

A Layman's Guide  
to  
Loving a Survivor  
of  
Childhood Sexual Abuse

by

Shelly Strauss Rollison

**Disclaimer:** The information in this book does not take the place of and should not be substituted for professional advice from appropriate and licensed practitioners in their respective fields. Factual information has been duly footnoted and the rest is the writer's opinion based on personal experience, speaking with survivors and their partners, and education, most of that from reading and the school of life.

## Come On Home

Dark clouds are comin' like an army  
Soon the sky will open up and disarm me  
You will go just like you've gone before  
One sad soldier off to war with enemies that only you can see.

Dishes stacked, the table cleared  
It's always like the scene of the last supper here  
You speak so cryptically that's not news to me  
The flood is here it will carry you and I've got work to do.

Come on home, the team you're hitched to has a mind of its own  
It's just the forces of your past you've fought before  
Come back here and shut the door  
I'm stacking sandbags against the river of your troubles.

There is fire; there is lust  
Some will trade it all for someone they could trust  
There's a bag of silver for a box of nails  
It's so simple the betrayal  
Though it's known to change the world and what's to come.

Come on home, the team you're hitched to has a mind of its own  
It's just the forces of your past you've fought before  
Don't you recognize them anymore  
I'm stacking sandbags against the river of your troubles.

There's the given and the expected  
I count my blessings while I eye what I've neglected  
Is this for better is this for worse  
You're all jammed up and the dam's about to burst.

I hear the owl in the night  
I realize that some things never are made right  
By some will we string together here  
Days to months and months to years  
What if everything we have adds up to nothing?

Come on home, the team you're hitched to has a mind of its own  
It's just the forces of your past you've fought before  
Come back here and shut the door  
I'm stacking sandbags against the river of your troubles.

## Introduction

The sad statistics show that about one in four girls and one in seven boys will be sexually abused (which includes molestation, assault and rape) by the time they're 18 years old. Estimates suggest that 20-62% of the entire US population have been sexually abused. And that's *just* sexual abuse. When you throw in all the other forms of abuse that children suffer, it's easy to see how virtually all of us are dealing with some sort of abuse issues.

In my opinion, sexual abuse seems to be one of the most damaging types of abuse perpetrated against a child. It often involves not only sexual abuse but physical, emotional, mental and even spiritual abuse as well. A child's innocence is stolen at the moment of the first unwelcome touch. Their trust is violated and shattered, especially when it comes to their concepts of what it means to love and be loved because roughly 90% of childhood sexual abuse is perpetrated by a family member or a close, trusted family friend. While the incidence of female abusers is on the rise, statistics show that roughly 95% of abusers are heterosexual males.

In the US, childhood sexual abuse crosses all natural and man-made boundaries. There are no common denominators such as socioeconomic status, race, gender, orientation, religion, occupation, political affiliation or even age. One study suggests that 40% of children who are sexually abused by a family member or close family friend are victimized by an older child who is under the age of 18.

While there is no common denominator among abusers, victims of childhood sexual abuse tend to be girls. The percentage increases with age: 69% of victims 0-5 years old, 75% of victims 6-11 years old and 90% of victims 12-17 years old are female. The most vulnerable age is between 12-17 years old, which accounts for about 50% of all sexual assaults on children, but victims have been as young as newborns. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth are at even greater risk of being abused. They tend to be easier targets since they are often social "outcasts" because of society's views on non-heterosexuality. One study suggests that gay boys are 7 times more likely than heterosexual boys to be victims of childhood sexual abuse.

Only about 10% of sexual abuse cases are reported to police and roughly 30% of victims never reveal to anyone that they have been abused. These statistics are one of the reasons that the average serial child molester victimizes about 400 children over the course of his lifetime. (I use the male pronoun because female serial child molesters are virtually unheard of.) 7 out of 10 child sex offenders have up to ten victims, while 2 out of ten have up to forty.

The effects of childhood sexual abuse on the survivors are long-term and devastating, especially if the survivor receives no counseling or therapy immediately following the incident(s) or disclosure of the incident(s). Male survivors tend to have an even harder time with the effects of abuse for several reasons. Males tend to report abuse less often than women because admitting that one was abused is often perceived as a sign of weakness and/or a lack of "real" masculinity. Additionally, there are often fewer resources available to male survivors to help them heal. Rape support groups, for example, tend to focus mainly on women and, since most women are raped by men, men are usually not welcome in those groups. Finally, there are some common yet false beliefs held by society that men cannot be raped and that sex between a minor male and an adult female is "normal", and in some cases even a cause for "bragging rights", therefore it is not harmful to the minor male.

Relationships are one of the hardest things survivors have to deal with because their ideas of what constitutes a healthy or "normal" relationship were damaged or destroyed by the abuse. The purpose of this book is to help those who love someone who is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse understand the dynamics of their relationship with their survivor and learn what they can do to hopefully avoid the landmines that survivors often place around themselves for their protection. In doing so, I hope that the healing journey of survivors is made easier

because they have someone in their lives who understands on some level why they behave the way they do and why they think the things they do. Most of the stories contained in this book deal with those who are partners of survivors because this seems to be the hardest relationship for survivors to deal with due to the sexual aspect often involved. While this book is specifically aimed at those who are partners to those who have been sexually abused as a child, partners of survivors of other forms of abuse (which includes rape, assault, etc), whether suffered as a child or an adult, may find their survivor has many of the same “symptoms” or suffers many of the same effects. It is my hope that they too can find some help from within these pages.

I am not a licensed therapist and this book is not meant to take the place of therapy or counseling, which I highly recommend anyone in a relationship with a survivor seek for themselves. The information in this book is based on what I've read, what I've learned in my own counseling sessions, what I've learned in my training as a worker for a domestic violence shelter and what I've learned from my personal interactions with both survivors and their partners/children/friends/parents/co-workers over the last twenty years or so.

It is also, to some extent, based on a gift I have been blessed with: empathy. The empathy I experience goes beyond the ability most of us have of putting ourselves in another's shoes to get a better understanding of what they are experiencing. I can, when I choose, feel the emotions that others are projecting. This has given me the ability to understand, perhaps to a greater degree than most, the emotions and fears many survivors experience. In fact, I finally decided to go ahead and write this book after many requests by survivors for some kind of book to help their partners understand them like I seemed to be able to understand them, even if I had only just “met” them online.

It is not my intent to write a definitive “how to” book because I do not believe that such a thing is even possible. Every survivor is different and how they cope with the effects of the abuse varies as well. Additionally, everyone who loves a survivor is also different and brings into their relationship with their survivor baggage of their own. Some of the things in this book usually apply more to the survivor, such as the chapter on the need for control. I have included these chapters because I believe that if you can understand these aspects that are present in many survivors it will make it that much easier on the entire relationship. If this book helps just one person find one moment of peace in their relationship with a survivor, it has fulfilled my intentions. Take from this what you find helpful and disregard the rest.

Any stories that are related in the pages of this book are compilations of incidents I have either witnessed or had related to me by others who were involved in those incidents. Details—including names and sometimes even gender— have been altered to protect the privacy of all involved. Sometimes, I switch pronouns like she and he in the same sentence for the purpose of highlighting the fact that gender is really not important to the behaviors and effects that are suffered as the result of childhood sexual abuse.

At times, while reading this book, you may get the impression that being in a relationship with a survivor is not worth the effort. There seems to be so many issues to deal with and, especially for those who are just starting in a relationship, it may seem as if there is no light at the end of the tunnel. But survivors are very strong people. They have to be to have lived through what they lived through. And it is an amazing experience to watch the one you love blossom right before your eyes. It is a privilege to share in that experience with her and as much a joy to watch him take those first “baby steps” as it is to watch your own child learn to walk. Loving a survivor is also a wonderful way to learn about your own strengths and to grow into a better person yourself. Please keep in mind as you read this book that many of the examples given are extremes because it's so much easier to see the point when you use extreme cases.

A word of warning to any survivor of sexual abuse/assault or abuse of any form who may read this book. Some events described herein may be triggering. Please be safe while reading

and if at any time you feel uncomfortable or frightened, you might want to put the book down until you once again feel safe enough to continue to read.

Finally, I would like to thank the hundreds of people who have entrusted me with their stories. They have taught me so much about courage, forgiveness, compassion, and unconditional love, which I view as the essence of the human spirit.

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The following sources were used to compile the factual statistics in this introduction. All of these online sources are themselves compilations of statistics and contain links to their sources as well.

"Child Sexual Abuse I: An Overview"; Adovates For Youth;  
<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/PUBLICATIONS/factsheet/fsabuse1.htm>

"Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement: Victim, Incident, and Offender Characteristics"; US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000 (Available online at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/saycrle.pdf>)

"Child Sexual Abuse Statistics"; Project Kidsafe; <http://republican.sen.ca.gov/web/36/projectkidsafe/stats.asp>

"Statistics Surrounding Child Sexual Abuse"; From Darkness to Light;  
[http://www.darkness2light.org/KnowAbout/statistics\\_2.asp](http://www.darkness2light.org/KnowAbout/statistics_2.asp)

## Lady Willow

look for a minute, if you don't mind, at a weeping willow tree. ya, i know, there isn't one in front of you right now, but look in your mind and i'm sure you'll find one. ya see it? tall and mighty, a strong trunk to support it...branches from the top, stretching all the way to the ground, covering the trunk until it is virtually invisible. but it's still there, right? it's not like those branches are hanging in mid air. just because you can't see the support and strength of the tree, doesn't mean it isn't there.

ok, so now you got that mental image. i want you to take that image, and apply it to a very different and yet similar situation. here we go...

picture a girl or woman or whatever you wanna call her. you know her... you may be her, and you may not, but you know her. she stands tall and proud, yet her pain and her guilt and her fear seem to be all you can see if you take only a quick glance. her tears stream down, like the branches of the willow tree. looks as though all she is, is a tangled mess of emotions. but look through that shit. spread the blanket of shit that shows. what do you see? you see her true strength. you see her foundation, her strength... unshakeable, unmovable... solid and grounded, just a bit hidden behind so much that it's hard to find. but it's there... don't ever forget that.

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This book is lovingly dedicated to my wife, Tresa.  
You are my inspiration.  
I love you.  
Forever and a day.

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## What Is Childhood Sexual Abuse?

Legally, what constitutes childhood sexual abuse varies from state to state because laws on what constitutes sexual assault, the degrees of sexual assault and the age of consent vary from state to state. There are other legal considerations that also come into play when talking about childhood sexual abuse. For example, in Kansas, until recently, there was no minimum age at which a minor could marry if s/he had parental permission. Therefore, it was conceivable that a child of 10 could have married someone who was much older and any sexual contact between the two would not have legally constituted childhood sexual abuse. While some might say that if the child said they wanted to get married it *shouldn't* be considered abuse, it is difficult to know with any degree of certainty whether the child really wanted to get married or said they wanted to get married to please their parents or because their parents ordered them to say they wanted to get married. I personally believe that even most young adults under the age of 22 rarely know what they really want from their lives, let alone a child under the age of 13.

Then you have the issue of sex between minors. This may or may not be considered sexual abuse depending on the ages of the minors involved. In some states, if the age difference is less than three years and the act was consensual, it is not considered sexual abuse. But this leaves a lot to be desired as well. Consider this hypothetical situation. A couple begins dating in middle school when he is in the eighth grade and she is in the sixth grade. Let's suppose he is one of the oldest in his class and she is one of the youngest and their birthdays are three years and one day apart. The laws in their state allow a three-year age difference before it is considered abuse. When they've been dating for a couple years and she's in eighth grade and he is a sophomore in high school, they become sexually active. The parents of the girl find out and charge the boy with sexual abuse. Because he is more than three years older than she is, he can be arrested and charged as a sexual offender. A conviction could require him to register as a sex offender for the rest of his life. Is justice really being served in this situation? Does anyone really think that the one day makes any difference?<sup>1</sup>

In this scenario, we also have the issue of whether or not it was truly consensual. Aside from the urges of full-fledged puberty, children are especially prone to peer pressure not to mention that parents who find out their child is sexually active may convince their child that they didn't really want to have sex. Or even order their child to say they didn't want to have sex. Finally, one of the most overlooked problems (in my opinion) with laws regarding sex between minors where the sexual activity is legally considered to be sexual abuse (often called statutory rape) are two assumptions: a.) that the older child is the aggressor and the younger child is the victim. b.) that the male is the aggressor and the female the victim, especially if the girl is the younger of the two. In our scenario above, had the girl been the older of the two, chances are that no charges would have been brought because of the perception of society that sex between a younger male and an older female is normal and even something to be proud of.<sup>2</sup>

The American Medical Association defines child sexual abuse as "the engagement of a child in sexual activities for which the child is developmentally unprepared and cannot give informed consent."<sup>3</sup> Even this definition fails to clearly define what is actually abuse. The term "developmentally unprepared" can be interpreted in many different ways. Some children develop emotionally and/or mentally much faster than they do physically. Puberty is hitting girls earlier than in the past and with the onset of puberty comes the surge in hormones that awakens the sexual urges. But simply because a girl of seven who enters puberty has sexual urges does not mean she is developmentally prepared emotionally or mentally to engage in sexual activity.

There's also a lot of leeway in what it means to give "informed consent". A fifteen year old girl may understand that having sex may result in her becoming pregnant, but does she need to also understand the implications of having a baby at fifteen in order to give "informed consent"? Does informed consent mean she has to also understand the increased risk she will have of

developing cervical cancer if she has more than five sexual partners in her lifetime or that having a baby that young could decrease her chances of being able to carry a pregnancy to term later in life? What about a young boy who is raised in a home in which the only "sex education" he gets is "abstinence only"? Can he, even at the age of 17, give "informed consent" to have sex if he has no idea what risks he is running of contracting STDs or getting a girl pregnant? Is he "developmentally prepared" to engage in sexual activity? And finally, there are situations in which two or more children engage in sexual activity that is mutually pleasurable to all where none are developmentally prepared and/or able to give informed consent. For example, you have three toddlers who are playing in the wading pool. None are potty-trained so their moms just put them in the water without a diaper. All three of them start mutually exploring their bodies and having fun doing it, which is perfectly natural for that age group. Even older children, say seven or eight, engage in mutual exploration of their bodies. But according to a strict adherence to the AMA's definition, all are guilty of child sexual abuse.

The American Psychological Association says that, while there is no universal definition of childhood sexual abuse, a key factor in determining what constitutes abuse is "the dominant position of an adult that allows him or her to force or coerce a child into sexual activity."<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, this definition also falls short because in many cases, force and coercion are not required to entice a child to perform sexual acts on an adult, especially if the adult is someone the child loves or trusts. Most childhood sexual abuse is an ongoing, escalating process that can last for years. Often, the abuser uses trickery more than coercion. For example, it might start out with Uncle Jack asking little Susie to rub his feet because they're sore. The next time, he asks her to rub his knees. The next time, it's his back. Then maybe his buttocks. And eventually, he gets her to rub his genitals. She sees nothing wrong with it because she's rubbed other places and Uncle Jack loves her. To be sure, some child sexual abuse does involve force or coercion, but even if it doesn't, it's still child sexual abuse.

There are several other problems with the APA's "definition" of childhood sexual abuse. One is that sexual activity is not always initiated by the adult. Young children are naturally curious about their bodies. A young boy, for example, may discover that when he rubs his penis, it can get hard. He may be fascinated by this and want to share this information with his father. He walks into his father's room and says, "Rub my wee-wee and watch what happens." If his father takes him up on the offer, he is guilty of child sexual abuse despite the lack of force or coercion and despite his son's "invitation" because he already knows what happens.

Additionally, the APA's key criterion does not encompass child on child sexual abuse, including cases where a younger child sexually abuses an older child. (Although they do say, almost in passing, "Abuse by peers also occurs."<sup>5</sup>)

I believe a more comprehensive definition of child sexual abuse requires three distinct parts:

- a. an adult involving a child in any sexual activity, with or without physical contact, for the adult's personal gratification, sexual or otherwise,
- b. unwanted/unwelcomed sexual activity between minors, with or without physical contact, that leaves the child(ren) who did not initiate the activity feeling violated or scared and/or results in self-blame and/or a lower sense of self-worth (i.e., the child feels like they're "bad" for what happened or that it's their fault that it happened.)
- c. sexual activity between minors, with or without physical contact, in which the innocence/naiveté of one of the minors is exploited by the other for personal gratification, sexual or otherwise.

Childhood sexual abuse does not have to involve physical contact (although most does.) It does not have to involve the use of force. It does not have to involve the abuser even seeing the child! The internet has opened a whole new avenue for the sexual abuse of children.

Childhood sexual abuse is not so much about the sex or sexual gratification of the abuser as it is about power and control over his/her victims. The abuser's "proof" that s/he is in power and has the control is found in the sexual act. That power and that control can be applied subtly (as in placing a child's hands on the abuser's genitals while watching a movie together without the child even noticing what's really going on), forcibly (as in rape at knifepoint) or with any combination of the two.

The power and control need not be physical: it can also be emotional, mental or spiritual. A boyfriend who tells his girl "If you love me, you'll have sex with me" is exerting emotional power and control. A parent who says "You will do as I say because I'm your mom!" is exerting mental control by taking advantage of the child's understanding that the parents make the rules. A priest who tells a young altar boy that God is calling him to a unique service for the Lord by performing oral sex on the priest is using spiritual power and control.

The power and control may simply be the result of the abuser being in a position of authority. A cop who orders a sixteen year old driver to strip for a body cavity search or a teacher who tells a student to stay after class and molests the child are guilty of using their position of authority to sexually abuse a child.

And finally, the power and control may be the result of opportunity. A dentist who molests children who are under anesthesia or a man who exposes himself to a young boy in a public restroom are using the opportunity presented to them to sexually abuse a child.

Some specific examples of childhood sexual abuse include (but are certainly not limited to):

- calling the child a slang term for a reproductive body part or alternate words for "prostitute".
- forcing a child to watch someone masturbate
- forcing a child to masturbate
- forcing a child to watch a pornographic movie or look at pornographic pictures
- watching a child take a shower or bath
- watching a child undress
- forcing a child to walk around the house partially or totally naked
- fondling (either the abuser fondling the child or forcing the child to fondle him)
- forcing a child to perform sexual acts on another child, an animal or an inanimate object
- exposing oneself to a child
- engaging a child in a sexually explicit conversation, either in person or online.
- penetration (anally, vaginally or orally) with a part of the abuser's body and/or with an object.
- child pornography of any kind

You may notice that some of the items listed above are things that some parents/caretakers do quite frequently, such as watch their child take a bath or get undressed. Even exposing yourself to your child can be part of a parent's daily routine. Many parents, for example, take showers with their children until either the child or the parent becomes uncomfortable with doing so. When I lived in Colorado, our house had only one bedroom and all three of us (my ex-husband and I and our son) slept in that same room. There are those who would argue that it would be child sexual abuse if our son had wakened to find my ex and I engaged in sexual activity.

What determines if these situations are innocent acts or childhood sexual abuse is the intent of the parent/caretaker. If the activity is for the benefit of the child, for the child's own protection or health, or if the act is accidental (or at the very least not intentional) then the act is not sexually abusive. It may still be traumatic (how many of us walked in our parents having sex and felt we were scarred for life?) but it is not abusive because there is no intent to control or exert power over the child.

The lack of a clear legal, medical and psychological definition of childhood sexual abuse means that many cases have to be taken on a case by case basis, especially if it only happened one time. While this can be frustrating to the survivors and to their loved ones, it is a necessary "evil" since we live in a country where one is innocent until proven guilty. Unless we want to toss out the US Constitution, we simply can't slap all accused child molesters in jail. While studies have shown that, of cases of suspected child sexual abuse reported by a child, less than 1/2% are false reports<sup>6</sup>, being accused of child molestation can ruin someone's life if it is not true. Justice is not served by creating a new victim who has been abused by the legal system.

The fact that some acts can be part of normal life but can, under certain circumstances, also be acts of abuse also means that it can be difficult to determine if you need to report what happened to the police. Take this hypothetical situation for example. A mother and her seven-year-old son go to a local high school basketball game. The boy says he has to go to the bathroom and the mother stands outside the restroom while her son goes inside. About 15 seconds later, a teenage boy comes running out of that same restroom. He sees the woman and lowers his eyes, trying to avoid her gaze. The young boy comes out several minutes later and tells his mother that he saw some older kid's penis in the bathroom. The mother panics (as most mothers would) and contacts authorities. When they arrive, she goes back inside the gymnasium and points out the young man to police. They question him and find out that the boy had used the urinals and, being in a hurry as most teenagers always seem to be, had begun to walk out of the restroom before he was "zipped up." Which just happened to be at the same time the young boy was walking into the restroom. His suspicious actions were nothing more than embarrassment at seeing the woman outside after what had just transpired.

So how do you know if your loved one has been the victim of child sexual abuse if, as statistics indicate, not many people report being abused? The easiest way is to look for the smoke—the effects of the abuse. And where there's smoke, there's usually— but not always— fire.

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<sup>1</sup> For those who may think this scenario is a bit far-fetched, you may want to read about the case of Marcus Dixon. You can find the story at [http://www.oprah.com/tows/pastshows/200402/tows\\_past\\_20040226.jhtml](http://www.oprah.com/tows/pastshows/200402/tows_past_20040226.jhtml). Additional information on the story can be found at [http://www.accessnorthga.com/news/ap\\_newfullstory.asp?ID=29199](http://www.accessnorthga.com/news/ap_newfullstory.asp?ID=29199) and at <http://www.talkleft.com/story/2004/05/03/562/62659>

<sup>2</sup> Witness the controversy surrounding several recent cases of female teachers who engaged in sexual relationships with their male students. The sentences given to the women were far more lenient than those handed down to male teachers in similar situations.

<sup>3</sup> "Diagnostic and Treatment Guidelines on Child Sexual Abuse"; American Medical Association; p. 5 (Available online at <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama1/pub/upload/mm/386/childsexabuse.pdf>)

<sup>4</sup> "Understanding Child Sexual Abuse"; American Psychological Association; <http://www.apa.org/releases/sexabuse/>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Percentages can be rather obtuse and not give us a real idea of the scope of the problem. Let's say there are 100,000 cases of sexual abuse reported every year. (The number is actually much higher.) Out of that 100,000 cases, 1/2 of 1 percent—or 500 people—will be unjustly and wrongly accused of being a child molester. Would you want to be one of those 500? "Statistics Surrounding Child Sexual Abuse"; From Darkness to Light; [http://www.darkness2light.org/KnowAbout/statistics\\_2.asp](http://www.darkness2light.org/KnowAbout/statistics_2.asp)

## The Subconscious Mind

Before we get into the effects, I want to discuss the subconscious mind because very few people realize the power of the subconscious. In very simplified terms, the subconscious has one goal: to protect you and keep you from feeling pain—or at the very least, to lessen what pain you are feeling.

It believes everything it hears in a literal sense. When it hears conflicting things, the thing it has heard the most is what it accepts as true, no matter how illogical it may sound. Anything you see, hear, smell, taste or experience, the subconscious remembers. It categorizes it all and, if there is no obvious connection, it looks for patterns. For example (and a very simplified example at that), let's say you date a dozen people in college and eight of them end their relationship with you (as opposed to you ending it with them.) All your break-ups, whether initiated by you or by the other person, left you sad and feeling hurt. Let's say they all told you at some point in your relationship what a beautiful person you are—maybe even told you this many times. Your subconscious may take these unrelated events and draw the conclusion that relationships you get into with others will all eventually end, causing you heartbreak, because you are a beautiful person. Therefore, since you will always be a beautiful person, you must not get into another relationship to avoid further heartache. Now, on a conscious level, this makes no sense. But the subconscious mind's "job" is to protect you. To stop any pain you might feel. To do that, it finds a cause/effect sequence of events to explain the origin of the pain and then it takes steps to eliminate or minimize the chance of the pain re-occurring.

In the example above, you may, without even realizing it, take a job with long hours, leaving you very little time to get into another relationship. You may become super-critical of anyone your subconscious sees as a potential partner in a relationship. You may develop an illness that keeps you homebound so you don't have many chances to meet someone else. How it stops you from forming relationships can vary widely, but your subconscious will find a way to keep you out of further relationships in order to protect you and to stop the pain you felt after the ending of your previous relationships.

Aside from those in the mental health field, I would say that advertisers, televangelists and politicians best understand the subconscious mind. (Does that tell you anything about how the subconscious works?)

Advertisers understand the power of the subconscious. That's why their commercials are full of words like "bigger", "better", "faster". It's why the pictures flash by so quickly sometimes—the conscious mind doesn't need to know what it saw because the subconscious remembers. Advertisers used to use subliminal advertising in which you were never even consciously aware that you saw an advertisement because it was only one frame and went by faster than the blink of an eye. But the subconscious saw it and remembered it. It used to be common practice to use this form of advertising at the drive-in or movie theaters to get moviegoers to visit the concession stand between films. By flashing a picture of a hot dog or a soft drink once every so many frames, the subconscious began to focus on food and that made the body react with hunger pangs. Such advertising is technically illegal, but advertisers still use the same principles. It's the subtle messages that you need to be on the look out for.

George W. Bush (or at least his speechwriter) is a master at manipulating the subconscious of the majority in this nation. By inserting the words "9/11" into a speech, regardless of the topic, Bush manages to get people to be more receptive to what he wants them to do. This is because the term "9/11" invokes fear and sadness and outrage (among other emotions) and the subconscious immediately looks for a way to stop those stressful feelings. And lo and behold, here's a man saying "If you support me in this, then you'll be safer than you are now." There are still people who actually believe that Iraq had major ties to bin Laden or vast caches of WMDs.

Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's propaganda minister, once stated, "The most brilliant propagandist technique will yield no success unless one fundamental principle is borne in mind constantly - it must confine itself to a few points and repeat them over and over." This works because the subconscious believes all it hears and takes everything it hears literally. It doesn't really matter if it's true or not. Repeat a lie often enough and it will become "truth". The internet is full of "urban legends" that many people believe are true because they've heard the same story from so many different sources online. The subconscious mind works the same way: if it hears a lie repeated often enough, it will believe it is true.

Many "conspiracy theories" are the subconscious mind's attempt to make sense of something (usually traumatic) it has seen or heard. When it hears it again from a "credible source" (ie, someone with an education, some sort of "credentials" or someone who is famous), it says "He must know what he's talking about!" The conspiracy theory becomes more firmly cemented in his mind as being "true".

Televangelists are another group who has mastered the art of manipulating the subconscious. "Our world is full of hatred and greed and depravity and God's only going to take so much before he cleans up this world. But if you send us money, you'll be helping us make this the nation God wanted it to be." By invoking the fear of God's wrath and eternal damnation (in a very subtle manner), and giving you a way to ease that fear (send us money), the televangelists are pulling the strings of your subconscious in order to get it to act the way they want it to. Dr. James Dobson, head of Focus on the Family, has no formal religious training despite the fact that he speaks on what God wants us to do in our lives. His title was earned in the field of psychology. Dobson understands the power of the subconscious and is using that knowledge to advance his personal religious agenda. But I digress....

The subconscious is often the real motivator for our actions, often times without us even being aware of its influence. But if you take the time and go back in your life and look carefully, you'll find the reason for virtually all the things you do without really thinking about it. (And for clarity's sake, I'm not talking about things like breathing or blinking or the heart beating.) I remember as a child hearing my parents having arguments. My bedroom was right above the dining room where they'd do most of their arguing. I remember crying myself to sleep many nights wondering how I was ever going to choose which parent I would live with for I was sure they'd end up getting a divorce. Fast forward thirty some years and I was married—and my marriage was in trouble. My (now ex-) husband and I had had only one major argument for the first nine years of our marriage. Then we started fighting all the time. We went to marriage counseling and I was taken aback to learn that I had a ton of resentment that I was holding against my ex. Resentment that grew from stuffing all my feelings for that first nine years. Stuffing feelings because my subconscious learned that fighting=unhappiness therefore not fighting=happiness. That black and white thinking of the subconscious regarding something I had learned as a small child (we're talking maybe a child of four or five) had led me, as an adult, to avoid any sort of confrontation wherein the other party could walk out on me. I had never given the arguing I had listened to as a child another thought, and yet thirty years later, it was directly influencing how I lived my life without my even realizing it.

The subconscious is often the root cause of our prejudices and fears and if we can break the associations that our subconscious holds, we can get rid of those fears. An incident in my childhood (which I will elaborate on later) led me to have nightmares about my home burning down. From the day of that incident on, about every three days, I'd wake up screaming from the nightmares. For twelve years that continued until we moved out of that house and into another. My subconscious associated "fear of house fire" with that house and that house alone. I've not had a nightmare about a house fire since we left that house. Not all connections are going to be that easy to find or to eliminate, and sometimes it's easier to see the connections between someone else's actions and their past than to see the connections between our own actions and our past. But once we understand those motivations, things in our life become much clearer and, quite often, easier to deal with.

Most of the effects of childhood sexual abuse are on the subconscious level and the survivor cannot connect these behaviors with the fact that they were sexually abused as a child. It often takes years of therapy for many survivors to be able to see the connections and begin to do something about them. As you read through this partial list of effects of childhood sexual abuse, please remember that not every survivor experiences every effect. Also remember that the extent to which these effects affect a survivor's life will vary as well. A survivor who has already started on his healing journey may exhibit only a few of these effects. Some may have one effect that seems overwhelming and very little of any of the other effects. Each person is different. And the presence of any one of these "symptoms" should not be taken as "proof" that someone is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. Even if there's a lot of them in your partner, it doesn't mean that she has definitely been sexually abused as a child. Other traumas can cause very similar effects. But the ways to deal with these effects won't really change all that much whatever caused them. After all, whether you were cut with a piece of broken glass by accident or cut by someone wielding a knife who was assaulting you, you still need to get stitches to close the cut.

Something else to keep in mind is that it seems that the first instance of abuse—whether it is experienced as a child or as an adult—is what seems to cause the most damage. When the abuse is repeated, it only reinforces the messages learned and the associations made by the subconscious at that first incident. This is why someone who was raped once as an adult and an adult who was sexually abused for years as a child often exhibit many of the same lasting effects.

## The Effects of Childhood Sexual Abuse

The effects of child sexual abuse manifest in virtually every area of the survivor's life. As you read about each of these effects and how the abuse brought it about, you will begin to realize just how difficult it is for the survivor to heal from the abuse. Many of the effects of the abuse feed each other in a self-perpetuating cycle that causes ever-increasing damage to the survivor. I've often compared trying to heal from childhood sexual abuse to trying to untangle twenty different fishing lines in the dark wearing gloves. When you pull on one loop to loosen it, you make five other loops tighter. Healing for a survivor is a very difficult task and it takes a very patient partner to make the relationship last. Finally, please keep in mind that many of the examples I give apply more to survivors who have not yet started their healing journey or are in the early stages of that journey. As the healing progresses, the effects usually lessen and may even disappear altogether.

**Self-blame/guilt:** Most abusers find ways to blame the child for the abuse. "If you didn't wear that dress, I wouldn't be doing this." "Don't make me do this again." "It's your fault for being so pretty/handsome." Additionally, children are very egocentric. They are the center of their world. A child who witnesses his parents fighting will often say something like, "I'm sorry, Mommy! I'll be good so you and daddy don't fight." Children of parents who separate or divorce often blame themselves for the break-up of the marriage because in a child's world, where they are the center of their universe, they are also the primary cause of all that happens in that universe. Therefore, even without an abuser who blames the child, the child will take that guilt on herself. And what we take on as a child, we tend to view from a child's perspective even when we're adults.

Let me illustrate what I mean by that last statement with a true story from my own life—the event that triggered my nightmares about house fires. When I was about 14 months old, a man came to our house selling smoke detectors. This was when they were a new thing on the market and they were pretty expensive. I remember looking at a book of black and white photos. Three of them still stand out clearly in my mind. One showed a pile of water-destroyed toys with a soaked teddy bear laying on the top sitting at the bottom of a curved driveway, the charred ruins of a house visible in the distance. Another was of a black dog lying dead on a sidewalk with fireman around it trying to revive it. The third was the shell of a house, half the house had completely collapsed and the rest you could see straight through to the backyard. There were holes in the roof that was still there. When I think about these pictures, I see them the size of small posters, maybe 18"x24". But I know that they were only 8"x10" pictures in a normal photo album. But I have kept them proportionately the same size now as when I was 14 months old. Even knowing that they were 8x10s doesn't stop my mind from picturing them much bigger.

Even as an adult, even though the survivor may now realize that the abuse was not his fault, his subconscious mind still tells him it is because he's still seeing what happened from the perspective of the child that he was when the abuse started. I was once told by a therapist that when a child is sexually abused, he stops maturing emotionally at the "normal" rate starting at that moment. While he will usually mature physically and mentally at a "normal" rate, emotionally, the child's maturation is stunted. Part of the healing process is finding that child and helping that child to mature emotionally. To see the events in his life not from the child's perspective but from the adult's perspective.

**Low Self-esteem:** Because survivors feel they are to blame for the abuse, they think they're horrible people. This is often reinforced by their abuser because someone who sexually abuses a child will often abuse a child in other ways as well. Because they think they're horrible people, they don't deserve good things in life. Anytime something bad happens to her, regardless of whether it was related to the abuse or not, it reaffirms for the survivor what a horrible person she is because bad things don't happen to good people. Her low-self esteem tends to make her withdrawn and a loner. Other kids tend to avoid her as a result and the survivor then sees her lack of friends as proof of what a horrible person she is. She begins to call herself "loser" and

other negative names and every time she does, every time her abuser does or someone else does, it only reinforces her own negative self-image.

**Difficulty accepting compliments:** One of the consequences of this low self-esteem is that he has difficulty accepting compliments because it conflicts with his negative self-image. He minimizes any good that he does or any beauty or talent that he possesses. He may hide his good looks with dirty clothes or use his talent in a negative manner for example. He may get himself in trouble at school because he sees himself as a "bad kid" and bad kids get into trouble. He also tends to sabotage any successes he achieves because, again, in conflicts with his negative self-image. This is almost never intentional and if you ask him why he does it, he'll likely not be able to tell you or will tell you something like "I'm just no good."

**Twisted view of love:** Since roughly 90% of childhood sexual abuse is perpetrated by a family member or trusted family friend who usually professes to love the child, the child's ideas of what it means to love someone are often very warped. They see someone who says "I love you" do horrible things to them, so in their child's mind, to love someone means you do horrible things to them. Even as they're growing up and are exposed to school and outside ideas about love, even as they're taught about child abuse in prevention programs at school, they often don't consider what they're going through as abuse. After all, his grandfather loves him! He wouldn't abuse him. The prevention programs tend to focus on "stranger danger" and people outside the family, so often the child doesn't make the connection between what grandpa is doing and abuse. The egocentric worldview of a child again comes into play since they tend to believe that what goes on in their home goes on in every home, even if they go to someone else's house and see how other families live. After all, Grandpa doesn't do anything to him when there's company over so everyone else's grandfather doesn't do anything to them when he's over at their house. This twisted view of love often means that survivors end up in abusive or unhealthy relationships as adults, which only serves to reinforce both their twisted views of love and their low self-esteem.

**Lack of healthy boundaries:** Childhood sexual abuse is a violation of a child's personal boundaries on so many levels. Often done in the name of love. Protesting that violation often does nothing except perhaps make the abuse worse. Because the abuser has to lie to cover up what he's doing to the child, the child learns that it's okay to lie to protect yourself. The child learns that saying "no" means nothing and that adults can do what they want. Many abusers have drug, alcohol and/or pornography addictions (especially pornography) and so the child learns no boundaries with respect to these destructive behaviors. Essentially, a survivor learns that the most important thing is to take care of what you want and to hell with what anyone else wants. She learns rules are meant to be broken and that the rules and laws only apply to her if she gets caught. And she's allowed to do anything she needs to do in order to not get caught.

**Obsessive need for control:** One of the most common effects of childhood sexual abuse is the survivor's almost obsessive need for control in any situation. When you stop to consider that abuse is when someone else takes control of your life to hurt you, this need really should come as no surprise. For many survivors, their subconscious firmly believes that loss of control=abuse. They truly believe on a level they're probably not even aware of that if they lose control of any aspect of their lives, they will suffer the same kind of pain they suffered while being abused. Many of the effects of childhood sexual abuse are really different ways this need for control manifests in the individual's life. When a survivor loses control for any reason, his immediate response is fear of being abused again and that fear often manifests as anger. As an adult, he feels he's able to express his anger, but he often expresses that anger at someone he feels will not hurt him rather than at his abuser. This is similar to a child who has no problems expressing his anger to his parents but will not show his anger to the parents of his best friend, for example. The child feels safe with the parents and recognizes that his parents won't hurt him, but he's unsure of his best friend's parents. While it may sound warped, and in some ways it is, having a survivor get mad at you and express that anger is a sign of trust.

Let me give you another real-life example (modified in minute details to protect the privacy of those involved.) David and Valerie had been married for six years. Valerie was a survivor of childhood sexual abuse and had only just started to deal with the issues through therapy. That summer, she and David decided to purchase new patio furniture and a grill for their new covered deck. They sat down and went over what they were looking for in the furniture and decided there were really only three criteria that had to be met: it couldn't be metal (since it would be kept outside, it would rust), it couldn't have a glass table top (kids with baseballs and footballs in the backyard meant that the tabletop would probably end up broken) and it couldn't have a round table (took up too much room.) They went shopping one afternoon and Valerie went to look at the furniture while David went to look at grills. About half an hour later, David found Valerie standing in front of a set of patio furniture. Before he could say anything, she made it clear that she'd found what she wanted. David just stared because the furniture was everything they had agreed it couldn't be: it was metal and had a round, glass tabletop. Valerie asked him if he'd found a grill and he told her that he had just realized they couldn't put a grill on the deck since it was covered by a roof with white soffit. Valerie got very upset with David because one of the reasons they'd put the deck on was so they could cook outside in the summer. David reminded her that she had been the one who had wanted the deck covered, which only made Valerie even more mad. David finally asked, "How come you can change the entire design of the furniture without even consulting me yet when I point out something to you that isn't really something I changed, just something I realized, you jump down my throat?" It was only later, after much more counseling, that Valerie realized that that episode had been about control. As long as *she* made changes in their plans, she was still in control. But as soon as David pointed out something that caused the plans to change, she felt out of control and threatened. Her "fight or flight" instinct took over and she lashed out at David because she felt safe with him.

**Self-destructive behaviors:** There are many forms of self-destructive behavior. This is one way in which survivors punish themselves for "causing" the abuse or for "making" their abuser become a bad person. However, often times, engaging in these behaviors is a way for survivors to feel some semblance of control. These behaviors, as harmful as many of them are in and of themselves, also act as a safety valve on the survivor's emotions. When the emotional pain they feel becomes overwhelming and the survivor feels unable to function, she engages in some form of self-destruction. The physical pain many of these behaviors cause allows temporary relief from the emotional pain. If unable to engage in these behaviors, the emotions become too much to handle and many survivors may do something even more drastic. These behaviors include (but are not limited to):

- drug/alcohol abuse
- cutting
- burning oneself
- pulling out one's hair
- ripping off one's nails
- scraping off one's skin
- over-exercising (to the point where one causes harm to one's body)
- bulimia/anorexia
- promiscuity

It bears to keep in mind that everyone who engages in these kinds of behaviors is NOT a survivor of childhood sexual abuse but the vast majority of survivors engage in at least one of these behaviors. That's like saying that all things that are round are not spheres but all spheres are round. If you know someone who engages in self-destructive behavior, it is NOT a wise idea to assume s/he a survivor of childhood sexual abuse.

**Fear of change/Fear of unknown:** Actually, fear of the unknown is the root cause of fear of change. And again, this is often one of the manifestations of the need for control in a survivor's life. As long as they know what they are dealing with, they know how to react, they know what to

expect and this gives them a feeling of control. It is when they are placed in new situations with unknown factors to deal with that they "freak out".

This can in turn manifest in many different ways. A survivor may stay in an abusive relationship because the fear of pain from the abuse is less than the fear of facing the unknown (i.e., leaving and starting a new life.) It can mean staying in a dead-end job because it's a known versus taking a new job with much better pay and more benefits that is an unknown. It can even mean not changing your hairstyle or the kind of clothes you wear because you know how people will react to you with your existing hairstyle/clothing but you don't know what they might say if you change.

This fear is often what keeps survivors from seeking counseling/therapy as well. Despite the pain, it's a known factor. Dealing with their past, facing their fears and the demons from their past—those are unknowns and therefore very frightening to a survivor.

**Trust issues:** A survivor's trust was violated in ways most of us can't even begin to imagine. It's not a surprise, therefore, to find that survivors have issues with trust. This usually takes one of two forms. Either they trust no one or they trust everyone even when they shouldn't. Ironically, in each situation, the survivor feels more in control. By trusting no one, they believe they're allowing no one close enough to hurt them. If they trust everyone, when someone they shouldn't have trusted DOES hurt them, they say "I was the one that trusted them, therefore, the pain I'm feeling is my own fault." This gives them a feeling of being in control as well since they chose whom to trust. Learning to trust in a healthy manner is one of the hardest lessons many survivors have to learn.

**Black and white thinking:** Many survivors tend to view the world as black and white. Either you're for them or you're against them. Something is either right or wrong, good or bad. There is no middle ground. This is the way the subconscious thinks and because so many of a survivors behaviors are unknowingly motivated by the subconscious (in part because the conscious mind is often overwhelmed by the emotions and pain of being a survivor), they view the world in the same way. If you disagree with a survivor, then you don't like them. You're not their friend. You don't love them anymore. You're out to get them.

Also, this ties into both the fear of the unknown and the need for control. There are two things in life: the known and the unknown. When you disagree with a survivor, you're putting him in a place of unknowns. He knows how to deal with you when you agree with him, but not when you disagree. People who hurt him disagreed with him that he had the right to NOT be abused. And if he can put you into a category that he knows how to deal with, then he feels more in control. (Can you begin to see how difficult it is to heal from the effects of the abuse because they're all interlaced and interdependent?)

**Expecting the worst:** If you make a comment to a survivor that can have more than one meaning, in most cases, the survivor will interpret its meaning in the worst possible light either for you or for them. For example, if you tell a survivor she looks nice today, she may interpret that to mean that she DIDN'T look nice yesterday or the day before. Part of this is due to their feelings of self-blame and their low self-esteem: they can't take compliments because they don't think they deserve them. Therefore, anything that can be even remotely seen as praising them or uplifting them needs to be shot down. But it also ties into the need for control: if they expect the worst, they believe they can't be hurt as bad when you eventually hurt them...which they're sure you'll do because everyone else has.

One partner of a survivor was told that he put her up on a pedestal and it made her feel as if she had to be perfect which was too much pressure on her. The next day, he bought her a dozen roses and on the note that came with the roses told her that if he put her up on a pedestal it was only to admire her beauty, not because he expected her to be perfect. She became furious

with him for giving her the flowers because she said he was invalidating her feelings because he gave her another explanation for the feeling of "being on a pedestal".

**Intimacy issues:** This one should be a no-brainer but surprisingly, there are those people who don't understand why a survivor would have issues with intimacy, physical or otherwise. Aside from the obvious connection between sex and the abuse, there are other factors that come into play. For many survivors, especially if the abuse was ongoing and long-term, chances are that at some point during the abuse, their body reacted with an orgasm. This leaves the survivor with feelings of guilt and shame and they shy away from physical intimacy that may reproduce the physical feelings they experienced during the abuse.

Some even begin to question whether they actually liked or wanted the abuse to take place. This in turn makes them feel horrible about themselves, makes them think they're worthless or "bad" and that anyone they let get close to them will become "bad" as well. For many, certain touches cause flashbacks (discussed later in this section) and or act as triggers (also discussed later in this section) for overpowering emotions.

On the other hand, some survivors go completely the other way and are very promiscuous. They see their only value and worth as that of a sexual being. They can't begin to conceive of a close, intimate friendship or a relationship that does not involve sexual activity.

This issue can be particularly difficult in a relationship with a survivor because of the over-emphasis on the sexual aspect of relationships, particularly in American society. Far too many people—including many survivors—believe that that more sex you have in your relationship, the more you are loved. There's also the other side of that equation for partners: when a survivor rejects physical intimacy with you, you feel s/he is rejecting you. Additionally, many survivors may only have difficulty being physically intimate with someone they love but can be sexually intimate with a stranger. This is often because someone they loved sexually abused them and they fear that someone they are romantically involved with will also abuse them eventually. Sex with someone they don't care about is easier than sex with someone they love. Yet it's also a control issue: when you are sexually intimate with someone you love, you open the door to emotions you may not be able to control in the heat of passion. Yet if you have meaningless sex with a stranger, you don't have to deal with those emotions and the survivor feels more in control.

**Physical/mental ailments:** I'm including this one here, although for many of the things listed, there is no hard scientific evidence that they are caused by or made worse by the fact that one is a survivor. I include them on this list because they are ailments that the many survivors I know have, at least in part, in common. Like those who engage in self-destructive behaviors, not everyone who has one of these ailments is a survivor, but the vast majority of survivors have at least one and usually quite a few of these physical ailments.

- Bipolar disorder
- Borderline personality disorders
- TMJ (temporomandibular joint syndrome)
- IBS (irritable bowel syndrome), ulcers and/or spastic colon
- Severe menstrual cramps or PMS
- Insomnia, nightmares or other sleep disorders
- Chronic fatigue and/or fibromyalgia
- Migraines or other frequent and severe headaches
- Severely overweight or anorexic/bulimic
- Chronic depression
- Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Dissociative identity disorder (DID, formerly called MPD (multiple personality disorder))

**Difficulty making decisions:** Survivors tend to not trust their own judgement due to their feelings of worthlessness. Combine this with their tendency to expect the worst and you end up with someone who believes that no matter what they chose to do, they're going to make the wrong choice so why make a choice at all? There's also the issue of the fear of the unknown tossed into the mix. No matter what decision they make, they may not know what the outcome will be. This leaves them feeling totally out of control and therefore, rather than make a choice, they are simply unable to choose.

**Severe lack of self-confidence:** This ties in closely with the difficulty making decisions and low self-esteem. Many survivors tend to get into relationships with abusive partners due to the fact that they have a warped perception of what it means to love someone. They trust their judgement less and less with each abusive relationship they end up in or every job they lose until it gets to the point where they don't believe they can do anything right. This causes their self-confidence to be almost nil.

**Perfectionism:** Perfectionism could also be listed under self-destructive behaviors because it sets up a repeating cycle of failure that serves only to reinforce the survivor's negative self-image, lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem. But perfectionism is also a control issue: the survivor was NOT perfect when they were being abused, therefore if they ARE perfect, they won't be abused anymore. This too illustrates the black and white thinking of the subconscious mind.

**Difficulty expressing emotions:** Expressing emotions often resulted in more abuse for survivors, so many of them learned how to stuff their feelings. (The more extreme cases can result in emotions completely "dissociating" from the survivor and forming a "new personality". This is, in simplified form, what happens when someone develops DID. They may have one personality that is always angry, another that is the social butterfly, another who is always sad. This allows them to express their emotions without really knowing they're doing so since, when one of the other personalities is "in charge", the host personality often has no recollection of what transpires.)

Another aspect of this difficulty in expressing emotions comes from not being sure what emotions are being expressed. Because their ideas of "love" and "happy" and "sad" are so warped by the abuse, and because they don't trust their judgement or feelings, they often choose to remain silent about what they're feeling. Additionally, often times, especially if the abuse included physical abuse (like hitting, kicking, etc.), their abuser was very angry and screaming at them. Therefore, confrontation and anger especially scare survivors.

**Triggers:** Triggers are events that cause a survivor to feel the same feelings they felt when being abused. It is often very difficult to determine what is a trigger and what isn't. It could be a sound, a smell, a time of the year, a place, a color, a phrase. It could be a combination of things: a sunset in the rain with a specific song playing on the radio, for example. Anything, literally, can act as a trigger. The feelings it triggers can be anything from mild discomfort to full-fledged terror to a flashback (discussed later in this section.)

**Testing/Sabotaging:** Testing usually involves the survivor testing the truthfulness of what you say. If you say, "I'm working late tonight and will be at the office until seven. Call me if you need anything," don't be surprised if you get a phone call at a minute after seven asking you if you're on your way home. Or a visit bringing food for dinner just to make sure you're doing what you said you would.

Testing also comes in a more difficult form. You may say "I love you" to a survivor, but do you *really* love him? Will you love him if he runs up a huge credit card bill? Will you love him if he buys all new furniture without asking you? How will you react if you find out that she went out to dinner with your best friend and kissed him because they were both drunk? Will you love her if she wrecks your new car? The tests will push the boundaries of your patience and your anger

management skills. The survivor, on some level, believes that you too will hurt them just as everyone else did. And so they test to see where your breaking point is. Unfortunately, this is another one of those self-fulfilling downward spirals that survivors almost always seem to be in. If you do leave, then they say "See? He hurt me just like everyone else did!" But if you stay, then you're setting yourself up for harder and harder tests. These tests are often sabotaging the relationship the survivor is currently in yet when the relationship ends, the survivor says "See! I told you I'm not lovable!"

**Push me-pull me:** Survivors are scared to enter into relationships because for many of them, those who have said "I love you" have hurt them. And yet we humans need interaction with other human beings in order to grow and thrive. Survivors have a tendency to pull you close emotionally and then to push you away just as fast. This mirrors their seesawing emotions with respect to the desire to be in a loving relationship and their fear of more abuse. It's also a form of testing. A survivor can be very affectionate at the beginning of a relationship, but then once the relationship is somehow "sealed", they may not want to be physically touched again. Until it comes down to you saying "I'm leaving" and then they'll be affectionate all over again until you come back and then it's the cold shoulder once again. This "yo-yo" can be very draining emotionally if you don't know why it's happening.

**Missing Time:** Many survivors have large chunks of missing time in their lives, usually corresponding to the ages when they were abused. They may have a memory or two from those missing years, but the largest part of it is blocked out. This is a self-protective measure. The mind blocks out what it is not yet ready to deal with. When the mind is ready, the memories of the abuse may come back. If the missing time is in the present (for example, if someone finds themselves at the mall and has no recollection of driving to the mall), then they might need to check into the possibility they have DID.

**Flashbacks:** Flashbacks are usually terrifying for survivors. They suddenly find themselves back in time to an abusive incident. If you're standing in front of a survivor having a flashback, they will not see you—they will see whoever abused them. They may lash out at you, truly believing you are their abuser. They hear, smell, taste, feel and experience the abuse over again in terrifying realism. When a survivor is having a flashback, sometimes they have a "distant" look in their eyes, as if they're focused on something that you cannot see but is very real for them. They may speak in the voice they had at the time of the event they're remembering. Flashbacks can be terrifying for a partner because you have no idea what is happening. They can also be, quite literally, life threatening. Imagine, for example, that you happen to be driving down the road when your survivor has a flashback and starts kicking you in the head while leaning against the door. Or you are in the kitchen preparing dinner and she's chopping onions with a big butcher knife and suddenly has a flashback and is now coming at you with the knife.

**Transference:** Transference is when a survivor transfers the traits of an abuser to someone who is not an abuser. If everyone she's ever been with has called her names, she believes you're going to call her names. If her abuser had anger issues and screamed a lot, then she'll believe you have anger issues. It may even get to the point where she blames you for the abuse she suffered because she is unable to place the blame where it belongs—on the abuser. This is particularly true when the abuser is a family member because the survivor is torn between love for the family member and hatred for the abuse at their hands.

**Projection:** Projection is similar to transference except it's the survivor's own traits that are projected on another. For example, if a survivor is afraid of confrontation, then everyone is afraid of confrontation. If a survivor is angered by something, then that same thing angers everyone. The survivor projects his own emotions, his own feelings, his own beliefs onto others.

**Gender/Orientation Issues:** First of all, being sexually abused has nothing to do with one's orientation. You cannot be "turned" gay or straight by being abused by any particular gender. However, being abused may cause gender or orientation confusion. For example, a young girl

who is sexually abused may believe that if she had been a boy, it wouldn't have happened. She then develops a subconscious desire to become a boy so that she isn't abused anymore. However, once she deals with the abuse and heals from it, the desire to become a male usually disappears.

Likewise, a young boy who is sexually abused by a male, but whose body reacts to that abuse by becoming aroused, may believe that he is gay. Or a young girl who is abused by a male may have such a fear of males that she turns to women for emotional support and maybe even sexual gratification and therefore believes she is a lesbian.

But orientation really has nothing to do with what gender you have sex with. It has more to do with who you are capable of falling in love with. And that is not something that abuse will change as it is an innate part of who we are, much like being left- or right-handed. As with handedness, one can attempt to go through life using the other hand as the dominant hand, but it will always feel unnatural and forced. A survivor with orientation issues is usually not happy being or is ashamed of his/her orientation.

**Dissociation:** Everyone dissociates from time to time. When you get lost in a movie or reading a book and someone has to call your name several times before you hear them, you were dissociating. But with survivors, dissociation occurs more frequently and often in situations they find stressful, such as physical intimacy or during arguments. In severe forms of dissociation, there are actually multiple "personalities" (often called "littles") that "split off" from the host personality. Many times, these littles are not fully developed personalities and are often limited in their emotional expression. For example, one personality may be the one who gets angry. Another may be the one who gets abused. Another may be the one who is sad or scared. Compartmentalizing their emotions like this allows the survivor to avoid having to deal with the emotions or feelings that frighten them since they are handled by the littles. When one of the littles is "out" or in charge of the body, the survivor often is not aware of what is going on and therefore may have blocks of missing time in the present. Littles can also be different ages, different genders and even have different illnesses or orientations.

**Inability or unwillingness to cry:** Crying did them no good when they were being abused and in many cases their abuser took pleasure in the fact that they were crying. Therefore, crying is seen as a sign of weakness and many survivors have a hard time allowing themselves to cry. This also ties into the difficulty feeling emotions.

**Minimizing the impact of the abuse:** Many survivors tend to downplay the impact the abuse had on them. They'll say things like "It was so long ago and I'm over it." That should be your first clue that they really haven't even begun to deal with it. They may say things like "It wasn't nearly as bad as most people have to go through so it's no big deal." It will take them many therapy sessions to realize just how big a deal it was.

**Fear/Dislike of Doctors:** Often visits to doctors (including dentists) require physical touching of the body, often without the express consent of the patient. (When was the last time you went to the doctor and s/he asked to feel your glands in your throat before reaching out and feeling them?) Aside from the issue of someone touching their body, this leaves the survivor feeling vulnerable and therefore out of control. Most dental work requires the use of at least partial anesthetic, which also tends to leave survivors feeling out of control. Many survivors tend to avoid visits to doctors and dentists, which could be one of the reasons many of them have so many health problems.

**Fear/Dislike of getting one's face wet:** This one is a bit strange, but most of the survivors I have spoken to have a fear or dislike of water splashing in their face, as it would if they were taking a shower and facing the showerhead. Or being hit with a stream of water from water gun in the face. They may also be hesitant to go underwater at a swimming pool. My guess is that it is a

control issue: it's almost instinctual to close one's eyes when something is coming at the face. This leaves them feeling vulnerable and out of control.

As you can see, this is a rather extensive list and yet it's only a small sampling of the effects that childhood sexual abuse can have on someone. Many of these effects are things that we all struggle with, but they are far more pronounced in survivors. The presence of one or two does not mean that someone is a survivor, but the more "traits" that someone exhibits, the more likely it is that they are indeed a survivor. Still, don't assume that someone is a survivor even if they have most of the effects on this list since other forms of trauma (like a natural disaster) can cause very similar effects.

## The Need for Control

This was touched on briefly in the last chapter but, in my humble opinion, this is the key to understanding why a survivor behaves the way he does. Virtually all the effects listed in the previous chapter can eventually be traced back to the need for control.

When a child is abused, someone takes complete control of their body and often their mind and their emotions. When that abuse is repeated over and over again, the child's subconscious mind comes to the conclusion that loss of control means they're going to be abused. Let's go over the list of effects and look at how most of them are related to the need for control.

**Self-destructive behaviors:** A survivor has learned that life is full of pain and that pain is something that other people inflict on them. To a survivor, it is normal to have a life full of pain and if that pain disappears—for example, if she meets someone who is truly a good friend to her—she is faced with dealing with a situation that is new to her. She does not know how to deal with the emotions she is feeling because they're not painful. Therefore, she feels out of control and seeks to find a way to get back in control. In some cases, this means inflicting pain on oneself through self-destructive behaviors.

In other cases—perhaps the majority of cases—self-destructive behaviors act as a means of releasing the emotional pain. When the emotional pain builds to levels that are unbearable, by inflicting physical pain on himself, a survivor feels a sense of release. Because he is in control of when that pain is felt and how much pain is felt, the survivor often doesn't see that pain as self-abusive. It is normal to him because it is a means to get rid of the pain caused by others, although it is only a temporary release.

Some self-destructive behaviors like alcohol and drug abuse, for example, allow the survivor to escape into a world of dulled senses where the pain is not as unbearable. This too is a manner in which to control the level of pain that is being felt.

**Fear of change/Fear of unknown:** I remember once reading a study in which children who were in abusive homes were offered the option of staying with an abusive parent or going to a foster home where they were promised they would never be abused again. Almost all of the children chose to remain with an abusive parent. Most of us can't really understand why a child would make that choice, knowing she is going to be hit or molested again and again. But this is also a manifestation of the need for control.

The abusive parent is a known factor. The child knows how to cope with situations in which she's being abused. (That's not to say it's a healthy way to cope but it allows her to survive.) Knowing what she's dealing with and knowing how she's going to behave allows her to feel some measure of control. When placed in a situation she has never before experienced, she feels lost and totally out of control, which triggers the fear of more abuse.

**Trust issues:** Most survivors either trust everyone or trust no one. This is part of the black and white thinking, which is part of the fear of the unknown, which is a manifestation of the need for control. By trusting everyone, when someone violates that trust, the survivor can say to himself, "It's my fault for trusting him or her" and he feels a sense of control. By trusting no one, he feels in control as well because he's choosing to allow no one to get close enough to him to hurt him. Since he can rely on no one else to do things "right", he does them all himself and keeps strict control of his life.

**Black and white thinking:** "Either you're with me or you're against me" is the motto of many survivors, even if they never voice it. Black and white thinking allows the survivor to feel in control

because he knows all the possible answers. When you introduce shades of grey, there is some measure of the unknown and this induces a feeling of lack of control.

**Expecting the worst:** By expecting the worse, a survivor can't be disappointed (i.e., hurt) by anyone's actions or words because the only way to be disappointed and hurt is to have someone let her down. To have someone not live up to her expectations. Therefore, if her expectations are the worst possible outcome or meaning, she can never be disappointed or hurt. So by expecting the worst, a survivor feels some sense of controlling the potential pain she may feel. She believes that if she expects the worst, it won't hurt as bad as if she had been expecting something better.

**Intimacy issues:** As with the trust issues, survivors tend to fall into one of two categories with respect to intimacy: they either totally reject all forms of intimacy or they become overly intimate with everyone. The reasoning is the same as with the trust issue: they are in control of who they are intimate with either by allowing no intimacy or by allowing being intimate with everyone. And I'm not referring only to physical/sexual intimacy. Many survivors share intimate secrets with strangers that may hurt them in the end.

**Physical/mental ailments:** Did you ever get butterflies in your stomach when you were nervous? Or have muscle aches after having a tense day? Or get a sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach when you were scared? These are examples of emotions creating physical discomfort in our bodies. It is my belief that all physical ailments are either the result of genetics or are, usually on a very subconscious level, the result of our own actions or thoughts or beliefs. In this sense, I see physical/mental ailments as a sort of "self-destructive" behavior. I know one woman who clenches her jaws whenever she is upset and, as a result, has been diagnosed with TMJ. I don't believe she is consciously attempting to hurt herself in the same sense that someone who is a cutter does. But the end result is the same. Her emotions cause her to react physically which created the TMJ. Please understand I am not blaming a survivor for their physical/mental ailments because their actions/thoughts/beliefs are the direct result of the abuse they suffered and the blame for that lies squarely on the shoulders of the abuser. But I do believe there is a cause/effect relationship between the abuse and the physical/mental ailments. I also believe that survivors can heal themselves of these ailments as they heal from the abuse.<sup>7</sup>

**Difficulty making decisions:** One would think that with such a need for control, survivors would be pros at making decisions because there's no greater control than to decide what is to be done. But this comes back in part to the fear of the unknown. We can't know what the outcome of our decisions will be, which leaves a survivor feeling totally out of control.

**Perfectionism:** Children are very egocentric. They believe that everything that happens in their world is their fault. Children of divorcing parents, for example, will often say things like, "I'm sorry I was bad. If I promise to behave, will you and daddy stay married?" They tend to believe that their actions are what caused the abuse. Therefore, survivors tend to try to be perfect because perfect people make no mistakes and therefore no harm will come to them. By striving for perfect, they feel they are taking greater control of their life.

**Difficulty expressing emotions:** One of the most common manifestations of the difficulty expressing emotions is refusing to allow oneself to cry. Crying is seen as a sign of weakness and weak people are the ones who get hurt and abused. They were weak as a child (and they probably cried as a child as well) and that is why they were abused (in their minds, at least.) Other emotions—especially strong emotions—make them feel as if they have lost control. Good strong emotions, like Love or happiness, are often things they have never felt before, which is along the same lines as the fear of the unknown. Bad strong emotions, like anger, often accompanied the abuse they suffered. Additionally, many survivors have learned how to "turn off" their emotions altogether. It served as a way to protect themselves during the abuse. As the saying goes, once bitten, twice shy. Survivors learned that allowing their emotions to be "on" resulted in feeling hurt and pain, so they're reluctant to turn those emotions back on again. They

believe that by not feeling emotions—by controlling them to the point of not expressing them—they can protect themselves.

**Fear/Dislike of Doctors:** The touching that often goes on in a doctor's office can be very triggering to a survivor. By not going to the doctor, they control when their body is touched. Also, if the visit to the doctor involves putting them under some sort of anesthesia, there is the fear of what will happen to them because they have no control over what happens to them when they're unconscious or impaired (as with nitrous oxide (laughing gas) that is commonly used by dentists.)

**Fear/Dislike of getting one's face wet:** When you close your eyes because something is coming at your face, you can't see what else might be coming at you. This leaves you vulnerable and out of control.

The need for control is really a double-edged sword because while it gives the survivor some sense of "security", it also leaves them with feelings of self-blame for the abuse they suffered. After all, they reason, if I was in control, I allowed the abuse to happen and if I allowed it to happen, I must have wanted it to happen. Therefore it's my fault. This in turn leads to a lower self-esteem and greater self-loathing, which in turn causes more emotional pain which leads to a greater need for control and the cycle starts all over again.

If we, as partners of survivors, can keep a survivor's need for control in the back of our minds and take extra care not to violate that need for control (or at least to minimize how much control we take from them), we can help things go much smoother in our relationships. For example, if your survivor likes to have her laundry folded in a particular way and you like to fold it another way, will it cause you any harm to learn to fold it her way? Is it really worth the energy to argue about what way the clothes get folded? If you know that folding them your way will upset her, why not fold them her way? Yes, it is such a small thing, but to someone who is a survivor, the loss of control over even small things is very frightening.

As a survivor journeys down the healing path, the need for control will normally diminish as he learns that he can safely give up control to someone worthy of his trust and love. As the need for control lessens, the various manifestations of that need will also lessen provided that the survivor is aware that these behaviors are tied to the need for control. If your survivor is seeing a therapist to assist in their healing, this is something the therapist should point out. But if your survivor attempts to heal on his own, which is entirely possible, be aware that they might not make the connection and if, after healing has progressed, the behaviors are not diminishing, this is an issue that must be looked at by both parties in the relationship.

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<sup>7</sup> For anyone interested in reading more about the relationship between illness and emotions/thoughts, I highly recommend a book by Louise Hay called "You Can Heal Your Life".

## So Now What?

Let's say you've met someone and your relationship is progressing towards a more serious stage. You notice that she exhibits many of the effects of childhood sexual abuse but she's never said anything about being abused to you. So what do you do now?

First, don't ask her directly. A survivor might see that as an invasion of her privacy and as a violation of her trust. If you suspect someone you are dating/involved with is a survivor, the best course of action, in my humble opinion, is to let him know in a roundabout way that you are there to support him. You could, for example, talk about a story you read in the newspaper or a magazine about someone who was abused. You might then add something like, "If anyone I was ever involved with someone who was abused, I'd do whatever I could to help them heal from it if they wanted my help." If he says nothing, don't push the issue. Give him time to digest what you said. And by time, I mean days or even weeks or months!

If a survivor confides in you, how you react may well determine whether or not they start their healing now or wait until they feel safe enough to start the process. In the moments, hours, days and weeks immediately after a survivor confides in you, keep in mind this list of dos and don'ts.

- Do believe them when they tell you they were abused. Very few cases of abuse are made up and in fact, most cases are never reported, especially if the abuse was incestuous. In many incest cases (I'd be willing to bet in most cases), the families refuse to believe that the abuse is happening. Even if they do believe it's happening, they often insist that the survivor not talk about it or say anything about it. If a survivor takes her abuser to court, the abuser often plea bargains down to a lesser charge and very rarely does any time in jail. This has a tendency to make survivors feel that telling someone does no good, so if a survivor opens up to you, believe him!
- Don't get too emotional—or at least don't let your strong emotions become visible because strong emotions frighten many survivors. Don't get angry and start to scream or yell because a survivor will think you're mad at him and she'll probably become hesitant to share anymore of her story with you. Don't say things like "I'll kill the bastard who hurt you" because that too will frighten them. They will also see that as an attempt to take control away from them by dictating how they should feel about their abuser. In cases of incest especially, a survivor often maintains a relationship with the abuser and may still love the abuser while hating the abuse he has suffered.
- Do offer your support in whatever manner they may need when they decide they need it. If they ask you to listen, do just that: listen. That means not interrupting them when they're speaking (except to perhaps ask for clarification), not offering advice that's not asked for, not volunteering to do for them what they can do for themselves.
- Don't tell a survivor what they need to do next to start their healing. How a survivor heals from the abuse is a very personal matter and no two survivors follow the same healing path. A survivor must be allowed to deal with the issues on their time, in their way. If you attempt to control their healing, they will see that as a loss of control and, in their minds, that means you are just another abuser. It may take a while for them to fully see you as an abuser, but if you keep trying to dictate how they heal, how quickly they heal, etc., they will eventually come to see you as another abuser.
- Do educate yourself on the effects of abuse. There are a lot of good books you can read, websites you can visit, organizations that will offer you support and counseling as a partner of a survivor. There may even be a support group in your area for those who are partners of survivors of abuse. There are webring online—sites that are linked together because they

deal with the topic of being a partner to a survivor. There are forums and email lists for partners. The more information you have, the better equipped you will be to deal with the roller coaster ride you are about to embark on. Keep in mind, however, that online sources of support like email lists, forums, etc. are usually not moderated by a professional and that you have a lot of frustrated, angry, depressed, sad partners trying to help each other. It can be a case of the blind leading the blind. Additionally, just as the same methods for healing may not work for all survivors, the same methods of dealing with a partner's emotions may not work for everyone either. Carefully consider any advice you get from online support groups. The same goes for books you read, including this one! (A more extensive list of resources will be presented at the end of this book.)

- Don't tell anyone else that your partner is a survivor. That is a personal matter and it is their right to determine who does and does not know. In the context of a support group (whether online or in person), your very presence there tells them your partner is a survivor. But even in that case, what goes on in the support group should stay in the support group. If you need to talk to someone about what effect your partner's abuse is having on you and your relationship, ask your partner's permission to reveal his or her status as a survivor.
- Do find ways to take care of your own needs. If your partner starts the healing journey, they will not, in all likelihood, have the ability to deal with meeting your needs. Get a circle of trusted friends that you can meet with, spend time with, go out with, talk to. If you don't have a hobby, get one. Realize that at times, you will be the only one capable of doing everyday household chores and that, for a while (even for several years), you will probably have to shoulder more of the responsibility for maintaining the relationship than your partner. You will be the one that has to give more and get less. That's simply the nature of being in a relationship with a survivor on her healing journey. Just make sure that it doesn't stay that way once your survivor has healed since that would indicate an unhealthy relationship.
- Don't expect the healing to happen overnight. For some survivors, it may take years of off and on therapy to even begin to decide to start the healing journey. On average, it takes about three to four years of almost constant therapy (meaning about once a week at a minimum) to get to the point where they can function "normally" in a relationship. Don't say things like, "I didn't think it would take this long" or "I don't see you working on your issues..." unless you've grown tired of the head that you were given at birth.
- Do get yourself into therapy. Some places offer free counseling to not only survivors but to those who love them. Everyone has their own issues they need to deal with and those who love survivors tend to have some common issues just as survivors do. Co-dependency is one of the issues that many partners of survivors have to deal with. Effective communication skills are something else that many people in general often lack. By dealing with your own issues, you are showing the survivor that a.) therapy is not threatening b.) that you're not blaming any problems in the relationship solely on them and c.) that you love them enough to work on you to make the relationship work.
- Don't take things personally. This one is probably the hardest for most people to follow. When a survivor rejects intimacy time after time, many partners feel as if they are being rejected and become depressed or hurt. Even if a survivor has an affair, you may have to learn to not take it personally. (We'll discuss how to do that later on.)
- Do know your limitations. If you are a person who has a high libido and you don't think you can go for several months or even years without sexual intimacy, then you need to let the survivor know that up front. Sometimes, a survivor is not even able to tell you "I love you" or even hold your hand. They may recoil at even being touched on the arm. If you can't deal with that, then you need to seriously consider leaving the relationship because it won't do you or the survivor any good to allow resentment and anger to build up until you simply explode.

- Don't play headgames with your survivor. Don't say things like, "If you loved me, you'd..." Don't try to guilt them into therapy or trick them into doing something they don't want to do. The survivor will see this as manipulation and will feel as if they are not in control and you'll end up being tagged as just another of her abusers.
- Do set healthy boundaries with consequences for violating those boundaries and follow through on those consequences. (We'll talk about what is a healthy boundary and how to set them later as well.) Give yourself permission to leave the relationship if you've reached your limit. It will do no one any good if you "sell your soul" to stay in the relationship.
- Do use positive affirmations with your survivor. Repeated and frequent statements like "You are so wonderful. I'm so lucky to have you" or "You are such a strong, good person" or "You are so beautiful" or "I admire your courage at facing your past" or "You deserve to be happy!" will probably initially be scoffed at. But keep saying them every chance you get. Survivors have spent years thinking themselves worthless, undeserving of happiness or any good in their lives and it's going to take time and repetition to teach them the truth about themselves.
- Do set up a safe word. This should be a word, or even a phrase, that when spoken by your survivor means that you immediately stop whatever it is you are doing and wait for your survivor to tell you what she wants you to do. The phrase should be something that's not hard to remember but yet won't usually appear in everyday conversation. The purpose of a safe word/phrase is to give the survivor a sense of being in control, especially when engaged in activity that makes her uncomfortable. But as a partner, you **must** respect that safe word/phrase every time it is used. Don't be surprised if your survivor tests you by tossing out the safe word/phrase in the middle of some fun activity or for no reason at all.
- Do discuss with your survivor what you should do if he has a flashback. Flashbacks can be very scary and often feel like he is reliving the experience of being abused. While you may instinctively want to hold your survivor to calm him or protect him, in his mind, you may actually be taking the place of the abuser and he may fight you off like he wanted to do as a child. It won't help your survivor if you try to hold him during a flashback and he ends up causing you serious bodily harm.

## Common Mistakes

Being in a relationship with a survivor can often feel like you're walking through a minefield in the dark on stilts. You can say one thing on Monday and get a laugh and say the same thing on Tuesday (or even later in the day on Monday) and you'll get your head handed to you on a silver platter. One day you can't do anything wrong and the next day you can't do anything right. There is no apparent rhyme or reason for some of the things the survivor says or does.

I read an article many years ago about an experiment conducted to determine how quickly the brain could "rewire" itself. In the experiment, the subjects were given a series of hand-eye coordination tests. After several practice tests, they were timed to see how quickly they could perform the test. They were then given a pair of glasses that made everything they saw appear to be upside down. And they were again timed on the hand-eye coordination tests. It took a week (I believe it was) before the brain had "rewired" itself to get to the skill level it had before donning the glasses. Then the glasses were removed and the subjects were again timed. It took another week for the brain to "rewire" itself to the original settings before the glasses despite the fact that that was the way the brain had operated for years.

