this for every supporter, but if you feel comfortable enough trying this, I don't think there's any real harm in it.

If you think about it for a moment, it's not all that complicated or startling. Think about how old the survivor was when she was abused. Now picture yourself about that age. Now ask yourself how you would have felt if someone you had trusted came into your room in the middle of the night and abused you. Remember, you didn't know anything about sex. You didn't know if it was right or wrong. How would it have affected your emotional development? How would it have affected your trust for people? How would it have affected your self-confidence and your own self-worth?

The extent of psychological damage can vary widely, depending on the abuse. It depends, for example, on how long the abuse continued and the relationship of the offender to the child. It also depends on such things as the kind and degree of sexual abuse, the age of the child, if others were involved and whether or not the child disclosed the abuse and how it was handled. Each person is different. Each situation is different. Some trends have appeared though. For example:

- Psychological effects of childhood sexual abuse are usually greater when the abuse has involved physical violence.
- The psychological distress is usually greater if the child was abused by a trusted person rather than a stranger.
- Brief incidents of childhood sexual abuse usually have less of an impact than abuse that continues over a long period of time.
- Children abused when they are very young usually show fewer psychological effects than children who are abused when they are older.

HOW THE CHILD FORMS

The child within forms because the abused child is unable to handle emotions like an adult can. Although the child may feel the abuse is wrong, a young child gets very confused because the perpetrators enforce the notion that what happens is right. Plus, the child is usually rewarded for all the actions. Because they get so confused about it, abused children lock the emotions deep inside. It's sort of like forming a child within a child. In the end, the abuse may have caused them to feel guilty and believe bad things about themselves.

The child may carry around feelings of anger, fear, shame and guilt. The survivor might feel angry at the perpetrator for putting her through the abuse. She may also be angry at herself for letting it happen. She may carry a lot of anger towards her parents for not stopping the abuse. She may just be angry at anybody and everybody for what happened.

Sometimes, a child who is being abused may tell somebody about what is happening. But many times, the older person she tells either refuses to believe her or doesn't want to get involved. If a child tells the mother, the mother will sometimes blame the child for what is happening. Other times, the mother tries to stop the abuse but finds out she can't without letting other people know. She may choose to do nothing because she's ashamed or doesn't want to break up the family.

Children who've been sexually abused are usually afraid because perpetrators often make threats. The child might feel she can't tell anybody because nobody will believe her, or that the family will break up. Strangely, she might also be afraid of losing the love, friendship or security of the abuser. A child who is a victim of abuse

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might also feel shame that other people will find out what happened. The child may think that people will regard her as dirty or bad if she tells.

Guilt is common among abused children. The child might feel it's her fault, especially if she was rewarded for her actions. She might feel like she is betraying the abuser if she tells on him. The child might also carry guilt because she may think she could have done something to stop the abuse.

Because of their age and inexperience in life, children don't have the capacity to cope with the feelings which overwhelm them from abuse. So, when a child gets overwhelmed with emotions, the child shuts out those feelings. Instead of letting them out in a healthy manner like an adult, the feelings go deeper inside the child where they churn around for years on end. That bottled up anger and frustration affects the child's emotional development. In later years, it's like having a child's emotions locked inside an adult's body.

Children often lack the skills to objectively assess what they're learning. So, if they get mixed up messages as a child, they are unable to determine what is right and wrong as an adult. Although a child may have sensed that the abuse which took place was wrong, the child doesn't know any different or how to avoid it. When a child is being abused by someone that she is supposed to respect and listen to, she tells herself, "I know this is wrong and I hate this feeling, but he is telling me that I have to do it."

DISASSOCIATION

Often, the only way for a child to hang on is to disassociate herself from the abuse. The disassociation results in a child self being formed inside the subconscious of the survivor. The abuse may stop and the child may grow up, but the child within does not. All the thoughts and feelings that were there during the abusive years are still inside the person. So, if the abuse took place 20 years ago, the survivor has been carrying around the thoughts and feelings for 20 years.

The child may use a number of methods to disassociate herself from the abuse. In Liz's case, she used music. She remembers disco music playing when the abuse took place. She would focus on the disco music as a way of disassociating herself from what was happening to her body.

This disassociation can manifest itself in a number of ways later in life. I remember one day shopping with Liz. She insisted that we get a disco tape. It sounds silly, but since I wasn't a big disco fan, I questioned why it was so important. Well, I got my answer when she stormed out of the store in anger. I didn't know what I had said or done that had made her so mad. Later, when we visited our counselor, we explained what had happened and she pinned it down to the fact that the disco tape was important to the child within Liz because it was her only way of disassociating from abuse.

Survivors cope with the abuse and adjust to its effects in different ways. But ignoring the effects of the abuse and hoping it will go away usually ends up backfiring. All the bad things that got locked away when the survivor was a child eventually come up in some way. And they can be triggered by a number of things.

An adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse may end up with a deep lack of trust for everyone, low self-esteem, depression, sexual and parenting problems. The survivor can also have memory blocks of their childhood years, recurring depression and suicide attempts. They may also have their feelings completely shut down, shut off or made inaccessible to anyone. Sometimes, the survivor disassoci-

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ates herself from any stressful situation or perceives the adult self and child self as two separate individuals.

As an adult, feelings of self-hatred, guilt or shame may lead to high-risk activities such as alcoholism, drug addiction or sexual promiscuity. One common symptom among survivors is eating disorders. In a 1990 study of 158 women with eating disorders, more than half divulged they had suffered some form of earlier sexual trauma. Others go in the opposite direction and end up starving themselves.

Sometimes, survivors don't manifest symptoms until they marry or have children. Occasionally, powerful, overcoming feelings may arise from sexual activity or other things like diapering a helpless baby.

It is important that the survivor learn how to talk to the child within. A good professional counselor should be able to help the survivor get in touch with her inner self. The counsellor will also be able to help the survivor manage and cope with this newfound entity.

It's equally important that you also learn how to cope with the child within. Rest assured, it is not something the survivor is making up. It is best if you accept the fact that the child exists and help the survivor learn how to handle it. Sometimes it could mean leaving the survivor alone for periods of time when she decides to deal with the child. Remember, the child within is like any child. It wants attention and it wants to be assured it is safe. At times, the child will demand the survivor's complete attention and that's when your feelings will just have to take a back seat for the time being.

You can slowly establish a relationship with the child too, although this can be a bit tricky. The child probably doesn't trust anyone, especially males, so don't expect immediate success with this approach. Patience is a virtue here. If you feel you aren't able to handle the whole episode of talking to the child within, don't try. It's best not to offend the child and have to start from scratch again.

It all sounds rather strange. But, when you're talking to the child within, what you're actually doing is talking to the survivor. The survivor may say things like, "The little girl doesn't like men. She doesn't trust them." You may want to respond with something like, "Well, she's right to think like that. She's been abused. But all men aren't like the one who abused her."

Remember, trust has to be earned. The child within doesn't trust easily and it's going to take a lot for you to earn her trust. Remember, the child within has been abused so don't expect miracles too fast.

If you're trying to talk to the little girl and you don't know the answer to something, don't try to bluff her. It's best to let her know that you don't know something and be honest with her. She'll respect honesty. Never try to trick the little girl. She'll be too quick for that, and when she finds out it will take a long time for her to trust you again.

Think of the child within as a real child and treat it with that same respect. Assure her that you'll protect her, that you'll try to help her and that you'll never give up on her. Don't yell at her if you get mad because she'll just disappear and not come back for quite some time. Assure the child that you do believe her, that the abuse wasn't her fault and that you're not angry at her for it.

It doesn't happen all the time, but the child within usually disappears as the healing process nears an end.

I recall Liz telling me one day that the child within was gone. She no longer had

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a sense that the child was there. She was well into her healing process when this happened. And she was a little bit worried that something was wrong. There was nothing wrong, though. It was a progressive step.

There's no time limit on all of this. Like the other parts of the healing process, it doesn't happen overnight. In the majority of cases, the adult and child become one. That's because, as a survivor heals, the child's emotions will heal too. In the end, the child no longer exists.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- The child within is real.
- The child acts and feels like a real child.
- Children disassociate themselves from abuse.
- Learn to accept the child within.
- The child within usually disappears.

Chapter Eight — The Myths

Friends will ask. Family will ask. So will co-workers. In fact, so many people will ask that you'll probably get tired of hearing them ask. But the questions are inevitable — and unavoidable.

They will want to know what's going on with the survivor, why she has to keep bringing up the sexual abuse which occurred in her past, why she can't just let it go, and why she's putting you through the agony as well. Usually, they're not mean-spirited about it all. They just don't understand what's involved and why it's so important for the survivor to heal.

You might as well get used to it. If they haven't hit you with these questions yet, you can bet they will soon. So you'd better get ready. The best way to be prepared is to educate yourself about the abuse so that you have answers when the questions start coming. Also, the more you understand, the more you're prepared for the road that lies ahead.

The more you learn about the survivor's healing process and everything else it entails, the less you will misjudge her, the fewer mistakes you'll make and the more you'll be able to help rather than hinder, her healing from the past.

People are usually more curious than anything else when they ask about the problems you're facing. Often, they just don't know what's involved in the healing process or why it's so important to heal. By asking questions, they gain a better understanding of the problem and come to appreciate the magnitude of the healing process.

Most people aren't aware that childhood sexual abuse is one of the most devastating things that can happen to someone. They aren't aware of the long-term effects it can have on a person's life. They aren't aware that it robs its victims of their innocence, trust and self-esteem. Most people aren't aware that it introduces a child to adult sexuality before they're able to deal with it, or that the trauma can fester inside a survivor for years and create a lot of self-hate. They aren't aware it can, in many cases, cause self-destructive behaviour in the survivor if she doesn't let it out, if she doesn't get help for the problem.

THE REACTIONS

Sometimes you might want to lash out at the world for failing to understand the predicament you're in. You might wonder why people keep pestering you with questions when you've already made it clear that the survivor is doing her best to heal from the abuse. Yet, you can't blame people for their lack of understanding about the issue. After all, sexual abuse of children is something that society has only recently come to terms with.

Yes, it's true that the problem has been around for centuries, but it's only in recent years that people have chosen to face up to the issue and its devastating effects. Only in recent years, with more and more women coming forward to tell their tales, has the crime been addressed at all.

Until recently, it has been dealt with behind closed doors, kept hidden by both survivors and their families. It's always been something that happens but is seldom discussed. So, don't be alarmed when people ask questions and want to know what's happening.

To understand more, just think back to when you were first asked to come to grips with the issue. Chances are you were a bit naïve yourself.

It's not surprising that people are in the dark about childhood sexual abuse.

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People have only been able to learn about the issue through television documentaries and movies. The media is a great way of providing information to the public, but in doing so, events are dramatized, and in some cases the public sees the issue through rose-coloured glasses. It's little wonder, then, that there are a lot of myths and misconceptions about the problem. It's also little wonder that people have a lot of questions which still need answering.

More education about the problem is the only way that people will understand. It's the only way to debunk some of the myths and misconceptions that are out there. You can do your part by getting more information about childhood sexual abuse and increasing your knowledge of the issue. Not only will it help you deal with the survivor and give you a better understanding of what she's going through, it will also help you to educate others.

So, to help you out, following are some of the myths and misconceptions — and the truth:

“It was her fault too. She probably asked for it”

This is absolutely false, of course. The survivor was an innocent child when the abuse occurred, not a consenting adult. She knew nothing about sex. She might have felt that what she was doing was wrong, but she didn't know how to prevent it. She was merely following the orders of an adult who was in a position of trust. The abused child didn't know any better, but the adult did. Don't forget the child is truly the victim here and what the perpetrator did was a criminal act. Children never ask to be sexually abused.

