

Male Victims of Sexual Assault: Healing the Hurt

Only recently has the sexual assault of males been talked about or written about. If you were a male victim of sexual assault, as a child, teen or as an adult, you may feel alone. Talking about your assault may be very difficult, but getting information and support is the first step toward helping yourself.

What is sexual assault?

- Any sexual contact by any adult to any child.
- Any unwanted sexual contact between adults.

The person who assaulted you is responsible for his or her actions. You, the victim, are not to blame.

Things that may be true for you:

- Your assault may not have been violent or painful.
- You may have been assaulted by a woman.
- You may worry that you are gay if you didn't enjoy the sexual assault by a woman.
- If you were assaulted by another male, you might be confused about your sexual identity. (Am I gay or straight?)

How can I heal the hurt?

"When you undertake the process of recovery, it must be a conscious decision that has been arrived at through a great deal of soul-searching. Having attempted every imaginable way of working around, over, and under your feelings, you have reluctantly come to the conclusion that the only way out of the pain is straight ahead – through it." Mike Lew from his book Victims No Longer – Men Recovering from Incest and Other Sexual Child Abuse

Recovery is possible

Help is available through a variety of resources. Your local sexual assault program can provide you with information and support.

- **Get support** – Understanding and supportive people can play an important role in your recovery.
- **Seek information** – New pamphlets, books, and articles that have been written in the past few years. Get some suggestions from your local sexual assault program or library.
- **Get counseling** – There are trained counselors who can listen to and support you. Contact your local sexual assault program for an advocate and for referrals to private counselors.
- **Find a support group** – Led by counselors or advocates of your local sexual assault program.

Sexual assault of boys

Child sexual abuse is any sexual act an adult does to a child. It is any touch or behavior that has to be kept a secret. People who abuse boys can be male or female; however, most offenders are straight men – someone the child knows and trusts, often a member of his family, a youth leader, babysitter, or neighbor.

It is sexual assault if an adult:

- Touches the child sexually
- Has the child touch him or her sexually
- Takes pictures of the child for sexual reasons
- Shows the child pornographic pictures or videos
- Shows the child his or her genitals for sexual reasons
- Masturbates in front of the child
- Has the child witness others being assaulted

If a child you care for has been sexually assaulted he may:

- *Have nightmares*
- *Have angry outbursts*
- *Avoid contact with people*
- *Have problems at school*
- *Have eating and sleeping problems*
- *Be sexually aggressive*
- *Masturbate a lot*
- *Not be able to stay with one task*
- *Have many fears*
- *Be sexual with younger children*

Ways you can help:

- *Believe him when he tells you about the abuse – even when you know and trust the abuser.*
- *Talk with him openly and honestly.*
- *Get him medical help. He needs to know his body is okay.*
- *Find support for yourself.*
- *Find a counselor or treatment group for him.*
- *Try to remember that what you are feeling may not be what he is feeling.*
- *Remember that just because he was abused that does not mean he will become an abuser.*

Can a teenager or an adult be sexually assaulted?

Yes, any sexual contact by a male or female without permission is sexual assault.

You may have told yourself:

- *I should have been able to protect myself.*
- *Guys can't be assaulted by women.*
- *Because I was assaulted by a man, people will think I am gay.*
- *I enjoyed it, so it can't be sexual assault.*

Men are taught that they must always protect themselves. But sometimes that isn't possible. You may have been tricked or physically overpowered. Women sometimes assault males, such as an older woman having sex with a teenager. Most offenders are straight men, not gay men. Even if your body responded sexually, it could have been assault.

You may experience:

- *Feelings of shame*
- *Mood swings*
- *Problems expressing anger or fear*
- *Flashbacks (memories of the assault)*
- *Not being able to eat or sleep*
- *Confusion about your sexual identity*
- *Alcohol or drug problems*

For Gay, Transgendered or Bisexual Men

Many gay, transgendered, or bisexual teens and men are victims of sexual assault. Getting help or support may be more difficult because of negative reactions about your sexual identity from friends and family. You may have been assaulted by a woman, a straight man, or another gay man.

- *If as a boy you were sexual with a man, you may wonder whether he was helping you to 'come out' or if it was sexual abuse.*
- *You may worry that your sexual identity was caused by a childhood assault.*
- *You may have been the victim of 'gay bashing.'*
- *You may believe that if you weren't gay, transgendered or bisexual you might have avoided being assaulted.*

Are you an adult survivor?

If you are an adult who was assaulted as a child, at the time the abuse was happening you were a victim. Because you have found ways of coping, you are now a survivor.

As a survivor you may:

- *Feel ashamed because you believed you 'allowed' the abuse to happen.*
- *Believe that if it felt good then it really wasn't abuse.*
- *Feel your body is 'dirty'.*
- *Fear that because you were abused as a child you will become an abuser or if you talk about your abuse people will think you are an abuser.*

You may be experiencing:

- *A low opinion of yourself*
- *Problems with relationships*
- *Nightmares*
- *Flashbacks (memories of the abuse)*
- *Problems with anger*
- *Sexual addiction*
- *Sexual aggression*
- *Lack of sexual desire*
- *Problems with drugs or alcohol*
- *Trouble trusting – fear of being close*
- *Shame*
- *Guilt*

This handout has been adapted from a brochure by the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs and the Washington Department of Social and Health Services.