I use this story because it serves as a good analogy for those who are survivors. Their entire world is turned upside down. It's like they're wearing glasses that make everything look upside down while the rest of the world doesn't wear the glasses. The world they see is not the same world we see. When they start to heal, they take off those glasses. Now, they have to relearn everything they thought they already knew. Some of the things they have to relearn are basic beliefs, like what it means to love someone. Even who they are as a person. That can be a very frightening prospect, especially when she's doing it while on an emotional roller coaster from facing the demons of her past. (And the process of "rewiring" the brain takes much longer than a mere week because the issues are far more complex than just hand-eye coordination tests.)

Unfortunately, there are some common mistakes that many partners of survivors make that complicate the situation even further. Some are new and some have been covered in the "Dos and Don'ts" in the previous chapter, but they're so important they bear repeating.

- Questioning the survivor's story

This is what I would consider one of the most damaging things you can do. If, for example, you've already met the survivor's father and she later tells you that he raped her, even saying "Are you serious?" may be seen as calling her a liar. Other types of things to avoid saying:

- "But he seems like such a nice guy!"
  - "Are you sure you're remembering correctly?"
  - "She couldn't have done that! I've met her!"
  - "Maybe you misunderstood what he was trying to do."
  - "I can't believe it!"
  - "There's no way she could have done something like that!"
- Dictating how the survivor should feel about his abuser.

One skill which survivors seem to have that many non-survivors lack is the ability to separate the person from the person's actions. Since most survivors are abused by a family member or close, trusted family friend, the survivor may still love the abuser even though he hated being abused. Don't even suggest that because the survivor maintains a relationship with her abuser that the survivor somehow wanted the abuse to happen or enjoyed it while it was happening. Don't try to make the survivor hate his abuser or break off his relationship with his abuser. Many survivors maintain a relationship with their

abuser in order to "keep tabs" on him/her and/or to limit the abuser's access to other children.

- Confronting/revealing the identity of the abuser without the survivor's permission.

Whether or not a survivor ever confronts an abuser must remain a decision that the survivor makes. Many survivors are able to heal from the effects of the abuse without ever confronting their abuser. This is especially true when the abuser is a family member or close family friend because the survivor doesn't want to hurt the rest of the family. If we partners decide to confront an abuser, we are first—and most importantly—taking control of the survivor's healing process and second, we're violating the trust the survivor placed in us by telling us about the abuse.

This issue raises a lot of ethical concerns because if it's not revealed that someone is a child molester, then chances are s/he will continue to molest children. Yet at the same time, when you take that choice out of the survivor's hand by revealing an abuser, you may cause even more harm to the survivors of the abuser. Keep in mind that the survivor you love is probably not the abuser's only victim. If you reveal that someone is an abuser, you are not only forcing the survivor you love but also all the other survivors of that abuser to deal with the issues on your timetable.

You may want to attempt to make an anonymous tip to authorities, but without evidence to back it up, there won't be much of an investigation. Even if you do get evidence, if you are the only one the survivor told about the abuse, s/he will know it was you who turned in the abuser. While you can always say that someone else turned the abuser in, the survivor will most likely continue to believe it was you because they often believe they're the only ones that the abuser molested. That no other child had to go through what they went through. (This is often encouraged by the abuser who may say something like, "If you don't do what I tell you to do, I'll just have to get your little brother (or sister) to do it for me." So the survivor does what is demanded, thinking that s/he is protecting other children.)

Many survivors may have already told the abuser that if s/he harms another child, the survivor will go public. If you make the abuse public, then the survivor feels as if they have no "hold" on the abuser anymore and that more children will now be abused.

If none of those arguments quell your ethical urges, consider this. Even if you go to the police or other authorities, if the survivor is not ready for the information to become public, the survivor will simply deny that anything happened. Then not only do you lose the trust of the survivor and any chance of helping them along their healing path, but you may even be charged with filing a false police report and possibly even sued for slander/libel by the abuser. Additionally, the abuser who has the "I was falsely accused" argument on his side if the survivor won't back up your accusations. Then the next time someone tries to accuse them of being a child molester, they can say "Copycat!" or "It didn't work the last time, it's not going to work this time!"

If your survivor had not entrusted you with the information about his past, then you would be unable to do anything anyway. While it seems the right thing to do, it is in truth forcing those who are already victims to deal with the abuse in their past on your timetable, in essence, re-victimizing them. And it really won't prevent an abuser from abusing again, especially if the survivors of that abuse refuse to back you up. Even after someone is arrested and charged with rape/abuse, quite often the story dies after a few days. Think back and ask yourself how many of the convicted child molesters you've seen on television you could identify if you saw them sitting on a park bench in a crowded city park. A child molester will find opportunities to molest/abuse again unless they're kept off the streets. The problem is that that's not legal since they are presumed innocent until

found guilty in a court of law. Revealing an abuser's identity without a survivor's permission really does no good in the long run. It is more effective, even if time consuming, to allow the survivor to get to a point in their healing where they are ready to reveal the abuse and identify their abuser.<sup>8</sup>

- Attempting to stop the survivor from being self-abusive.

If your survivor cuts himself with a razor blade or pulls out clumps of hair or burns herself with cigarettes, do not attempt to prevent him/her from doing so. For one thing, the survivor will see this as a loss of control and may actually cause himself more harm in order to show you that you can't tell him what to do. Also, as explained in previous chapters, this behavior is a release of emotional pain. It is unarguably an unhealthy way to release pain, but it is, at this point in time, the only way a survivor knows how to release that pain. To try to prevent them from doing so may actually be more harmful than good.

At the same time, you need to educate your survivor on healthier ways to release any internal pain, like doing twenty minutes at a punching bag or screaming into a pillow. I remember as a child, a woman lost control of her car on a rain-soaked road and crashed into our house. The car had knocked over an electric light that was at the front of the sidewalk near the street. That light had a large ball of concrete at its base to keep it upright. When my siblings and I would get mad at each other, rather than listening to us yell back and forth, my parents sent each of us involved in the dispute one by one out to the concrete where we pounded it with a hammer until our anger or frustration was gone. You can suggest to your survivor that they get a piece of wood and some nails and hammer the nails into the wood until they feel better. But make sure they're suggestions and that you don't tell them what they SHOULD do. Offer alternatives but allow them to choose for themselves what they will do. One of the best way to offer alternatives is to tell a simple story like I did above about breaking up the concrete ball on the lamppost.

You may want to gently suggest that your survivor seek help in order to find alternative ways to release the pain she's feeling, but you can't push that issue too hard because she will then feel you're trying to take control of her actions. A gentle way to suggest it might be to say something like, "I don't think what you're doing can be very healthy for you but I don't know how to help you find a healthy way to ease your pain. Maybe you could talk to a therapist about other ways of dealing with the pain when you want to cut." This way, you're making sure it's stated as your opinion ("I don't think what you're doing is healthy" as opposed to "It's not healthy to cut") and you're admitting you don't have the answers (showing her it's safe to not know (i.e., not have control)) and offering a healthy alternative in the form of a suggestion ("Maybe you could talk...") instead of a command ("You need to talk to...").

- Not being careful of not only what you say but how you say it.

You need to learn to watch how you phrase everything you say because of a survivor's need for control. Oftentimes, if you tell them they have to do something, they will *not* do it just to prove to you that they are in control, even if it is harmful to them to not do it. For example, your partner finds a lump in her breast and you say, "You need to make an appointment with your doctor for tomorrow and get this taken care of immediately!" A survivor may simply ignore you just to prove she has control of her own life. Had you phrased it differently, such as "Are you going to make an appointment in the next few days to have that looked at?", she may very well be in the doctor's office later that afternoon.

This can extend even to compliments. Rather than saying "You look beautiful tonight!", which a survivor may take to mean she doesn't look beautiful the rest of the time (part of expecting the worst), say something like, "You look as beautiful as ever!"

- Surprising your survivor.<sup>9</sup>

While it might be romantic to surprise your survivor with a romantic weekend getaway, chances are your survivor will be less than thrilled with the idea. For one thing, surprises accent her lack of control. She had no input in where to go, when to go, what is going to happen, etc. Second, romantic weekend getaways may put undue pressure on her to feel as if she must perform sexually.

It's natural to want to do something nice and special for your survivor. But it would probably be more appropriate to say something like, "I am so proud of you for how hard you've been working on these issues you're dealing with. I would like to show you how proud I am by doing something special but I'm not sure what you'd like to do, so would you mind giving me some suggestions? Then I could pick one of them so that it's still a bit of a surprise."

As bizarre as it may sound to you, even the act of bringing home some flowers for your survivor may be seen in the wrong light. Remember growing up as a kid and wanting your parents to give you something? How you always brought them something like wildflowers or said something nice about them or did extra chores without being told to "butter them up"? Remember the survivor tendency to expect the worst? If you walk in the door with flowers, your survivor may immediately start wondering what you want from them or what you're going to say ("I'm leaving you" for example).

- Expecting all the problems in your relationship to go away as your survivor heals.

You come into the relationship as equals and in order for the relationship to remain healthy you both need to grow together as individuals. That doesn't mean you have to believe the same things or like the same things. It means you both have to continue working on making yourself a better person while working to make your relationship better. Deeper and more fulfilling.

Believe it or not, you came into this relationship with baggage of your own. You have your own issues that might be more quickly resolved through therapy. You work on your issues and let your survivor work on his. If he does all the work, your issues will still be there to cause problems in the relationship even after he heals.

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<sup>8</sup> This will not hold true for those who are bound by law to report suspected abuse, such as healthcare workers, school employees, etc. This is also generally not the case when the survivor is a young child and/or the abuse is still ongoing. If the abuse is still going on and the survivor tells you about it, it is usually a call for help in stopping the abuse, otherwise they would have continued to remain silent about the ongoing abuse.

<sup>9</sup> A reminder that suggestions like these apply more to those survivors who have only started healing. The effects of the abuse will usually lessen as healing progresses and may disappear altogether.

## Self-esteem Vs. Ego

Most survivors don't know the difference between self-esteem and ego. Actually, in my experience, most people—survivor or not—don't know the difference between self-esteem and ego. As a result, they often do things that are great for the ego but damaging to the self-esteem. On the other hand, partners of survivors often have their egos bruised and allow it to affect their self-esteem, which is just as unhealthy. So we're going to discuss it here from both points of view.

Simply put, self-esteem is what you think of yourself. Ego is what you hope others think of you. While self-esteem comes totally from inside you, until you realize this, it can be influenced by what others tell you and how they treat you. A child who is always told that they're worthless will grow up to feel worthless and to believe they are worthless. They will have low self-esteem. Children who are sexually abused are being taught through the actions of another that their only value is for sexually gratifying others and they too will have low self-esteem. On the other hand, children who have supportive parents, who encourage them to follow their dreams and try their best and don't withhold love if the child disappoints them often have very high self-esteem.

Survivors have a lot of difficulty distinguishing between self-esteem and ego. The following is a true story that really illustrates the difference between self-esteem and ego.

A twenty-something, married gay survivor—let's call him Jim—went out after work with some of his co-workers. They went to a local bar and sat around drinking a pitcher or two of beer. Another gay man—let's call him Steve—came over to the table and began talking to Jim, who made it very clear up front that he was married. Steve said that was fine and sat down to ask Jim about his husband. Jim told Steve all about Mike: how they met, how long they'd been married and how much they were in love. The two men had some pleasant conversation, but as the night went on, it was very clear to Jim that Steve was in fact trying to pick him up. Jim repeatedly told Steve that there was no way he was going home with him because he loved Mike and only Mike and would never cheat on him. But Steve kept on trying, even offering to allow Jim to sleep on his couch if he was too drunk to drive home—not even noticing that Jim had been nursing the same drink for the last two hours. When Jim finally got home, he told Mike about Steve and how it had boosted his self-esteem that someone beside Mike found him desirable. When Mike got angry at Steve, Jim didn't understand why since Steve's attempts to pick him up had made Jim feel good!

Mike explained to Jim that Steve hadn't boosted Jim's self-esteem, just his ego. He pointed out that what Steve had done had really been disrespectful, not only to Jim but to Mike as well. By repeatedly trying to pick Jim up even after finding out he was married, Steve was essentially saying that Jim's wedding vows meant nothing. That he didn't think Jim had the ability to abide by his vows. That he didn't care if Mike was betrayed. That he thought Jim was gullible enough to fall for the same old pick up lines that have been used forever. That Jim didn't respect himself enough to avoid a meaningless one-night-stand. That he didn't love and respect Mike enough to avoid endangering their entire relationship for a one-night-stand. Essentially, Mike explained, Steve was telling Jim that he thought he was nothing more than a cheap piece of ass. This is the message the subconscious heard: the subtle, often unspoken, underlying meaning to Steve's actions. And such a message, when taken in by the subconscious, is damaging to the self-esteem no matter how good the ego feels.

In truth, no one can affect our self-esteem unless we allow them to, but this truth doesn't help us until we accept that it *is* truth. It's the old "sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me." We tend to consider it only a child's ditty and don't pay much attention to the great truth it possesses. Until Jim, in the scenario above, learns that Steve's actions can't affect his self-esteem, Steve's actions *will* affect Jim's self-esteem on a subconscious level and will affect his ego on a conscious level. Had Steve simply talked to Jim all night and respected the fact that he was married, his actions and words could have positively affected both Jim's self-esteem and his ego.

I remember when my oldest son first shouted out in anger or frustration, "I hate you, Mommy!" I think he was two or three. It cut through me like a knife and stabbed into the very essence of me. It took me a while to understand that he simply was unable to distinguish between me and my actions. It was my actions (disciplining him) that he hated but because I was the one who spoke the words of discipline, I was the one he hated. What he bruised was my ego and I allowed it to affect my sense of self-worth and self-esteem. Later, when he said it again, it saddened me because he was obviously distressed but my sense of self-worth—my self-esteem—wasn't harmed by his words.

That is what happens with partners of survivors as well. We reach out in a moment of tenderness to our survivor and they recoil in disgust. Our ego is hurt and we feel rejected, which we then take to mean that we're worthless or not pretty enough or too fat and so we start to feel bad about ourselves and our self-esteem goes down.

So what's the solution? Get yourself into therapy (even self-help therapy) and learn how to develop a healthy sense of self-worth and self-esteem. When you do, you will realize that no matter what others think of you, you are a wonderful person who deserves to be loved and deserves to be happy.

Unfortunately, there are very few of us who can apply this to our life all the time, especially when it involves people we dearly love. When someone we love says something hurtful to or about us, it really gives us pause to think. If they betray us, we begin to wonder what is wrong with us to make them do that. There will be the initial chemical reaction that might cause us anger or pain or hurt feelings, but that is over in a matter of less than a minute. Then it is up to us how to handle the situation. It is at times like this when it is most important to remember that the words and actions of others have no power over us other than what we give them.

Once you know that other's opinions of you really can't hurt you, even when your subconscious gets a subtle or unspoken message like that given to Jim by Steve, it will simply ignore it because the truth it holds is that others can't affect your self-esteem. It will become much easier to not take your survivor's behaviors personally when you have a healthy self-esteem and a strong sense of self-worth.

What Steve doesn't realize is the subtle message he's sending his own subconscious and the damage he is doing to his own self-esteem and ego: "I can't even get a cheap piece of ass to sleep with me. I must really be worthless..."

## Needs Vs. Wants

Truth be told, as adults we have very few actual needs. I define needs as things that we require in order to continue to live out our life on this beautiful planet. We really only need oxygen to breathe, food, water, protection from the elements and interaction with our fellow humans in order to continue to grow in a healthy manner. Virtually everything else is a "want" although, unfortunately, we tend to use the words "need" and "want" interchangeably.

I can't tell you how many times I have heard partners say something like, "I need my wife to at least tell me she loves me!" And my response to them often angers them because I tell them that that is *their* issue to deal with. "Needing" someone else to tell you something so you can feel better is a sign of low self-esteem and that's something that the partner has to work on, *not* the survivor.

The usual comeback to that is something along the lines of "There's nothing wrong with wanting to your wife to tell you she loves you." I then point out that they're absolutely right, there's nothing wrong with wanting it, but needing it is another matter altogether.

What many partners don't realize is that quite often, especially in the early stages of healing, a survivor can barely meet their own needs, let alone being able to fill their partners wants.

The partner who looks to his or her survivor to meet wants that involve an action on the part of a survivor must discover the root reason for that want. Yes, it's nice to hear your wife loves you, but if it causes her anxiety or distress or makes her feel as if she is being controlled (thus triggering fears of abuse or flashbacks), is it worth it? Is it still nice to hear if you have to ask to hear it rather than it being spontaneously said?

If it's to reassure you that she really does still love you, then you need to ask yourself why you don't trust her love and why you need reassurance. And like it or not, most of the time, it comes back to either a low self-esteem and/or a lack of self-love. And these are issues that the partner has to deal with without causing undue stress on the survivor.

Our needs rarely change unless our situation changes, for example, if we were to be paralyzed in a car accident. We would then have a lot of very new and different needs. But for most of us, that's not the case. We have the same needs for most of our lives, but our wants can change as often as the wind changes direction.

Unfortunately, for too many partners, the biggest want involves sex, something that many survivors are unable to meet well into their healing. It really is not uncommon for survivors to avoid all manner of physical contact, intimate or otherwise. Even holding hands is often too much for some survivors to do without great anxiety. While it's true that the sex drive is caused by chemicals in our bodies, it's also true that how often you have sex has nothing to do with how much you are loved. If your sex drives needs a release, there's always masturbation. If you are in a polyamorous relationship, you can seek release with another partner. If you have your survivor's permission, you can seek release with someone else. But to ask your survivor to do something that causes them great fear and anxiety simply to relieve your sexual urges is, in my humble opinion, not a very loving thing to do.

Many partners simply don't understand how hard it is for many survivors to endure physical touch from another. They say it's unfair that they're being treated like an abuser. And they're right: it's not fair. But neither is the fact that their survivor had to endure what he endured at the hands of his abuser. Life isn't always fair and as a healthy adult, we have to accept it and deal with what is, not complain about what is not. Especially when you are in a relationship with a survivor because complaining only sounds to them like you're blaming them for your

unhappiness. And the truth of the matter is that you can be happy regardless of the circumstances you find yourself in if you choose to be happy.

I work in a nursing home as a certified nurse aide. Some of the people in the home have been there for years. Many of them can do nothing for themselves and spend their days following the same routine: getting up in the morning, eating breakfast, going to the bathroom, eating lunch, going to the bathroom, eating dinner, going to the bathroom and then going to bed. Somewhere between lunch and dinner, most homes have an activity for them to participate in if they are able. Many of them just sit in their chairs all day, rarely getting visitors. And yet the vast majority of them are always ready with a smile for anyone who comes to talk to them. It's not fair that they're there, often "forgotten" by their families (except maybe at holidays). I'm sure that most of them don't *want* to be there and would much rather be able to move about and take care of themselves. But they have accepted that that's not the way it is and most of them have chosen to be happy in their surroundings.

Many partners— even many therapist— will say that there's nothing wrong with trying to meet their "needs" (which are, in reality, wants since masturbation will relieve the sexual urges caused by hormones). And they're right: there's nothing wrong with it. And IF you're in a relationship with a someone who is emotionally and mentally healthy, there's nothing wrong with expecting your partner to meet some of your wants (and, of course, you meeting some of hers.) However, survivors are often emotionally and/or mentally scarred and utilize many unhealthy thinking patterns and behaviors in their lives. Expecting your survivor partner to meeting your wants causes the survivor harm. The harm need not be physical harm, but can be emotional, mental, psychological or even spiritual. Is what you want worth the price the survivor will have to pay?

Partners need to realize that wants are not necessities and that asking a survivor to meet a want is, at times, an imposition and possibly even an impossibility. As the survivor heals, she should be able to meet your wants more and more often. More importantly, as the partner heals, the list of wants that, if unmet, cause hurt feelings, pain or distress, should decrease if not completely disappear.

## Enabling Vs. Empowering

A survivor often gets "stuck" in patterns of behavior that he developed in order to survive his childhood. Oftentimes, these patterns are harmful, hurtful or destructive. Unfortunately, many survivors either don't know that there are other ways to behave or they're too scared to try new ways because of their fear of change. If you are in a relationship with a survivor, you will be caught in the backlash of these behavior patterns. For example, many survivors have difficulty keeping a job because they have problems with people in authority. (This ties into the need for control—those in authority have control over the survivor and therefore she is triggered into fearing abuse, which makes it difficult for her to stick to a job for any length of time.) They may "test" those in authority to see if they're going to become abusive and this "testing" may result in them getting fired. If you are living with your survivor, you're going to end up with a lot of financial difficulties because she is always losing her job and, with the ensuing lack of good references, finding another job may take increasingly longer periods time. Additionally, any new job will probably pay less with each successive job loss since employers who pay higher wages don't want to waste the time/money on training someone who won't be there very long.

When you see your survivor following one of these unhealthy behavior patterns, you have two choices: you can enable him to continue or you can empower him to change.

Enabling them is much easier—at least on the surface—because you don't really have to do anything. You don't have to confront her about her behavior or deal with any angry or hurt feelings that may arise from that confrontation. You don't have to see tears or hear the pain in his voice. Of course, you may have to take a second job to pay the bills that can't be paid because he can't keep a job. Enabling a survivor is much like enabling an alcoholic by giving him money to pay for his DUIs or bailing him out of jail all the time or covering for her when she can't go to work because she's hung over. If you keep making excuses for her behavior, she's not going to get the help she needs to change her life for the better. Enabling someone shows her that there is no real consequence to her actions or that someone else will take responsibility to get things back on the right track. That's not the way the real world works and enabling someone only insures that he will fail in the long run because he's not learning to be a responsible adult.

Many partners of survivors tend to overlook negative behavior patterns because they don't want to hurt the survivor's feelings. The partners say things like, "Oh, she's suffered so much already....it's not really that big of a deal." Overlooking negative/harmful/unhealthy behavior is another form of enabling and it's actually damaging to the survivor. If you don't call him on the behavior the first time it happens, by the time you DO call him on it, he's going to wonder why it was okay to do it this long and now suddenly it's not. She's going to think, for example, that you're just trying to find fault with her or he'll think that this is your way of telling him he's not good enough for you or that you're trying to find an excuse to break up with her. (Remember expecting the worst?)

Enabling *anyone* is also unhealthy for you. Each time you enable someone, he is in essence taking advantage of your good nature. And on some level, that builds up resentment within you. For many people, as resentment starts to build, their desire to be with the person who is using them slowly diminishes. You will always be waiting—and dreading—the next phone call asking you to bail her out of jail or pay some debt or help him find a new job. It can even affect your physical well being by raising the level of stress in your life.

Empowering someone takes much more effort, much more tact, much more patience, but in the long run, it is healthier for everyone involved. Empowering someone means that you help him learn to help himself. You help the survivor see that there are other ways of dealing with life's situations. This could be anything from showing her other ways of thinking about things to helping him find all his options and understand all the possible consequences of each of those options. Then you let her choose what to think/do and support her in that choice.

But you have to always keep in mind that you're dealing with someone who likes to be in control all the time. So how do you teach her to see alternatives while allowing her to feel as if she's always in control?

One of the most effective ways to do that is to ask questions. Asking questions, as opposed to telling a survivor something, allows him to feel in control because he can decide whether or not to answer and what the answer is. What kind of questions you ask depends on the situation. You can ask direct questions, you can ask leading questions or you can ask questions that are a little of both.

Let's create a mock conversation between you and your survivor, who comes home from working at a supermarket complaining about her boss and saying that he hates her.

Her: My boss is such an idiot! And I know he hates my guts!

You: What makes you say that? What has he done to show you he hates you? [Note: These are direct questions. You are asking her to supply evidence to support her claim that her boss hates her.]

Her: He always gives me the dirty work. The nastiest jobs, like cleaning the restrooms.

You: Do you think that maybe he gives you those jobs because he thinks you can do them better than anyone else? [Note: This is a leading question because you're giving her a direction in which to turn her thinking that's different than what she currently thinks. It's also a subtle way of paying her a compliment by saying she can do the job better than anyone else.]

Her: Oh, yeah, it takes a lot of knowledge to clean a damn bathroom! Any moron can clean a damn bathroom! [Note: Remember difficulty accepting compliments because of low self-esteem?]

You: I don't know. I've seen some pretty nasty bathrooms. I think it takes someone with a good work ethic and respect for the customers to get it really clean! I'll bet you clean them as well as you clean our bathroom, don't you? [Note: This is both a direct question and a leading question because you're asking for a "yes/no" answer but you're also not only leading her to think that she does a good job but telling her that YOU think she does a good job on your bathroom at home. Notice the "I think it takes someone..." rather than "It takes someone..." The former clearly shows it's your opinion while the latter she may see as you flat out telling her she's wrong in her opinion that any moron can clean a bathroom. (Remember expecting the worst?) You want to avoid telling her she's wrong about what she thinks or you may trigger that need for control. Using "I think" statements rather than simply stating something avoids that trigger in most cases.]

Her: Of course I do!

You: Have you seen the bathrooms after other people clean them? [Note: This is a direct question.]

Her: No, cause I'm always the one who cleans them!

You: Good point! OK, then haven't you been in places where the bathrooms were really nasty? [Note: Another direct question. Throwing in "Good point!" is showing her that she has good reasoning and thinking skills which will help her build a more positive self-image.]

Her: Yeah...

You: What did you think about the people who cleaned them? [Note: This is a direct question.]

Her: That they didn't do a good job.

You: So what do you think people who see your clean bathrooms think about the job you did? [This is a leading question, because you leading her to recognize that she did a good job.]

Her: That I did a good job.

You: So if the customers know you did a good job, is it possible your boss knows you do a good job and he gives you that job because you're the only one who does do a good job? [Note: This is both a leading question and a direct question because it only requires a "yes/no" but it's leading her to think in a direction different than she originally thought.]

Get the picture? This is a very simplistic example and finding the right questions to ask will not always be easy. But if you practice at it (maybe even on your friends/family who are not survivors), it will get easier. No matter what kind of question you ask, you're getting her to think about her actions/reactions rather than simply allowing her to believe that her reactions will always be the same and that her conclusion is the only right conclusion.

By asking questions, you encourage her to consider alternatives. By considering those alternatives, she is not automatically falling back into her unhealthy behavior pattern of always thinking the worst. Now, don't expect her to suddenly start thinking the best, but eventually, if you keep doing this kind of thing, she'll stop automatically expecting the worst in every situation.

Sometimes, questions won't work or aren't appropriate at that time and you simply have to outline the options and the possible consequences. Let me give you an example.

A woman is in an abusive relationship. One day, she decides to leave and calls a hotline number for a shelter. The shelter worker doesn't have the time to ask questions, so she tells the woman, "There's several things we can do. You can call the police and have him arrested. If you do that, he might retaliate when he gets out of jail. It also means your name will get in the papers and your kids' friends will see it. On the other hand, it will show him you're serious about not allowing him to beat you anymore. You can come to the shelter. While you're here, you can get counseling to give you the tools you need to change the situation. We have a partnership with an organization that offers counseling to the abuser as well and maybe he'll agree to go. Coming here will give you a safe place to consider all your options and give him time to see what it might be like if he loses you. You can stay where you are and I can give you some tips on how to protect yourself and what you should get together in the event you decide to come to the shelter or leave him at some point in the future. That won't stop any abuse right now, but it also means you don't need to make a decision about whether to leave right now. Or you can simply hang up and nothing will change. The choice is yours and whatever you decide, I will do what I can to help you if you want my help."

In this case, the shelter worker gave the woman all her options, showed her the possible consequences, both good and bad, and gave her the choice as well as offered support for whatever choice the woman might make.

There are two important things to remember about empowering someone.

The first is that you need to help him discover all his options, not just the ones you like or the ones you think would be the best for him.

The second, which is often the hardest, is to let her decide which of those choices she will take and doing what you can to help her whatever choice she makes.

One of the hardest things I have ever had to do was to help a woman pack her bags to leave a shelter and return to the home she shared with her abuser, knowing that statistically, the abuse would only get worse because she had dared to leave him. Sure enough, less than a month later, she was back at the shelter after having spent a week in the hospital due to his abuse.

The choice a survivor makes may not always turn out to be the best one, but by allowing him to make that choice, you're

- a. not taking control from him
- b. showing him you trust him to know what's best for him
- c. showing him that choices do exist and that he has the right to choose for himself
- d. teaching him to be responsible for his own actions and that those actions have consequences
- e. showing him that it's okay to make mistakes and that making mistakes doesn't make you "bad" or cut you off from further assistance

There's an old saying that goes "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."

Enabling someone is giving her a fish. It makes her dependent on you. It gives you control and power over her life because she needs you to do things for her. Oftentimes, enablers are co-dependent, which we'll talk about in the next chapter.

Empowering someone is teaching him to fish. It helps him to become independent and self-reliant. As partners we should always seek to empower our survivors. It's the healthiest choice for all parties involved.

## Co-Dependency

Co-dependency is an issue that partners of survivors often have to deal with in their own lives. It's something the partners need to heal in their own selves. Co-dependency is when your happiness depends on your ability to "make" other people happy or on your ability to "rescue" other people from their own problems. It can be very simply stated that co-dependents need to be needed. Their happiness depends on how much someone else "needs" them. I'd be willing to bet that most partners of survivors are co-dependent to some degree. For those who are very co-dependent, as their survivor gets further along the healing path, the attraction they felt for the survivor may actually begin to fade because the survivor no longer "needs" them as much.

It is not my intent to write a definitive paper on co-dependency. That's already been done many times. In fact, there is a twelve-step program for co-dependents, CoDA (Co-Dependents Anonymous). I simply want to show how co-dependency makes it more difficult to be in a relationship with a survivor.

The problem with co-dependency is that no one can truly "make" another person happy or "rescue" them from themselves. Happiness is a choice we make within ourselves. We can choose to be happy even in the most adverse conditions or situations. I used to live in Milwaukee, near downtown, in an area that had quite a few homeless. I remember one man in particular who always had a smile and a kind word to say to anyone who took the time to notice him, even if it was someone glaring at him in disgust. This man, despite all his problems, was choosing to be happy.

If we are healthy mentally and emotionally, then nothing else someone says or does to us will affect our happiness for more than a few seconds. Our happiness really is not dependent on anyone else. Someone may do something nice for us and we say it makes us happy. But in truth, what's happening is that the ego is stroked when someone does something nice for us and we (usually subconsciously) choose to equate this with someone "making" us happy. When someone did something nice for us, we were reminded that we are special. But even if someone didn't do something nice for us, we're still special! So feeling happy at being special doesn't really rely on someone else doing or saying anything special. It simply depends on us remembering we are special.

Additionally, we can't really "rescue" anyone. In truth, rescuing someone is enabling him/her if we have to do it more than once. With survivors, rescuing often takes the form of trying to make all the pain go away. That is not something we can do for them. The only way the pain will "go away" for a survivor is to complete the healing journey. When we co-dependent partners try to make the pain go away, we end up instead making our survivor more dependent on us, which is the exact opposite of empowering them. Additionally, by making her more dependent on us, we are taking more control of her life, which, in the end, she will see as just another form of abuse. And we will become simply another abuser.

At its root, co-dependency is an indication of a lack of self-esteem. The co-dependant individual lacks a strong sense of self-worth and believes that the more people that "need" him, the more important he is and the more important he is, the greater his sense of self-worth becomes. The only problem is that co-dependents create their own self-worth deflators. As the people who "need" the co-dependent heal or move on, they no longer "need" him as much as they once did. He sees this as a personal rejection which causes his sense of self-worth to decrease.

Co-dependents and survivors are like opposite poles on a magnet. Put them in a crowded room and they are drawn to each other by an unseen force. It would seem to be a match made in heaven. Survivors tend to be very needy because of the abuse in their past and when they find someone who not only doesn't abuse them but wants to take away all their pain, they

cling to that person like a life preserver. This suits the needs of the co-dependent to a tee. But after the "honeymoon" period all new relationships have, things start to go downhill fast.

The survivor, who believes that this is too good to be true (due to low self-esteem), begins to suspect every move the co-dependent makes (ie, staying late at work, going out after work with his buddies to have a few drinks, a new phone number on the cell phone, etc.—due to expecting the worst.) This suspicion leads to accusations, which the co-dependent denies. The stronger the co-dependent denies, the more the survivor suspects (again, due to expecting the worst). The more the survivor suspects, the stronger the co-dependent denies. This vicious cycle continues until it begins to tear apart the relationship. Both need the relationship to continue but both want the relationship to end. The survivor wants the relationship to continue because everyone wants to be in a loving relationship, but she wants it to end because she begins to believe that the co-dependent is just another abuser (due to the fact that when we need someone to do something for us, it gives them power over us. When they have power over us, we lose control of part of our life and survivors need to be in control of every aspect of their life.) The co-dependent wants the relationship to continue because he needs to be needed but he wants it to end because no one likes being unjustly accused or having his every move suspect.

Until either the co-dependent or the survivor heals from their low self-esteem issues, they're probably going to keep getting into the same kind of relationships. Unfortunately, the more relationships they get into that end, the more it reinforces their low self-esteem.

Just like no one can heal for a survivor, no one can heal for a co-dependent. She must first recognize that she has a problem before she will seek help. Unfortunately, recognizing this fact can be very difficult. If you try to tell a co-dependent that it's unhealthy for him to be needed so much, he is likely to turn around and ask you what's so bad about someone needing him. He'll ask what's so bad about trying to help someone who's been hurt so much. She may even point to a Bible or other sacred text and say, "You're supposed to treat others as you want to be treated! If I were hurting, I'd want someone to help me, so I'm helping him!"

The problem here is that the co-dependent is confusing ego with self-esteem and needs with wants. (Again, can you see why this is so difficult because of how interconnected all these issues are?) When someone needs a co-dependent, it's not his self-esteem that's getting a boost but his ego because self-esteem is totally unrelated to what anyone else says or does to us. A co-dependent doesn't really need someone to need him, he wants someone to need him because it boosts his ego, which he confuses for boosting his self-esteem. The good news is that while needs don't really change, wants can. Only when a co-dependent is able to recognize the harm his current wants are doing to him will he seek to change what he wants.

## Setting Boundaries

With respect to this book, boundaries deal with the types of conduct we expect others to exhibit towards us. Survivors of childhood sexual abuse usually have no sense of what constitutes a healthy boundary because their abusers violated so many boundaries. This can be very clearly seen in the general failure of child abuse prevention programs to significantly cut the rate of child sexual abuse. These programs target school children and attempt to teach them what are healthy boundaries with respect to being touched. Yet so many children, when the abuse they suffer comes to light, have no idea they were being abused. Many people cannot understand why this is the case.

When a child is raised in a home where they are being sexually abused, there is a cloak of secrecy. The child is almost never abused in front of people. And since most children are abused by either a family member or close family friend, and are told that such abuse is okay or normal, the child believes that this happens in *every* home. Even if they go to a friend's house and don't see their friend being abused, they still believe that it's happening when they are not there just as it happens in their home when no one else is around. Therefore, if it's happening to everyone, it can't be abuse because it's normal and abuse is not.

Children who are not taught about healthy boundaries while they're growing up have difficulty setting or recognizing healthy boundaries when they're adults. That's why so many survivors get into abusive relationships as adults. It's why a survivor can have an affair with a married man and see nothing wrong with it. It's why a survivor can have sex with her boss or his child's teacher and see nothing wrong with it. It's why a survivor can drink and drive and see nothing wrong with it. It's why a survivor can lie about anything and see nothing wrong with it.

Most of us grew up with some degree of healthy boundaries. Boundaries—although we probably just called them "rules"—gave us a sense of safety because we knew what was expected of us and what the consequences would be if we didn't live up to those expectations. We didn't have to fear getting hit for no reason. We didn't have to fear being screamed at for no reason. We didn't have to fear someone coming into our bedroom at night and sexually abusing us.

Setting healthy boundaries with a survivor can be particularly tricky because, depending on how the boundary is set and how we phrase it, it can be seen as an attempt to take control from the survivor. This is apt to make them intentionally violate the boundary just to prove that they have control over their actions.

Setting healthy boundaries requires three things:

1. the boundary must have as its goal to protect you
2. there must be a consequence to violation of that boundary and it must be proportionate to the goal of the boundary.
3. follow through on the consequences.

For example, let's say that you decide you will not allow anyone to call you nasty names in anger. How does that protect you? It is disrespectful and you will not allow yourself to be treated with disrespect. Now what about a consequence? You could say that if someone calls you a nasty name, you're going to end your relationship with them. People will do things in anger or frustration they won't normally do otherwise. Sometimes they just don't think about what they're saying before they say it. Is ending a relationship with them proportionate to the "crime" committed? I believe it's a bit extreme. A more appropriate consequence might be something like the first time it happens, you'll speak up and warn them you won't tolerate being called names. The second time it happens, you will end the conversation/discussion and won't talk about it again that day. The third time it happens, you'll walk out of the room or hang up the phone and

won't talk to them again for the rest of the day. Maybe by the fourth time it happens you'll reconsider your relationship with them, but even then, it might simply be a temporary separation from them by not calling them or not emailing them or seeing them.

Now that you have your boundary and your consequences set in your own mind, you must convey this boundary to your survivor in a manner that will not cause them to feel as if you're taking control.

First, you'll want to pick a time when tensions are low. Anything you say won't be received very well if your survivor is already mad at you, with or without just cause.

Second, you want to avoid statements that begin with "Do not..." These statements are more like commands or orders and survivors don't take too well to being commanded or ordered around. It's best to phrase it more along the lines of, "If this should happen, then I am going to..." The "if/then" format doesn't accuse the survivor of anything, doesn't suggest that you *expect* it to happen and allows the survivor complete control over his actions by deciding if, in fact, it will happen.

Third, you don't want to make accusations, even if they're true. Let's say that your survivor called you a name during your last argument with her. You don't want to say something like, "Because you've taken to calling me names..."

Fourth, explain what the boundary is and how it protects you from harm or pain.

Fifth, explain what the consequences of violating that boundary are.

And finally, follow through on the consequences.

Using the example from above, here's how I'd inform my survivor of my boundary. I would pick a time when there was minimal tension. Maybe after dinner, after we'd washed the dishes (or otherwise cleaned up) and were sitting down to relax a bit. Then the conversation would go something like this:

Me: I was wondering if it would be okay if we had a little talk about something that's been bothering me lately.

Survivor: I guess so. What's up?

Me: When I was a kid, when my brother would call me names, my mom would always tell me that old rhyme: Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me. It took me a while to realize that being called names doesn't have to hurt me, but to me, it seems to be really disrespectful and I won't tolerate being treated with disrespect.

Survivor: Oh, give me a break! I only called you a name once and that was because you pissed me off so much!

Me: I know it was only once. But I just wanted to explain why I won't tolerate anyone calling me names in anger and what I am going to do if it ever happens again.

Survivor: Is this going to take long?

Me: No, I don't think so. I realize that sometimes people say things they didn't mean and I'm willing to give anyone a second chance. And this applies to everyone, not just you. So in the future, if I'm ever called a name in anger, the first time it happens, I'm going to interrupt the conversation and—using you as an example—remind you that's not something I will tolerate. If it happens a second time, even if it's during another

completely different conversation, I will end the conversation right then and there and not discuss it again for the rest of the day. If it happens a third time, I will leave the premises or hang up the phone if the conversation is taking place on the phone. If it happens again after that, I will have to give considerable thought to continuing the relationship. Do you have any questions about those boundaries or the consequences of violating them?

Survivor: I think it's stupid. If you're acting like an ass, I don't see why I can't call you an ass.

Me: If I'm acting like an ass, I think it would be more productive if you told me exactly what it was I was doing that you thought was acting like an ass so I could stop doing it or at the very least explain why I was doing it. I don't believe calling someone a name accomplishes anything positive because we may have different ideas about when someone is acting like an ass.

There are several things to note here.

- I believe it's very important to add some form of "if it ever happens again" because this shows the survivor you don't *expect* her to do it again. By saying "The next time you call me a name...", you're essentially telling her that you fully expect her to do it again. So why shouldn't she if you already expect her to! People tend to live up (or down) to what is expected of them.
- The boundary applies to everyone in your life. This doesn't make her feel singled out or picked on.
- By saying things like "I believe" and "it seems to me", you're letting her know that it's your opinion and you're not trying to tell her that she has to believe the same things you do.
- By explaining how the boundary protects you, you are showing her that this is about protecting you, not about controlling her.
- By making the boundary an "if/then" situation (If you do this, then I will do that), she is in control of whether those consequences are ever enforced because she controls whether or not she ever calls you another name.
- The consequence involves you taking some action, not her. For example, a healthy consequence would not involve forcing her to apologize before you talk to her again.
- By asking her if she has any questions, you are giving her a chance to voice her thoughts. If she responds (she may not) it also gives you a chance to further explain why you're setting the boundary and to offer other alternatives for action other than name calling.

Keeping the above thoughts in mind, here's the kind of thing I would avoid saying.

Me: It really ticked me off when you called me an ass the other day. Don't ever call me names like that again! I won't let you treat me with disrespect. The first time it happens, I'll call you on it. The second time it happens, the conversation is over. The third time it happens I'll hang up on you or leave. If it happens after that, we're through!

This kind of direct confrontation is going to set off all kinds of alarms in the survivor's subconscious and he's going to immediately raise his defenses and probably won't hear a word you say. He may see it as an attempt to control him and he may intentionally call you names just to see if you're going to do what you said you do and to show you that you can't control him.

Sometimes the hardest part of setting healthy boundaries is following through with the consequences. You need to remember that survivors will probably test those boundaries a time or two just to see if you will do what you said you would do, so be careful in setting the

consequences. You don't want to be forced to end your relationship after the second violation of your boundary if we're talking about a minor issue like name-calling. There are some issues that would certainly warrant ending the relationship immediately, such as discovering she is sexually abusing your child or stealing valuables from your home. But for most situations, giving them a second or third chance to respect your boundaries may be a wise thing to do.

You may also want to consider starting with a small issue first. Maybe you don't like it when he leaves his towel on the bathroom floor. Your boundary might be that all dirty/wet towels need to be off the floor when you're done using them because you have tripped on them in the past and almost hurt yourself. The consequence might be that if it happens again, you're going to leave it there and not wash that towel when its time to do laundry. If you start with a small issue and the survivor tests your resolve to follow through on the consequences, it's not going to be a relationship breaker when you actually do follow through with the consequence.

If you discover that a consequence you set is too harsh when the boundary is actually broken, it's okay to set a different consequence, as long as it's always "less" than the original. If you find that a consequence isn't harsh enough, then you should give the survivor one more chance to respect that boundary after you have set the new consequence. (Of course, this does not apply if your safety is ever threatened or you feel your life is endangered by staying.)

# Anger

Anger is an emotion that many survivors have great difficulty handling with any degree of comfort, even after they are well along their healing path. Anger is also an emotion that many partners have difficulty handling because they're often unable to express their anger at the one who caused the anger: the abuser. This can be because the abuser is unnamed, unknown or even because the abuser is now dead.

For the survivor, anger was often involved in the abuse: either their abuser was angry during the abuse or the survivor was angry at being abused and was unable to give voice to that anger. Either way, anger often becomes an emotion to be feared and avoided, or at the very least left unacknowledged.

When someone fears anger, he tends to avoid situations that may lead to anger. This can often lead to others bullying him, taking advantage of him or even of further abusing him because he's afraid of what might happen if he stands up for himself. Of course, this "timidness" tends to embolden the bully which only causes more fear in the survivor and the cycle continues, often spiraling into ever increasing levels of violence or abuse. In extreme cases, the fear of anger can even lead one to become somewhat of a recluse, only interacting with other people when absolutely necessary.

Avoiding anger is almost impossible because anger is caused by a chemical reaction that's triggered by our instinctual fight or flight response. When, for example, someone cuts us off on the highway and we narrowly avoid a collision, the brain sends adrenaline pumping through our bodies. Adrenaline causes our heart to beat faster, increases our physical strength (temporarily), makes us more alert and causes our reaction times to decrease which could lead to impulsive actions, such as flipping off the other driver or screaming obscenities at him. However, once that initial surge of adrenaline is pumped into our bodies, it soon wears off and we have the option of how to act after that. The problem for many survivors is that they often don't *know* they can react differently. It's not a skill they were taught growing up, especially in a home where they were being abused.

It's been my experience that most people, even those who are not survivors, don't believe they have a choice when it comes to anger. Many times they'll say things like, "I can't help it! He just pissed me off!" But the truth is that, while you can't stop the chemical release of the adrenaline, with practice, you can control how you react to the influx of adrenaline into your body. How many of us continue to mumble and complain about the driver long after the incident is over, thereby continuing to be angry? How many of us think that maybe the driver just got a phone call telling him that his wife had been in an accident and was being rushed to the emergency room in critical condition and he's simply trying to get to her side? It doesn't matter whether he really got a call or whether he's really just a wreckless driver. What matters is how we deal with our anger at his behavior.

When we don't acknowledge our anger, we're often "forced" to "stuff it", keeping it inside us, unexpressed. This will eventually lead to either resentment towards the one(s) we're angry at and/or an angry emotional outburst of enormous proportions, often at something very minor: the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. Stuffing our anger inside can even affect our physical health, causing headaches, tension, increased stress which could lead to an increase in blood pressure, stomach problems like ulcers, insomnia and other health problems.

Partners of survivors are often unable to give voice to the anger they have towards the abuser. If they don't find a healthy outlet for this anger, they will likely develop some of the same health problems that many survivors develop by not acknowledging their anger. Additionally, if you express your anger to your survivor, they may no longer tell you things about their abuser or

the abuse they suffered, both to avoid causing you distress and to avoid having to deal with your anger.

But partners face other potential risks with respect to the survivor's anger:

- A survivor's desire to avoid anger may result in her never telling you when you upset her or anger her. You may think the relationship is going just fine because she's not complaining and she's planning on leaving you because she's got so much resentment built up from her unexpressed anger.
- Many times a survivor will transfer his anger at his abuser to someone with whom he feels safe and truly loved. Many times, this means his partner will get yelled at for something the abuser did many years ago. This is where not taking things personally really comes in handy. Of course, it's necessary to gently point out to the survivor that you're not the one who abused her or hurt her and remind her that you love her and only want what's best for her.
- Many survivors often project their own emotions onto their partners. If, for example, you don't get angry at something someone said to him, then you don't really love him or you're not being supportive. Unfortunately, his desire to avoid anger means he may not tell you that he thinks you don't really love him or aren't being supportive.

Both the survivor and the partner must learn healthy ways to deal with their anger. Sometimes, simply writing it down on paper can help get rid of a good deal of the anger. At the very least, it's giving voice to your anger and so it's not being completely stuffed inside you. Some other options include:

- screaming into a pillow
- punching a pillow or punching bag
- deep breathing exercise
- running, swimming or other physical exercise
- crushing empty milk cartons or soda cans
- hitting some golf balls, tennis balls or baseballs
- playing the drums or other musical instrument really loud
- meditating/praying
- listening to your favorite music really loud
- write a poem about your anger
- draw/paint/create something that represents your anger
- journaling (perhaps one of the most therapeutic because you can go back and look at where you were and where you are now and see just how far you've come in learning to cope with your anger.)
- join a support group for partners of survivors (these may be hard to find but you can look into setting one up for yourself.)
- seek professional counseling (again, something I would highly recommend to anyone in relationship with a survivor. (On second thought, I'd highly recommend it to anyone just to help you get a better handle on who you are and what you want to do with your life.))

Anger doesn't have to be a scary emotion. Anger serves a healthy and useful purpose and can actually be a catalyst for a survivor to start healing. But uncontrolled anger or unexpressed anger can pose many problems so it's best to find something that helps you to give voice to and control your anger.

## Frustration

If there's one emotion that a partner of a survivor will have to learn how to deal with, it's frustration. Frustration can hit you on so many levels: emotional, mental, spiritual, psychological, sexual. But no matter how frustrated you may become, it's very important that you don't convey that frustration to your survivor in a way that will make them think that they are the cause of the frustration. It's important to remember that everything that your survivor is going through is caused by the abuse and that the abuser is really the root cause of your frustration.