“She should be leaving the past alone. It all happened so long ago”

Should the person who took away the survivor's childhood go unpunished? Should that person be allowed to be free to do it again to some other vulnerable and unsuspecting child? Should that person be allowed to live his life without being held accountable for his actions?

While it's true that many survivors might not care about the perpetrator and what becomes of him, others feel it's a necessary part of the healing process to ensure that the perpetrator is held accountable and punished for his actions. They may also want to ensure that the truth is known so the perpetrator can't harm another child.

Whatever the reason, it's important the survivor deal with her past so she can get on with her future. Nobody can tell the survivor she shouldn't deal with the past.

“Why did she wait so long? Why didn't she tell someone when the abuse was occurring?”

Many times young children who are abused do tell someone about the abuse, but aren't believed or the perpetrator isn't confronted. Sometimes abused children don't say anything because they are so afraid of what the perpetrator will do to them. Other times, they don't tell because the perpetrator is someone they are supposed to trust and they don't want to get him in trouble.

Abused children are often confused about what's happening. It may feel wrong, but they're often rewarded by the perpetrator for doing it. The point is that no child deserves to be abused, and whether the child did or didn't say anything about it makes no difference at all. Remember, it's not up to the child to do something about the problem of abuse — it's everybody's responsibility. The fact of the matter is that many women come forward years after the abuse has occurred. Liz went to the police 20 years after the incidents involving her stepfather.

“It wasn’t really abuse because it happened only a few times.”

How many times have you heard this one? But abuse is abuse no matter how many times it happened. The act of sexually abusing a young child is still a criminal one even if it happened only once. A child who is abused once may not be as affected as a child who was abused repeatedly, but that doesn’t change the nature of the crime. When a child is abused, the child is abused, period. It affects each child in some way, The number of times it occurred has no bearing on whether it was abuse. If it happened once, twice or 20 times, it was still abuse.

“It didn’t cause any damage because she looks fine.”

The survivor may appear fine on the outside, but her emotions may be in shambles. The abuse may have taken its toll on the inside. The distress may range from mild to severe, depending on the circumstances of the abuse. If the abuse was brief and short-lived, the effect might not be as severe. If the abuse took place over a long period of time, however, the effect will probably be more severe. Much depends on the severity of the abuse.

Keep in mind that survivors of childhood sexual abuse are often very good at hiding their real feelings from people. On the outside, they may look okay but don’t underestimate how devastating sexual abuse can be.

“She’s always got a problem. She always has to be the centre of attention.”

Yes, she does have a problem. And yes, she may always want attention. But there’s probably a good reason for it — and that’s the abuse. She may always be seeking to be the life of the party because she’s been abused and didn’t have a chance at any normal kind of emotional development.

The adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse might have a totally different outlook on life than others. She might want attention because she thinks it’s the only way people will like her. Instead of criticizing someone for these types of actions, perhaps it is wiser to get to the root of the problem, find out why they act that way, and then try to help them.

“It can’t be her father. He loves her. Besides, he’s a respected man in the community.”

The fact is that most perpetrators are known to the child. They’re usually a person in a position of trust, someone she believes in, someone she respects. The perpetrator often gets away with it while the child is still young because he can still use his position of trust and power to threaten to harm the child.

Of those who abuse, about one in four assailants is a family member or a person in a position of trust. About half of the assailants are friends or acquaintances of the child. Only one in six is a stranger. It is much rarer to find that the perpetrator didn’t know the child.

DOUBTERS WILL ALWAYS EXIST

There will always be people who doubt that childhood sexual abuse really does exist, so you’re not going to win everybody over.

Even the facts aren’t going to convince all doubters. Some people just refuse to admit it happens. Others feel it shouldn’t be talked about. They feel it should be kept within the family. Still others believe it’s not really a serious problem in society.

It’s usually that lack of education about the problem that is responsible for these feelings. If people knew more about the devastating effects that childhood sexual abuse can have on a person they might not be so quick to deny its exist-

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tence. If they knew more about the serious social consequences, they might want to learn more about the problem. Then, in the end, all of society would benefit.

You can't blame people for their ignorance, though. Unless you're involved in something there isn't much need to learn about it, is there? You might not know a lot about alcoholism or drug abuse, but you can bet that someone who has a partner who is an alcoholic or drug abuser knows a lot about the problem and the issue. It's just human nature not to worry about things that don't affect you.

But you're reading this book because you have an interest in childhood sexual abuse. It likely has affected you and now you need to know how to handle the situation.

Don't be taken aback at how naïve people may be about the subject. And don't get too upset at the questions they ask or statements they make. The best approach is to treat it as a learning experience. The more information you can pass on to somebody else, the better. When people begin to understand the issue and learn what you and the survivor are going through, their support might prove invaluable.

If you can just win over one supporter, the world will be better off than it was before because those supporters, like yourself, will now be on the lookout for such abuse.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Many people don't understand the effects of childhood sexual abuse.
- Don't blame people for their lack of knowledge about the subject.
- Do your best to educate others about the issue.
- You won't win everybody over, but that's okay.
- Victims often come forward years after the abuse has occurred.

Chapter Nine — The Confrontation

At some point, it could very well happen.

The survivor may want to confront the perpetrator and anyone else who let the abuse happen — friends, family and relatives included.

She may want to set the record straight, let everybody know who abused her and make it clear that she's not going to keep the secret any more.

She may want to let the whole world in on the secret. She may want everybody to know what happened to her.

For you, this is going to be a real eye opener. It may also be an especially difficult period if you've known the perpetrator for years and have a relationship with him and the survivor's family. The prospect of suddenly being in a face-to-face confrontation with him doesn't sound too appealing. But there's no use trying to avoid the situation. Some things you just have to do — and this is one of them.

It's for the betterment of both of you.

Think about it for a moment. You don't want to be associated with someone who molests little girls, do you? You don't want your wife or partner hanging around someone who molested her as a child, do you? You don't want other innocent children falling prey to the same abuse, do you?

Experts say not all survivors will want to confront the perpetrator. It depends on the survivor. Sometimes survivors will feel sorry for the perpetrator or they may not want to upset the family. It's an important step in the healing process, however, and you should support the survivor if she does choose to confront the perpetrator.

All this shouldn't come as a total surprise to you. You've probably thought about the problem at times during the healing process. You must have thought there would come a time when the survivor might want the perpetrator to face the music. You must have thought how it would happen, how the survivor would tell him, and how you would cope.

If, by some strange reason you haven't, though, you might want to put this book down for a moment and give it some thought right now.

It's a progressive step if the survivor wants to take the perpetrator to task. The reasons may vary, but many survivors feel it's something they have to do in order to protect other children. People will be more reluctant to let their children be around a man who's been called a perpetrator, right?

There's another reason, though. Exposing the perpetrator also places the blame where it should lie — squarely on the shoulders of the perpetrator.

For years the survivor has probably been carrying around a lot of shame, guilt and anger. Exposing the perpetrator shifts that burden. No longer is the problem hidden. The perpetrator, as the survivor did for so many years, will have to live with a cloud hanging over him.

In Liz's case, she exposed the perpetrator — her stepfather — not only for herself, but also to protect her nieces and nephews.

She confronted her stepfather directly one day when he came to pick up her mother at work. She had been working with her mother and when he came into the room she met him face to face. She told him she was well aware of what he did to her as a child, she told him she wasn't afraid of him any more and that he would pay for what he did.

She yelled at him, screamed at him and told him never to come near her again. Then she left.

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DON'T FRET

Don't get afraid and tied up in knots when the survivor tells you she wants to confront the perpetrator. Again, like the other steps in the healing process, it is a big step in the right direction. After all, isn't it time he felt some of the things the survivor carried around with her all these years? Isn't it time he was accosted? Isn't it time he was made accountable for what he has taken?

The survivor isn't taking a step backwards by confronting the perpetrator. By doing it, she's progressing. When the survivor wants to confront the perpetrator, she's doing it because she's decided it's something she needs to do. It's much different than being angry. So, if the survivor tells you she wants to confront the perpetrator, you can bet she really means it. Don't try to stop her. Just help her do it in the right way.

There are two ways the survivor can confront the perpetrator — directly or indirectly. The circumstances of the abuse and the perpetrator's temperament and disposition will factor greatly into this. So will the attitudes of the survivor towards the perpetrator and her reasons for exposing him.

If the perpetrator is a violent person and likely to bring harm to the survivor or her family, she may prefer to expose him indirectly. If she's still afraid of confronting him face to face, she may want to phone him, write him a letter or send a tape-recorded message to him. She's still getting the message across — it's just that she's doing it in the way that's most comfortable to her.

The direct approach may be used by the survivor if she feels she has healed and is strong enough to cope with the anger of the perpetrator or whatever other problems he may try to cause her. It also depends a lot on how much support the survivor has. If she has little support, she may doubt herself and have difficulty confronting the perpetrator. With a lot of support, though, she'll feel positive about what she's doing and do it in a strong, confident manner.

LET HER DECIDE

Whatever approach the survivor decides to take, it is important that you let her make the decision. You'll just have to accept her judgment here. Remember, she's doing this for herself and her healing. It's very important that she empower herself to do it the way that she wants to do it.

Sure, you may have a very strong desire to confront the perpetrator for her. You might want to wring his neck for her, say a few choice words to him, let him know what you think of him. You have a right to feel this way. After all, what is happening affects you too. However, this isn't your fight. It's the survivor's, and it's up to her how she wants to deal with the perpetrator.

Liz and I lived in a small city and every time I saw her stepfather the anger would boil inside me. He'd go out of his way to make sure I saw him. Some mornings, he'd sit in his truck outside of where I worked, just so I knew he was around. I wanted to grab him and belt him for what he had done, but I didn't because I knew it wouldn't help Liz in her healing. It's one of the most difficult things I've ever had to do, but I did manage to restrain myself. I just wanted to give him one good shot, but I held myself back.

Looking back now, I realize I did the right thing by restraining myself. It might have brought some immediate satisfaction, but it wouldn't have done Liz any good in the long run. It would just have caused more problems.

It's tough, but you have to hold back. You have to let the survivor determine

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how she wants to deal with the perpetrator. It wouldn't be fair to take that away from her, would it? It's better if she decides how she'll deal with him.

It's better if she decides how and where she's going to do it. You might have some strong views on how all this should be done, but for the time being it's wise to keep them to yourself.

It will work out for the better if you let the survivor sort things out here. She's got a lot on and she doesn't need the extra burden of worrying about your thoughts and feelings. But that doesn't mean you can't be a help to her. You can have some input and you can encourage her to confront the perpetrator using the right method and manner. You could sit and plan it all with her, giving her the final say in all decisions, of course.

Whether she chooses the direct or indirect approach, there are a few things which should be worked out beforehand.

If she chooses the direct approach, it's probably not a bad idea for her to rehearse how she's going to go about confronting the perpetrator. You could help by setting up the scenario, encouraging her to practice and helping her find the courage within herself to carry it through.

After all, she'll want to say all she has to say in the short time period she has to say it. She won't want to miss anything because it's probably a one-shot deal. You can help her rehearse how she's going to do it.

For example, make sure she answers these simple questions:

- What happened? It's better if the survivor tells the perpetrator in no uncertain terms exactly what happened and why she is talking to him.
- How has it affected her? The survivor must make clear what the abuse has done to her and how it has taken away from her life and person.
- How does she feel about the perpetrator? It's important that the survivor leave no doubt in the perpetrator's mind what she thinks about the abuse and him.

