

## Help for survivors of childhood sexual abuse

**Welcome! Although we are deeply saddened by the circumstances that brought us together, we are so happy you made it here...**

This section of our site is intended to be a resource for survivors of childhood sexual abuse and we hope it can be helpful in your recovery.

Although Wonderful Women is responsible for the content you find here, we are not associated with, and take no responsibility for the site that provided the link to this site or published this address. Nor are we responsible for the content of their statements to the world.

**Our best wishes to you on your journey.**

**We know that recovery is difficult, but would like to share two truths with you:**

- **You are no longer alone**
- **You were not to blame for what happened to you**

Currently only in Dubai, (though we plan to take the program to South Africa soon) to support fellow survivors, we run a monthly support group called *Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse Anonymous*.

Another site that we think is extremely helpful to survivors is [www.darkness2light.org](http://www.darkness2light.org).

If child sexual abuse is part of your history, do not keep silent. By breaking the cycle of silence, you can break free from the trauma you carry within you and begin an important healing process. There are 39 million survivors of child sexual abuse in America today. Let your healing start now.

### **How to contact us**

Please navigate to the CONTACT US section of our website if you would like to make contact with us? There you will find a form that you will need to complete and submit.

Sue, who is a fellow survivor, handles most enquiries and usually responds to them personally within 24 hours. (You can read something about Sue's own story in the PRESS OFFICE section on this site.)

*If you do not hear from us within 48 hours, this will only be because of some sort of technical glitch, so PLEASE try contacting us again, as we would never intentionally NOT respond to an enquiry.*

### **An Introduction to the support group: *Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse Anonymous***

#### **WELCOME (read aloud at the beginning of meetings)**

We welcome you to ***Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse Anonymous*** and hope you will find here the hope, camaraderie and recovery that we have been privileged to experience.

We are a self-help group of women, 18 years or older, who are guided by a set of 12 Suggested Steps and 12 Traditions.

There are no dues or fees although donations are welcome.

Everything that is said here, in the group meetings or member to member, must be held in strict confidence. We do not have any professional therapist working in our group. Our meetings are not a replacement for therapy or any other professional service or intervention that may be needed. The only requirement for membership is that you are a victim of child sexual abuse, and you are not abusing any child.

We define sexual abuse very broadly as a sexual experience by a family member, extended family member, or authority figure that damaged the child. These may include an aunt, uncle, in-law, step-parent, cousin, friend of the family, teacher, coach, another child, religious leader or anyone that you were led to trust.

We believe we were affected by the abuse whether it occurred once or many times since the damage is incurred immediately.

We learn here not to deny, that we did not imagine the abuse, nor was it our fault in any way. Some abusers will stop at nothing in their attempt to shift the responsibility to the defenceless child, often accusing the child of being seductive.

We had healthy, natural needs for love, attention and acceptance, and we often paid high prices to get those needs met, but we did not seduce our abuser. Physical coercion is rarely necessary with a child since the child is already intimidated. The more gentle the assault, the more guilt the victim inappropriately carries. We also learn not to accept any responsibility for the assaults even if these occurred over a prolonged period of time.

We accept with sadness that some of us are still being sexually abused.

Here we share our experiences and common feelings. We realize that we felt we had to protect our caretakers from this horrible secret, as if they were not participants. We felt alienated from the non-abusive family members. Often, greater anger is directed toward them since it is safer to get angry at people we perceive to be powerless. We became caretakers in order to maintain an image of a nurturing family. Our feelings of betrayal by our families are immeasurable. We need to mourn the death of the ideal family that many of us created in our own imaginations.

In dealing with this pain, it feels as if we are pulling the scab off a wound that never healed properly, AND IT HURTS. However, it is easier to cry when we have friends who are not afraid of our tears. We CAN be comforted - that is why we are here. Our pain is no longer in vain. We will never forget, but we can, in time, end the regretting that accompanies destructive remembering. We can learn, One Day at a Time, that we are childhood sexual abuse SURVIVORS, rather than victims.