A survivor's healing journey is often two steps forward and one step back. Sometimes it even seems like two steps forward and three steps back. This can be a major cause of frustration for a partner because it would seem that once a survivor sees that the new ways of thinking/doing things they learn in their healing actually works, he would not want to go back to doing it the old way. What partners have to keep in mind is that for most survivors, they've spent years being afraid of change and as soon as they start to change, their subconscious minds say "Stop! You're going to be hurt! This is dangerous!" It's so much easier and, to the subconscious mind, so much safer, to go back to doing things the way it's always been done. Just as we test the ice of a pond before we step on it with all our weight, so too will a survivor test the new methods and ways of thinking/doing things they learn in their healing journey. Sometimes when we test the ice, we hear a large crack and we hurry back to where we stood moments before. The "turn back" messages a survivor gets from his subconscious mind is, to him, just like hearing a large crack while walking across a frozen pond.

Another source of frustration is when a survivor seems to reach a plateau and appears to be making no progress in healing. For those of us who are partners, we tend to think that once a survivor sees how much "easier" life is when she starts to heal, she will want to heal as quickly as possible. We may think of the healing journey as a snowball rolling down a hill: it will pick up momentum as it gets bigger and bigger. But for a survivor, healing is like running up a hill. She has her subconscious mind saying "Don't change!" and as she heals, she may be facing more and more memories and more and more issues from those memories. It's like she is running and someone keeps putting more weight on her back. At times, she has to stop and rest and gather her strength to keep on running.

Sometimes partners get frustrated at the lack of information their survivor is giving them about their healing, like what goes on during a therapy session or even how they're feeling about the healing journey. Partners need to remember that this is a very personal and intimate journey and that we need to respect their desire to keep the information private. If you should try to get information from a survivor about a therapy session, for example, she will wonder why you want the information (she probably still expects the worst most of the time), how you might use it against her if you ever break up, whether it will change how you feel about her, etc. All this does is add more issues and fears and insecurities to someone who is already being overwhelmed with issues, fears and insecurities. There's nothing wrong with telling your survivor that if she ever needs someone to talk to, you're there to listen or talk (whichever she prefers), but then let the matter drop. You might want to give a little reminder that you're there to listen or talk every month or so or if she looks particularly stressed after a therapy session. But don't force the issue. She is processing a lot of new information and new ideas and new ways of doing things and even new feelings. Allow her to process it in her own time and share it with you in her own time. Of course, she may choose never to share it with you and that's her right and as a partner, you need to respect that.

Another possible source of frustration is not knowing what actually happened to your survivor during the abuse. The reasons for wanting to know can vary from not wanting to trigger a flashback by doing something the abuser did to justifying some sort of revenge because of the extent of the abuse. Remember that a survivor does not need to discuss the abuse in order to heal from it. Many survivors never reveal the details of exactly what happened to them. Every

individual is entitled to reveal what they want about their past to their current partner and to keep secret what they want to keep secret. Oftentimes, telling someone else about what happened to them is like reliving the abuse all over again and no one wants to do that. Additionally, many survivors were told to keep the abuse a secret and talking about the details may trigger fear of their abuser carrying out any threats s/he may have made against the survivor to guarantee secrecy. If you feel the need to know what exactly happened to your survivor, that is an issue that you have to deal with in your own life. You need to find out why you feel the need to know the details.

Many survivors have physical ailments that can, at times, be quite debilitating, like migraine headaches, chronic fatigue or just a general achiness and soreness. It can get very frustrating if your survivor is often in pain and yet avoids going to the doctor or trying to do anything about it. One partner compared it to listening to someone complain about never having enough money to do what he wanted to do and then calling off work for days at a time. To most non-survivors, it's common sense to go to the doctor when one is in pain or hurting. But most non-survivors don't have the fear of going to the doctor that a survivor often has. Try thinking of it this way. Think about the creature you most fear in this world, like spiders or rats or bats or snakes or worms. And then imagine that your doctor worked in an office that was full of whatever creature you fear. How difficult would it be for you to actually make yourself go to the doctor, knowing that the office would be full of these creatures? How much easier would it be to tough it out at home and "complain" to your partner about your aches and pains?

One of the biggest frustrations many partners have to deal with is the almost constant testing they are often put through by their survivors. This can range from the "push-me-pull-me" to using the last of the shaving cream to lying about little things just to see how they will react. They may even ask you the same question on different occasions to see if you give the same answer each time. These tests are, in principle, not much different than kids "pushing the limits" of the parent's rules in an effort to find out what is safe to do and what is not. But often the motivation for the tests is different. For many survivors, these tests are often a form of sabotaging a relationship. They push your buttons and wait to see when you say "I've had it!" and walk out. They then say "See! I told you I was unlovable and that I turn everyone who loves me bad." Or "See! I told you everyone who ever loved me leaves me!" It's all part of the self-perpetuating cycle in which blame/guilt lower the self-esteem, which then can't believe someone really loves them, so they test and test and test until their partner has had enough. Then they blame themselves for the failure of the relationship and this lowers their self-esteem and the cycle starts all over again. So while this can be very frustrating for a partner, it can be just as frustrating for a survivor.

Another frustrating aspect of loving a survivor is paying for what someone else did to them. Partners of survivors, in effect, become secondary survivors when we have to deal with the effects of our survivors' abuse. Many view the behaviors that some survivors engage in as abusive in and of themselves: things like name-calling or even physical violence against their partner, especially in stressful situations. They can be emotionally manipulative, which could be seen as emotional abuse. Here, I think, is where I come into conflict with the common teachings of psychology today. I hesitate to call these behaviors by a survivor "abuse" because, in my humble opinion, they're more like survival tactics. The survivor is mirroring behavior patterns she learned from her abusers that she believes are perfectly normal due to the lack of healthy boundaries while she was growing up. I think that the intent is very important when determining what is and what is not abuse. If the motivation for someone's actions is fear or survival or simply ignorance that their actions could be considered abusive, and their goal is not control over another, I may consider it unhealthy behavior and not allow myself to be victimized by such acts, but I would hesitate to call it abuse. But whether you call it abuse or not, partners suffer from the behaviors of their survivors. As unfair as it may be, we need to remember that it's our choice to be in the relationship with our survivor and that we can stop the "unfairness" any time we choose by simply walking away (which may not be all that simple a thing to do.)

Probably the most talked about frustration is in the area of intimacy, particularly physical/sexual intimacy. The problem is further compounded by the differences, in general, between women and men with regards to what constitutes intimacy. I know of a husband and a wife who, in the course of marriage counseling, were asked to make a list of how each showed the other intimacy. The wife wrote close to three pages that included things like buying him his favorite beer when she got an exceptionally large tip and accompanying him to auto shows, which she found very boring, and even watching the kids while he went fishing with his buddies even though she was a stay at home mom and wanted to get out sometimes without the kids. The husband didn't bother to write a list because he said the only way he could get a sense of intimacy was through sex. I've heard similar stories from many, many people. In general, women tend to think of intimacy as the emotional closeness as much as (or even more than) the physical closeness/sex. Men, on the other hand, generally seem to need sex to be part of the equation in order to get a sense of intimacy. I like to put it this way: In general, men need sex to feel loved and women need love to want sex. In 1985, syndicated columnist Ann Landers asked her readers whether they're rather have sex or just cuddle. Of the more than 90,000 responses she received, 72% of women said they preferred cuddling to actual sexual intercourse.<sup>10</sup>

Given these vast differences about what constitutes intimacy, when you toss into the mix the problems many survivors have with intimacy and/or physical touch (including sex), you can see where this can be a major source of friction between partners and frustration for the partner of a survivor.

As was discussed in the chapter on the effects of abuse, most survivors fall into one of either two categories: they're totally turned off by sex or they're very "promiscuous". (Again, remember that this is meant to address those who have not really started on their healing journey. I put promiscuous in quotes because quite often, the survivor will not view their behavior as promiscuous but as "normal".) A survivor who falls into the latter category may actually not see sex as an act of intimacy. They may have learned, through their abuse, that their only value is as a sexual object. They may have learned, again through the abuse, that you're supposed to have sex with everyone of the opposite gender. (Or even everyone period.) For example, a young girl who is being sexually abused by her brother, who later brings home his friends to have sex with her and they bring their friends....

To the "promiscuous" survivors, the idea of any sort of relationship with someone that does not involve sex on some level is often something that has never crossed their mind! And when they get into a serious relationship, quite often, the sex at the start of the relationship is very good. But then the idea of love and commitment enters into the picture and suddenly their faced with a whole new situation. Sexual activity brings on strong emotions they're not used to dealing with and it scares them. Someone who was very sexually adventurous at the beginning of a relationship may now suddenly clam up and not want any sexual contact whatsoever—but sometimes only with her partner! She may still have sex with other people and not have a problem with it and she may not even see it as violation of her commitment or betrayal of her love for her partner! To these survivors, sex and intimacy are two different things, often unrelated and it's the intimacy that scares them more than the sex. Sex brings with it no inherent sense of commitment or exclusivity that it does for most of us. Sex, to them, is often something of no particular value because that is the value given to it by those who abused them.

Then you have those survivors who can't seem to deal with physical touch at all, let alone sexual intercourse. The aversion to physical touch may only affect specific areas of the body (for example, a survivor may hate having her hair touched because her abuser grabbed her by the hair when she tried to run away) or it may involve the entire body. However, even if a survivor doesn't like physical touch, they may still engage in sexual activity (including intercourse) for some length of time. Often, this is because it's "expected" and they don't want the relationship to end because of, what in their minds is often seen as nothing more than a stupid hang-up. They usually find ways of dealing with their dislike of physical touch in order to feel "normal".

One of the most common ways to deal with the dislike is to dissociate during physical touch. Dissociation during sexual activity is often accompanied by a “far-away” look (what may appear to be a blank stare), inattentiveness (i.e. you have to call his name several times before he responds to something you said, asked or requested), “robotic” movements (not in the sense that they’re “stiff” but more in the sense that they’re almost “automatic” or lack spontaneity and/or passion) and/or the inability to remember what happened during the time in question. Sometimes a survivor’s voice may change or anything said may be spoken in flat, unemotional tones. Partners of those who dissociate during sex have said that it almost seems as if their survivor is “not there”. Some partners will accuse a survivor of fantasizing about someone else during sex because their survivor has dissociated and isn’t really a “full participant”.

However your survivor deals with intimacy and/or sexual activity/physical touch, it’s going to take time to change that response. It can take years for some survivors to become comfortable with physical touch. If, as a partner, you don’t want to spend many months or even years without sexual contact with the one you love, then you really need to give serious thought to getting into— or remaining in— a relationship with a survivor. You also need to remember that sex is a want but not a need. You can ask your survivor if she can fulfill your want, but if she can’t, you have to respect that. If sex is a need to you, then you have issues you need to deal with because you really won’t die without sex. A survivor’s rejection of physical touch or sex is usually not a rejection of you.

Many might be more concerned with how to deal with the frustration more than identifying all the various forms frustration a partner may feel. Since, in the end, frustration is really a form of “specialized anger”, all of the tactics that you can use to deal with anger also work for dealing with frustration. The main point for this chapter was to show you that you’re not alone. That others are going through and have gone through the same frustrations you’re feeling now in your relationship with your survivor. Sometimes, just knowing your not alone can relieve a good deal of the frustration. Here’s hoping that’s the case for you.

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<sup>10</sup> I couldn’t find the original article, so I found this story about the survey Ann Landers did. “The Lady With All The Answers”; CBS News; June 23, 2002; <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/06/23/national/main513120.shtml>

## Unconditional Love

There are a lot of misconceptions out there about unconditional love. Unconditional love does not mean that you place no conditions on your survivor's behavior. Quite the contrary. You *must* place conditions on the survivor's behavior because the first person you have to love unconditionally (or at least as close as we humans can come to that ideal) is yourself. When you love yourself unconditionally, you don't allow others to treat you like dirt, which is where setting healthy boundaries comes into play.

Setting boundaries is not putting conditions on your love: it is putting conditions on whether or not you stay in the relationship. Unconditional love means that no matter what your survivor does, your love for them does not lessen. It does not mean you have to like, condone, agree with or participate in any behavior they may choose to engage in, but it does mean that simply engaging in that behavior does not mean you love them any less. This can be a difficult concept to grasp for many people so I think a few examples would be in order.

One of the most common examples we see of unconditional love is that between a parent and a child. I remember a particularly moving example of unconditional love from the news many years ago. A young man had crashed his car into a school bus while driving intoxicated. The impact had caused an explosion in which several young children had died. The young man was arrested on charges of vehicular homicide and taken to the local jail. His mother went to visit him shortly after his arrest and was besieged by reporters when she came out of the jailhouse. They had microphones in her face and were shouting questions at her faster than she could answer them. She finally made a brief statement that, while I am unable to recall her exact words, went something like this: "My heart breaks for all the parents, families and friends of those young children who were killed. I do not condone what my son did. It was wrong and he will pay for it for the rest of his life. And so will I. But he is still my son and I still love him as much as I always have."

I'm sure there are many parents out there whose children have at one time or another screamed "I hate you" to them. I know mine have. But it doesn't change how much we love our kids even when they scream mean and nasty things like that to us. This too is an example of unconditional love.

It is admittedly harder to demonstrate unconditional love for a partner than for one's child, but it is possible even in the face of such difficult issues as infidelity or drug/alcohol abuse. The key, I believe, is to remember what we were unable to recognize as children: that there is a difference between a person and his/her actions. That the person is not defined by his/her hurtful or harmful actions. Or, more accurately, that a person is far more than his/her hurtful or harmful actions. And as much as we may not want to admit it, this applies even to those who commit horrendous crimes. How many times has a child molester been caught only to have his neighbors say how surprised they were because he was a firefighter or such a good pastor or a wonderful friend or a terrific nurse? That doesn't lessen the seriousness of the crimes committed, but it also doesn't lessen the good things that person may have done with their life. They are still someone's child.

Of course, being able to differentiate between a survivor and her harmful actions doesn't guarantee that the relationship will succeed. As a partner of a survivor, you must still set healthy boundaries. But loving someone unconditionally means that your love does not lessen even though those boundaries are violated and you must, for your own protection, end the relationship. It does mean that even if you are apart, you will love them none the less. Loving someone unconditionally essentially means that you accept them as they are and respect their right to make choices for their own lives. You don't have to like those choices, agree with them or participate in them. One former partner of a survivor put it this way when she said, "It got to the point where I didn't even want to be around the person he was choosing to be because I didn't

like who I was or how I felt when he was around. But part of me will always love him and I still hope he finds the love and happiness he's looking for."

Many people have a problem knowing that their current partner still unconditionally loves a former partner. I believe this is because too many people believe there's only so much love we can give. Love is not like a pie where we only have so much to dole out before we've got no more to give. Love, especially unconditional love, is like sunlight: no matter how much we use it up or give it out, there's always just as much there to give. And you don't need to be standing next to someone in order for them to feel the warmth from the sun's rays.

In my pastoral counseling, I have compared loving a former partner who is no longer part of your life to loving a partner who has passed on. For both, there is a period of mourning that must be gone through: mourning for the dreams and hopes that will no longer come true. But for someone who unconditionally loves a survivor but can no longer allow themselves to be in the relationship, the death is not a physical death but a metaphorical death. It is the "death" of all the potential the relationship had. It is the "death" of all the potential that survivor has and cannot use until she makes the decision to heal. Until that time, a survivor is only a ghost of who they can be. There's a song written by Emily Saliers of the Indigo Girls called "Ghost" that, in one verse, virtually sums up what it's like loving a survivor who has chosen not to heal (even though the song has nothing to do with loving a survivor):

I feel it like a sickness, how this love is killing me  
But I walk into the fingers of your fire willingly  
And dance the edge of sanity I've never been this close  
In love with your ghost.

Just like someone who has lost a partner to a physical death, you're in love with the ghost of the one who is gone from your life. But that doesn't mean that you can't love someone else with all your heart and soul at the same time. Most people have no problem getting into a relationship with a widow(er) who still loves their deceased spouse, yet many people are unwilling to get into a relationship with someone who still loves their "deceased" survivor. My guess is that the mere possibility, no matter how slim, that the survivor will walk back into a partner's life is what makes the difference. That saddens me if that is indeed the case....so much love lost or denied over insecurities and low sense of self-worth....

## Forgiving and Forgetting

Forgiving and forgetting is perhaps one of the skills you will use the most in a relationship with a survivor. They're actually skills we need to know in any relationship, but they're even more important in a relationship with a survivor because of all the "testing" they do.

There are many who would argue that you can't forgive someone who doesn't ask for it or who doesn't think they've done anything wrong. If this were true, then your ability to forgive—and thereby let go of the past and begin to heal—is in the hands of another individual. What if the individual who hurt you was a rapist or a mugger and you never saw them again or even knew who they were? To suggest that unless they ask for your forgiveness you cannot give it to them means that anyone who is the victim of a crime by someone who is never caught can never begin to heal. The same would be true if the one who hurt you died before you could forgive them. You'd be doomed to never heal if they have to ask for forgiveness in order for you to grant it.

Forgiving is an act of love for yourself. By forgiving someone who hurt you, you are releasing any ties to the past and the pain that it brought you so that you can begin to heal. Because forgiving is something you do for yourself, you can forgive someone even if they never ask for it. Even if they never know you've forgiven them. You can forgive them even if they laugh at you should you tell them they're forgiven. You can forgive someone even if they feel they did nothing wrong.

The only thing you really need to forgive someone is a desire to not continue to relive the pain they brought into your life. It may be helpful to remember that any individual, no matter how much harm s/he may have caused you, is more than the sum total of all their hurtful acts and/or words. It may also help to recognize that the vast majority of us do the best we can with what we know at any given point in our lives. All of us make mistake, especially if we're under stress. I know from my own experience, it's sometimes easier to forgive when I "make up" a story as to why someone did something to me. Let me reuse a very simplistic example and expand on it just a bit.

Say you're driving to work and someone cuts you off in traffic and you slam on your brakes and swerve to the side of the road. In the process you run over a large piece of metal that flattens your tire. The person who cut you off is long gone but you're stuck having to change the tire, replace it and maybe even losing time at work. You can choose to stay mad at this person or you can choose to forgive him for cutting you off and causing you financial harm. To make it easier to let go of the past, you might tell yourself that perhaps this guy just got a phone call telling him that his wife had been in an accident and was in critical condition and not expected to live. That would make anyone hurry to get to the hospital and even be distracting enough so that they didn't know they were cutting other people off and driving like a maniac. So you take a deep breath and say that you forgive him. And you just let it go.

Forgiving something like infidelity is obviously going to be more difficult because the pain caused is more personal and hits close to the heart.

- Keep in mind that most survivors don't have any idea what constitutes healthy boundaries with respect to who they have sex with.
- Remember that survivors have often been taught that sex is not tied to commitment or monogamy— their abuser may have been their married uncle or a family friend who always brought his girlfriend with him when he visited.
- Remember that survivors often think that their only value is that of a sexual object and/or that there is sex involved in virtually every relationship that you form.
- Remember that survivors often don't know how to say no or to stop someone from having sexual contact with them because saying no and trying to stop sexual contact as a child never worked. Just like if you chain a baby elephant to a stake in the ground that he can't pull

out, even as an adult, the elephant won't even try to pull it out once he feels something around his leg, even if it's now just a rope that he could easily break. The elephant has been programmed to believe that it is impossible to pull out the stake and so it never tries! Survivors usually, at some point during their childhood, simply give up trying to stop the abuse because the only thing it usually does is to cause them to feel more pain from an angry abuser. They simply don't recognize that, as an adult, they have the power to stop the abuse.

- Remember that, as a child, there was often no force or threats involved in the abuse: the abuser acted and the child did what s/he was told. As an adult, this same programming is often still in effect: someone tells your survivor to get undressed and climb into bed and they simply do it because that's how it works in their mind!
- Even if your survivor tells you that she cheated on you because she was mad at you, you need to remember that she most likely has no healthy anger management skills or coping mechanisms or conflict resolution skills. She struck out in anger by giving to someone else what she feels is her only asset of value: her body to use for their sexual pleasure.
- Perhaps most importantly, remember the love you have for your survivor. Remember the person you fell in love with. Remember the potential you saw inside them— potential they may not even know they have. Sometimes that potential gets hidden by all the garbage they have to deal with from the abuse, but it's still there!

Forgiving something like infidelity usually isn't something you're going to be able to accomplish overnight. You may need to go through a period of mourning for what was lost in your relationship, such as the knowledge that you were the only one she had kissed like that since you became a couple. On the other hand, you may find that your anger is directed more against the individual she had the fling with for taking advantage of her. You may not even feel that she needs to be forgiven because she did nothing wrong since she didn't know how to stop it. But then you need to work on forgiving the individual who took advantage of her— although s/he may not have known s/he was taking advantage of anyone. Still, that's a lot like forgiving her abuser and that's probably the toughest person you'll ever have to forgive.

Forgiving does not mean you're going to stay in a relationship with your survivor. If, for example, your survivor is an alcoholic and refuses to get help for his drinking problem (in fact, refuses to acknowledge he has a drinking problem), you can forgive him but still have to leave the relationship to protect yourself. Forgiveness simply means you are releasing the hold the past has over you to continue to inflict pain. It means you have chosen to heal from the past and allow the wounds to heal rather than reopening them every time you remember the past and it hurts you all over again. Forgiving, as difficult as it can be, is often the easier of the two.

Forgetting is an act of love for the one who hurt you. Forgetting is not always necessary. Someone who was raped by a stranger, for example, doesn't have to worry about "forgetting" because in all likelihood, she'll never see the man again. By "forgetting", I don't mean not remembering. If you don't remember what you have gone through, then the lessons you learned from the experience will be lost to you. As the old adage says, those who don't remember the past are doomed to repeat it. By forgetting I mean not bringing it up to use it against the one who hurt you at a later date. For example, not bringing up her affair when you're having an argument or not bringing up his DUI when he forgets to mail the bills and you get charged late fees.

Forgetting forces us to silence our almost instinctive "fight-back-with-the-biggest-weapon-you-have" urge. In stressful situations like arguments with our partners, because we love them so much, their words can initially cause us a lot of pain and hurt feelings. When we are hurting, our subconscious mind seeks to make the pain stop or at the very least to retaliate in kind in the hope that causing the other person pain will make them stop causing us pain. So we dig up all the painful things they did to us in the past and throw them in their face in an effort to make them stop hurting us in the present. When you forgive and forget, you have to resist the urge to dig up the past. To use that painful weapon in the heat of the moment.

You also have to refuse to use the past as a lever to get what you want in the present. If you're going to forgive and forget, you can't, for example, say something like, "I forgave you for cheating on me! The least you can do is buy me that diamond ring!" You can't use it for justification for doing something you don't tell him about: "I forgave him for cheating. He doesn't have to know that I bought this ring for myself." And you can't use it to change another's perception of you. For example, let's say his mother doesn't like you. You can't say "I forgave him for cheating on me!" in the hopes that she'll like you better.

Forgiving and forgetting are not going to be easy things to do all the time. But they are part of the healing process that many partners of survivors have to go through. Even if we know our survivor didn't mean to hurt us, sometimes we still get hurt. And that means we need to heal. Sometimes, in order to heal, we need to end our relationship with our survivor.

# The Decision to Leave

Hope Alone (music and lyrics by Emily Saliers of the Indigo Girls)

Let's not drag this out, everything's in motion  
Though I've only ever loved you kind and with devotion  
I remember when I met you and even from the start  
I thought one day you'd probably just come home and break my heart  
It's funny what you know and still go on pretending  
With no good evidence you'll ever see that happy ending  
You were looking for your distance  
And sensing my resistance you had to do your will  
I had to learn the hard way  
We were just an empty dream too big for hope alone to fill  
I know I'm a dreamer, so I'll give you that  
Still I hope I'm more than just a place you laid your hat  
You're a land of secrets, its only citizen  
And though I paid my dues I was never allowed in  
And so I am a stranger but especially today  
As I get sad and lonely and you get your way  
You were looking for your distance  
And sensing my resistance you had to do your will  
I had to learn the hard way  
We were just an empty dream too big for hope alone to fill  
Holding out for change I know we never stood a chance  
So I could only wait and watch you slip right through my hands

\* \* \* \* \*

It is the intent of this book to offer a realistic idea of what you may encounter in a relationship with a survivor of abuse. And realistically, sometimes forgiving and forgetting and shared hopes and dreams and unconditional love aren't enough to keep a relationship going. There are no hard statistics as to how many relationships with survivors succeed and, in truth, it really wouldn't prove anything. After all, there's only a one in a trillion chance of winning the lottery and someone always wins, right? Rest assured that your chances of a successful relationship with a survivor are much better than your chance of winning the lottery.