STAY ALERT

Once the survivor has confronted the perpetrator, don't let your guard down. You need to be ready for anything. A lot of things happen within families once the situation is confronted and out in the open. A lot of emotions are stirred up. A lot of feelings are exposed.

Sometimes the perpetrator will let the situation ride, but not often. The perpetrator may hope that nothing more will come of it. He may try to distance the survivor from the family so others won't get on the bandwagon. Other times, the perpetrator will fight back with more abuse, trying to show the survivor that more harm will come to her if she tells, just as he may have done when the survivor was a child.

In our case, Liz's stepfather tried everything he could to harass us. He had her mother phone our house. He even phoned my workplace and told people I was trying to hurt him. The day before he was to be sentenced in court on charges of molesting Liz as a child, he tried cutting her off in her car and threatened to kill her.

There was one time that I did nearly lose my temper with him. I was in a grocery store and saw him standing and sneering at me from a few feet away. I decided I wasn't going to take it any more and called his bluff. I faced him and called him a child molester in front of all the people in the store. He left and told the police I had threatened him. However, before I approached him I had asked an employee I

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knew in the store to listen to what I was going to say to the perpetrator. Luckily, I'd protected myself and nothing came of it.

DON'T TAKE IT ON YOURSELF

There are a number of ways to deal with a perpetrator who does cross the line, and we'll deal with that in more detail in the next chapter. Suffice it to say, the best way to deal with a problem perpetrator is through the legal system. By letting authorities handle a problem situation, you don't get personally involved and go and do something stupid that will hamper the survivor's healing process.

Remember, there's a lot of tension and emotions are running high at this time. The perpetrator is being made accountable for something he never thought he'd be held accountable for. You're involved in something you likely never thought would happen to you. It's easy to step over the boundary and get yourself in real deep trouble by accosting the perpetrator and feeling better about yourself. But getting yourself into trouble won't help the survivor progress in her healing, and that is what is most important.

The moral in all of this is to leave it up to the authorities to handle. That way you don't get personally involved. That way you don't get in any trouble.

Unfortunately, it sounds as if what you have to do here is sit back and watch. To some extent, that's what you must do. You must let the survivor confront the perpetrator in the manner she wants to. But you also have to be there — ready and willing — when she calls on you for support, help or understanding. That's how you're involved.

You have to show a lot of compassion here. For the time being, you have to put your feelings about all this in your pocket. The focus must be on the survivor. If you have too much trouble with your anger and frustration about this whole thing, perhaps you should see a counselor yourself to work things out. It won't do any good venting them on the survivor. She has enough to cope with just now.

All this might seem like a pretty tall order. But it'll be worth it down the road when you see the survivor healing and the perpetrator still carrying guilt.

I used to get angry when I saw the perpetrator. He'd walk down the street like he didn't have a care in the world. It bothered me then because Liz was suffering from the abuse he caused. But now that Liz has healed, it doesn't bother me. He's still living in his miserable world. He was taken to task for his actions and he no longer has any control over her.

BE CAUTIOUS

It's so important to let the survivor confront the perpetrator in her own way. The survivor will build self-esteem and feel better about herself if she is able to confront the perpetrator on her own. The important thing is to be supportive of the survivor.

Don't be afraid or embarrassed about seeking professional counseling for yourself. Your dealing with a very emotionally charged issue here and it's important for you to deal with your feelings in a constructive manner. You don't want to be bogging the survivor down with your feelings. Right now, it's the survivor's fight. She needs to say what she has to say. Remember, it's not your turn yet. It may never be your turn. So if you have to express your anger, you have to do it in another way.

Hitting a punching bag with the perpetrator's face on it is an example of a constructive way to vent your anger. You are venting your anger, but not damaging the healing of the survivor. And you're getting a good workout in the process. Writing a letter, making a tape, yelling in a closed room, or group counseling sessions are

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other great ways of getting rid of anger and frustration. There are also other, more productive ways to vent your anger. Perhaps working towards tougher laws for child abusers would help alleviate some of the anger that you might have built up.

Once the survivor has confronted the perpetrator, you'll probably feel a sense of relief. The survivor, on the other hand, will feel a lot of satisfaction. The survivor may also have a great feeling of empowerment and want to change other things about her life. After all, she's lifted a heavy burden from her shoulders. She's confronted someone who took so much away from her, the person she couldn't confront as a helpless child.

Imagine how uplifting that is for her.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- The survivor might want to confront the perpetrator.
- Confronting the perpetrator is a good move for her.
- The confrontation can be direct or indirect.
- Help her do it in the proper manner.
- Let police handle any fallout.

Chapter Ten — The Aftermath

Okay, it's done. The perpetrator has been exposed. Now what? Well, buckle up and get ready for some real action. The feud between the Hatfields and the McCoys were nothing compared to what can happen when a perpetrator is exposed. Once that happens you can expect all hell to break loose. Family members take sides. The battle lines get drawn between the survivor and her family. After that, the denials, accusations and lies might really start to fly.

The perpetrator will probably deny it: "I never did anything wrong," he will say. "It's all in her head. She's lying. She's just trying to cause a family rift."

The mother might defend him: "Oh, she's always been a little strange," she'll say. "I don't know what's wrong with her. She'll get over it in time, I'm sure."

Siblings will probably side-step the issue: "Nothing happened to me," they'll say. "I don't remember anything. He wasn't a bad guy."

Liz and I heard it all.

In all this confusion, however, there's one thing you can bet on — the survivor is the only one telling the truth about what really happened. Her story is the only one you can truly believe. Everybody will deny there's a problem while the survivor faces up to it.

It's simple to see why. Childhood sexual abuse is repulsive and families don't want to admit when it's happened. It's embarrassing to families. Once a perpetrator is exposed, it can rip a family apart at the seams. In many instances, families will do all they can to keep it quiet.

When a survivor exposes the problem she's often ostracized by her family. She might be left alone to deal with the emotional scars of the abuse. Others in the family might not have faced up to the fact the abuse occurred or they may just want to keep it hidden. The survivor might not fit in with the family any more. She may be creating too many ripples in the pond. She therefore gets banished from the family for speaking about the abuse. She's labeled a problem child, someone who is always stirring up trouble. Meanwhile, the rest of the family — the perpetrator, the mother, the other siblings — bond closer to try to secure what they have left.

It can be a particularly painful time for the survivor. Not only is she trying to deal with the emotional pain of facing up to the abuse, but she is also dealing with added problem of alienation from her family.

It's all very confusing because she has a lot of good reasons for confronting the situation, but she probably also has a lot of memories of good times with the family. Although there was abuse, she may still have warm memories of times like Christmases and birthdays.

In our case, Liz knew the situation had to be confronted, but she was still sad because there had also been good times with her family. It was a very emotional experience for her, having to separate the good from the bad. It took her years to figure out which parts of her past she wanted to remember fondly and which parts of her past she wanted to discard. Christmas is still a tough time for her because that's when so much emphasis is placed upon the family. Because she doesn't have a family now, it is particularly difficult for her to be upbeat about the festive season. Time is healing the wounds, though, and as each Christmas passes it gets easier for her.

SALVAGING THE GOOD

Once the survivor has exposed the truth, she'll still attempt to salvage some

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good from the bad. Even in the most dysfunctional of families there is still good mixed in with the bad. She'll have to decide what can be salvaged from her family and what needs to be discarded. It becomes very confusing for her to sort out the good from the bad and she needs time to do this.

As a supporter, all you can do is provide a listening ear and let her know she still has someone who believes in her and does care. It may take the survivor time, perhaps even years, to decide how she wants to deal with the rest of the family, with her brothers and sisters who might maintain the abuse didn't occur or aren't ready to speak about it. But she'll do it.

In Liz's case, the decisions were made fairly quickly — over a period of months. Nobody supported her when she made the decision to confront the perpetrator. Her mother, a brother and a sister all wondered why she had to do such a thing. They all stuck by the perpetrator.

Months later, Liz did talk to her brother and sister to see if there was a chance a relationship could be worked out, but it was her own decision that none could. She told each of them that she was unable to see them any more because they still associated with the perpetrator and hadn't acknowledged what he had done. It was a painful process for her, but also necessary if she was to live a life free from the abuse.

Sorting out family ties is a difficult process for the survivor. She may approach family members many times as she heals to see if they'll come over to her side. There's no harm in all of this if she's healed enough. Once the survivor is well on the road to recovery, she'll never be able to go back to the abuse. So don't worry about her slipping back into the folds of an abusive situation and falling prey to the very people who abused her in the first place. It just won't happen.

When she reaches out to her family, all she's doing is extending the olive branch to see if any of the family members who may have been abused or didn't believe her at first will reach out for that branch and join her in healing from the past. If she's healed, there's no harm in trying. In fact, she may do some good. Perhaps another family member who was abused by the same perpetrator might have been too afraid in the beginning to come forward. Perhaps that family member wanted to make the break but just didn't know how.

There's a very good chance, it might not work out, though. In fact, in some cases it does not. The survivor has to be ready for a lot of disappointment here. Many times, families in which abuse occurred are so close-knit that even the truth won't cause the members to separate from the perpetrator.

TESTING THE FAMILY

The survivor will probably want to test each member of her family individually, so be prepared for a lot of ups and downs during this tumultuous period of her healing. She'll want to explore what type of relationship, if any, she can have with each individual member of her family. She may have vowed many times in the past that she'd never talk to any of them again, but chances are she'll try to keep the lines of communication open to see if any of them have changed their minds. If they haven't, you can rest assured she'll figure it out quickly, more quickly than she has in the past, and not bother with them again.

It's easy to see why the survivor wants to help other members of her family. As she heals, she begins to experience what life is like without the shame, anger and guilt many abused children feel years later. She realizes the gains made from

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healing and only wants the others to realize the benefits as well. Unfortunately, all members of a family aren't as receptive to the offers. Many family members will turn their backs on the survivor or just lead her on.

It's difficult to watch the survivor go through this process. She will have a lot of headaches and heartaches as she tries to determine which family members she can trust and have relationships with. But, like the other stages of healing, it is an essential one to go through.

How close the survivor remains to her family is something only she can decide. There are a lot of variables at work here like whether the family is prepared to admit the truth or whether they care about the truth. The more the survivor heals, the more easily she'll be able to figure them out, and the less time she'll spend trying to get help for someone who doesn't really want to be helped.

SETTING BOUNDARIES

The survivor might go about testing the boundaries with her family in different ways. She may opt to have a temporary separation from her family in order to work out her feelings and see if she wants a relationship with anybody. She may want to heal more so she is stronger to deal with the family. She may also impose a cooling off period.

When Liz decided to deal with her family, it was quick and deliberate. She gave them a chance to see her point of view, and when they refused to confront the situation, she decided not to have contact with any of them. I think it helped her recover much faster. Because there was no tugging at the heartstrings, Liz healed more quickly than a lot of survivors. By separating from her family, she didn't have to deal with a lot of the emotional upheaval that accompanies a perpetrator being exposed.

That's not to say that everything was a bed of roses for us. Liz still had her problems. In addition to healing, she had to come to grips with the fact that her family didn't support her and what she was doing. That in itself was an emotional nightmare. But she did come to grips with it and sort through the process by herself.

Each situation and family is different, but if the survivor feels her recovery is thwarted by the family, then she will have little choice but to pull away from them — at least temporarily. In many cases, complete separation is the only answer.

