



Friends and Family of Sexual Abuse Survivors

What Happened?

Child sexual abuse is any kind of sexual behaviour that an adult, or someone who has power over a child, directs toward that child. Both girls and boys can be victims of child sexual abuse.

Child Sexual abuse is against the law.

Most of the time, when a child is abused she or he knows the person who is abusing them. It could be a family member, a neighbour, a family friend or anyone else in the child's life.

People who are sexually abused often deal with long-lasting effects. It is important that the family and friends of Survivors are supportive.

What Can I Expect?

Survivors of sexual abuse can have many different reactions.

Some Survivors may:

- Feel alone and defenseless
- Have difficult trusting
- Use drugs or alcohol to cope
- Eat too much or too little
- Self injure (cutting, burning, etc.)
- Experience flashbacks of the abuse
- Have trouble remembering
- Have difficulty sleeping
- Have suicidal thoughts or feelings

As they heal, Survivors may:

- Not want or be able to talk to you about their abuse
- Not want or be able to talk to you about their therapy
- Lose interest in sex
- Want to be alone
- Feel angry, depressed, anxious, relieved, numb – they could feel a lot of different emotions

It is not the victim's fault.

Are My Feelings Okay?

If you find out that someone you care about has been sexually abused, you may feeling many things. There are many feelings you could have.

Some of these feelings could be:

- Shock
- Disbelief
- Fear
- Anger
- Depression
- Guilt
- Numb

There are many other feelings you could experience as well. It is important to find ways to take care of yourself and your feelings.

What Can I Do Now?

The most important thing to remember is that you can help

- Just listen
- Believe the Survivor
- Get information about sexual abuse and healing from sexual abuse
- Tell the Survivor it was not their fault
- Don't push them to 'forgive and forget'
- Help your friend or family member to get support
- Respect the time it takes to heal. Your friend or family member may need a long time to heal
- Accept the Survivor's feelings toward the offender
- Accept that there can be major changes in your relationship as your friend or family member heals
- Support their choices
- Get help if your friend or family member is feeling suicidal
- Tell them about the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre