



Adult Survivors of Sexual Abuse

Sexual Abuse is defined as any sexual act that is threatening, violent, coercive or exploitative. It is a sexual act that occurs without the individual's agreement or consent because they are either unwilling or perhaps unable to provide that consent.

Each individual who has been sexually abused responds and feels differently. Some of the feelings reported by survivors of sexual assault include shame, guilt for enjoying aspects of the abuse, fear, feelings of blame and responsibility, feeling dirty and confused. In most cases of sexual assault, the abuse is never reported to the police, consequently there are no legal proceedings initiated 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.

If you have been sexually abused there is action you can take to deal with any negative effects your experience may be having on your life. It is important to seek the help you need to ensure your life moves forward in a positive direction.

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

- Break the secret. If you kept your experience of being sexually abused a secret tell some supportive people in whom you trust. If you are able, tell them exactly what happened, what it was like for you, how you felt about the experience and how it affected your relationships with people around you.
- Ensure 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 happened to you, how it has affected you and the steps you can take 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 trust from the person who abused you? Do you need to learn to trust again?
- 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 related to that experience. While this might have been necessary when the abuse was taking place it can create 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. Plan what you will do when a flashback occurs. Try to relax when you experience a flashback. Facing the memories and associated feelings that come with a flashback can be a useful part of the healing process. Reassure yourself that it is just a memory, not a current occurrence, but try to face the feelings that are triggered by talking or even writing about the flashback you experience.

Please feel free to contact Life Supports if you would like to discuss your situation with a professional counsellor.