

Victim, Survivor, Thriller: 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 $\frac{3}{4}$ 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



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)

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

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

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* 6

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?



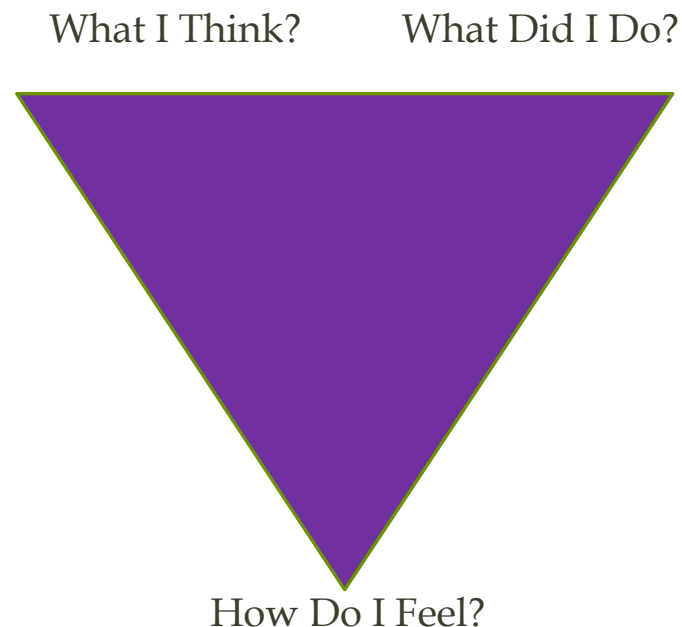
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Relaxation and Stress Management Skills

- ◉ 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

Cognitive Coping and Cognitive Processing

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



Self-Esteem / Positive Sense of Self

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

Relationships and Trust

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

Trauma Narrative

- Story-telling
- Scrapbooking
- Art
- Time Line
- *Survivor's Journey*
- The Sexual Abuse Game (*Paper Dolls and Paper Airplanes 7*)
- T-Shirts

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
OF ME. LEAVE!



INDIVIDUAL



I am on
MY
Journey



END
Sexual
Violence
NOW!

THE
A
COULDED
SAFE
MAY YOU RE
IN PEACE
THANK KENNEDY
NEVER FORGET
WHAT YOU DID
I NOW HAVE
PEACE



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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!



Citations

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