A survivor might want to separate from her family if:

- She finds that the family continually denies the abuse took place and isn't willing to get help.
- The family continues to try to abuse the survivor.
- The family continually upsets her and generally won't let her live a normal life.
- The family is also dysfunctional in other ways.
- The family tells the survivor that she shouldn't deal with her past and attempts to interfere with her recovery.
- The perpetrator doesn't get any help for his problem.

At sometime during the healing process, the survivor will have to deal with her family. The survivor has to work out the past, and determine who she can and can not trust before she can move ahead with her healing. She might also decide to take legal action against the perpetrator, for a number of reasons. She may just want him to pay for what he did to her. She might want to protect other children

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from the perpetrator. Whatever the reason, she has every right to take legal action because what the perpetrator did was a crime.

In most countries the legal system is fairly open when it comes to the length of time the survivor can wait before deciding to charge a perpetrator in court. It's not uncommon for perpetrators to be sent to jail two decades after the abuse occurred.

That's exactly what happened in our case. Liz took her stepfather to court more than 20 years after the initial abuse occurred, and he was sentenced to a three-month jail term. Later, he spent another day in jail for threatening to kill her. Although it took a lot of time and patience, not to mention a lot of work by the police in investigating the matter, the rewards were well worth it. After the conviction, Liz felt a relief that the courts had finally believed what she knew to be the case.

She also knew that the perpetrator could no longer deny his actions — and be believed.

RELATIONS MAY GET WORSE

Once a survivor has decided to charge the perpetrator relations with her family can only get worse, especially if nobody else is admitting the abuse occurred. Families will do just about anything to make sure the survivor doesn't cause any problems for them. First, they may deny there ever was a problem. Then they may try to coax the survivor into keeping the problem quiet. Lastly, they'll threaten her — especially if charges are considered. The don't have a lot to lose, and perpetrators are so used to being in control they'll resort to just about anything to stop from being exposed.

Now this is where you can help — big time. Throughout this book you've been told, in many cases, to relax, take it easy and not worry. Well, now you can do something you'll really feel good about. There's nothing that says a survivor has to put up with continual harassment from a perpetrator. She has a right to a safe, secure life. So do you.

If you find the perpetrator is causing problems for the survivor — whether he's calling your house or sitting in a car outside her work — make problems for him. Just one word of caution, however. Make sure you do it legally, otherwise you won't be doing anybody any good.

Do it legally — but do something. You can protect the survivor and you can do it in the right manner without getting yourself in trouble. Don't forget, the important point here is not to get yourself in trouble. Nobody benefits if you go and threaten the perpetrator or take matters into your own hands. Sure, it might make you feel better for the time being. But the only thing it will bring you and the survivor is grief and trouble — something she doesn't need any more of at this point in her healing.

You won't do the survivor any good if you end up in court for accosting the perpetrator. While you might think you had a good reason, a judge will still punish you because it's unacceptable behaviour. It might help you let off some steam, but in the end it will only build more frustration and cause more pain for the survivor. Court processes can be long and strenuous ordeals, so don't cause yourself any more grief.

Remember, your job here is to help and protect the survivor, not to vent your frustrations by beating up the perpetrator. Keep your cool and deal with the perpetrator in the proper manner. That means going to the authorities every time there's a problem. Don't try to handle it yourself because it will only backfire on you.

Every time I got a phone call from the perpetrator, every time I had tire marks

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on my front lawn or nails in my tire, we'd call the police. At first, they didn't understand the situation. But after several reports of incidents, they began to see the pattern and were very helpful with suggestions on how to protect ourselves. They suggested filing a trespass order against the perpetrator but it never came to that.

Police can't investigate every little problem, and you have to realize that. However, they are there to help and don't want to see people harassed.

It's important to try not to beat the perpetrator at his own game. Don't get into a tit-for-tat exchange with him. It's better to let the police handle it. You'll only be playing his game if you try to deal with the perpetrator on your own. Remember, he's got nothing to lose and everything to gain by playing this way. Perpetrators are good at it. Police officers, on the other hand, are trained to handle these situations, so let them do their job.

Sometimes you may get frustrated with the efforts of the police. You might feel they're not doing enough to protect you from the perpetrator. But keep in mind that there's only so much they can do. They have their hands tied too. They have only so much authority. The law enforcement authorities will do what they can to help. If you're being harassed and they can do something about it, my experience is that they will. The authorities don't like perpetrators any more than you do.

If you're at your wit's end and can't get any action from the police, there are other legal avenues to pursue. The laws vary from place to place, so it is best to contact a lawyer to see what you can do. In most places, legal consultation is free for the first half-hour so it may be well worth the time spent to seek a lawyer's advice. A lawyer can advise you on such things as peace bonds, restraining orders, trespassing notices and how to launch a civil lawsuit.

Yes, the period after a perpetrator is confronted can be a long, upsetting and frustrating time. But, if you're patient and deal with the family and the perpetrator in the proper manner, you'll come out a winner when the dust settles.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- The survivor is often outcast by her family.
- The survivor will try to salvage some good from the bad.
- Relations with the family will probably deteriorate after the truth comes out.
- Deal with the problems legally.

Chapter Eleven — Gaining Trust

As the survivor heals, you can bet she'll watch you like a hawk. It might be unsettling for you, but it's important to her. After all, she wants to make sure she can trust you.

The simple truth is that someone healing from childhood sexual abuse has a tough time with trust.

It's not complicated to figure out why — a person she trusted was probably the one who sexually abused her. A survivor has to figure out whom she can and can not trust. Trust is something she's never experienced in her life. The abuse she suffered as a child destroyed her ability to trust anyone.

It all makes perfect sense if you think about it for a moment. When your first sexual experience as a child is abusive, it changes your outlook on trust.

The survivor was never allowed to figure things out for herself, or experience normal sexual feelings through a normal series of life experiences. It was forced upon her in an ugly manner.

She learned not to trust. That's because she was never allowed to make the necessary mistakes and implement the necessary checks and balances to find out for herself who you can and can not trust in this world.

Because the survivor was abused, she had to learn quickly. She learned that even someone she loves can not be trusted fully. While most children are taught to watch out for the stranger, the person that might pull up alongside them in a car and attempt to abduct them, most aren't taught that the perpetrators can exist right in their own safe homes.

Trust, therefore, is confusing for the survivor. It can cause myriad problems for you and the survivor.

When things are going well between the two of you, it might make the survivor uncomfortable. She might have to sabotage a good thing or even a relationship just to reinforce the notion that men can't be trusted. After all, a male figure she trusted and looked up to as a child was probably the one who abused her. What kind of message does that send to a young child?

In the beginning, my relationship with Liz was very rocky for this very reason. We fell into a pattern. Things would be fine for a few weeks. Everything would be going really well. Then, all of a sudden, usually after a period of three weeks, as we'd be getting close, she would call the whole thing off. For no reason at all, she'd tell me it wasn't working out and she couldn't see me any more. It was downright confusing, not to mention infuriating.

It wasn't until later, when Liz and I went to a counselor, that I learned the real reason this was happening. She was afraid that bad followed good because the abuse by her stepfather always followed good times with him. He would suddenly turn around and abuse her. As a child, Liz got used to this cycle, so later in life, when things were going well between the two of us, she had to sabotage the relationship because she feared it would turn rotten anyway.

TRUST

As I've said, it's not uncommon for a perpetrator to be a person in a position of trust. That's how he's so successful in getting away with the hideous crime. The perpetrator either threatens the child so the child is too afraid to tell on him, or the perpetrator leads the child into thinking she is doing the right thing by not telling.

It's not surprising, then, that the adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse gets

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so confused when it comes to trusting someone. So, while you might be trying to do good things for the survivor, don't be surprised if she questions your motives. In her mind, it's possible that an abusive situation will follow the good times she's having with you.

As an adult, Liz had the toughest time trusting anyone — including me. It took years for me to earn her trust. She'd watch me and test me to see if I was telling the truth.

On one occasion we were shopping and I mentioned that she might look good in a certain dress. Well, that was the end of that. She wondered where I'd got the idea she might look good in the dress. She wondered who I had seen it on before.

This lack of trust can manifest itself in a number of ways. For example, the survivor may have a tough time saying she loves you because that's what the perpetrator told her. To her, love is a dirty word. It's the same word she heard when bad things were happening to her. So you can't blame her now for not wanting to be loved, can you? In her way of thinking, she can't trust or love you because of that past.

BE HONEST

It'll take time — a lot of time — for her to come to grips with the situation. The only way you can help is by being open and honest with her. The survivor will have to learn through experience and time — a long period of time — that you are much different from the perpetrator, that your thoughts and intentions are in no way like his.

At times, the survivor may even test your honesty. She'll ask you about stories you've told her in the past to see if the facts are still the same. Even a little white lie can upset the survivor a lot so don't even try it. Remember, she already thinks all men lie. Once she catches you lying about something, she's confirmed her belief and it will take her a long time to trust you again.

Honesty is your best policy here. Using your own common sense is another. Be honest with the survivor. Sit with her and talk about how you feel about the situation. Tell her your shortcomings. That way, if something does happen and you're in trouble, she knows you're not trying to abuse her. She knows it's something you can't help.

For example, some people have trouble making appointments on time. Some people won't fill up the gas tank in the car until it's on empty. If you've noticed these peculiarities about yourself, let the survivor know. That way, when you don't show up right on time or if the car's running on empty, she understands it's not because of her. She'll realize it's a problem that you have. That doesn't mean she still won't lambaste you for being a flaming idiot, but she won't think you're trying to abuse her as she was abused in the past.

It's important that the survivor know about your shortcomings. After all, nobody in this world can be expected to be 100 per cent trustworthy. It's just part of our nature to fail sometimes. We're all human. How many times have you said you'd be somewhere at a certain time and found yourself running late for no reason of your own? You see, you can't be perfect. So accept that fact. But do your best to be where you said you'd be and do what you said you'd do.

If you fail, tell the survivor why you failed. It's important she know the real reason. And she deserves an explanation. The last thing she deserves is to be disappointed, manipulated or lied to again.

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Of course, the best way to build trust is to be trustworthy; and that goes without saying. So now might be a good time to sit down and evaluate yourself to see how trustworthy you really are. Some of us think we're trustworthy, but when it gets right down to it, we fall short.

Try this. Make up a list of things you feel you can be trusted to do. Then make up a list that shows why you're unreliable. Which list is longer? What does that tell you? Once you've completed the lists, see if you can make some improvements. Be honest with yourself when you do this.

Ask yourself some of these questions:

- Do I keep my promises?
- Do I tell little white lies to get what I want?
- Do I safeguard confidences?
- Would I make a trustworthy friend?
- Would I trust myself?

This isn't scientific and there's no perfect way to score this test. Only you can decide how trustworthy you are. Still, sitting down and compiling a list might help you realize where your shortcomings are and where you can improve. At least this way, if your partner gets upset because you can't be relied on, you know exactly what she's talking about. If, after making up the list, you're satisfied that you are a fairly trustworthy person, then you're in good shape. You've got a good base to start from. Barring a few minor problems, you should pull through all this okay. If you're not, however, you've got some work to do.

YOU'RE NOT SUPERHUMAN

The survivor won't expect you to be superhuman. She'll realize that you can't be trustworthy all the time. But she will expect you to be trustworthy when it really counts.

It all sounds very stressful, and it is. Finding a way to cope under this ever-watchful eye can be a very difficult process indeed. But you can help minimize potentially explosive situations by avoiding them.