**CLOSING (read aloud at the end of many of our meetings):**

As we close this meeting, it is important for us to realize that no one here can tell us what we should or should not do. We must each decide on our own course of recovery. In our meetings we do not give advice. Take what you like and leave the rest. Let there be no judgment or criticism of one another.

Because we come together for support, it is important that we share, but let us always remember that what is said in this room must also stay in this room. Confidentiality is central to this program.

Ours is an anonymous program; therefore, we must remain unidentified at the level of press, television, radio and films. If we meet outside a meeting, we must not jeopardize anyone's

anonymity by acknowledging each other as fellow members.

Regardless of who abused us, how often, or what the nature of the abuse was, know that we are where we belong. Most of us suffer with many of the same feelings and consequences as other abused survivors and we can offer each other support.

We want to remind those who have recently joined us that each of us is a creative, courageous and caring person. Each day we deal with our incest experience we will become stronger people, and we will come to recognize ourselves as survivors.

We are sorry that suffering brought us together. We hope you will feel the love we already have in our hearts for you. We know your pain. We want you to believe that you are not to blame, and you are not alone. We have come to the awesome realization that our pain is temporary, but denial and its consequences are forever. And if any one of us can recover, then so can all of us.

- There are many survivors in the world
- Please be gentle to the child within and remember, you are no longer alone

## About Us

Started in June 2009, ***Wonderful Women Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse Anonymous*** is a 12 Step, self-help recovery program modelled after the Alcoholics Anonymous program that was later also adapted for use by Survivors of Incest Anonymous - [www.siaawso.org](http://www.siaawso.org).

With the program now launched in Dubai, the next step will be to take it to South Africa.

There are no dues or fees. Confidentiality and anonymity are essential to our program. Meetings are for women only, 18 years and older, who were sexually abused as children. You will not be rejected because you think your abuse was "too horrible," neither will you be dismissed because you think your abuse wasn't "bad enough to count."

We depend primarily on the contributions of our members. No donation is too small.

Our best wishes to you in your recovery.

Recovery is difficult, but at least we now know that we are not to blame and we are not alone.  
Please be gentle to the child within?

## The Effects of Child Sexual Abuse on the Adult Survivor (with thanks to [www.siaawso.org](http://www.siaawso.org))

Any sexual contact, covert or overt, between a child and a trusted individual that damaged the child, whether these contacts included suggestive remarks, pornography, fondling or acts of sexual aggression or torture, needs to be dealt with assertively. These contacts scar virtually all facets of victims' lives since we are left with little or no self-esteem.

At least one out of every four girls is abused before they reach the age of eighteen. The child's emotional growth will be arrested at the age of the first attack, and the victim will probably not begin to recover until adulthood, if ever.

Boys, as well as girls, can be victims of sexual abuse. And the statistics indicate that one in 6 boys is.

Anyone can be an abuser, especially if the perpetrator is perceived by the child to be in authority, including father, grandfather, mother, step-parent, brother, uncle, friend of the family, aunt, teacher -- the list is endless.

Some of the social maladjustments arising from incest are alcoholism, drug addiction, self-injury, prostitution, promiscuity and sexual dysfunction. Eating or sleeping disorders, migraines, back or stomach pains are just a few of the physical consequences that we may suffer. Food, sex, alcohol and/or drugs deaden painful memories of the abuse and obscure reality temporarily. If we perceive obesity to be unattractive, and if we believe we were abused because we were attractive, we may overeat in a misguided attempt to defend ourselves from further sexual assault.

"I felt like throwing up" is a common response among victims, and bulimia is a way of acting out that feeling. Anorexia can be another form of self-punishment, eventually leading to the ultimate self-victimization, suicide.

A number of emotional problems may emerge from the abuse, including inability to trust, perfectionism, phobias, avoidance of both intimacy and emotional bonding. The denial system that insured our survival as children now prevents us from enjoying complete, joy filled adulthoods.

