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Adult Survivors of Sexual Abuse

Sexual Abuse is any sexual act that is threatening, violent, coercive or exploitative. It is a sexual act that the person has not agreed to or is unable to consent to.

Everyone who has been sexually abused responds and feels differently. Many survivors of sexual assault report feeling ashamed, guilty for enjoying aspects of it, scared, responsible, dirty and confused. Most cases of sexual assault are never reported to the police, consequently there are no legal proceedings against the offender. This is largely due to careful planning on behalf of the person who commits the sexual offence. Perpetrators are usually well known to their victims and their families.

Being sexually abused can cause a range of difficulties in your life but none of them are a life sentence. If you have been sexually abused there is plenty you can do to deal with any negative effects your experience may be having on your life. It is important to seek the help you need to live your life the way you want to.

If you have been sexually abused it may be helpful to:

- ◆ Break the secret, if you did keep your experience of being sexually abused a secret, and tell some supportive people who you trust. If you are able to, tell them exactly what happened, what it was like for you, how you felt about it and how it affected your relationships with people around you.
- ◆ Make sure you surround yourself with supportive people.
- ◆ Think carefully about seeking professional help from a counsellor. Whilst being sexually abused is not a life sentence it is important that you take the time to carefully understand what has happened to you, learn how it has affected you and what you can do to get back in charge of your life.
- ◆ Think carefully about the issue of trust. Are you able to trust people in your life today? What did you learn about sexual abuse from the person who abused you? Do you need to learn to trust again?

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- ◆ Remember that sexual abuse is never, in any circumstance, in any way the fault of the victim (even if it feels that way).
- ◆ Keep doing the things which make you feel good.
- ◆ A common way of dealing with traumatic experiences is to avoid your feelings and memories about a situation. While this might have been necessary when the abuse was taking place it can be a serious problem in your adult life. In your day to day life try to become more aware of your own feelings, take them seriously and get to know them again.
- ◆ If you experience flashbacks there are things you can do to reduce their severity. It is important to learn to relax when you experience a flashback; plan what you will do when a flashback occurs, that doesn't always involve ignoring it; remember that what you are experiencing is a memory and the associated strong feelings, but that the abuse is not happening now; write about the flashback.

Please feel free to contact Life Supports on 1300 735 030 if you would like to discuss your situation with a professional counsellor. You can find more information about Life Supports services by visiting www.lifesupports.com.au.