



SEPTEMBER 2011 NEWSLETTER

Cheryl Jones - SARC 580 481-7428

Anderal Ward- Deputy SARC 580 481-7835

Crisis Hotline:
580 649-0656



What are the Impacts of Sexual Abuse in Future Relationships?

by Dan Williams

It is very difficult to predict outcomes in relationships due to sexual abuse. It depends on many variables. The duration of the abuse, the age of the victim when abused, relationship to the perpetrator, and severity of the abuse. Other variables include, has the victim worked through any issues they have, and are they introspective in regards to their symptoms.

Typically one may see distancing around intimacy, lack of disclosure, bursts of anger, and/or depressive episodes. Certain triggers can occur that bring back memories from the abuse. In the psychiatric field this is known as a conversion disorder. A conversion disorder is where actual physical symptoms manifest themselves triggered by previous memories from the sexual abuse or any severe trauma. This is commonly seen in Post Traumatic Stress Disorders.

Victims of abuse know how to be victims. They can easily fall into a "door Mat" type syndrome, going out of their way to please. What is not discussed as commonly by the therapeutic community is that the victim also has learned to be a perpetrator. Not a sexual perpetrator but a verbal emotionally hurtful perpetrator. Women who have been raped as well as men who were sexually abused can be verbally assaulting, demeaning, and critical. The soft side of victims needs to be recognized and empowered.

Teaching one to look for red flags in relationships are crucial to stop the cycle of choosing inadequate partners. Look for signs of excessive alcohol intake, here is where victims may self medicate to cover up an underlying depression or anger. A relationship is a team. Two people coming together, to not only sacrifice time for each other, but to support and love each other in crisis. Victims of abuse are able to learn this. Once there is support, true affection and trust, the relationship will be nurtured and able to grow. Open communication, knowing that one will not experience intentional hurt is of the utmost importance. Victims of abuse are hyper-vigilant, scanning their environment, questioning true intent. Consistent trust and the fostering of a solid foundation of communication will overcome many obstacles.

Please remember, it is one thing to read the words on this blog or in a text. It is completely different to actually implement it into behavior. Relationships can work between two individuals, when one has experienced abuse. It takes time, dedication, and total acceptance for it to flourish.

It is possible and the pay off is a partner to grow old with and share the stories of the past with laughter and grace.

How to Help a Survivor

- **Believe them.** Nothing can be more devastating to a victim/ survivor of sexual violence than knowing that their friends don't believe what they are saying.
- **Establish yourself as a safe person and make sure that the victim/survivor feels safe.** Being a safe person means that you are a person that won't pass any judgment and will let your friend lead their own recovery process. Just doing this helps your friend feel safe. Allow them to decide what makes them feel safe, don't choose it for them.
- **Let them talk.** Just having someone listen is a huge help for the victim/survivor. No matter how hard it is for you to understand or hear, it is harder for them to say. Do not impose your own thoughts or feelings on the victim/survivor— especially judgmental ones.
- **Don't try to rationalize what happened.** It may be that if your friend knew the person that hurt them, so do you. The situation can be hard to understand, but the perpetrator's actions are never justified. Never make excuses for the offender.
- **Provide options to the victim/survivor and let them choose which option is best.** Sexual assault is a fundamental loss of control for the victim/survivor and they are the only person that understands what is right for them. Never force them to do anything that they do not want to do - this would only increase their trauma by continuing their loss of control.
- **Let the victim/survivor "name" their victimization and then you use their "name".** Use the same words that the victim/survivor is using to talk about what happened to them. If they are not saying "rape", don't say "rape".
- **Be Patient.** Healing from a sexual assault takes time. Be patient and continue to offer your support to your friend throughout the coming weeks and months, or even longer. Remember that every healing process is unique.
- **Do not avoid the victim/survivor or the subject.** For a victim/survivor, the thought of people being scared of them may be a huge concern. If you avoid your friend, you may be reinforcing their shame and fear.
- **Educate yourself about sexual violence and the trauma associated with it.** It is not the victim/survivor's job to help you to understand what happened to them. The SAPR office will provide you with assistance with helping you understand the traumatic events of sexual assault. Other helpful resources include RAINN (www.rainn.org) or Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (www.sapr.mil)
- **Refer them to Rape Crisis Center where they can get help and different resources.** If they aren't interested in these resources, don't force these options on them. You can contact these resources for guidance on how to help your friend. Our local rape crisis center is ACMI house.
- **Get help for yourself.** Having a friend who has been victimized can be a scary and confusing experience.