There are several factors that make it more or less likely that a relationship with a survivor will succeed, but they really aren't all that different from the factors that make it more or less likely that a relationship with a non-survivor will succeed. They include (but are not limited to):

- willingness of each party to seek professional therapy/counseling, either joint or individual
- how hard each is willing to work on their own issues
- how long the relationship has been around before healing begins
- what other issues must be dealt with such as financial problems, illness, disability, etc. all of which add stress to an already stressful situation.
- how closely you mirror/share your hopes and dreams and beliefs

The lyrics to the song "Hope Alone" are so apropos when applied to relationships with survivors who have chosen not to heal. No matter how much we may love them, it is very likely that one day our hearts will be broken when they leave or we have to leave. We feel that we've paid our dues when we "put up" with all their behaviors and sit with them through the flashbacks and nightmares and illnesses and yet often they still shut us out and don't let us in. And there's not a thing we can do as we watch them slip away from us slowly but surely.

Many partners put off leaving, afraid of hurting their survivor more than they've already been hurt. Unfortunately, many wait until they build up so much resentment that the likelihood of

an amicable separation is very low. This is another reason setting healthy boundaries **and** following through on the consequences is so important. It helps you to reach the decision to end the relationship before the resentment becomes too strong. Remember, if you discover that a consequence you set is too harsh when the boundary is actually broken, it's okay to set a different consequence, as long as it's always "less" than the original.

Only you know when you have had enough. When you reach that point, you need to give yourself permission to leave the relationship. If you can, in your heart, say that you did your best to make things work, then you have no need to carry any guilt for the ending of the relationship. A relationship is a two way street and one person can't make it work all by herself. Even if your survivor is trying to make it work, it's still possible that you are doing too much to keep the relationship alive in the sense that it's beyond your ability to keep it up. There's no shame in that. But should you decide to leave, there are some things you should try to do for your own good.

- When you inform your survivor of your decision to end the relationship, do it gently and when they're not already totally stressed out. Be clear about why you are leaving.
- Avoid the blame game— either laying blame or accepting blame. It's fine to accept responsibility for your own mistakes, but remember that you did the best you could with what you had/knew at the time. Blame implies intentional wrongdoing and if you've tried your best, there's no blame to go around. This applies to your survivor as well. Even their choice not to heal is the best they can do at that point in their life.
- Attempt to resolve any unresolved issues. This won't always be possible but you should get as many resolved as possible.
- Trying to maintain a friendship during this time plays havoc on the heart and usually prolongs the pain and the mourning period. It may be possible to be friends later on but for the immediate future, you should at the very least minimize your contact to that which is absolutely necessary. Of course, if children are involved you will have to remain in contact and remain civil towards each other for the sake of the children. Don't put the children in the middle or use them as pawns for any unresolved issues with your survivor.
- Don't jump into another relationship right away. You need time to process all you've learned and experienced without the added complications of a new relationship. Remember the old adage about learning from history? Do you really want to go through this again?
- Find a hobby, join a support group, volunteer for a community service, join a gym or take up a new sport. Find something to keep you active/busy so you don't stay cooped up inside your home brooding and getting more and more depressed.
- If you're already in therapy, keep going. If you're not, start going. An objective third party can be a wonderful tool to helping you see the mistakes you might have made as well as the things you did right.

The decision to leave does not mean that you're going to be able to shut off your love for your survivor, which often makes it all the more painful to leave. But you have to love yourself as well and when you reach the point where staying in the relationship is causing more harm than providing benefits, it's not doing either of you any good to remain. Leaving may be the most loving thing you can do for both of you.

# Healing

Healing for a partner involves healing from her own issues *not* those of the survivor. Someone who is certain of their own self-worth, someone who recognizes the difference between needs and wants and who has healthy ways of getting what they want, someone who is able to give unconditional love, someone who is able to forgive and forget, someone who knows how to set and enforce healthy boundaries will have very few problems (relatively speaking) in being in a relationship with a survivor.

In truth, all of us have self-esteem issues. All of us have trust issues. All of us have intimacy issues. All of us have most of the issues that survivors have to face. The difference is that most of us have a solid foundation of relatively healthy boundaries and experiences to draw upon to help us cope with these issues so that they don't become so overwhelming and so destructive. Survivors usually either lack this foundation or the trauma they suffer (such as rape) is so overwhelming that the subconscious' self-protection mode overrides that foundation.

There is a direct corollary between how quickly one gets mental health help after the abuse/trauma and how easily one finds the healing journey. Children who are sexually abused and who are placed in counseling while they're still children often avoid most of the long-term side effects of the abuse. The same could probably be said about how quickly a partner seeks counseling after getting into a relationship with a survivor and the chance of success of that relationship. But again, a partner's counseling must focus on how to deal with their own issues: how to handle their frustrations, how to deal with their anger, how to set healthy boundaries, how to meet their own wants, how to forgive and forget and, most importantly, how to love themselves unconditionally. Once you learn how to do that, the rest fall into place like knocking over a line of dominoes.

One of the biggest problems in healing for partners of survivors is often the reactions of those around you. If you find it in your heart to forgive a survivor who has an affair, society is going to tell you you're asking for trouble. They'll remind you that if they cheated once, they'll do it again. If they cheat twice and you still forgive and forget, they're going to think you're a fool. You may lose a large part of your support system to those who think if you're stupid enough to take him back after he cheated twice, you deserve whatever troubles you get.

Most of us have been subconsciously programmed from birth that wants and needs are the same thing; that ego and self-esteem are the same thing; that blame and responsibility are the same thing; that loving someone unconditionally is impossible; that there are some things you simply cannot forgive and forget; that loving the self is selfish and/or egotistical. When you try to buck the system, the system bucks back. Human beings, in general, are afraid of change and the unknown and changing attitudes of society is like pulling teeth from an angry lion.

Too many people still believe that a woman walking in a short, tight dress is partly blame if she's raped. Or that a child who doesn't speak up about being abused can't be all that damaged. Families still worry more about their social status or what the neighbors might say than the emotional health of their children. Far too many people still think that it's not their business if it's not happening in their home or otherwise not affecting them. We have judges who still insist that a history of abuse be shown before granting a protection from abuse order, as if the first attack that left the victim in the hospital fighting for her life is not enough. We have a medical system that allows some of their employees to refuse to dispense emergency contraceptives because it violates the employee's beliefs. We have a judicial system that essentially rapes a victim of abuse all over again by allowing character assassinations by defense attorneys. We have an education system that is teaching a new version of the three Rs— recitation, repetition and regurgitation— in their quest for conformity because it's easier to teach the same thing to everyone instead of teaching critical thinking skills and encouraging creativity.

Modern society, at least in America, is so focused on “taking care of number one” that the ideals of forgiveness, compassion, turning the other cheek and helping others no longer mean much of anything. It’s almost as if they’re now seen as the makings of a fool and we all know that a fool gets what he deserves.

The gap between the haves and the have-nots is growing ever wider, leaving many with such limited resources that they can’t afford the cost of counseling. Meanwhile, our government has cut so much funding for social service agencies that many survivors are left without any help along their healing path.

Too many people look for the quick fix and don’t want to put in the effort that it takes to do things right. (“Right” in the sense of in a manner that provides positive results to everyone involved.) Rather than learn to forgive and forget, we just divorce or break up. Rather than learn how to set healthy boundaries, we scream and yell and fight and blame, reinforcing the negative beliefs already held by so many about their value as a person. Rather than help others learn how to fish, we toss them a fish because it’s less of a bother for us. We’re taught to enable rather than to empower because empowering takes too much time and time is money.

We can see the effects on our society. Divorce is near an all-time high. Child abuse, for all the prevention programs, is still an epidemic. Rapists and child molesters are freed from jail while someone who was arrested three times for possession of small amounts of marijuana rots in a jail cell for the rest of his life because of misguided three-strike laws that were put in place as a quick fix to our governments failure to win the “war on drugs”— as if such a war was actually winnable. Didn’t we learn anything from Prohibition? Meanwhile, the two most addictive and deadly drugs on the market are not only legal but are providing the government with billions of dollars in revenue every year despite the fact that alcohol and tobacco kill more people in this country in one year than all the other illegal drugs in this country combined kill in ten years. We’re engaging in self-destructive behaviors at ever increasing rates. The rates of mental illnesses like depression and anxiety attacks are on the rise. Media personalities who publicly humiliate others by calling them names like “faggots” are paid millions and find honor and prestige among millions for their verbal abuse. We’re becoming desensitized to the death and destruction so much so that there was no real massive rebellion against our government for fighting to legalize the physical, emotional, mental, verbal, spiritual and sexual abuse of another human being. Never before in the history of this country— not even during the Civil War— have the people of this nation been so divided. We’ve become a nation of extremists. Most people in society now think in much the same way as a survivor does: you’re either with me or you’re against me.

I’m sure many of you are wondering what all this has to do with healing. We humans don’t live in a vacuum. We need one another not only to survive as a race but to thrive as individuals. When we’re this polarized, we’re not only going to destroy ourselves but it makes it that much harder for those who are trying to heal to find support and assistance. Just as a survivor and her partner need to heal, we as a society need to heal so that we can get rid of the problem instead of putting band-aids on the gaping wounds it causes. If we have to do that one person at a time, then that’s how we’ll do it. It is my hope that this book and the list of resources in the next chapter will aid you in your own healing journey and help you to make your relationship with your survivor a successful one.

If you found this book helpful, please tell your friends about it. Permission is hereby granted to anyone to copy this book unaltered and distribute it free of charge to anyone they think may benefit from it.

## Resources

Fortunately, the list of resources for partners of survivors is growing thanks in large part to the internet. Through the internet, the sheer numbers and the vast need could finally be seen. Of course, there is a downside. Those out to make a quick buck jumped on the band-wagon, some of them more interested in making money than in helping someone in a relationship with a survivor.

Use your discretion when joining any of the email lists or forums. Some allow you to read messages without joining while others do not. Be careful what information you share since you really don't know who's getting that information.

Inclusion in this list of resources does *not* imply endorsement of or agreement with the contents or ideas expressed in this book by any organization, author or website. These are simply resources that I have found helpful in my own healing journey or that others have recommended to me.

Many of the resources listed here, especially the online articles, are written more for the survivor. But I believe they offer valuable insight into the issues facing many survivors and can help a partner understand on a deeper level what his/her survivor is going through. Also, when your survivor decides it's time to heal but doesn't know where to turn, you may be able to help point them in the right direction. Many of the miscellaneous links are to pages that contain many more links to groups and organizations that are dedicated to helping the healing process for survivors and their loved ones.

I feel as if I have to place the first resource in a class by itself. **The Wounded Healer** is a website that offers a lot of resources for survivors but it also has a very extensive listing of resources for what they termed "allies" of survivors. I do not believe the list has been updated lately and some of the links are no longer working, but it is still a great resource for partners of survivors.

### **The Wounded Healer's Partners And Allies of Sexual Assault Survivors Resources List**

Site URL: <http://twhj.com/allies.shtml>

### ***Articles (Online) (Listed alphabetically by title)***

#### **Am I Gay Because of The Abuse?** by Kali Munro

Site URL: [http://www.kalimunro.com/article\\_gay\\_abuse.html](http://www.kalimunro.com/article_gay_abuse.html)

#### **(The) Effects of child sexual abuse on the adult survivor** by SIA

Site URL: <http://www.siaowo.org/Default.aspx?pagelD=5143>

#### **From Victim to Survivor: A Group Treatment Model for Women**

##### **Survivors of Incest** by Brenda J. Saxe

Site URL: [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence/html/nfntsvictimssurviv\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence/html/nfntsvictimssurviv_e.html)

[Note: This article details how to form a group for female survivors of incest. I have placed it here because it gives some good insight into what kind of issues are being faced by survivors, especially of incest. It also has some good ground rules for discussion of issues surrounding the abuse that you can adapt to fit your own life.]

#### **Violence and Its Impact on Womens Lives** by Desiree Hoffman-Hizi

Site URL: <http://www.ywca.org/site/pp.asp?c=djISI6PIKpG&b=281418>

### ***Books (Listed alphabetically by title)***

#### **Allies in Healing** by Laura Davis

#### **Beginning to Heal** by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis

#### **Choices** by Melody Beattie

#### **Codependent No More** by Melody Beattie

#### **Courage to Heal** by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis

[Note: This book is written mainly for female survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Reading through it may help a partner better understand the issues involved in healing.]

**Dance of Anger** by Harriet Lerner, Ph.D.

**Dance of Intimacy** by Harriet Lerner, Ph.D.

**Empowering Women** by Louise Hay

**Ghosts in the Bedroom** by Ken Graber

**If She Is Raped: A Guidebook for Husbands, Fathers and**

**Friends** by Alan McEvoy and Jeff Brookings

**Lovers & Survivors: A Partner's Guide to Living with & Loving  
a Sexual Abuse Survivor** by Yvette S. DeBeixedon

**Outgrowing the Pain Together: A Book for Spouses & Partners  
of Adults Abused as Children** by Eliana Gil

**Partners in Recovery: How Mates, Lovers, & Other**

**ProSurvivors Can Learn to Support & Cope with Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual  
Abuse** by Beverly Engel

**(The) Power Is Within You** by Louise Hay

**Self-Esteem Tools for Recovery** by Lindsey Hall and Leigh Cohn

**Survivors No Longer** by Mike Lew (for men)

**To Be an Anchor in the Storm : A Guide for Families and**

**Friends of Abused Women** by Susan Brewster

**You Can Heal Your Life** by Louise Hay

**Email Lists (Listed alphabetically by name)**

**Loved Ones of Survivors of Abuse**

Site URL: <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/loosoa/>

**Making Peace with the Past**

URL: <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/MakingPeaceWithThePast/>

**Paired**

Site URL: <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/paired/>

**Positive Partners of Survivors**

URL: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/positivepartnersofsurvivors/>

**(The) Saferoom Project**

Site URL: <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/theSRP/>

**Forums (Online) (Listed alphabetically by name)**

**Abuse Survivors**

Site URL: <http://forums.delphiforums.com/abusesurvivors2>

**Healing Horizons**

Site URL: <http://forums.delphiforums.com/healinghorizons>

**~ isurvive.org**

Site URL: <http://www.isurvive.org/>

**Living With DID/MPD**

Site URL: <http://forums.delphiforums.com/livingdid>

[Note: This forum is for those who have been diagnosed with DID (Dissociative Identity Disorder) and those who love them.]

**MamaP's House**

Site URL: <http://forums.delphiforums.com/mamapshouse>

**NeedID Exchange**

Site URL: <http://forums.delphiforums.com/needidex>

[Note: This forum is for those who have been diagnosed with DID (Dissociative Identity Disorder) and those who support them.]

**Pandora's Aquarium**

<http://www.pandys.org/>

**Rainbow Hope**

Site URL: <http://forums.delphiforums.com/rainbowhope>

[Note: This site is primarily for lesbian survivors of abuse and their partners and is the backup site should the main site go down.]

**Rape Recovery Forum**

Site URL: <http://forums.delphiforums.com/rapehealing>

**Survivor's Journey**

Site URL: <http://forums.delphiforums.com/JourneyTogether>

**Miscellaneous Resources (Listed alphabetically by name)****Abuse/Incest Support**

Site URL: <http://incestabuse.about.com/>

**Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists**

Site URL: [http://www.atss.info/trauma\\_tips.htm](http://www.atss.info/trauma_tips.htm)

[Note: This site deals with all sorts of trauma but their tips on common reactions to trauma and tips for dealing with those reactions may be helpful in your relationship with your survivor.]

**Child Abuse: Statistics, Research and Resources**

Site URL: <http://www.jimhopper.com/abstats/>

**Child Welfare Information Gateway**

Site URL: <http://www.childwelfare.gov/>

**Family Violence Prevention Fund**

Site URL: <http://endabuse.org/>

**Intimate Partner Violence**

Site URL: <http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=41728>

**Male Survivor**

Site URL: <http://www.malesurvivor.org/>

**Rainbow Hope**

Site URL: <http://www.rainbowhope.org/index.php>

[Note: This site is primarily for lesbian survivors and their partners. In addition to a forum for discussion, it also has a library of articles on various topics.]

**Stop It Now!**

Site URL: <http://www.stopitnow.org/>

[Note: This site focuses on prevention and warning signs of ongoing abuse. As a sort of afterthought, getting involved in an organization to prevent childhood sexual abuse and/or raise awareness about the damage it causes is a good outlet for one's anger and frustration.]

**Voices in Action, Inc.**

Site URL: <http://www.voices-action.org/linkspage.html>

**Secondary Survivors**

Site URL: <http://www.survivingtothriving.org/secondariesurvivors>

**Sounding Board Counseling Center**

Site URL: <http://www.sboard.org/resources.htm?>

[Note: This site provides a state by state listing of all known domestic violence shelters. However, since child sexual abuse is a form of domestic violence, these shelters can also help survivors locate counseling services and other resources and may be able to provide the same help to partners.]

**Survivors and Friends**

Site URL: <http://www.sandf.org/index.asp>

**Abuse/Rape Crisis Centers (Listed alphabetically state and then, under each state, alphabetically by name of city)**

There's no way to list an abuse/rape crisis center for everyone who needs one. With that in mind, I have included some national organizations that list shelters and crisis centers around the country. All these sites have an online presence and some have a toll-free number you can call 24/7 and they'll give you the address or phone number of the shelter closest to you.

Additionally, I have included information on the statewide agency/coalition that deals with sexual abuse/rape. The vast majority have a website that gives details about shelters/crisis centers within the state on a county by county basis. Unfortunately, many of the crisis centers/shelters do not have a web presence and you may only get a phone number. (Many shelters keep the exact location of their facilities private for the protection of the clients).

Finally, I have included a smattering of centers from each state, although some of the smaller or less populated states have all their centers listed on one website. Many of the shelters listed don't have a toll free-number, but they do have a 24/7 emergency line. While some may see it as redundant to put these sites here since they can access them from the national or state sites, you never know when you're going to need a number but not have access to a computer or long distance services. [Please note, you may not need to dial the "1" in front of the numbers depending on where you live.]

Site URLs and phone numbers may change without notice. If you are unable to reach a site listed by the information given, try one of the state or national lines.

### **Nationwide:**

An Abuse, Rape and Domestic Violence Aid and Resource Collection (AARDVARC): (No phone number available)

Site URL: <http://www.aardvarc.org/victim/states/>

(The) National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence: (No phone number available)

Site URL: <http://www.ncdsv.org/index.html>

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence: (No phone number)

Site URL: <http://www.ncadv.org/>

(The) National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE

Site URL: <http://www.ndvh.org/>

Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network (RAINN): 1-800-656-HOPE

Site URL: <http://www.rainn.org/>

**Alabama:** Alabama Coalition Against Rape

<http://www.acar.org/main.asp>

**Birmingham, AL:**

Crisis Center: 1-888-323-7273

Site URL: <http://www.crisiscenterbham.com/>

**Huntsville, AL:**

Crisis Services of North Alabama

Site URL: <http://www.csna.org/>

**Alaska:** Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

<http://www.andvsa.org>

**Anchorage, AK:**

Standing Together Against Rape: 1-800-478-8999

Site URL: <http://www.staralaska.com/scripts/home.asp>

**Kenai, AK:**

The LeeShore Center: 907-283-7257

Site URL: <http://www.alaska.net/~leeshore/>

**Arizona:** Arizona Sexual Assault Network  
<http://www.azsan.org>

**Tempe, AZ:**  
Empact Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-866-205-5229  
Sexual Assault Hotline (Maricopa County): 1-480-736-4949  
Site URL: <http://www.empact-spc.com/>

**Tuscon, AZ:**  
Southern Arizona Center Against Sexual Assault: 1-800-400-1001  
Site URL: <http://www.sacasa.org/>

**Arkansas:** The Arkansas Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
<http://www.acasa.ws/>  
1-866-63-ACASA

**Fort Smith, AR:**  
Crisis Center for Women: 1-800-359-0056  
Site URL: <http://www.crisiscenterforwomen.org/ccfw/index.asp>

**North Little Rock, AR:**  
Family Service Agency Rape Crisis Center: 1-877-432-5368  
Site URL: <http://www.helpingfamiliesfirst.org/rape-crisis-center/>

**California:** California Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
<http://www.calcasa.org/>

**Claremont, CA:**  
Project Sister: 1-909-626-HELP (4357)  
Site URL: <http://www.projectsister.org/>

**Lancaster, CA:**  
Sexual Assault Response Service of Antelope Valley Hospital:  
1-661-723-RAPE (7273)  
Site URL: [http://www.avhospital.org/avhcd/about\\_us/community\\_benefits/sars0.html](http://www.avhospital.org/avhcd/about_us/community_benefits/sars0.html)

**Madera, CA:**  
Madera Community Action Partnership: 1-800-355-8989  
Site URL: <http://www.maderacap.org/victim.html>

**Sacramento, CA:**  
WEAVE, Inc.: 1-916-920-2952  
Site URL: <http://www.weaveinc.org/>

**San Diego, CA:**  
Center for Community Solutions: 1-888-DVLINKS (385-4657)  
Site URL: <http://www.ccssd.org/index.html>

**San Fernando Valley, CA:**  
Valley Trauma Center: 1-818-886-0453  
Site URL: <http://www.csun.edu/vtc/>

**Santa Clarita Valley, CA:**  
Valley Trauma Center: 1-661-253-0258  
Site URL: <http://www.csun.edu/vtc/>

**Santa Monica, CA:**

Rape Treatment Center at Santa Monica-UCLA Medical Center: 310-319-4000

Site URL: <http://www.911rape.org/>

**South Lake Tahoe, CA:**

South Lake Tahoe Women's Center: 1-530 544-4444

Site URL: <http://www.sltwc.org/>

**Woodland, CA:**

Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Center of Yolo County:

1-530-662-1133 or 1-916-371-1907

Site URL: <http://www.sadvc.org/>

**Colorado:** Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault

<http://www.ccasa.org/>

**Aspen, CO:**

Response Helps: 1-970-925-SAFE (7233)

Site URL: <http://www.responsehelps.org/index.php?lang=eng>

**Boulder, CO:**

Moving to End Sexual Assault (MESA): 1-303-443-7300

Site URL: <http://www.movingtoendsexualassault.org/>

**Colorado Springs, CO:**

TESSA: 1-719-633-3819

Site URL: <http://www.tessacs.org/>

**Denver, CO:**

Rape Assistance and Awareness Program: 1-303-322-7273

Site URL: <http://www.raap.org/>

**Greeley, CO:**

Sexual Assault Survivors, Inc. (SASI): 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

Site URL: <http://www.survivorinfo.org/>

**Loveland, CO:**

Alternatives to Violence: Access all ATV services by calling 911

Site URL: <http://alternativestoviolence.org/index.html>

**Connecticut:** Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services

<http://www.connsacs.org/>

1-888-999-5545 English

1-888-568-8332 Español

**Danbury, CT:**

Women's Center of Greater Danbury, Inc.: 1-203-731-5204

Site URL: <http://www.womenscenterofgreaterdanbury.org/>

**Millford, CT:**

Rape Crisis Center: 1-888-999-5545

Site URL: <http://www.rapecrisisctr.org/>

**Delaware:** Contact Delaware  
<http://www.contactdelaware.org/>  
1-800-262-9800

**District of Columbia:** DC Rape Crisis Center  
<http://www.dcrcc.org/>  
1-202-333-RAPE

**Florida:** Florida Council Against Sexual Violence  
<http://www.fcasv.org/>  
1-888-956-RAPE (7273)

**Bradenton, FL:**  
Manatee Glens: 1-941-708-6059  
Site URL: <http://www.manateeglens.com/services.htm>

**Fort Myers, FL:**  
Abuse Counseling and Treatment, Inc.: 1-239-939-2553  
Site URL: <http://www.actabuse.com/>

**Sarasota, FL:**  
Safe Place And Rape Crisis Center (SPARCC): 1-941-365-1976  
Site URL: <http://www.sparcc.net/>

**Tallahassee, FL:**  
Refuge House: 1-800-500-1119  
Site URL: <http://www.refugehouse.com/>

**Tampa Bay, FL:**  
Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, Inc.: 1-813-964-1964  
Site URL: <http://www.crisiscenter.com/>