For example, it's best to avoid movies or televisions shows about childhood sexual abuse or ones that show graphic violence against women. The survivor is trying to heal from childhood sexual abuse and doesn't need to see a rape scene played out on the big screen. The survivor is ultra-sensitive to anything that depicts exploitation or sexual abuse.

Gaining a survivor's trust can be a very frustrating experience. On one hand, you might feel that you shouldn't have to earn the survivor's trust. On the other hand, you have to face the reality of the situation you are in. She was abused and trust for her is non-existent.

One certainty in all of this, though, is that if you pass the test you will gain her trust. That's not to say things are going to be consistently rosy. But, if the survivor begins to show trust for you, it's going to make things a lot easier. And both of you will benefit from that.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- A survivor finds it difficult to trust anyone.
- Earning her trust takes time.
- Expect to be tested.
- Honesty is your best policy.

Chapter Twelve — Nightmares

You've probably experienced it many times already. It's the middle of the night. You and the survivor are sleeping soundly. Suddenly, the peaceful silence is shattered. The survivor jerks herself upright in the bed and sits there, staring with a look of horror into the darkness. She grabs you by the arm. Her frightened fingers tighten around your arm like a vice. Her eyes widen like saucers.

"Can you hear them?" she says in a quivering voice. "I can hear them. They're footsteps. Listen to them. He's coming after me."

As you try to gather your thoughts, the survivor is pushing you to investigate.

"Quick, he's coming up the stairs," she says. "Hurry, go and see if it's him."

The terror in her voice is contagious. Now you're scared stiff too. But like a flash you're out of bed, on your feet and heading towards the door. Then it hits you. Wait a minute, you didn't hear anything at all. You didn't hear any footsteps, noises or anybody coming up the stairs. So what are you doing, standing there in your pyjamas, in the dark, in the middle of the night, looking for this imaginary assailant?

You turn quickly to the survivor. But at that moment, she looks like a frightened child. At that moment, she's reliving some horrible moment from her past, perhaps an unwanted visit in the night from her stepfather, uncle or friend of the family. It's clear from the expression on her face.

As she slept, her subconscious conjured up images of the past — an ordeal from which she never healed. Now, her mind is acting it out like some strange play. Anybody who has helped a survivor heal knows about the nightmares — endless haunting dreams. Although the memories are in the subconscious, to the survivor they are very real. They manifest themselves as nightmares. The survivor thinks she really sees or hears the assailant. She can describe where he is and what he's wearing.

It seemed there was never a moment's rest while Liz was healing. I don't think we ever had a full night's sleep. Turmoil was always present. She'd wake up three, four, maybe six times a night while she was in the process of healing. The nightmares seemed to come in waves. She'd be relatively calm for a few weeks, then the nightmares would start and not stop. It got really tiring at times. Liz wasn't working so she could sleep in the next day, but I was up early for work each morning and it took its toll on me.

WHAT TO EXPECT

The nightmares are much more prevalent during the initial stages of healing or anytime the survivor is dealing with a lot of trauma. During the healing process, the survivor spends so many waking hours thinking about the abuse that took place that it overwhelms her — even during her sleeping hours. When the survivor goes to bed, the brain is still working, trying to sort out the day's thoughts. As the survivor sleeps, the thoughts continue. Those thoughts form into dreams. Before you know it, the survivor is dreaming of the abuse. It overwhelms her and she wakes, still convinced the abuse is taking place.

Sometimes Liz would get violent during her nightmares. She'd punch me in the back or yell at me for something I didn't do. It was downright confusing and frustrating to be wakened this way. You automatically assume you've done something wrong, but all you're guilty of is being the person closest to her while she's having a nightmare.

GRANT CAMERON

Occasionally, I'd get so sick and tired of the nightmares that I'd just grab a blanket and go to sleep on the couch. I'd get upset. I'd stew about it all night, just as if we'd had a real argument. But it wasn't an argument at all. It was a nightmare and it was something Liz couldn't control. I didn't realize that right way. It took me quite a few nights sleeping on the couch before I figured it out. I'd wake up the next morning still angry with Liz, but she'd wake up and not recall the nightmare.

The nightmares can come without warning. The survivor can go days, even weeks, without a nightmare. Then suddenly, one night it can happen again for no reason.

Unlike most people, survivors are most threatened in their own homes. They sometimes feel safer outside in open spaces. That's because, as a child, the home may have been where the abuse took place. A survivor can be deathly afraid if left alone in her own home. She'll spend countless hours going around the house, checking cupboards for noises, seeing that the windows and doors are secure. She'll sit down to watch TV, then get up and start the routine all over again.

Survivors usually have a tough time sleeping at night because their fears haunt their thoughts. As a result, they can get very tired. Liz would often have to take naps during the day because she was so tired. She also felt safer sleeping during the day. I encouraged her to take those naps because she had to recharge her batteries. She needed all her strength to deal with her healing. If she didn't get sleep she wouldn't have the energy to heal properly.

WHAT TO DO

Remember, the survivor has no control over what happens when she's sleeping. Her world can become filled with fear and images of sexual abuse. It's as if the brain is trying to sort out some big jigsaw puzzle but gets the pieces in all the wrong places. These nightmares can be especially disturbing to a supporter — not only because of the sleep you lose, but because of the helplessness and despair you feel watching a loved one suffer so much.

Nightmares may always exist for the survivor, but they'll diminish as she recovers. Eventually she'll be free of the pain. You'll have to wait patiently for this to happen, though. It's not an overnight thing.

When the survivor is having a nightmare, the best thing to do is soothe her and let her know that she's really loved and protected by you. That could mean getting out of bed — even if it's two o'clock in the morning — and going through the various motions of checking out a noise.

Sure, it's a pain in the butt — especially when you're absolutely sure there's nothing there. But, if you do it for her and assure her nobody is there, she'll feel comforted by the fact you protected her. Then she'll sleep again. If you don't, she'll have to go back to sleep with doubts in her mind. And she'll probably end up waking you again with another nightmare.

When you're confronted with this situation, don't say things like, "You're out of your mind," or, "Stop playing games and go back to sleep." Also, don't grab the survivor or physically try to force her to lie down. This will only be seen as an aggressive move on your part and likely she'll resist. Remember, when this is going on she's in a frightened state and it won't do you any good to try to restrain her physically.

With Liz, I'd just let her scream, punch her pillow or do anything else she wanted to do during a nightmare as long as she didn't hurt herself. I'd just try to pick the

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right time to intervene and soothe her.

While the dreams are very real to the survivor at the time, don't expect her to remember them in the morning. If she does remember them, she might not want to discuss them, so don't push the issue. There's no use trying to discuss them or make rational sense of them the next day, especially if the survivor doesn't want to talk about them.

Keep in mind that the dreams are just something she's going to have to go through. Like many of the stages you've already experienced in the healing process, it's just one more step on the ladder.

So don't lose any sleep over it.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Nightmares are common for survivors.
- They will be more prevalent during the initial stages of her healing.
- Don't blame her for them.
- Help her through them.
- Nightmares will diminish as the survivor recovers.

Chapter Thirteen — Releasing Rage

The frustration, stress and accumulated problems associated with helping a survivor heal from childhood sexual abuse can take a toll. It can also cause a lot of anger.

Anger is something you'll have to deal with if you're going to get safely and sanely through the healing process with a survivor.

It's something that plagues every supporter and is caused by a mountain of things — the pressure, the fact you have limited control over the situation and because things seem hopeless at times. Every supporter feels it at some point during the healing process, but learning how to control it is the real key to survival.

It's easy to let anger spill out in all the wrong ways in all the wrong places. After all, you're dealing with a lot of things that can make you angry. Wrong ways may be punching things, carrying the anger around with you for days on end and venting it on innocent bystanders, friends or co-workers.

TWO TYPES OF ANGER

As a supporter, you've got two types of anger to deal with — your own anger and that of the survivor.

It's easy to see why the survivor is angry. After all, she has a lot of good reasons to be angry. She was stripped of her innocence as a child. She was abused and was never given a chance at a normal childhood. Because she was a child and wasn't able to handle all the emotions that came with the abuse, the survivor never appropriately dealt with that anger. So it went deep inside her, where it has remained for years. Churned around inside her, it has affected her emotional development. She wasn't able to enjoy life in the same way as other people.

Only now, as the survivor goes through the healing process, is that anger getting a chance to surface. It's being freed up. And when it does come out, watch out. It can come out in a torrent. It can come out in an uncontrollable rage.

Sometimes Liz would just erupt. It could be something very insignificant. It could be something you'd never think would get her upset. But it would set her off. She couldn't help it. The rage would just boil up inside her. It could be the way I looked at her or the way I didn't look at her. It didn't matter. Sometimes anything could tick her off. It was like there was a little demon inside her, screaming to get out. At times it completely controlled her.

HER ANGER

There isn't much you can do once the survivor has crossed the threshold into the world of anger — except to give her the time and space she needs to cool off. The anger can erupt at any time because the survivor has so many feelings buried deep inside her. She may not even know they're there. In the early stages of her healing, she won't know when it's coming or what triggers the rage.

Once she starts counseling and dealing with the abuse of her past, the anger is stirred and it has to come out in order for her to heal. As the anger leaves her, though, it can be replaced by good experiences. It's a little like reprogramming a robot. You're taking the bad out and putting the good in. So, even though it may not seem that way, when the anger does come out of her it's a good sign. It's a sign that she's healing. It's a sign that she's on the road to recovery.

The survivor should be encouraged to express her anger — not at you but in a way that is more constructive and positive. She should be encouraged to get the anger out, either through counseling, through hitting a punch bag or teddy bear, or

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whatever safe means is possible.

There's little you can do to protect her from the anger she will feel. About all you can do is make sure she isn't abusing herself, you or others while she's getting rid of the anger deep inside of her. Don't take it personally if she directs her anger at you. It's a very difficult thing to stand and take her anger, but keep in mind you're not really the culprit here — just someone who is an easy target. The survivor probably just needs someone to vent her frustrations on and you're the closest thing she's got.

When she's quiet and not going through an anger period, that's a good time to sit with her and talk to her about more constructive ways of letting out her frustrations. Let her know how you feel when she takes her anger out on you. Tell her you'd prefer her to find another, more positive alternative.

If she is having an anger session, give her plenty of space to get her anger out. You're not going to prevent it from happening. Just make sure she doesn't harm herself. Make sure, if you can, that she doesn't go driving a car when she's angry. She won't have all her wits about her and could get into trouble.

One time, when Liz was in a state of anger, she hopped in the car and took off. I didn't like it one bit but there wasn't much I could do to stop her. A police officer did stop her, though, and gave her a very expensive speeding ticket. The officer also told Liz she'd gone through a stop sign. Liz hadn't even seen the sign. She was lucky. If someone had been coming the other way, the result could have been tragic. When she got home we talked about what happened and she promised that she wouldn't take off in the car again if she had an anger fit.

YOUR ANGER

Getting the anger out is good for the survivor. She has to mourn her loss of innocence as a child, have the chance to express rage at that loss, then begin to heal by replacing that anger with good.

Your anger, though, is a different story. You may be angry for different reasons. You may be angry with friends or family for not understanding your predicament. You may be angry at the circumstances. You may also just be angry with the survivor for being angry.

You may be angry with the perpetrator for causing all these problems in your life. You may be angry with yourself for not being able to protect the survivor from things that upset her. At times, you might also be angry with the counselor for bringing up the horrid past.

Your anger also needs to be vented in a constructive way or it will boil over inappropriately. Above all, it's important to make sure you don't direct the anger at the survivor.

