

Living as a Survivor of:
**CHILDHOOD
SEXUAL ABUSE**



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Special Thanks to the **Survivor's Healing Center** for their thoughtful review of this packet and for the crucial services they provide.

AM I A SURVIVOR OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

When you were a young child or teenager were you:

- Touched in sexual areas?
- Shown sexual movies or forced to listen to sexual talk?
- Made to pose for seductive or sexual photography?
- Subjected to unnecessary medical treatment?
- Forced to perform oral sex on an adult or sibling?
- Raped or otherwise penetrated?
- Fondled, kissed, or held in a manner that made you uncomfortable?
- Forced to take part in ritualized abuse in which you were physically or sexually tortured?
- Made to watch sexual acts or look at sexual parts?
- Bathed in a way that felt intrusive to you?
- Objectified or ridiculed about your body?
- Encouraged or talked into having sex when you did not want to?
- Told that all you were good for was sex?
- Involved in child prostitution or pornography?

If you find yourself answering yes to one or more of these questions or you were violated in any way that made you feel uncomfortable then you may be a survivor of childhood sexual abuse.

If you find yourself unable to answer yes to the previous questions, but you feel something abusive happened to you, it may have. As a result of traumatic childhood events some people are unable to recall their experiences.



FEELINGS YOU MAY EXPERIENCE AS A SURVIVOR OF CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE

SELF ESTEEM AND PERSONAL POWER:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">You may feel that you are powerless in your life, or that you have no sense of control. When you were abused your boundaries were violated leaving you with no sense of control or power. You may have been blamed by others for the abuse, told to forget it, or told that it was something you made up for attention, or wanted. All of this may have made you feel isolated, leaving you with little self-esteem or feeling of personal power.
FEELINGS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Many survivors have trouble recognizing and expressing their feelings. If you were betrayed by someone you loved you may not have understood your mixed feelings of love and hate for the same person. You may have learned to block out the physical or emotional pain of the abuse because it was too painful to bear. You may have been told that your feelings didn't matter, or that you liked the abuse, leaving you with a sense of confusion. All of these things could have led you to stop feeling emotions in your everyday life.
YOUR BODY:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Many survivors have a difficult time loving and appreciating their bodies. You may not always feel present in your body, or you may feel numb. These are coping mechanisms that allowed you to deal with pain at the time of the abuse. Some survivors may hurt their bodies by using food, drugs, alcohol, self-mutilation, etc.
INTIMACY:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">As a survivor you may not have been given adequate love and attention to develop an intimate relationship in your life. You may have been given confusing messages about the relationship between sex and love. Many survivors find it difficult to trust people or to be affectionate in relationships. You may find yourself involved with people who remind you of the abuser, and it may seem impossible to imagine what a healthy relationship is like.
SEXUALITY:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">When children are sexually abused they may experience that sexual arousal is linked to shame, pain, humiliation, or disgust. As an adult survivor you may not find sex pleasurable, or you may try to avoid sex in your personal relationships. Other feelings you may experience are numbness or panic while having sex, or using sex to meet non-sexual needs.

You may experience some of these feelings. The important thing to remember is that these are normal feelings. Acknowledging your feelings without judgment is healthy and will help in your healing process. These were the ways you coped with the abuse, and this is one of the ways you have become a survivor.



SUPPORTING THE SURVIVOR OF CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE

(Give to a friend, partner, or family member who is supporting you)

Supporting a person who is a survivor of sexual abuse can be very difficult and rewarding. You may feel confused or overwhelmed by what they are telling you, but these are normal feelings. It is important to take care of yourself during this time period and set limits on what you can do to support them. There are important steps you can take to help the survivor in their healing process:

1. **BELIEVE THE SURVIVOR:** Some of their memories may sound vague or too extreme. But remember to always believe them. Realize that the memories may be painful for them and you may be one of the first people they have ever told. Let them know that you respect them and believe them.
2. **NEVER BLAME THE SURVIVOR FOR THE ABUSE:** Children do not want to be abused nor do they seduce the abuser. Even if they did not protest the abuse it is still not their fault. It is ultimately the adult's responsibility not to be sexual with a child.
3. **LISTEN:** Be with them and let them talk. Validate their feelings, do not ignore them. Let them know that their feelings are normal and natural.
4. **RESPECT THEIR TIME AND SPACE:** Remembering the abuse and healing from the pain can be a slow process that takes time. Allow them to set limits on their time and space.
5. **IF THE SURVIVOR IS SUICIDAL:** If they express any type of suicidal thoughts, take them seriously, and get help immediately (look at references in pamphlet).
6. **SEE THEM AS A SURVIVOR NOT A VICTIM:** See them as a strong person who has survived childhood sexual abuse, not as a victim.
7. **ENCOURAGE THEM TO GET HELP:** Encouraging and supporting the survivor in getting counseling is important.



HEALING FROM CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE

Once you have recognized that you are a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, you may or may not be ready to begin the healing process. The healing process is a long process, in which many changes take place, these changes do not happen overnight. However, you must be ready to begin the healing process. It is important to remember that the first stage of the healing process is to recognize the abuse and the fact that you are a survivor who has made it to adulthood.

There are stages that all survivors pass through. The stages are given in an order, however, not all people experience their healing process in this order. You may experience some of the stages simultaneously, or you may never experience some of the stages. Every person is different; so each person's healing process will differ.

THE STAGES

THE DECISION TO HEAL. Once you recognize that you are a survivor, and you begin to realize the impacts of sexual abuse in your life, then you must choose to heal. You must want to heal and change yourself.

THE EMERGENCY STAGE. Once you begin to deal with your feelings and memories of the abuse you may feel your life is in turmoil. Remember this is only a stage it will not last forever.

REMEMBERING. Remembering is the process of getting back the memories and feelings attached to the abuse.

BELIEVING IT HAPPENED. Realizing that the abuse really happened and that you are a survivor is important in the healing process.

BREAKING THE SILENCE. Many adult survivors do not talk about the abuse they endured as a child. As children they are often told to keep it a secret.

VALIDATION. Hearing other survivors' stories and experiences often validates your feelings and emotions. (stages continued on the next page)



UNDERSTANDING IT WAS NOT YOUR FAULT. As a child you may have felt the abuse was your fault. As an adult survivor it is important to recognize that the abuse was not your fault. The fault lies on the shoulders of the abuser.

Making Contact With The Child Within. Getting in touch with the child is an important and difficult step in the healing process. Many people blame or hate the child for their experiences. It is important to remember it was not the child's fault. It is important to love that part of yourself.

Trusting Yourself. Listen to your inner voice and trust it. Learning to trust your feelings, intuitions, and perceptions can greatly change your life and your perception of the world.

Grieving and Mourning. Grieving is a way to honor your pain as a survivor, let go of the pain, and move into the present. Many people grieve for the loss of their feelings, the abandonment they felt, the betrayal they endured, the damages that they are now healing from, the relationships ruined, and the pleasure missed.

Anger. Directing your anger and rage at the abuser, and at those people who did not protect you is a large part of the healing process. Many survivors suppress their anger and turn it inward, instead of directing it appropriately at the abuser.

Disclosures and Confrontations. Some survivors find it beneficial and healing to confront the abuser, and others who did not protect them. However, directly confronting your abuser is not for every survivor.

Forgiveness. It is important to forgive yourself for the childhood sexual abuse you endured. Others find it useful to forgive the abuser, but this is not an essential part of the healing process.

Spirituality. You may find spirituality through a support group, religion, nature, meditation, or a hobby. It is a unique experience for each survivor.

Resolution and Moving On. Through the stages of healing you may begin to reclaim your personal self. Through this process you begin to learn how to manage your feelings. Although you will probably never forget the abuse, you may learn how to cope with it, and honor the strength you acquired.