Many of us don't trust our own perceptions; we were forced to become an expert in disbelieving our own senses. We tried to convince ourselves that we over-reacted and that nothing really terrible happened: "My daddy would never REALLY hurt me." When reality is too painful for children's minds, we learn to fictionalize. It is extremely painful to give up the fantasy family since children see themselves either in reflected glory or disgraced shadows. Therefore, we sometimes make excuses for the abuser: "He was drunk at the time. She had it rough as a child." We take responsibility for the assaults: "I was too attractive, too sexy." The abuser probably reinforced our own nagging guilt and questions we had concerning our own innocence. Essentially, we defend the perpetrator by minimizing, rationalizing and taking on the blame. If we continue to use these coping mechanisms as adults, we are set up to be abused in current relationships. In *Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse Anonymous*, we can learn to accept the fact that we were abused rather than loved by the abuser. We can then learn to seek out only healthy, loving relationships. We have been accustomed to accepting only crumbs, believing that we do not deserve anything better.

We may have parenting problems, always second-guessing decisions, which is another result of distrusting our own perceptions. We may avoid parenting altogether, try to be a perfect parent or repeat the abuse. The worst possible consequence is when we perpetuate the abuse onto the next generation.

Another repercussion of childhood sexual abuse or incest is that we often regard authority figures with anxiety. Passivity is comfortable because it is familiar, and we may accept familiar misery rather than risk unfamiliar change. An experiment in learned helplessness was conducted in which dogs were forced to endure painful electric shocks without any means of escape. A second group of dogs were compelled to endure shocks and quickly escaped when it was possible. When the first group was shocked again, with escape now possible, they did not leave. They had been conditioned to endure pain. This experiment explains why so many of us are sexually abused as adults by therapists, spouses, counsellors, doctors or bosses. We are accustomed to losing battles and to feeling powerless. We may not believe we can win. Assertion is a difficult concept for sexual abuse and incest victims.

Our inability to trust affects our sexual relationships too. Women who have been abused by men will often say, "I don't trust men, they only want sex." The assaults have sometimes been associated with emotional or physical pleasure, and this fact reinforces the suspicion that we must have somehow 'asked for it'.

Another result of the conflicting messages of sexual abuse, particularly incest is that many of us confuse sex with affection and love. Many women will say, "The only time my father ever gave me any attention was in bed. I was special to him then. I felt loved." Since she desperately needs validation, this woman may become promiscuous. She needs to know that a promiscuous child is often the result, but never the cause of incest. She believes if someone has sex with her, then that partner automatically loves her. She has confused sex and love.

When the abuse is physically violent, perhaps even painful, we may confuse sex with control and power. A typical comment might be, "When I have sex with someone, I feel like my body is being controlled. I feel that as I respond to my partner, he is manipulating me, and I am a puppet all over again." We may shut off all sexual feelings and retreat from all sexual contact: we fear that everyone will use and abuse us.

Changing self-destructive patterns is a slow process, but here we can learn that it is possible. It takes tremendous strength for us to put ourselves in a position to examine and feel this pain. We need incredible courage and reliable professional help.

*Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse Anonymous*, a 12-step self-help recovery program, is a resource for adult female survivors. A statement read at the end of our meetings reminds us: "The pain is temporary, but denial and its consequences are forever." When we tire of the consequences, and become willing to work diligently on the abuse issues, we are then on the way to living our lives as survivors rather than victims.

As always, take what you like and leave the rest.

### **12 Steps of Wonderful Women's *Survivors of Sexual Abuse Anonymous***

1. We admitted we were powerless over the abuse experience and that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that only a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God.
4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. We were entirely ready to have God remove these defects.
7. We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would hurt them or others.
10. We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. We sought through prayer to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

## 12 Traditions of Wonderful Women's Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse Anonymous

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends on unity.
2. For group purposes there is but one authority - a loving God. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for membership is that you are a victim of child sexual abuse and that you desire to recover from it.
4. Our group should be autonomous except in matters affecting another group.
5. Our group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the childhood sexual abuse survivor who still suffers.
6. Our group ought never to endorse, finance or lend our name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property or prestige divert us from our primary aim.
7. *Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse Anonymous* strives to be fully self-supporting and will not accept contributions that compromise our autonomy or mission.
8. Our work should remain forever non-professional, although later on we may employ special workers.
9. *Wonderful Women's Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse Anonymous* ought never to be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. *Wonderful Women Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse Anonymous* has no opinion on outside issues; hence our name should never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, film and television.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