You also need to be sure that you're not getting angry because her healing is triggering something that happened in your past. That wasn't the case with me, but I've spoken to men who've had problems helping their partners heal because of problems in their own pasts.

If you're angry with the survivor for something you shouldn't be angry at her for, it could have something to do with your own situation, and not hers at all.

This opens up a whole new can of worms. But if that's the case, seek some professional counseling right away. Remember, you don't want to complicate the survivor's healing any more than you have to. She doesn't have the time to deal with your reasons for being angry, so get help from another source to help you

figure out your reasons for being angry.

It could be something simple, something from your own childhood that is triggered by the healing which the survivor is going through. But it is important that you don't get upset with the survivor because she is opening up wounds from you own past. Somehow — like the survivor — you have to get rid of that anger in a constructive rather than a destructive way. You'll have to find a way of dealing with the immediate situation, then get a longer-term solution in place.

RELEASING ANGER

When you release your anger ensure it is released in an appropriate manner. Don't hold it inside and let it feed on itself. Don't let it get to the point where you're ready to blow. It's difficult to function under these types of circumstances and it won't do your partner any good either.

The best long-term solution is talking out problems when you and the survivor are in a calm state of mind. Don't try it when you are both angry. It won't help. You should both be in a rational state of mind when you try to solve a problem to your mutual satisfaction.

There is one certainty in all of this. Letting anger build inside and control you will only send you off in the wrong direction. It won't benefit you, the survivor or anybody else. Remember, she already has a good reason to be angry. Being angry yourself won't help her, or you.

Sometimes, nothing will work when you're both angry. When that happens, it is often best to simply take a break. If something the survivor does or says really annoys you, perhaps the best thing to do is be apart for a while. That way you both get the chance to calm down. The time out also gives you both a chance to ponder what was said or done, then get together under more rational circumstances and try to come up with a solution.

If that doesn't work, try some exercises like breathing or counting to 10 before you reply. These sound like simple things, but they work, believe me.

THE GROUND RULES

It's important that you discuss ahead of time what steps you both plan to take when you're angry. It's sort of like setting out the ground rules before the game is played. In the end, nobody will get hurt, and hopefully the dispute will get solved in a peaceful manner.

Remember, yelling and screaming at each other won't solve anything. And both of you might feel pretty hurt afterwards. Sometimes you're simply going to have to bite your lip when it comes to a dispute. Nothing you can say or do will change things, and you'll have to accept that.

Disputes can erupt during the healing process for any number of reasons. The survivor might be dealing with something from her past. She may be testing you to see if you really will stand by her side. In those instances, logic is often thrown out the window and nothing you say or do will resolve the problem. That's when you need to have a plan.

The plan could be hopping in the car and turning on the stereo full blast and yelling at the top of your lungs.

I found exercising was a surefire way to release anger. It helped when I went out and worked up a good sweat. I was into running at the time and would go for long jogs. It gave me a chance to put everything into perspective, all the while getting some exercise.

WHAT ABOUT ME?

The important thing to remember here is that you and the survivor are in a real situation dealing with real anger. She has a right to be angry about what happened to her. You have a right to be angry too. But it's essential to get your anger out in an appropriate way.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- You both have a right to be angry.
- You need to rid yourselves of that anger in an appropriate way.
- Don't let anger build.
- Exercise is a good way to release anger.
- Decide how to deal with anger before it erupts.

Chapter Fourteen — How to Cope

Coping with the pain and trauma of helping a survivor heal from childhood sexual abuse can, in no uncertain terms, be a challenge. This chapter will draw together many of the things we have already said about what to expect and how to cope.

As I've said, it is by no means an easy task and it will take all the resources you have. Apart from the pressures of the healing process, there are the pressures that others — your friends, family and co-workers — will put on you.

You'll have to be prepared for the unknown. At times you'll feel like you're walking on eggshells, with no idea what to say or do. If you say the wrong thing, it's like setting off a volcano. Even keeping quiet at the wrong time can prove fatal.

People who help survivors through the healing process are put through the grinder themselves. You'll experience an array of emotions along with the survivor. You'll have to go through the gut-wrenching experience of watching the survivor deal with her torturous past. You'll have to watch her explore the unknown. You'll have to watch her suffer greatly.

Hopefully, you'll stick around long enough to see some of the results of all this. Before that ever happens, though, you're going to have a real roller-coaster ride.

So, if you've chosen to go on this journey with the survivor, you're going to have to learn to cope with what's ahead. At times, you'll be tested to the limits. At times, you'll be overwhelmed. At times, you'll feel like the abuse never goes away. The array of problems and emotions you'll have to cope with are staggering, to say the least. Coping isn't easy. Nobody said it was. But you can do it.

Following are some ways to help you cope:

BE TOLERANT

You have to understand that there are vast numbers of people out there who just don't believe that childhood sexual abuse occurs. And many fail to understand why it's so important for a survivor to heal.

Some may think the survivor put herself in a position to be abused or didn't mind being abused. They'll suggest that she caused the abuse or that she should just forget about it and get on with life. If these people know more about the subject, though, they'd realize how misguided they are. If they knew more about the devastation it causes in human lives, they wouldn't brush it off so easily.

Tolerance is the key here. You might want to explain your situation to people who are really worth explaining it to, but don't worry about the others. Not everybody deserves an explanation of what you're up to. Apart from family and close friends, it's up to you to decide whom you want to tell. You don't want people gossiping behind your back, so use some judgment here.

RELEASE YOUR FRUSTRATIONS

Frustration and tension can both mount as you help a survivor through the healing process, so it's important to release them early. Don't let the feelings build too long. Otherwise, they'll erupt all at once — likely in an inappropriate manner.

If you allow your anger and frustration to build, it will eventually become a bigger problem — and the survivor might end up as the focus of your anger.

Learn to accept that you're in a tumultuous period in your life and that you have to take time out to release the built-up anger. Understanding your position and accepting that some things are just beyond your control can prove a real asset. It can save you a lot of headaches, sleepless nights and problems with the survivor.

WHAT ABOUT ME?

ARGUE FAIRLY

Arguments are inevitable during the healing process. They happen even in a normal relationship. Two people can't always agree on everything, right? Add to that the stress and suffering that's involved during healing from childhood sexual abuse, and you've got a very volatile situation.

When the survivor is healing from abuse, of course, a lot of turmoil exists. She's probably discovering feelings and thoughts she didn't even know existed. So, at times, things are going to get a little tense.

It's important, then, to be fair when you argue. Don't hit below the belt. Don't say things that are meant purely to insult the survivor. On the other hand, she also has to be fair with you. It's difficult when tempers are hot, but when you're arguing with the survivor, make sure you keep to the argument. In other words, don't start insulting the survivor's entire family or the way she looks. If you disagree about a point, argue that point, but don't take it beyond that.

It might be best to talk about the subject of arguments when you are both calm. It's good to set the ground rules when you're both at ease and you both realize you're doing it for the good of the relationship and for each other. There's no use trying to set the ground rules once you're arguing. That just doesn't work. You're both too worried about finding ways to hurt the other person.

DON'T BECOME A VICTIM

You have to be careful in all of this that you don't become the victim of abuse yourself.

That doesn't necessarily mean physical abuse. It can be emotional, too. Don't let the survivor use her past to control you and make you do everything she wants you to do.

At times, you'll just have to stand your ground. It's easy for the survivor to slip into a power play mode — to attempt to use her past to control you and get everything her own way.

In the end, it can be harmful to both of you. If you are being emotionally abused by a survivor do your best to put a stop to it.

SET PRIORITIES

As you get further into the healing process it's important that you set priorities in your life. Sit down and figure out what's important. To help a survivor heal, some things will have to take a back seat — at least for the time being.

Some things you need — like a job, friends and money. But each of these may have to be pushed further down the priority list to free up time for the survivor's healing. You may have to give up a sport or hobby. Sure, it's tough, but if you're going to go through this, you need to be honest with yourself. You're going to need a lot of time to deal with the survivor.

That doesn't mean you should quit your job, ignore your friends and forget about your financial situation. What it does mean is that you may have to put your career aspirations on hold for a while — until things get a little more settled with the survivor. It's no secret that survivors need a lot of time, patience, love and support. You'll have to set your priorities accordingly.

You can't be everything to everyone, so you need to map out what's important and make some sacrifices.

You'll need all your time and energy to focus on what's really important here — helping the survivor get through the healing process.

FIND SUPPORT

There are times when a good friend will be a lifesaver.

A good friend can be one of your greatest assets in the long run — someone to turn to in times of real crisis, someone who can keep you on the level when times get really tough and you need help.

But be sure the friend isn't someone who is going to go out and tell everybody your business. The friend needs to be someone who is going to listen to you and help you get through the tough times.

It's also a good idea to find out if there's a support group for the two of you in the community. It can be a real learning experience to see that others are in the same boat. Not that it makes you feel any better that someone else is having similar problems, but it may help to know that you are not alone with these troubles.

Others in the group might be further along in their recovery and, in times of crisis, they can act as a guiding light. Others can also help educate you about the healing process.

Finding a support group for you — the supporter — might be more difficult. There isn't a whole lot out there for the supporters. Check with the local hospital or mental health centre. If you can't find one, you might want to consider starting a group of your own. You can advertise in the newspaper, and once you get enough people who are interested, you can set up the group. It might be wise to get a professional counselor involved in the process — just in case questions or issues arise which nobody knows anything about.

A support group is a great place for you to talk about your feelings. You can ask questions, see how other supporters feel and find out how they've handled certain situations. You can be open and honest in a support group because there will be others who have already been through what you are discovering now. Their support can be invaluable.

DON'T NEGLECT YOURSELF

While you may have to give up some things to make time for the survivor's healing process, that doesn't mean you should neglect yourself. It's a fine line, but make sure you don't spend so much time on the survivor and the healing that you forget about some of your own needs.

Only you will know when your needs are not being met. Go by your gut reaction. When you get to that point, don't feel guilty. You deserve to be happy and healthy. Life during the healing process doesn't have to be all bad. While the survivor is important and deserves your attention, you also have to devote time to yourself and your health.

Getting into a regular workout routine is a good idea. You need all your energies and resources to help the survivor get through the healing process, so it's also wise for you to be healthy. You can't be on your toes if you've been neglecting yourself. It's important you stay fit. You may also want to keep an eye on your eating habits. Not only will you feel better about yourself, but it will also give you more energy to deal with the survivor's problems.

TAKE A BREAK

It's okay to want to get away from the healing process for a while. The survivor will probably feel the same way.

It's important to have fun even though you're going through a traumatic time in your life. Go and see a comedian or have a night out — anything to get a break from

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the healing. Just do something occasionally that will get your mind off the process and give yourselves a break.

Don't forget that it's okay to laugh. Laughter is a great way to get rid of frustration, anger and feelings of helplessness, and to recharge your batteries.

SET REALISTIC GOALS

You have to accept the limits of what both you and the survivor can do. Don't expect too much of the survivor too fast. She won't be able to run before she can walk. The healing process takes time, so be prepared for that and set your goals accordingly.

If you expect too much of yourself and too much from the survivor, you're only going to put more pressure on yourself. It's a good idea to sit down with the survivor and set your goals. You'll probably want to keep in mind that you'll need a lot of down time — times you can just sit with the survivor and talk things over.

RELAX

Lastly, remember that helping someone heal from childhood sexual abuse is like running a marathon. Pacing yourself is very important. No marathon runner tries to go too far, too fast. They don't sprint the entire 26 miles. They pace themselves. They just keep plugging away.