*** These changes go in cycles, with each new cycle your feelings and memories allow you to make lasting changes, and find strength in yourself.**

(The stages from: [The Courage to Heal](#). By Ellen Bass and Laura Davis)

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

It is important to do things for yourself as you are going through the healing process. Here are some ideas on how you can nurture yourself:

🌸 Make a list of people you trust that you can call and talk to. 🌸

🌸 Take a hot bath. 🌸 Exercise. 🌸 Take a walk. 🌸

🌸 Watch your favorite movie. 🌸 Write in a journal. 🌸

🌸 Read a book. 🌸 Breathe. 🌸 Cook your favorite meal. 🌸

🌸 Listen to you favorite music. 🌸

TIPS ON FINDING A COUNSELOR

If you considering therapy there are many types of counseling to choose from. Here are some things to consider when choosing a counselor:

1. Get recommendations from agencies and other survivors.
2. Call different counselors and talk on the phone first. See how comfortable you are talking with them.
3. Ask questions-find out their background and education on working with survivors.
4. Many people prefer a counselor of the same gender, sexual orientation, cultural, economic, and spiritual background as themselves.
5. Make sure you feel respected by the counselor you choose. Never feel you have to do or say anything you are not comfortable with.
6. Remember you are not stuck with the fist counselor you choose. If you are not comfortable after a few sessions it is your right to see someone new.



Survivors Speak

(Healing quotes from survivors)

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“My own inner strength gives me hope. I just won’t quit. Period”



“No matter how old you were, no matter what the situation was, there is never an excuse for sexual abuse.”

“I look in the mirror through the eyes of the child that was me.” ~Judy Chicago

“Part of healing is doing the things you’ve always wanted to do. You do not have to wait until you’re “completely healed” to begin enjoying your present life.”

“When you can see that cocoons turn into butterflies, it’s just a little easier to believe that a damaged human being can become whole –even if human is you.”

“WHEN YOU TELL SOMEONE AND THEY LISTEN WITH RESPECT AND CARING, YOUR LIFE CHANGES DRAMATICALLY.”





RESOURCES FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS

RAPE CRISIS COUNSELING

Monarch Services~Servicios Monarca (24 hours).....	1-888-900-4232
Monterey Rape Crisis Center (24 hours).....	(831)375-4357
Youth Services (for teens - 24 hours).....	(831)425-0771 or (831)728-2226
UCSC Sexual Assault Facts and Education (SAFE) (M-F business hour).....	(831)459-2721
UCSC Women's Center (M-F business hour).....	(831)459-2169
Cabrillo College Student Health Services (M-F business hours).....	(831)479-6435
Suicide Prevention (24 hours).....	(831)458-5300

POLICE

Emergency	911
Santa Cruz County Sheriff.....	471-1121
Santa Cruz City.....	471-1131
Capitola.....	471-1141
Watsonville.....	471-1151
Scotts Valley.....	438-2323
UCSC.....	459-2345

COURT PROCESS

Victim's Services.....	454-2010
District Attorney.....	454-2400
Monarch Services~Servicios Monarca.....	425-4030 or 722-4532

LEGAL ASSISTANCE/ ADVOCACY

Lawyers Referral Service.....	425-4755 or 688-8448
Paralegal Services of Santa Cruz.....	457-8257
Women's Crisis Support ~ Defensa de Mujeres.....	425-4030 or 722-4532

PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING

Youth Services (for teens).....	425-0771 or 728-2226
Parents Center.....	426-7322 or 724-2879
UCSC Counseling.....	459-2628
Cabrillo College Health Services.....	479-6435

MISCELLANEOUS

Familia Center.....	423-5747
Lesbian Gay Bisexual Community Center.....	425-5422
Planned Parenthood.....	426-5550 or 724-7525
Santa Cruz Aids Project (SCAP).....	427-3900