



When Sexual Abuse Rears It's Ugly Head

*Understanding how past sexual abuse affects committed relationships*

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Sexual abuse is a trauma that affects heart level connections long after the fact. Years after the actual experiences, reactions to the event may start surfacing in odd ways.

### **Sexual Abuse and Future Sexuality**

Sexual abuse is the gift that keeps on giving. A person caught in the trap of keeping their sexual abuse secret out of fear or because they are being manipulated by their abuser will out of necessity begin to shut down their emotions. One way to shut down emotions is to go into denial mode. The Hebrew word for denial is "to lie." Keeping the secret means we have to lie to ourselves as well as to others. The person being abused must lie to themselves that (a) they are even being abused and (b) that what they are experienced from their abuser is "normal."

The sexually abused must detach themselves from their feelings as a way to survive the unthinkable. This shutdown mode brings them the protection they need to keep the secret.

### **First Stage-Promiscuity**

The sexually abused can begin to act out sexually as a way to release some of the hurt they feel about their "deep dark secret." Because they were harmed in the area of their sexuality and have lost power and control in that part of their life, the reasoning goes this way: "I lost power because of my sexuality so I will regain power by being sexual." Thus begins the sexual abuse cycle of sexual dysfunction.

Most sexually abused persons will go through a season of promiscuity. Typically, there will be several random and/or one-time events of acting out sexually. Then a strange thing happens. Finally meeting "the right person" the reasoning becomes: "Monogamy or being in a solid one-person relationship will relieve the pain surrounding my sexuality."

### **Second Stage-Sexual Detachment**

Once in a committed relationship the pendulum swings the other way. Marriage requires intimacy and connection. These elements have been lacking thus far in

the person's life. The sexually abused then become overwhelmed at the prospect of a relationship that requires so much of their heart and so much vulnerability. Keep in mind vulnerability was not safe for them in past relationships. The emotions begin shutting down. Feeling trapped and vulnerable, this person who was once *too* sexual becomes completely shut down sexually. Also there might be a sudden increase in anger. Angry responses serve the purpose of pushing loved ones away desiring connection.. Another response to a relationship that requires intimacy and trust is to isolate from the pursuer in the relationship.

At this point, the partner in the committed relationship is thrown into a tail-spin. One husband in this situation put it very well: "She was my dream girl until we got married. It's like I woke up one morning married to a psycho-witch!"

### **There are answers**

If you have sexual abuse in your past it will affect future committed relationships. It is important to get the help you need to work through those lost emotions. While it may seem scary to look at the way your abuse harmed you, ultimately it will be worth it to be free. A wise man once said, "what you can't talk about keeps you in bondage."

It is important to find a therapist trained in helping people find freedom from sexual abuse. No one needs to stay stuck in the cycle of sexual dysfunction in order to survive. You can have courage and work through past hurts by

- 1) Identifying lost emotions connected to the violations
- 2) Grieving the cost of the abuse in a safe place
- 3) Moving from a victim mindset to that of a responsible person who knows how to feel and trust.

Again, going through the pain at looking at your past secrets will make life worth living again...to yourself and to your loved ones.

You can see how past sexual abuse might be affecting you by taking the sexual abuse self test on the navigation bar of [www.missingpieces.org](http://www.missingpieces.org).