So try and follow their lead. Relax and pace yourself.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Be tolerant.
- Release your frustrations
- Argue fairly.
- Don't become a victim.
- Set priorities.
- Get a good friend or participate in a support group.
- Don't neglect yourself.
- Take breaks.
- Set realistic goals.
- Relax.

Chapter Fifteen — Taking a Break

It takes a lot of time, patience and understanding to help a survivor heal. The constant pressure and problems associated with healing can tax your reserves to the limit. It can drain you both physically and mentally, and if you're not careful, it can leave you a bundle of nerves.

If you don't schedule some breaks from it all, you're going to buckle under all the pressure — especially down the road as the healing process drags on. If you don't maintain your body as well as your mind you'll only end up a burden to the survivor. You won't be up to helping her when times get tough. You might not have the energy; you might not have the patience; you might not have the willpower.

You need to be physically as well as mentally fit for what's ahead, for whatever comes up on the survivor's road to recovery. To do this you've got to eat properly, exercise and, above all, take regular breaks from the healing process. It's very important to take breaks.

In a way, your body is like a car engine. It needs to be maintained. You wouldn't expect your car to keep running forever without an oil change or proper maintenance, would you? The same goes for your body. While you're helping someone heal from the trauma of childhood sexual abuse, your body is under a tremendous amount of stress and pressure. You must set aside time to recuperate and recharge.

Think of yourself as a professional athlete. You don't see a professional athlete compete all year round without rest. You don't see athletes compete when they're injured. That's because they realize they need to take breaks, they need time to heal in order to do a better job when they compete again. So, just like an athlete, both you and the survivor need time away from the healing process. That way, when you get back to the task at hand, you're in better shape to deal with matters. You'll have more energy, more patience and a fresher outlook. You won't be as tired. You'll have had time to put things in perspective, think things over in a non-stressful environment, away from the heat of the action.

Yes, a lot of your time will be devoted to helping the survivor heal. But there are other things that are important in life too, and you need to take some time to enjoy them. You have to schedule some time to do things that you and the survivor really enjoy doing together. If you don't, it will only add to the problems.

Liz and I used to go fishing in order to get a break. It was relaxing and stress-free, and we could be in our own little worlds yet still spend time together. It was a great way to unwind and give us a rest from the rigors of healing. After a day fishing, we'd return home relaxed and ready to face the world again. It wasn't so much the fishing that helped. It was just getting away to a place where there weren't any stresses. It gave our bodies time to recover

SHE'LL ENJOY IT TOO

You'll probably find out that the survivor enjoys breaks from the healing just as much as you do. After all, she can become physically and mentally exhausted by the whole process. She'll get through it a lot easier if she tries to heal a little bit at a time with breaks in between, rather than tackling everything at once. It can overwhelm her if she doesn't get a break.

The survivor has to make the decision to take a break — you can't do it for her — but she'll likely find that she needs some time away in order to reflect on the healing she's done, in order to see how far she's come. It can be frustrating

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for the survivor to keep pushing forward without reflecting on how much she's accomplished. She needs to know she's progressing. In the long run, it will give her more strength and courage to continue.

Sometimes it can be tough scheduling a break away from the action. But it doesn't have to be for a long period of time. It could be a weekend at the cottage or a day at the beach — as long as it's some quality time away from the healing.

If it's not possible to get away for a long period of time, don't worry. Just do what you can. Do your best to schedule some events or activities that will give you some time away. It could be anything from skiing in the winter to swimming in the summer. Perhaps a night at the movies, a day golfing or watching a sports event might help to take off some of the pressure. Go see a comedy show. That can be a great relief. So can a brisk walk, in the winter or summer. It's amazing the things that can take your mind off the healing for a while.

The important thing to remember is that you should, at times, do something — anything — that takes your mind off the healing. Helping a survivor heal from childhood sexual abuse causes a lot of stress. Over time, that stress will take its toll unless you do something to stop it.

I remember how the constant talk of abuse used to drive me crazy. It just seemed to go on and on. Liz wouldn't stop talking about it. We talked about the abuse every day. Sometimes I felt like walking out the door and taking a few days off from it all. Every waking hour seemed to be spent talking about it. After a while, I talked to Liz and found out she felt the same way, so we decided to do something about it. We started to schedule time off from the healing. It gave us something to look forward to and we both felt better knowing that we were going to have some quality time together.

DON'T FEEL GUILTY

Don't feel guilty about taking some time off from the healing process. It takes a long time for the survivor to heal, and both you and the survivor have to maintain some semblance of an enjoyable life during the healing. You are allowed to have a life during the healing process, and it's better that you do. You've got to find a balance.

There will be many times when the survivor is totally involved in her healing. But there also will be times when she isn't dealing with it at all. When you find the survivor is getting to the point of needing that break, help her arrange one. Likewise, when you find yourself in dire need of a break, make sure you take one.

There is one word of warning in all of this, though. When you're on one of those breaks, don't get too caught up in everything and forget that the survivor still has more healing to do. It can be downright frustrating to spend a great weekend at the cottage, only to find the survivor facing her problems again on Monday morning. You have to be prepared for that to happen because it does.

I used to make the mistake of thinking everything was turning around after a great weekend or outing away from the healing process. But the bubble would always burst and we'd soon be right back into the thick of healing again. At first it was disappointing because I didn't realize how much time it takes for a survivor to heal. But when it started to happen over and over again, I began to realize it was going to take time — a lot of time. Eventually, I accepted that we could have great times away from the healing but that Liz, at some point, had to get back to the job at hand.

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Although you're entitled to have a good time when you're on a break, remember the survivor still has to return to her healing. Just because she's had some time off doesn't mean everything is peachy again. It won't be, and you should be cognizant of that. If you're not, you could be in for some disappointments.

As you go through the healing process, you'll probably find that you fall into a routine of intense healing followed by periods of good time. As the survivor begins to heal more, the good times will last a little longer. Eventually, there will be more good times than bad.

However, it's wise to remember that, like a car motor, the survivor can't go full throttle all the time. And neither can you. So make sure the two of you schedule some time for rest and relaxation. That way you'll both get through this without running out of gas.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- It takes a lot of time for a survivor to heal.
- Both you and the survivor need breaks from the healing process.
- Don't feel guilty about taking time off.
- After a break, the survivor still has to get back to the job of healing.

Chapter Sixteen — Sexual Relations

I'll get right to the point here. Sometimes you just won't be able to have sexual relations with a survivor. That's the reality of the situation and you're just going to have to accept it — plain and simple.

Problems with sex can surface anytime — when you approach the survivor, when you're in the act, or right afterwards.

It can make for a very awkward situation but it happens.

For a partner, this can be difficult to deal with. To some men, even the temporary loss of sexual relations can cause a problem. The thought of losing your sex life with the survivor can be frustrating, to say the least. It's probably one of the things you were most frightened of when the survivor started the healing process. It was probably the first thing people warned you about when they heard your partner was healing from childhood sexual abuse. It likely also crossed your mind when your partner started healing.

It might sound a little selfish, but there are some pretty good reasons this can throw you for a loop. You've probably enjoyed a fairly normal sex life with your partner — only to have the rug pulled out from under your feet. It's no surprise, then, that when the sex disappears it takes a little time to get used to. Who can blame you for being upset?

It's normal for sex — or lack of it — to cause a lot of problems in relationships in which a survivor is healing from childhood sexual abuse.

I remember how frustrated I'd get during the healing process. Liz and I had such a great sex life before she started healing from the abuse. We never had a problem. But when she started healing it became an issue.

We'd both be in the mood, then suddenly she'd go cold for no reason at all. All she would tell me is that she was having bad thoughts. At first, I didn't understand. But later, as I became more familiar with what she was going through, I learned it wasn't me and it wasn't us that were the problem. It was the abuse of her past that was causing difficulties.

After a while, I learned that I just had to deal with it. For the time being, that's the way it was. Nothing I said or did could change it.

WHY SEX IS SO IMPORTANT

Sex means a lot to most guys. No doubt about it. The reason for all this is simple. It's in your genes — literally. Let me explain.

You see, males and females differ in both appearance and behaviour because of those little sex hormones that are inside you. It's the androgens, estrogens and progestins that determine your sexuality. You don't control them. They control you. They're like little chemical messengers in the body and they affect the body processes, the body developments and the behaviours of men and women.

Studies of animals have shown that not only do sexual hormones directly influence behaviour, but they also control certain aspects of behaviour by organizing the structure of the brain early in life. So, whether you like it or not, you have them. And they're there to stay. There's nothing you can do about it. It's a fact of life.

You'll just have to find a way to control yourself.

SEX WHILE HEALING

Sex does exist during the recovery process, albeit on a more sporadic basis than you were probably used to before the survivor started healing.

At times sex won't be a problem at all. But, as sure as the sun rises and sets,

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as sure as the world is round, as sure as there are pyramids in Egypt, there are going to be times when sexual relations will just be non-existent in your relationship with the survivor. No matter how hard you try, your advances will only be refused by the survivor. At times during the healing process, sex is just out of the question.

During these times, it's best not to push the issue.

How you feel about this situation will be much different from the way the survivor feels, and what you and the survivor think about sex at the time are probably also two different things. To you, sex may be a gratifying and satisfying act of love between two caring people. To the survivor, though, sexual acts can stir up much different feelings.

I saw it in Liz many times. One minute she'd be interested in sex, the next it would be the last thing on her mind. I'd get so frustrated because it would all be so confusing. She'd tell me she was looking forward to spending time alone with me and then, when we were finally alone, she'd back off. She wouldn't be at all interested.

Because the abuse of the survivor was of a sexual nature, it's easy to understand why she'd have so much trouble in adult life separating sex on consent — that which occurs between two adults who are in love — and the type that occurs between a perpetrator and an abused child. As the survivor heals, she'll begin to differentiate.

You can't blame the survivor for feeling this way. It's only natural that a survivor sometimes gets confused when you touch her. She's got a lot to figure out. What is good touching? What is bad touching? What feels good? What doesn't? What is right? What is wrong?

As a young child, the survivor was forced or manipulated into having sex. As an adult, she needs time to realize she has a choice in the matter.

It can cause a lot of tension and you might get tired of the refusals. But you'll just have to persevere until things get better. In the end, the survivor will figure it out. But it'll take time.

YOUR FEELINGS

When sex isn't in the cards, there's no use approaching the survivor. Chasing her all over the house, looking for affection, won't help a bit. It will only make the situation much worse.

It's best just to leave her alone. When a child abuse survivor makes it clear she's not in the mood, listen to her. She may be dealing with something she can't explain very well to you. She may be dealing with something she doesn't want to explain to you. She might be dealing with something you wouldn't understand.

In any event, keep your hands to yourself — unless the survivor asks. Trying to have sex with a survivor who doesn't really want it is plainly abuse in itself.

Having said all of this, it doesn't mean you shouldn't have feelings of your own about the issue. After all, sex is a normal part of a relationship so it's understandable you can get frustrated.

The important thing to remember, though, is that none of this is personal. So don't take it to heart. It's not your fault that sex isn't in the cards. And remember it's not hers either.

If the survivor doesn't want sex, it's not because you've failed as a man and it's not because you don't please her. It's not because you're not a good lover. It's not

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because there's somebody else.

You could be Brad Pitt and the survivor still wouldn't be interested in sex. You could wear your sexiest clothes, best aftershave and serve up the best wine but none of it would matter. When she isn't interested, she isn't interested. Nothing you say or do will change that. The problem is the abuse. That's what's really stopping the survivor from having sex.