## Frequently Asked Questions (with thanks to [www.siaawso.org](http://www.siaawso.org))

### **WHO CAN ATTEND A MEETING?**

Meetings are closed. 'Closed' meaning for adult (over 18 years) female survivors of child sexual abuse only. No current perpetrators of child abuse are allowed in any of our meetings.

You are welcome here even if you have no clear memories of the abuse. You will not be discounted because what happened to you seems "minor." You will not be rejected because your abuse seems too horrible. If you feel you belong here, we believe you and welcome you.

### **WHAT IF I DON'T HAVE PROOF - OR DON'T REMEMBER THE ABUSE?**

No one here needs more than your word that you survived the abuse. Most of us were children when it occurred and often do not remember it fully. If you believe you were a victim or have reason to think you were, then we believe you. That's enough to get started. This is not a court to deal with your perpetrator. This is a support group to help you heal yourself.

### **HOW DO I INTRODUCE MYSELF?**

In this program, we use only first names (and occasionally last initials). It's your choice how you introduce yourself. Most people will begin speaking by saying "I'm (first name) and I'm a childhood sexual abuse or incest survivor." This lets others know your name and helps to break the silence

you've kept for so long. If you would like to use a pseudonym, do so. Trust will develop as you recover further and get to know us. Some will add "I was abused by my father, mother, uncle, baby sitter, etc., and neglected by (whomever)."

### **WHO IS IN CHARGE?**

No one is really in charge. Leadership is shared by all. The leader of a meeting is woman and a survivor just like you, who is willing to read the format and facilitate the meeting. She can be the leader for a given period of time. This is called a service position. Usually service positions rotate giving everyone an opportunity to contribute to the meeting. Other service positions may evolve later on.

### **WHAT DOES IT COST TO ATTEND THE MEETINGS?**

There is NO COST for meetings although we do have expenses such as venue hire costs, refreshments and some administration. Our Seventh Tradition states that we are self-supporting. We will take up a collection for the Seventh Tradition but no one is obligated to contribute. Through these collections, bills are paid and when funds allow special speaker line-ups could be arranged.

### **DO I HAVE TO SPEAK?**

No. There are many formats of meetings – speaker meetings where a speaker does most of the talking; topic meetings where discussion is open but directed toward a specific topic and all are invited to participate. At a small number of meetings, people are called on to speak; at most meetings the floor is open to anyone wishing to speak, but no one is called on. You can choose not to speak. If you are in a group that rotates the discussion and do not want to speak, please say "I pass" so that the next person can begin. No one has to speak at these discussion meetings, but everyone is encouraged to speak. As survivors, we have had to keep the sexual abuse secret so we are not usually comfortable talking about it.

You may find that, in response to the abuse, your life has developed in a certain way and that, even though the abuse ended long ago, it still affects your life. Some of us come to this program full of anger at our perpetrators and hurting. We find that by breaking the silence and telling the secret, then talking about the things in our lives that were and still are affected; we can begin a long, slow process of recovery. Generally, in a discussion meeting each person (time permitting) is given an opportunity to speak. Some groups allow cross-talk (brief, positive feedback), but no advice is ever given. We encourage you to be respectful of the number of survivors that are sharing the meeting time.

We also encourage you to keep your comments to your own experiences. We keep our discussions on our own experiences using "I" statements (first person), and avoid politics and outside causes which keep us from our primary purpose. Generally, since newcomers and others in crisis have special needs to "get it off my chest," it is a good idea to speak early in the meeting so that there is time. Most groups will begin and end at a specified time. As survivors we often have problems with limits and are working on these issues. It will help us if you make your needs know early. If your questions don't get answered in the meeting, ask someone to speak with you afterward or call someone on the phone list to get answers.

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