

THE PAIN OF A SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILD

“Sexual abuse is nearly always a profoundly disruptive, disorienting and destructive experience for the child with a degree of stimulation that is far beyond his capacity to encompass or assimilate.

Consequently, there is interference with the accomplishment of normal developmental tasks.”

(Handbook of Clinical Intervention in Child Sexual Abuse)

When children are sexually abused, it turns their world upside down. Worse, I am convinced that only a tiny percentage of those who were abused ever come forward and get help to heal. Consequently they continue to hurt all their lives. Often, they get into destructive behaviors like drugs and alcohol and don't know that the roots of their addiction can be traced back to the abuse they suffered as children. By far, the vast majority of the abused never talks about it and go to the grave without getting help.

Some of them become abusers themselves and end up repeating the abusive behavior they suffered. They have poor self-esteem. They are often haunted by the abuse and tend to blame themselves for somehow drawing their abusers to themselves. Their shame, even if they are innocent victims, is so great that they can never seem to forgive themselves for what clearly was not of their doing.

Some victims of intense child sexual abuse that went on for an extended period become sex addicts. They look to sexual activity to find affirmations. They believe that to give and accept sex is the best way to win over someone from the opposite sex. They confuse love and sex and see both as being the same. They have real problems forming and keeping love relationships. Some tend to be abusive, jealous and possessive. Others might become submissive and slavish in their relationships.

Just about all of them are angry. Most often, they are not aware of where their anger is coming from and they displace it on those closest to them. Some view all men as not being trustworthy while others cannot live without a man and go from one relationship to another.

Every victim of child abuse is wounded and until he / she gets help, there is deep sadness that lies beneath the surface. He may hide it with noise and distractions, but unless and until there is healing, the pain remains.

If the abuse was too horrible to bear, the victim will repress some or all the memories of the abuse. I have seen women who were so traumatized by the abuse that they could not remember years of abuse until something or someone triggered a memory. Then they were flooded with thoughts, feelings and anger, all of which was difficult to handle.

When the awareness of what happened surfaces, victims of child abuse become very angry. Often the anger is turned in on themselves and they get into self-destructive behaviors. They hate themselves and have a hard time building a strong and healthy self-image.

The road to true healing can be very long and extremely painful. Many start, but turn back because they find it too difficult. They remain in their pain for life. Those, however, who have the courage to

persevere and face the demons of the past can be healed. It won't happen overnight, but liberation from the terrible effects of their abuse is possible.