CONSIDER HER FEELINGS

If you're having problems with the whole issue of sex, keep in mind that it's not her fault.

However, the survivor doesn't need to feel pressure because you can't handle the situation. If you're having problems with the situation, it might be wise to seek professional help. The survivor has other, more pressing things on her mind, and she needs all her energies and resources to deal with that. Putting pressure on her because of sex won't do either of you any good. Approaching her over and over again about sex isn't going to help. In fact, it probably will make matters worse.

So, if it's been a while and you're both lying in bed at night, don't say things like, "Is tonight the night?" or, "How long do I have to wait?" You might as well forget even asking, and just grab the blanket and head for the couch. You can be sure the question won't get a positive response.

Remember, you have to consider the feelings of the survivor. Your feelings aren't the important thing here. You'll have to work them out elsewhere. That's where talking to a friend or counselor might be a good idea.

The survivor needs her own time to sort things out. If you try to push her, she'll only resist. She's working through a lot of feelings and emotions as she tries to heal, and presenting her with your problems won't help at all.

Keep in mind that she could be grieving the loss of her past or the loss of her childhood. But if you keep pestering her about sex, you're definitely pushing the wrong buttons. You're simply going to have to play the waiting game. And that doesn't mean repeatedly asking her, "Is today the day?" If you're hovering around her like a vulture, you can be sure she will feel pressured by that and it won't speed things up at all.

A UNION IS MORE THAN SEX

Don't forget that a union between two people is based on more than sex. Maybe it's a good time, when sex is non-existent, to work on the other areas of your relationship. Sometimes the survivor will just want to hug and talk. She may want to be touched but not have sex. Other times she will want to have normal sexual relations with you.

Having said that, it is also important for the survivor to make her intentions clear to you. If she just wants to be hugged, she should tell you that when she approaches you. If she just wants to talk, she should let you know that too. It avoids any confusion. That way you don't mistake a hug for a sexual gesture. It makes it easier if you know what's going on so you don't cross the boundary.

Liz and I worked out a plan that was very simple. She'd tell me in no uncertain terms what she wanted. It helped solve a lot of difficulties and I think, in the end, it helped her heal more quickly knowing that I cared about her wellbeing. She didn't have the worry of playing a guessing game with me. There was no confusion about the issue.

You'll need open lines of communication to get through this stage in the pro-

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cess. The key to this part of the puzzle is to talk things out, discuss how you both feel about the situation. Be honest with each other. The survivor has to make her intentions known and the supporter has to know his limits.

If you're wondering about sex with the survivor, ask her about the ground rules. She'll be glad you did. Remember, she still loves you and it can be difficult sometimes for her to push you away.

OPEN LINES OF COMMUNICATION

By now, it probably seems clear that you have to do a lot of giving and be very understanding when the survivor deals with her past. Well, that's exactly what it boils down to. But it can be done. Remember, you're doing it for the betterment of your relationship.

Relationships are not always perfectly balanced. Sometimes one person has to give more than the other. During the healing process, you're doing most of the giving.

While the rules about sex can't be set in stone, and each couple might deal with situations differently, it's important to remember that the problem is not your fault. All you can do as a couple is communicate and understand why sex can be a problem while healing.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Problems with sex can occur.
- Sex can exist during the healing process.
- Don't have sex with a survivor if she doesn't want to.
- It's not your fault she's not interested.
- A healthy union between two people is about more than sex.
- Keep the lines of communication open.

Chapter Seventeen — Is It Worth It?

It's probably crossed your mind by now. In fact, you've probably spent countless hours and many sleepless nights thinking about it. It's the million-dollar question — the one you've probably been trying to get a handle on since your started helping the survivor heal.

Is it worth it? Is there an end to all this seemingly endless pain and suffering for the survivor? And how long will it take? How can you tell when a survivor has healed?

Well, glad you've asked.

Few supporters go through the process without wondering the same thing. After all, who wants to put up with all this turmoil and anguish if there's no light at the end of the tunnel?

Before I answer these all-important questions, though, I'd like to remind you about some very important aspects of the healing process.

First, remember that the recovery can be a very lengthy process for the survivor. You can't rush her through the healing. She's controlled by an inner clock and can't just suddenly take all the mixed-up emotions and feelings inside her and wipe them out in a single stroke. It would be great if she could, but we know it's simply not possible. The survivor must work slowly and methodically through her feelings. That's the only way to heal.

It's like the process a good doctor would follow in treating a patient. The doctor wouldn't rush you into surgery when he suspects something is wrong. He'd do tests to confirm his suspicions before he opts for an operation. The survivor, too, has to go one step at a time. She needs to conduct tests, find out the results and decide on the next step.

The survivor needs time to sort out her feelings. She needs time to work out what is right and wrong. She needs time to separate the good from bad. Don't forget, she's carried these pent-up frustrations and feelings inside her for years. It's going to take time to get them out in a good way. If she goes too fast, she'll end up missing something, then have to go back again to catch up.

IT DOESN'T HAPPEN OVERNIGHT

Healing from childhood sexual abuse is like grieving a death. It takes time — a different amount of time for each individual — and the survivor can't be rushed.

She has to go through the different stages of recovery, and feel the full effects of each stage, before she can get over the pain. If a step is missed, she will have to take time out later on to go back and pick up the pieces of the puzzle.

The length of time it takes a survivor to heal can vary. It depends so much on the circumstances of the abuse, how deeply it affected the survivor, what type of person the survivor is, and how she copes. It also depends on her supports, how much time she has to devote to the healing process and how badly she wants to heal.

There are a number of variables at work here, so it's impossible to say exactly how long someone should take to heal. A survivor who has good supports, a lot of time to devote to healing and a real desire to change the way she thinks and feels about life should heal more quickly. On the other hand, a survivor who has children of her own to take care of and a job to keep up might take longer because she has other commitments and can't spend as much time dealing with the healing process.

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There's no sure-fire formula to tell how long it can take someone to heal. Every survivor is different. Some just naturally take longer than others.

It would be miraculous, to say the least, if it took only a matter of weeks for a survivor to undo what was years in the making and what was then bottled up for many years afterwards. There are so many stages to go through in healing from childhood sexual abuse.

In Liz's case, it took nearly a year for her to get to the point where she was fully healed. She has dealt with the past and has moved on with life.

DON'T GET STUCK IN A RUT

One thing that can really drag out the process, though, is when the survivor gets stuck in one of the stages of recovery. Usually it's the suffering stage. Rather than moving forward and achieving a resolution, she gets into a position where she's spinning her wheels.

Sometimes, she just can't seem to move on. She might end up blocking the entire unpleasant past out of her mind for months or even years. It happens because this is one of the ways the mind protects itself from pain, but it also prevents the victim from progressing.

Sometimes, the survivor is unable to work things out to her own satisfaction. She may blame herself for what happened. This is where she may need a gentle nudge from you to set her on the right path again. If you feel the survivor is stuck in a rut you might want to suggest that she seek help from a professional counselor so that she'll get back on track.

While all this takes time, it really isn't as bad as it sounds. You're going to have to deal with a lot of problems caused by the abuse, but you can still have a lot of good times too. Don't think you have to sit around waiting for the whole thing to end. It isn't all work and no play.

It may be difficult but try not to keep track of the time it takes the survivor to heal. Somewhere in the back of your mind you're going to have a little clock running that remembers when the whole process started, but try not to keep mentioning it to the survivor.

Don't say things like, "Geez dear, how long is all this stuff going to take? You've been at this healing thing for a year now. When is it ever going to end?"

Sure, you have a right to feel a bit frustrated by the whole thing, but there's no use harping about it. Remember that it's not her fault. If she senses you're keeping track of the time it's taking her to heal, it's not going to help the process. The survivor is only going to feel more pressure. And that won't do either of you any good.

So remember to give her time — all the time she needs. Healing is a lot like running a marathon. She just has to keep putting one foot in front of the other. Eventually, she'll get to the finish line.

THE CHANGE

Once the survivor is well on her way to recovery — when she has got a lot of the anger and other feelings out of her — you won't need someone to tell you. You'll notice it right away.

Like a child, the survivor will begin to thirst for the things she missed out on when she was young. It could be something like schooling. Many survivors of childhood sexual abuse do poorly at school or drop out because their mind was elsewhere and wasn't on their work.

As the survivor reaches the end of her healing process, she'll want to start

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making up for lost time. She may want to go back to school if her education suffered. She may want to learn new skills. She might start taking more of an interest in the world around her. She'll probably have better success at this because her mind is less cluttered and she'll be able to take more in.

Her ambitions will rise too. I certainly found that with Liz. Instead of settling for second best, the survivor might want to set more lofty goals — a better job, house, or future. It's like watching a flower bloom, like watching a child grow into adulthood — but a lot more quickly. The mind that was once cluttered and confused becomes more clear and concise.

You'll probably get a real kick out of all this because it will probably be the first really clear indication you have that the survivor is healing. Before, the only way you could judge was if she was getting her anger out. And that wasn't much fun to go through. But at this stage in the survivor's healing, the process looks more positive. So take time and enjoy it.

You'll see genuine happiness in the survivor's face as she moves ahead on the road to recovery. The change will be noticeable and remarkable at the same time. It may also be a little scary for the supporter, though. Suddenly the person that you've been used to is showing signs of change. Although it's change for the better, it could make you feel a bit uneasy.

You might feel you're losing touch with the survivor as she sets out on her quest for knowledge. This is quite natural. She is changing, but rest assured she's still the same person. It's just that she doesn't have all that rotten stuff inside her any more. What you're going to be left with is the good stuff you liked about the survivor in the first place.

Your attitude is important here. Instead of feeling uneasy about the changes she's going through, you might want to get more involved in the whole process yourself. If you don't, you could get left behind. At this stage, the survivor wants to take more control over her life and head in a positive direction. Somehow, you should find a way to fit into her plans.

The survivor will probably want to change a lot of things about herself. It could be her job, her career, or where she lives. My advice is to go with it. The changes could be good for you too. Over the years, you might have become too set in your ways. Sometimes you might also need a change. Helping the survivor in her quest for knowledge could be a lot of fun for you too.

SETBACKS HAPPEN

Although the healing process might be going well at this point, be prepared for the occasional setback. The survivor might heal, but she is never completely free from her past.

She will eventually leave behind the pain and no longer mourn for a lost childhood, but she will always remember what happened to her. This is something that she — and you — will just have to live with. The best you can hope for is that she won't suffer any more because of it.

The past will always exist for her, somewhere in the crevices of her mind. When she's healed, though, she'll have put the past in perspective and it won't interfere in her present life.

Having said all this, though, let's get back to the original question, "Is it worth it?"

Well, if you ask a supporter who is just starting the process, the answer might

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not be too positive. That's because he often doesn't understand what's going on and doesn't know if it will end. But if you ask someone who has been through the process — someone who is at the end of helping a survivor heal — you'll get an easy answer.

They've watched the survivor change for the better. They've watched the survivor shed the haunting memories and replace them with a more positive outlook and demeanor. Often, the survivor and supporter have a stronger relationship as a result of having gone through such a traumatic experience. And they're usually looking at a brighter future together.

So, for those couples who've gone through the whole healing process the answer is quite simple. It's an unequivocal yes.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- The survivor has to work slowly through the healing process.
- Survivors heal at different rates.
- Make sure the survivor doesn't get stuck in the suffering stage.
- You'll know when the survivor has healed.
- It is worth it.



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