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Child Sexual Abuse – Signs And Symptoms

By Wendy McLellan MA, LCDPPII

Sexual abuse has affected millions of children throughout the world. Child sexual abuse is defined

as: An adult using a child for sexual purposes. This can be in the form of child pornography, submitting children to look at pornography, fondling, touching, kissing, sodomy, exposing oneself to a child, rape, oral sex, intercourse, or having the child touch the adult. All children will react differently to this type of trauma. There is no one single identifiable sign or symptom that all children will have. They may have very subtle symptoms or they may have very pronounced symptoms. I have gathered a list of symptoms that children of sexual abuse are often seen to have.

Bedwetting (after being potty trained)

Waking up in the night screaming, nightmares or other sleeping problems

Showing an unusual fear of certain people, places or things

A reluctance to be with a certain person

Loss of appetite or trouble eating

Fear of the bathroom

Excessive crying

Mood changes, anger outbursts or withdrawal or fear

Becomes worried when clothing is removed

Wearing layers of clothing

Age inappropriate knowledge of sex

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Imitating sexual acts with other children or toys, such as dolls

Withdrawing from activities they used to be involved in

Difficulty walking or sitting

Complains of pain with urination or bowel movement

Bleeding from the genital area or anus

Academic problems

Lowered self esteem

Symptoms of PTSD such as panic attacks

Somatic complaints

Regression of behavior

Having new words for private body parts

Excessive masturbation

These are all symptoms of child sexual abuse. One common feeling I have found in working with children and adolescents, is guilt. Children usually feel guilt over the abuse that occurred. It is important to remember that under no circumstance is a child ever responsible for what happened to them. It is crucial that "re- victimization" does not happen. Some ways a child can be re- victimized is by saying to the child:

"Uncle Joey, or Grandpa Bob would never do that to you, why are you lying?"

"It couldn't of been that bad, or you would have told me sooner"

Child sexual abuse victims usually carry this trauma with them for the rest of their lives. Some children as they begin to get older will start using drugs, get into relationships with others who are abusive, see themselves as "damaged goods" and begin acting out sexually. Engage in self mutilation, such as cutting behaviors. Some children gain weight or don't take care of themselves so they look "unattractive" to others.

There is hope. Finding the proper treatment for past trauma can be influential on how they cope with this as an adult. Rape crisis centers are usually available in most states. There is also a national rape crisis center. They are a full service agency that addresses prevention, education, crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy. They work with both children and adults. There is also a 24 hour hotline available at the national rape crisis center, for parents or victims of sexual abuse.

Wendy McLellan is a licensed mental health and substance abuse counselor, with more than sixteen years of experience. She has recently devoted time to the efforts of

<http://www.safecomputerkids.com>

in their goal to provide parental internet safety tools and resources to the public.

The Legacy of Sexual Abuse

By Margaret Paul, Ph.D.

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The Legacy of Sexual Abuse
Margaret Paul, Ph.D.

During the many years I've been counseling people, I've worked with many people who were sexually abused as children. Some of them remember it all their lives, while others repressed it and remember it only as adults. In either case, the resulting harm exists on many levels.

THE PHYSICAL LEVEL

If a child was violently abused, the physical pain may have been so intense as to cause the person to not be able to function in a normal way sexually as an adult. The fear of penetration or of oral sex may cause the person to avoid sex entirely, or to be too tense to actually enjoy sex.

However, even if the abuse was not violent and physical harmful, the physical harm can be deep. A child's body is not big enough to handle the intense feelings of sexual arousal. When a child is sexually activated at a young age, the child may be so overwhelmed with the feelings that he or she ends up constantly masturbating to find some relief. Incessant masturbation is one of the symptoms of sexual abuse. As an adult, this could translate into various forms sexual addiction.

THE EMOTIONAL LEVEL

The harm done on the emotional level is extensive. Sexual abuse is a deep form of violation, and invariably leads to the child feeling objectified. The child comes to see herself or himself as an object to be used rather than as a person deserving of caring. This objectification of the self can lead to promiscuity at a young age, or to other forms of being used and abused.

One of the deepest levels of harm is that the child tends to absorb the darkness of the abuser. The

child, not knowing that he or she is not causing the abuser to be abusive, takes on the shame of the abuser. It is as if the darkness of the abuser goes right into the child. As a result, the abused person grows up with a feeling of being a very bad person, with a huge ball of darkness within. Most survivors of childhood sexual abuse need to go through a process of realizing that this darkness does not belong to them and releasing it.

Children who have been sexually abused generally absorb many false beliefs about themselves that can plague them throughout their adult life – beliefs such as:

- * I've been damaged beyond repair. I can never heal and be whole.
- * I'm a bad person. I cause people to abuse me because of my badness.
- * All I'm good for is sex.
- * The only way to be safe is to be invisible.

These false beliefs can cause untold heartache for the survivor of sexual abuse.

THE SPIRITUAL LEVEL

Sexual abuse not only causes physical and emotional harm, it also causes spiritual harm. It is a form of spiritual abuse. Spiritual abuse is any abuse that contributes to a disconnection from a spiritual Source of love and comfort.

When a child is being abused by a trusted person, a person who is supposed to protect the child such as a parent, relative, teacher, religious leader, doctor, or friend, the child learns that adults can't be trusted. The deepest harm occurs when the abuser is a parent. Most children learn to project onto God their experience of their parents. If their parents are judgmental, then they believe that God is judgmental. If their parents are too busy for them, then they believe that God is too busy for them. If their parents do not protect them or harm them, they might conclude that God does not exist. "If God existed, then why didn't God stop my father from raping me?"

Some children leave their bodies when being severely abused. Invariably, with therapeutic help, they can remember that they were lovingly held by a spiritual teacher and told that the abuse was not their fault. Much healing occurs with these memories. They can remember knowing that they were being

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helped by God, even though, due to the law of free will, God could not stop the abuser from abusing them.

Reconnecting on the spiritual level is the key to healing on the physical and emotional levels. Through connection with Spirit, abuse survivors learn that they are not irrevocably damaged, that they are not inherently bad and did not cause themselves to be abused, that they can share much more than sex – they can share their love and compassion, and that they can create their own safety rather than be invisible as a way to be safe. Their false beliefs are healed through the truth that comes from their spiritual connection.

Learning to be a loving and compassionate adult with oneself is the major challenge for an abuse survivor. Deep healing occurs when survivors learn to see and value the beauty of their own soul, and learn to treat themselves with respect, caring and compassion. Inner safety and deep self worth are the

results of learning to treat oneself with love.

Margaret Paul, Ph.D. is the best-selling author and co-author of eight books, including "Do I Have To Give Up Me To Be Loved By You?" She is the co-creator of a powerful self-help, 6-step emotional and spiritual healing process called Inner Bonding. Learn Inner Bonding now! Visit her web site for a FREE Inner Bonding course: <http://www.innerbonding.com> or <mailto:margaret@innerbonding.com>



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