



Information Sheet: Child Sexual Abuse

What is child sexual abuse?

This term describes any kind of sexual behaviour by an adult with a child or any unwanted or inappropriate sexual behaviour from another child. It is estimated that 10% to 25% of adults have been sexually abused as children; two-thirds of which are women.

The impact of child sexual abuse:

Adults abused as children can experience many difficulties e.g. low self-esteem, shame, guilt, depression and feeling of suicide. They may find relationships difficult, be mistrustful, withdrawn or over-dependent. They can also be vulnerable to further abuse whether sexual, physical or emotional. They may suffer from anxiety, phobias, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, sleep problems, hallucination, flashbacks or panic attacks. Survivors may also suffer from eating disorders, alcoholism or drug abuse. They may also experience psychosomatic symptoms, sexually transmitted diseases, pelvic pain or gynaecological problems. Please note, however, that these problems do not necessarily mean you were abused as a child.

How you can help yourself:

People who have been abused often feel very alone. They may believe no one can understand or help them. However, there are lots of sources of help. Many victims of abuse have come to terms with their experiences and live full and satisfying lives.

Here are some of the things that may help:

- Talking to trustworthy family members or friends can provide support and encouragement.
- Talking therapies can help by offering a positive, supportive relationship within which to come to terms with the past and deal with the negative effects of abuse

by learning positive coping strategies. Some people only start talking about their abuse many years later.

- Support groups can provide a chance to meet people who have had similar experiences and share ideas for tackling common difficulties.
- Be patient with yourself: Just because something happened a long time ago does not mean you can easily put it behind you.
- It is never too late to get professional help.

How you can help someone:

When a person discloses that they have been abused, it is very important that they are listened to and believed. It is not up to you or anyone else to tell the person who they should talk to or when or how they should deal with their experience.

What CCL offers:

Our Specialist Counseling Service offers free long-term counselling for adults who have been abused as children as well as for people who have experienced domestic violence. Because of the number of sessions available, clients are able to proceed at a pace they are comfortable with. Clients do not have to talk in detail about their experiences if they do not wish to, but will work collaboratively with the counsellor to decide what kind of help they want. Clients can be referred by their doctor or self-refer by contacting CCL directly.

Other sources of information:

The National Association for People Abused in Childhood provides a range of different support, including a free phone telephone support line - 0800 085 3330 - www.napac.org.uk

HOPE provides support groups for survivors of sexual violence and child sexual abuse - 01723 381 811 (9:30 to 16:30, Mon. to Fri.) - www.hopesurvivors.org.uk

These organisations will also recommend suitable reading material for further support, advice and information.