

## **I Am Not Scarred for Life: Overcoming Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA)**

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- ▶ Introduction-- experiences in dealing with victims of CSA.  
Intervention is much more challenging. Case study examples.
  
- ▶ Childhood Sexual Abuse Defined:
  - "Sexual abuse occurs whenever one person dominates and exploits another by means of sexual activity or suggestion" (Maltz, 2002)
  - Sexual abuse occurs whenever a person-- child or adult-- is sexually exploited by an older or more powerful person for the satisfaction of the abuser's needs. Involves grooming.
  
- ▶ Childhood Sexual Abuse Facts  
Childhood sexual abuse includes:
  - any sexual act between an adult and a minor, or between two minors, when one exerts power over the other. forcing, coercing or persuading a child to engage in any type of sexual act.
  - non-contact acts such as exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, voyeurism, and communicating in a sexual manner by phone or Internet.
  
- ▶ Facts
  - CSA is under reported (16% of men and only 25% of women report—stays hidden)
  - About one in 10 children will be sexually abused before their 18th birthday.
  - About one in seven girls and one in 25 boys will be sexually abused before they turn 18.\* These numbers indicate a decline in recent years due to mandated reporting.
  - We are mandated reporters if abuse is still going on and victim is under age.
  - About 90% of children who are victims of sexual abuse know their abuser. Stranger danger is a myth.
  - Approximately 30% of children who are sexually abused are abused by family members.
  - The younger the victim, the more likely it is that the abuser is a family member.
  - Those who molest children look and act just like everyone else. They can be neighbors, friends, church and family members.

## ► The Research

- **Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACES)**. Original study with Kaiser Permanente from 1995 to 1997 included two waves of data collection. Over 17,000 HMO members from Southern California receiving physical exams completed confidential surveys regarding their childhood experiences and current health status and behaviors. These experiences covered three general categories.
- Abuse
  - Physical Abuse, **Sexual Abuse**, Emotional Abuse
- Neglect
  - Physical Neglect, Emotional Neglect
- Household Challenges
  - Exposure to Domestic Violence, Household Substance Abuse, Household Mental Illness, Parental Separation or Divorce, Incarcerated Household Member

From:

[www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/cestudy/about.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/cestudy/about.htm)  
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## ► Impacts

- The study found that childhood trauma increases the odds of heart disease, stroke, depression, suicide, diabetes, lung diseases, alcoholism and liver disease later in life. It also increases risky health behaviors like smoking and having a large number of sexual partners.
- Life expectancy was 20 years shorter for adults with high ACES scores.
- The Center for Disease Control estimates that the lifetime costs associated with child mistreatment is \$124 billion. This includes productivity loss, health care costs, special education needs, child welfare involvement, and the criminal justice system

Severity of impact is affected by the following:

- The more closely related the abuser, the greater the impact
- The earlier the age of onset, the greater the impact
- When combined with other adverse experiences the impact is greater
- Personality distortions
- Trauma rewires the brain
- Grief over loss of childhood

## ► CSA Survivors experience the following:

- Long term depression and anxiety

- *Guilt, shame and self-blame.* Groomed to take the blame
- Eating disorders
- Sleep issues
- Random physical pain
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Sexual promiscuity
- Dissociative patterns and denial—makes them more susceptible to further harm (rapes, etc.)
- Sexual and *relationship* problems



### Counseling Challenges

- Warped view of God & self
- Lack of trust
- C-PTSD— physical effects of trauma
- Triggers, flashbacks, panic attacks
- May not have seen it as abuse
- They may be minimizing it
- Anxiety about counseling
- May be controlling & abusive or withdrawn
- May make generalized statements about giving it to God, but his/her life doesn't reflect that
- Shame
  - “You have no idea how much I hate myself.
  - “Those years ruined everything. My self-identity is sad, melancholic, shy, retiring and angry... never content or at peace.”
  - “I'm not like other people. I feel so different and don't fit in anywhere.”
- No understanding of love— if they had at least one caring person it can lessen the severity
- Confusion (that they had physical pleasure)
- Lack of trust
- Control issues (perfectionism), etc.



### Helpful Strategies

- Pray, pray, pray!
- Let them know their struggle are common to those who have experienced CSA
- Help them avoid “why” questions regarding the abuse
- Most have God stories— maybe ask...how did you come to know him? May want to remind her/him of this later on.

- Teach them grounding techniques (distraction– 54321, TIP Skills, breathing, repeating and praying scripture, etc.) If dissociating, help them stay in the present moment with God
- Let them know they were NOT responsible for the abuse
- Teach them that healing is not about building self-esteem but receiving the authority of what God says about them, along with the witness and confirmation of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:16).
- Do a **thought journal**- intentionally identifying negative thought patterns at specific times (i.e., “I should have,” “I’ll never” or “It was all my fault.”)
- Explain redemption (not just for salvation)—ways God might use it for good. Most see themselves reaching back
- Do not focus on their sin. Instead focus on God's goodness. It's His kindness that leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). See John 4:4-26. Focus on misplaced worship vs. true worship. Knowing and loving God will naturally address sin.



## The Path to Healing

- Admit that abuse occurred and recognize the impact it has had
- Educate about the effects of trauma and strategies to overcome
- Replace lies with truth (scripture)
  - Lies about God & His nature– he shares in our suffering. Suffering does not = abandonment. (Is 53, Heb. 4:15-16)
  - Lies about identity in Christ. A new creation— his masterpiece.
- Deal with overwhelming emotions like anger, sadness and fear (Chapter 12 *Called to Peace (CTP)* and Lessons 7-10 in the *CTP Workbook*)
- Deal with guilt and shame—abuse is never the victim's fault but may have sinned in response to sin. Help them understand there is no condemnation for those in Christ (1 John 1:9, Rom. 8:1).
- Understand that redemption is not just for salvation and discuss ways God might redeem it (Rom. 8:28-29, Gen. 50:20)
- Work on **forgiveness**, understanding that it involves admitting to the full weight of the offense, not minimizing it. This should be done *after* they have come to recognize His goodness.
- Learn how to respond rather than react. Think through, talk through and practice responses to sin.
- Practice putting off and putting on (Eph. 4:22-32)
- Resist sinful mistreatment
- Break victim mentality (Chapter 15 in *CTP*, Afterword in *CTP Workbook*)

- Maintain wholeness by walking in praise, gratitude, and meditation

Although not specifically written on CSA, this outline is based on the keys to healing found in *Called to Peace: A Survivor's Guide to Finding Peace and Healing After Domestic Abuse* and the *Called to Peace Workbook*.

Also see *In the Aftermath* by Pamela Gannon & Beverly Moore.