



Let's Talk About It

No Child Should go Through This at All -
No Family Should go Through This Alone -



IN RESPONSE TO SOME QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE TRAUMA OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

How can the victims succeed and stay positive?

Often times, the victims are understandably not positive. One of their initial reactions is often to blame themselves. The sexual abuse trauma can create shame, guilt, depression, anxiety, eating and sleeping problem, weight loss, nightmares, (night terror in children), paranoia, fear, tearfulness, sadness, sense of insecurity, doubt, feeling of helplessness and hopelessness etc. They tend to have major problem in their personal relationships during adulthood. They can show difficulties engaging in sexual activities with their partner, which often causes great challenges in their family. Ability to trust themselves and others may seem to be a big

issue for them. They tend to develop a grim idea about relationship, intimacy, and sex.

One of the effective ways the victims could succeed and thrive is through therapy. In therapy, the child-victims learn to process their feelings in an appropriate and constructive manner. They are able to make sense of what happened to them and place the blame where it belongs, that is on the abuser. The victims may reconstruct a more positive view of themselves. They may come to the understanding that what happened was not their fault—a crime was committed to them. - They were violated and something was stolen from them—whether it was their trust, their body, or their intimate/personal space.



How can they forget?

The sexual abuse act is something that will never be forgotten. As a matter of fact, the purpose of therapy is not to make the victims forget, rather to teach them how to best deal with the trauma. The most resilient ones often turn that experience into something constructive. For example, they could turn their trauma narrative into books, poetry, and songs as a way to express their hidden and/or hurtful feelings. Sometimes, they become advocate and give speeches or hold conferences so that others could learn about their struggles and survival strategies. That approach could help the victims throughout their own healing process and recovery. Note that the more they talk about it, the more empowered they feel and become. They may be able to own their feelings and master away the trauma.

How can they forgive?

As far as forgiveness is concerned, therapists may teach them to first forgive themselves and then their abusers. Note that “forgive themselves” is underlined because one of the symptoms related to child sexual abuse is shame and/or self-blame. The victim may blame him/herself because of the reactions or response of his/her body during and even after the sexual abuse event. He/her may be confused as to why his/her body is or was reacting in certain way. The term “body memory” is sometimes used in therapy as a way to explain this phenomenon, which is actually a natural reaction. Additionally, the victims’ surroundings (e.g., family members, friends, church members, community members) might blame the victims; hence, create a sense of shame, self-doubt, and guilt. Sometimes, even suicidal ideation may be seen as a result of those feelings linked to the

sexual abuse trauma. Forgiveness helps them to move on and be whole as a person.

Further, the majority of the sexually abused victims know their abusers. The sexual predator or abuser might be someone very close to them—someone that they trust. Therefore, forgiveness could be very difficult depending on the victim's personality, inner strength as well as the level of the trauma. The therapist has to be very astute and sensitive throughout this particular process.

How can they live with it?

The trauma may become part of the victims' life experiences without letting it dictates or defines who they are as a person. They may be able to thrive as the blame is placed where it belongs, on the abuser. The victims may be able to understand the nature of sexual abuse and the common attitudes and behavior of sexual abusers. They also understand their own reactions to the painful and traumatic experience. The victims may understand that it is ok and natural that they experience certain feelings (e.g., sad, pain, hurt etc.).

They do not have to hide their feelings neither should they be ashamed because of that. They were not the cause of what happened—only the abuser has to be blamed, no one else. The victims may fix the responsibility where it belongs, therefore, they may become free of negative cognitions.

How can they overcome shame?

When looking at it closely and honestly, what

is there to be ashamed of? Therefore, part the therapeutic interventions is to help victims process their trauma in a more constructive way. Therapists help them to realistically translate their erroneous, distorted, and negative thoughts. That helps them to look at their feelings in a more appropriate way. Thus, their anxiety level tends to deescalate as well as their feeling of shame. The person who should be ashamed is the abuser. When the victims understand and accept the latter, the feeling of shame may be gone.

Sometimes, therapists may use analogies to reinforce the above statement. For example, “would you be ashamed to tell the police should a thief broke into your garage in steal your car?” You definitely will not feel ashamed to tell somebody that your car has been stolen. Therefore, it is the same for someone who has his/her trust and body violated. It is of course the same for a child who has his/her innocence stolen. In therapy the child-victim will learn that he/she did absolutely nothing wrong.

As a result, victims who become survivors no longer carry the feeling of shame. On the contrary they feel very empowered to have survived and still keep their dignity, pride, self-esteem, and self-confidence. They understand that even if they have been violated, but who they are as a person—as human being remains unshaken—no one can take that away from them - no one.

NOTE: These questions were asked to Mr. Georges Bossous, Jr. whose answers were based on over 10 years of clinical experience as a Psychotherapist. These answers are by no means the only and/or absolute way to prevent, treat, or understand the child sexual abuse trauma.



BACKGROUND

Georges Bossous, Jr. has a Master of Science degree in Psychology. He went through 3-year post-graduate studies in "Infant Mental Health." He is currently a Doctorate Candidate in "Public Health." He has been working as a Clinician/ Psychotherapist for more than 10 years. Mr. Bossous is a public speaker and child advocate. He is the Founder and Executive Director Word and Action, Inc.



Word and Action, Inc. (W&A) is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization that aims to prevent and/or decrease occurrences of child sexual abuse, and all other types of child abuse primarily within the Haitian community as well as other communities throughout the United States.

W&A promotes a culturally based approach to child sexual abuse prevention and treatment while expanding its partnership and network at the national and international level. W&A works as an advocate for sexually abused children worldwide.



HOW TO REPORT AN ABUSE?

Florida law stipulated that health care professionals, teachers, and school personnel, law enforcement, social workers, and day care professionals must contact authorities when they suspect abuse.

However, reporting is not limited to these professionals. Anyone who has knowledge or suspicion of child abuse should contact the Florida Department of Children and Families at:

1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873) or local law enforcement.