Victim, Survivor, Thriver: Working with Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse
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Thriving...

I was forced to enter the basement of my soul and look directly at what was hidden there, to choose, in the face of it all, not death but life."

~ Henri Nouwen
Facts About Sexual Abuse

- **1 in 4** girls and **1 in 6** boys will be sexually abused before the age of **18** ¹
- **1 in every 6** women will be sexually assaulted at some point in her lifetime ²
- In approximately **3/4** of child sexual abuse cases, the offender is someone known to the victim ³
- Approximately **2.78 million men** have been victimized by rape or sexual assault ⁴
These are the real Hands of an adult MALE SURVIVOR.
More Statistics

Victims of sexual assault are:

- 3 times more likely to suffer from depression
- 6 times more likely to suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- 13 times more likely to abuse alcohol
- 26 times more likely to abuse drugs
- 4 times more likely to contemplate suicide

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Long Term Effects of Sexual Assault

- Feelings of guilt and shame
- Feeling different or alone
- Sadness
- Confusion
- Anger
- Low Self-Esteem
- Dissociation
- Fear
- Hatred
- Depression
- Promiscuity

- Eating Disorders
- Body Image issues
- Anxieties
- Changes in lifestyle
- Turning to violence
- Substance Abuse
- Self Injurious Behavior
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS)

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Effects of Sexual Abuse (cont.)

- Intrusive thoughts
- Viewing sex as obligation
- Seeing sex as a means to exert power
- Confusing sex and love
- Rigid boundaries or lack of boundaries
- Difficulty forming close relationships
- Trust issues/intimacy issues
- Sexual/relationship dysfunctions
- Difficulty with authority figures
- Vague or no recollection of early years or periods surrounding sexual abuse
- Sexual/relationship dysfunctions
- Somatic or Psycho-somatic symptoms including long-term physical ailments

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Physical Effects of Sexual Assault

Research shows that survivors of sexual abuse have more medical problems, somatization issues, high-risk behaviors, family physician visits, hospitalizations and surgeries, compared to individuals who have not been sexually abused.

- Long term genital or anal discomfort with no medical cause
- Headaches
- Stomach aches
- Dissociation
- Fibromyalgia
- Asthma
- Chronic Fatigue Syndrome
- Irritable Bowl Syndrome
- Bladder/Kidney infections
- Reproductive system damage
- Sexual dysfunction
- Acne

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Therapeutic Needs of Adult Survivors

- Survivors need freedom to explore, process and grow – trauma is intrusive – interventions are not.
- Trauma is forced – treatment should be facilitative.
- Therapist / Advocate should be intentional at promoting self expression – trauma includes force and shame.
- The focus of treatment should not be the trauma or the individual’s symptoms but the individual her/himself.
- Therapist/Advocate must be comfortable discussing sexual abuse; be aware of your own body language, feelings, beliefs, etc.
Clinical Interventions and Treatment Goals

- Safety planning
- Psycho-education
- Feelings identification and affect regulation
- Increase relaxation skills; stress management
- Cognitive processing and Cognitive coping
- Increase Self-Esteem / Positive Sense of Self
- Increase Healthy Relationships and Trust
- Create a coherent trauma narrative
Safety Planning

- Support system
- Assess for past and current suicidal ideations or attempts
- Create Safety Plan
  - Examples
- Make Safety planning on-going
Psycho-Education

- What is sexual abuse?
- Common reactions and effects of childhood sexual abuse
- Offenders
- Boundaries
- Barriers to healing
- Needs of Children
- Coping Skills
- Survivor’s Journey

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Feelings Identification

- One of the first things we must do is help survivors address, connect with, and identify their feelings
- Feelings Box
- Masks
- Where Do I Feel?

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Relaxation and Stress Management Skills

- Deep breathing
- Meditation, prayer
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Exercise
- Yoga
- Music
- Self-Care Calendars
- Positive Anger Management Skills
  - Bull’s Eye, Balloons, Bubble Wrap
  - Letter writing to Perpetrator

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Cognitive Coping and Cognitive Processing

- Cognitive Triangle
- Intrusive Thoughts
- Automatic Thoughts
- Thought Records
- Journaling
- Reframing Negative Cognitions

What I Think? What Did I Do?

How Do I Feel?

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Self-Esteem / Positive Sense of Self

- Letter Writing
- Collages
- Self-Esteem in a Bag
- Post-it Notes
- Lipstick writing
- “Three Open Doors” activity

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Relationships and Trust

- Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships
- Creating healthy relationships
  - Sex vs. Love
  - Respect
  - Boundaries
- Assertiveness Skills
- Family dynamics and family of origin issues

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Trauma Narrative

- Story-telling
- Scrapbooking
- Art
- Time Line
- Survivor’s Journey
- The Sexual Abuse Game (*Paper Dolls and Paper Airplanes*)
- T-Shirts

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You can't keep me down.

Healthy love doesn't hurt.

Silent no more.

My mom set me up at the age of 3. I was raped and molested.

The rape and sexual abuse tree.

Stop the cycle. Start the love.

I told!

Mom didn't believe me or leave.
It's ok when you talk about it.

I was raped by my daddy.
CELEBRATE!

- Plan a celebration for all of the hard work the survivor has done!
  - Invite family / support person/people
  - Review accomplishments on the therapeutic journey
  - Tangible item for survivor to leave with—rock, letter, certificate, etc.
Now You Lose!

I won’t be silenced by your thoughts,
Nor by the words you say.
I won’t be buried in a hole.
Today’s a brand new day.

The wrong you did won’t be forgot.
And I won’t hide my tears.
The strength that grew you can not stop.
I throw away my fears.

For God turns good the evil thoughts.
You have the power no more.
For it is gone; Its death has come,
As life begins to soar.

I will not give you ONE MORE DAY.
You thought you had a ploy?
Your darkness lost. It’s gone for good.
Replaced with God’s great joy.

I let you live inside my head.
Each breath you took was mine.
I take them back; no breath’s for you.
Today I draw the line!

And now a Warrior has been made,
That you did not expect.
For I am strong and fight for good,
With kindness and respect.

You can’t kill me, for I am back.
I’m not against the wall.
No more to hurt the ones like me,
For we are standing tall.

I did not quit--you thought I’d lose,
You thought I’d walk away?
But I did not. I just grew strong,
And I AM HERE TO STAY!

NOW YOU LOSE! 
~Mary Elizabeth Holden
Peace

"I am ashamed of you!"
"Am I Real?
"Good Girl"
"Risk Journey"
You will never be good enough
Commitment

People
Hurt
People
Citations


5. World Health Organization, 2002


8. Therapeutic exercises for sexually traumatized children. Indianapolis, IN: Kidsrights.

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