

# CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

## A Worksheet for Victims and Possible Victims

Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed" -- Luke 4:18

It is thought that at least 20% of women have suffered child sexual abuse as well as a smaller percentage of men. This handout was created as an introduction to the topic for those who already believe they are victims and for those who wonder whether they might be. It will take you through some definitions and symptoms of abuse and suggest next steps you might take to pursue healing.

### Is It Abuse?

For some, your first question is, "What constitutes child sexual abuse?" Many people feel what happened to them was unpleasant but not really abusive. One component of abuse concerns coercion. Did the other person in the scenario have any type of power, stated or implied, to coerce, manipulate or force you into an unwanted situation? Age or physical dominance, position or trust, blackmail or threats are types of power. The element of surprise alone can constitute power – you do not have the ability to choose. Some situations begin with consent but end in coercion. Did the other person(s) in your particular situation have any type of power over you?

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It can also be helpful to consider the forms of sexual abuse: touch, visual abuse, verbal abuse and covert abuse. Physical touch includes any unwanted touching of any body part with a sexual motive or context, from an uninvited kiss to tickling to fondling and more. Visual abuse includes exposure to pornography, unwanted exposure of one's own or another's body parts, observation of masturbation, not allowing privacy in the bathroom, etc. Verbal abuse includes sexual jokes, sexual remarks about one's body parts, sexual requests, sexual name-calling and more. Covert abuse includes observing or taping another without their knowledge. Most sexual abuse does not involve intercourse or physical force. The abuser is rarely a stranger. If you would label something abusive if it happened to another, then it is abuse when it happens to you, too. Keeping the above guidelines in mind, what type(s) of sexual abuse might you have experienced?

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If you saw yourself in any of the descriptions above, it can be difficult to accept that you have been a victim of abuse, but it is only by understanding what happened that you can become a survivor of abuse, someone who is healing and ultimately able to help others with similar concerns.

Please know that God wants to walk through the pain with you, offering His help and hope: *Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.* (Isaiah 43:2-3)

On the lines below, write your own prayer, asking God to be with you as you continue thinking about this part of your story:

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While it is true that all unwanted sexual incidents are abusive, it is also true that not everyone reacts the same way. Many factors determine what type of burden you carry. Such factors can include how often you were abused, how old the abuser was, whether you protested, how far the abuse went, whether violence was used, whether you understood the activity to be abusive at the time, how emotionally healthy you were before the abuse, whether you felt betrayed, whether you told someone else and how they reacted, etc. What factors make your particular abuse most difficult for you?

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What factors may have reduced its impact on you?

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## The Results of Abuse

*Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. – Psalm 25:16*

Distorted thinking is always one result of child sexual abuse. A child is not able to process the loss of power, the shattering of trust and the violation of identity that occur, so children (of any age) develop false beliefs about themselves and the world. A few of the most common are listed below. Write about how you experience any that apply to you in the lines given.

- It must be my fault.

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- I should have reacted differently.

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- It didn't really happen/it wasn't that bad.

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- I can never tell other people about this/I should be ashamed.

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- I am ruined now.

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Another common result of childhood sexual abuse is a trauma reaction. This can range from dissociation (the ability to separate oneself from what is happening in the environment, to 'float' away from the pain) to panic attacks in certain situations to flashbacks or fearful dreams. Do you experience any physical or emotional symptoms you believe may be related to the trauma you experienced? If so, write about them below.

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Trust is destroyed when a child is abused. This can show up in many different ways in your relationships. Is it difficult for you to trust some category of people, such as authority figures or one particular gender? Do you tend to avoid relationships or leave them before you can get hurt? Do you seek out many relationships, trying to fill up an internal void? Do you recreate the abusive relationship in any way? How hard is it for you to trust God?

Journal about any problems you know you have in the area of trust.

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### **The Good News**

*He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. – Psalm 147:3*

The good news is that there are many steps you can take after this one to further your healing journey. Some of those include telling a trusted person what you have written here, seeking professional counseling, joining a support group for abuse survivors, reporting the abuse you suffered (even if it was many years ago), developing new truths with which to combat old lies, exploring and resolving the anger you may (or may not) feel toward your abuser, using art therapy to release some of your emotions, reading good books on the topic of abuse and, most of all, beginning to dialogue with God about the abuse and its effects. Some resources are listed below to help you as you take next steps.

*Shelter from the Storm*, by Kubetin & Mallory  
*On the Threshold of Hope*, by Diane Langberg  
*A Door of Hope*, by Jan Frank

*The Wounded Heart*, by Dan Allender  
*The Courage to Heal*, by Bass and Davis  
*Beyond the Darkness*, by Cynthia Kubetin