**Georgia:** Georgia Network to End Sexual Assault  
<http://www.gnesa.com/>  
1-866-354-3672

**Athens, GA:**  
The Sexual Assault Center of Northeast Georgia: 1-877-363-1912  
Site URL: <http://www.sacnega.org/index.htm>

**Carrollton, GA:**  
Carroll Rape Crisis Center, Inc.: 1-770-834-RAPE  
Site URL: <http://www.westga.edu/~crcc/>

**Decatur, GA:**  
DeKalb Rape Crisis Center: 1-404-377-1428  
Site URL: <http://www.dekalbrapecrisiscenter.org/index.php>

**Duluth, GA:**  
Gwinnett Sexual Assault Center: 1-770-476-7407  
Site URL: <http://www.gsac-cac.org/>

**Savannah, GA:**

Rape Crisis Center of the Coastal Empire: 1-888-241- RAPE (7273)

Site URL: <http://rccsav.org/>

**Hawaii:** Hawaii State Coalition for the Prevention of Sexual Assault

1-808-733-9038

**Hilo, HI:**

YWCA of Hawaii Island SAVE: 1-808-935-0677

Site URL: <http://ywcahawaiiisland.org/>

**Ewa Beach (Oahu), HI:** 1-808-681-3500

**Kahului (Maui), HI:** 1-808-877-6888

**Lihue (Kauai), HI:** 1-808-245-5914

**Kealahou (Kona), HI:** 1-808-323-2664

**Kualapu'u (Molokai), HI:** 1-808-567-6100

Child and Family Service

Site URL: <http://www.childandfamilyservice.org/index.php>

**Idaho:** Idaho Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence

<http://www.idvsa.org/>

1-800-669-3176 or 1-800-929-2588

**Driggs, ID:**

Family Safety Network: 1-208-354-SAFE (7233)

Site URL: <http://www.familysafetynetwork.info/index.htm>

**Idaho Falls, ID:**

Rape Response and Crime Victim Center, Inc.: 1-208-521-6018 or

1-208-521-6246

Site URL: <http://www.raperesponse.org/>

**Salmon, ID:**

Mahoney House: 1-208-940-0600

Site URL: <http://mahoneyhouse.com/>

**Illinois:** Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault

<http://www.icasa.org/>

**Aurora, IL:**

Mutual Ground, Inc.: 1-630-897- 8383

Site URL: <http://www.mutualgroundinc.com/>

**Carbondale, IL:**

The Women's Center, Inc.: 1-800-334-2094

Site URL: <http://www.thewomensctr.org/>

**Champagne, IL:**

A Woman's Fund: 1-866-236-3727

Site URL: <http://www.awomansfund.org/>

**Edgemont, IL:**

Call for Help, Inc.: 1-618-397-0977  
Site URL: <http://www.callforhelpinc.org/>

**Joliet, IL:**

Guardian Angel Community Services: 1-815.729.0930  
Site URL: <http://www.guardianangelhome.org/>

**Iroquois, IL:** 1-815-432-0420

**Kankakee, IL:** 1-815-932-3322  
Center Against Sexual Assault  
Site URL: <http://www.kc-casa.org/>

**Rock Island, IL:**

Family Resources, Inc.: 1-309-797-1777  
Site URL: <http://www.famres.org/>

**Indiana:** Indiana Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
<http://www.incasa.org/>  
1-800-691-2272

**Bloomington, IN:**

Middle Way House: 1-812-336-0846  
Site URL: <http://www.bloomington.in.us/~mwhouse/>

**Jasper, IN:****Rockport, IN:****Tell City, IN:**

Crisis Connection: 1-800-245-4590  
Site URL: <http://www.crisisconnectioninc.org/>

**Lafayette, IN:**

Lafayette Crisis Center: 1-877-419-1632  
Site URL: <http://www.lafayettecrisiscenter.org/>

**Sellersburg, IN:**

The Center for Women and Families: 1-877-803-7577  
Site URL: <http://www.thecenteronline.org/>

**Iowa:** Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault

<http://www.iowacasa.org/>  
1-800-284-7821

**Davenport, IA:**

Family Resources, Inc.: 1-563-326-9191  
Site URL: <http://www.famres.org/>

**Fort Dodge, IA:**

Domestic/Sexual Assault Outreach Center: 1-888-356-2006  
Site URL: <http://www.dsaoc.com/>

**Kansas:** Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence

<http://www.kcsdv.org/>  
1-888-END ABUSE (1-888-363-2287)

**Baldwin City, KS:** 1-785-594-6490

**Lawrence, KS:** 1-785-841-2345

GaDuGi SafeCenter: Ask for an RVSS advocate to be paged

Site URL: <http://www.rvss.org/>

**Overland Park, KS:**

Safe Home: 1-888-432-4300

Site URL: <http://www.safehome-ks.org/>

**Wichita, KS:**

Wichita Area Sexual Assault Center: 1-316-363-3002

Site URL: <http://www.wichitasac.com/>

**Kentucky:** Kentucky Association of Sexual Assault Programs Inc

<http://www.kasap.org/>

1-866-375-2727

**Bowling Green, KY:**

Hope Harbor: 1-270-846-1100

Site URL: <http://www.hopeharbor.net/>

**Covington, KY:**

Women's Crisis Center: 1-800-928-3335

Site URL: <http://wccky.org/>

**Louisville, KY:**

The Center for Women and Families: 1-502-581-7200

Site URL: <http://www.thecenteronline.org/>

**Maysville, KY:**

Women's Crisis Center: 1-800-928-6708

Site URL: <http://wccky.org/>

**Louisiana:** Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault

<http://www.lafasa.org/>

1-888-995-7273

**Amite, LA:**

Tri-Parish Victim Assistance Rape Crisis: 1-877-748-6882

Site URL: <http://www.21jdda.org/rapecrisis.html>

**New Orleans:**

Metropolitan Center for Women and Children: 1-888-411-1333

Site URL: <http://www.ibiblio.org/rcip/sara.html>

**Maine:** Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault

<http://www.mecasa.org/>

1-800-871-7741

**Bangor, ME:**

Rape Response Services: 1-800-310-0000

Site URL: <http://www.raperesponseservices.org/>

**Brunswick, ME:**

Sexual Assault Support Services of Midcoast Maine: 1-800-822-5999  
Site URL: <http://www.sassmm.org/>

**Ellsworth, ME:**

Downeast Health Services: 1-800-492-5550  
Site URL: <http://www.downeasthealth.org/>

**Portland, ME:**

Sexual Assault Response Services of Southern Maine: 1-800-313-9900  
Site URL: <http://www.sarsonline.org/>

**Winthrop, ME:**

Sexual Assault Crisis & Support Center: 1-207-377-1010  
Site URL: <http://www.silentnomore.org/default.asp>

**Maryland:** Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
<http://www.mcasa.org/>  
1-800-983-RAPE (7273)

**Baltimore, MD:**

TurnAround, Inc.: 1-410-828-6390  
Site URL: <http://www.turnaroundinc.org/>

**Frederick, MD:**

Heartly House, Inc.: 1-301-662-8800  
Site URL: <http://www.heartlyhouse.org/>

**Rockville, MD:**

Victim Assistance and Sexual Assault Program: 1-240-777-HELP (4357)  
Site URL:  
<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/hhstmpl.asp?url=/content/hhs/vasap/index.asp>

**Westminster, MD:**

Rape Crisis Intervention Service: 1-410-857-7322  
Site URL: <http://www.rapecrisiscc.org/>

**Massachusetts:** Massachusetts Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
and Domestic Violence  
<http://www.janedoe.org/>  
1-877-785-2020

**Cambridge, MA:**

Boston Area Rape Crisis Center: 1-800-841-8371  
Site URL: <http://www.barcc.org/>

**Lowell, MA:**

Rape Crisis Services of Greater Lowell: 1-800-542-5212  
Site URL: <http://www.rcsgl.org/>

**Michigan:** Michigan Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence  
<http://www.mcadsv.org/>

**Ann Arbor, MI:**

Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center: 1-734-936-3333  
Site URL: <http://www.umich.edu/~sapac/>

**Bloomfield Hills, MI:**

Common Ground Sanctuary: 1-800-231-1127

Site URL: <http://www.commongroundsanctuary.org/>

**East Lansing, MI:**

The Listening Ear Crisis Center: 1-517-337-1717

Site URL: <http://www.theear.org/SAC/>

**Grayling, MI:**

River House, Inc.: 1-888-554-3169

Site URL: <http://www.riverhouseshelter.org/>

**Ironwood, MI:**

Domestic Violence Escape, Inc.: 1-906-932-0310

Site URL: <http://www.geocities.com/Wellesley/2678/>

**Marquette, MI:**

Women's Center of Marquette: 1-800-455-6611

Site URL: <http://www.wcmqt.org/>

**Minnesota:** Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault

<http://www.mncasa.org/>

1-800-964-8847

**Burnsville, MN:**

Community Action Council: 1-651-405-1500

Site URL: <http://www.communityactioncouncil.org/> then click on Services and then Sexual Assault Services

**Duluth, MN:**

Program for Aid to Victims of Sexual Assault: 1-866-229-7425

Site URL: <http://www.pavsa.org/>

**Little Falls, MN:** 1-888-454-4878

**Long Prairie, MN:** 1-800-682-4547

Hands of Hope Resource Center

Site URL: <http://www.handsofhope.net/>

**Minneapolis, MN:**

Neighborhood Involvement Project: 1-612-825-4357

Site URL: <http://www.neighborhoodinvolve.org/>

**St. Paul, MN:**

Sexual Offense Services: 1-651-643-3006

Site URL: [http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/ph/yas/sos\\_services.htm](http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/ph/yas/sos_services.htm)

**Thief River Falls, MN:**

Violence Intervention Project: 1-800-660-6667

Site URL: <http://www.violenceintervention.org/>

**Mississippi:** Mississippi Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
<http://www.msCasa.org/index.php>

**Biloxi, MS:**

Gulf Coast Women's Center: 1-228-435-1968  
Site URL: None available

**Columbus, MS**

Safe Haven, Inc.: 1-662-327-2259  
Site URL: None Available

**Tupelo, MS:**

Safe, Inc.: 1-662-841-2273  
Site URL: None Available

**Missouri:** Missouri Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
<http://moca.missouri.org/>

**Joplin, MO:**

Lafayette House: 1-800-416-1772  
Site URL: <http://www.lafayettehouse.org/>

**Parkville, MO:**

Synergy Services: 1-800-491-1114  
Site URL: <http://www.synergyservices.org/>

**Springfield, MO:**

The Victim Center: 1-417-864-7233  
Site URL: <http://www.thevictimcenter.com/>

**St. Louis, MO:**

Women's Support and Community Services: 1-314-531-2003  
Site URL: <http://www.womenssupport.org/>

**Montana:** Montana Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence  
<http://www.mcadsv.com/>

**Bozeman, MT:**

The Voice Center: 1-406-994-7069  
Site URL: <http://www.montana.edu/wwwhs/voice/index.html>  
Note: The 24 hour hotline is only available during academic semesters.

**Butte, MT:**

Safe Space: 1-800-479-8511  
Site URL: <http://www.safespaceonline.org/>

**Glasgow, MT:**

The Women's Resource Center: 1-877-972-3232  
Site URL: <http://www.thewrc.org/contact.htm>

**Helena, MT:**

The Friendship Center: 1-800-248-3166  
Site URL: <http://thefriendshipcenter.org/>

**Thompson Falls, MT:**

Sanders County Coalition For Families: 1-800-265-0415

Site URL: <http://sccff.org/>

**Nebraska:** Nebraska Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Coalition

<http://www.ndvsac.org/index.html>

**Columbus, NE:**

Center for Survivors of Sexual Assault & Domestic Violence:

1-800-658-4482

Site URL: <http://www.citlink.net/~centerforsurvivors/>

**Gering, NE:**

Doves: 1-308-436-4357

Site URL: <http://www.dovesprogram.com/>

**Lincoln, NE:**

Voices of Hope: 1-402-475-7273

Site URL: <http://www.rsacc.org/>

**Nevada:** Nevada Coalition Against Sexual Violence

<http://www.ncasv.org/>

**Carson City, NV:**

Sexual Assault Response Advocates (SARA): 1-775-887-2020

Site URL: <http://www.saraadv.org/>

**Las Vegas, NV:**

Rape Crisis Center: 1-888-366-1640

Site URL: <http://www.therapecrisiscenter.org/>

**Reno, NV:**

Crisis Call Center: 1-800-992-5757

Site URL: <http://www.crisiscallcenter.org/>

**New Hampshire:** New Hampshire Coalition Against Domestic

and Sexual Assault

<http://www.nhcadv.org>

1-800-277-5570

**Concord, NH:**

Rape and Domestic Violence Crisis Center: 1-866-841-6229

Site URL: <http://www.rdvcc.org/>

**Durham, NH:**

Sexual Harassment And Rape Prevention Program: 1-888-271-7233

Site URL: <http://www.unh.edu/sharpp/>

**Portsmouth, NH:**

Sexual Assault Support Services: 1-888-747-7070

Site URL: <http://www.sassnh.org/>

**New Jersey:** New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
<http://www.njcasa.org/home.htm>  
1-800-601-7200

**Camden, NJ:**  
Services Empowering the Rights of Victims: 1-866-295-SERV (7378)  
Site URL: <http://www.centerffs.org/programs/victimservices.html>

**Flemington, NJ:**  
Women's Crisis Services: 1-888-988-4033  
Site URL: <http://www.womenscrisisservices.org/>

**Moorestown, NJ:**  
Contact Burlington: 1-856-234-8888  
Site URL: <http://co.burlington.nj.us/contact/rcare/index.htm>

**Trenton, NJ:**  
Womanspace: 1-609-394-9000  
Site URL: <http://www.womanspace.org/>

**New Mexico:** New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs  
<http://www.swcp.com/nmcsaas/>

**Albuquerque, NM:**  
Albuquerque Rape Crisis Center: 1-505-266-7711  
Site URL: <http://www.rape-crisis.org/>

**Carlsbad, NM:**  
Carlsbad Mental Health Association: 1-505-885-8888  
Site URL: <http://www.carlsbadmh.org/>

**Los Alamos, NM:**  
Los Alamos Family Council: 1-877-602-4060  
Site URL: <http://www.lafamilycouncil.org/>

**Santa Fe, NM:**  
Santa Fe Rape Crisis and Trauma Treatment Center: 1-800-721-RAPE  
Site URL: <http://www.sfrcc.org/>

**Taos, NM:**  
Community Against Violence: 1-505-758-9888  
Site URL: <http://www.taoscav.org/>

**New York:** New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
<http://www.nycasa.org/>

**Albany, NY:**  
Crime Victim and Sexual Violence Center: 1-518-447-7716  
Site URL: <http://www.albanycounty.com/departments/cvsvvc/>

**Buffalo, NY:**  
Crisis Services Advocate Program: 1-716-834-3131  
Site URL: <http://www.crisisservices.org/link2.html>

**Geneva, NY:**

Rape & Abuse Crisis Service of the Finger Lakes, Inc.:

1-315-536-2897 (Yates County) or 1-800-247-7273 (Seneca and Ontario Counties)

Site URL: <http://www.rapeandabusecrisisfingerlakes.org/>

**Corning, NY:****Elmira, NY:****Hornell, NY:****Horseheads, NY:****Montour Falls, NY:**

Rape Crisis of the Southern Tier: 1-888-810-0093

Site URL: <http://www.rcst.org/>

**New York, NY:**

Safe Horizon: 1-800-621-HOPE

Site URL: <http://www.safehorizon.org/>

**Oneonta, NY:**

Violence Intervention Program: 1.800.986.5463

Site URL: <http://24.97.186.162/victims.htm>

**Oswego, NY:**

SAF Rape Crisis Program: 1-315-342-1600

Site URL: <http://www.oswegocountyabusevictims.org/>

**Syracuse, NY:**

Vera House: 1-315-422-7273

Site URL: <http://www.verahouse.org/>

**North Carolina:** North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault

<http://www.nccasa.org/>

1-888-737-CASA

**Archdale, NC:** 1-336-434-5579

**Asheboro, NC:** 1-336-629-4159

Randolph County Family Crisis Center

Site URL: <http://business.asheboro.com/rcfcc/>

**Burlington, NC:**

CrossRoads Sexual Assault Response and Resource Center:

1-336-228-0360

Site URL: <http://bellsouthpwp.net/c/s/csarrcen/>

**Chapel Hill, NC:****Hillsborough, NC:**

Orange County (NC) Rape Crisis Center: 1-866-WE LISTEN (935-4783)

Site URL: <http://www.ocrcc.org/>

**Charlotte, NC:****Concord, NC:**

United Family Services: 1-704-375-9900 (Mecklenburg County) or

1-704.721.0110 (Cabarrus County) or 1-704.283.7770 (Union County)

Site URL: <http://www.unitedfamilyservices.org/>

**Greenville, NC:**

Real Crisis Intervention Inc: 1-252-758-HELP

Site URL: <http://www.realcrisis.org/>

**Raleigh, NC:**

Interact of Wake County: 1-919-828-3005  
Site URL: <http://www.interactofwake.org/>

**Wilkesboro, NC:**

SAFE, Inc.: 1-336-667-7656 (24 Hour Line) 1-336-838-SAFE (Crisis Line)  
Site URL: <http://www.safedvsa.com/>

**Winston-Salem, NC:**

Family Services: 1-336-722-4457  
Site URL: [http://www.familyserv.org/vr\\_overview.cfm](http://www.familyserv.org/vr_overview.cfm)

**North Dakota:** Coalition Against Sexual Assault in North Dakota

<http://www.ndcaws.org/>  
1-866-341-7009

**Bismarck, ND:**

Abused Adult Resource Center  
Site URL: <http://www.abusedadultresourcecenter.com/>

**Ohio:** Ohio Coalition on Sexual Assault  
1-614-268-3322 [Note: May not be 24/7 hotline]

**Cincinnati, OH:**

Rape Crisis and Abuse Center: 1-513-872-9259  
Site URL: <http://womenhelpingwomen.org/>

**Cleveland, OH:**

Cleveland Rape Crisis Center: 1-216-619-6192  
Site URL: <http://www.clevelandrapecrisis.org/>

**Columbus, OH:**

Sexual Assault Response Network of Central Ohio: 1-614-267-7020  
Site URL: <http://www.ohiohealth.com/body.cfm?id=980>

**Medina, OH:**

Medina County Rape Crisis Center: 1-330.721.HELP (4357)  
Site URL: <http://hometown.aol.com/MedinaCountyRCC/STOPRAPE.html>

**Youngstown, OH:**

Family Service Agency: 1-330-782-3936  
Site URL: <http://www.familyserviceagency.com/programs.htm#rape>

**Oklahoma:** Oklahoma Coalition Against Domestic Violence and  
Sexual Assault

<http://www.ocadvsa.org/>

**Stillwater, OK:**

Stillwater Domestic Violence Services, Inc.: 1-800-624-3020  
Site URL: <http://www.sdvs.org/>

**Tulsa, OK:**

Domestic Violence Intervention Services, Inc.: 1-918-7HELP-ME  
Site URL: <http://www.dvis.org/>

**Oregon:** Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence  
<http://www.ocadsv.com/>

**Bend, OR:**

Central Oregon Battering and Rape Alliance: 1-541-389-7021 (in Bend)  
1-800-356-2369 (outside Bend)  
Site URL: <http://www.cobra-dvsa.org/>

**Corvallis, OR:**

Center Against Rape & Domestic Violence: 1-800-927-0197  
Site URL: <http://www.cardv.peak.org/>

**Eugene, OR:**

Sexual Assault Support Services: 1-800-788-4727  
Site URL: <http://www.sass-lane.org/>

**Medford, OR:**

Community Works: 1-888-609-HELP  
Site URL: <http://www.community-works.org/>

**Portland, OR:**

Sexual Assault Resource Center: 1-503-640-5311  
Site URL: <http://www.sarcoregon.org/>

Portland Women's Crisis Line: 1-888-235-5333  
Site URL: <http://www.pwcl.org/>

**Pennsylvania:** Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape  
<http://www.pcar.org/>  
1-888-772-PCAR

**Altoona:**

Family Services of Blair County: 1-800-500-2849  
Site URL: <http://www.hso.blairco.org/FAMSERBL.HTM>

**Bloomsburg, PA:**

The Women's Center: 1-800-544-8293  
Site URL: <http://www.thewomenscenterinc.org/>

**Erie, PA:**

Crime Victim Center of Erie County: 1-800-352-7273  
Site URL: <http://www.cvcerie.org/>

**Evans City, PA:**

Victim Outreach Intervention Center: 1-800-400-8551  
Site URL: <http://www.voiceforvictims.com/>

**Greensburg, PA:**

Blackburn Center: 1-888-832-2272  
Site URL: <http://blackburncenter.org/>

**Philadelphia, PA:**

Women Organized Against Rape (WOAR): 1-215-985-3333

Site URL: <http://www.woar.org/>

**Pittsburgh, PA:**

Pittsburgh Action Against Rape (PAAR) : 1-866-363-7273

Site URL: <http://www.paar.net/index.htm>

**Reading, PA:**

Berks Women in Crisis: Spanish: 1-610-372-7461

English: 610-372-9540

Site URL: <http://www.berkswomenincrisis.org/>

**Rhode Island:** Rhode Island Sexual Assault Coalition

<http://www.satrc.org/>

1-800-494-8100

**South Carolina:** South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence And Sexual Assault

<http://www.sccadvasa.org/>

**Anderson, SC:**

Foothills Alliance: 1-800-585-8952

Site URL: <http://www.foothillsalliance.org/>

**Beaufort, SC:**

Citizens Opposed to Domestic Violence: 1-843-770-1070

Site URL: <http://www.codabft.com/>

**Columbia, SC:**

Sexual Trauma Services of the Midlands: 1-800-491-RAPE

Site URL: <http://www.stsm.org/>

**Myrtle Beach, SC:**

Grand Strand Community Against Rape: 1-843-448-7273

Site URL: <http://www.mbrapecrisiscenter.org/>

**North Charleston, SC:**

People Against Rape: 1-800-241-7273

Site URL: <http://www.peopleagainstrape.org/>

**South Dakota:** South Dakota Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

<http://www.southdakotacoalition.org/>

1-800-572-9196

**Aberdeen, SD:**

Safe Harbor: 1-888-290-2935

Site URL: <http://www.safeharbor.ws/index.htm>

**Sioux Falls, SD:**

Rape and Domestic Abuse Center: 1-605-339-0116  
Site URL: <http://www.rdac.org/>

**Tennessee:** Tennessee Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual  
Violence  
<http://www.tcadsv.org/>  
1-800-356-6767

**Chattanooga, TN**

Partnership for Families, Children and Adults: 1-423-755-2700  
Site URL: [http://www.partnershipfca.com/crisis\\_emergency/sexual\\_assault\\_center.php](http://www.partnershipfca.com/crisis_emergency/sexual_assault_center.php)

**Clarksville, TN:****Nashville, TN:**

Rape and Sexual Abuse Center: 1-800-879-1999  
Site URL: <http://www.rasac.org/>

**Knoxville, TN:**

Sexual Assault Crisis Center: 1-800-656-4673  
Site URL: <http://www.thesacc.org/>

**Memphis, TN:**

Memphis Sexual Assault Resource Center: 1-901-272-2020  
Site URL: <http://www.cityofmemphis.org/framework.aspx?page=250>

**Texas:** Texas Association of Against Sexual Assault  
<http://www.taasa.org/>

**Abilene, TX:**

Regional Crime Victim Crisis Center: 1-325-677-7895  
Site URL: <http://www.regionalcrime.org/>

**Austin, TX:**

SafePlace: 1-512-267-SAFE(7233)  
Site URL: <http://www.austin-safeplace.org/>

**Dallas, TX:**

The Family Place: 1-214-941-1991  
Site URL: <http://www.familyplace.org/>

**El Paso, TX:**

Sexual Trauma and Assault Response Services: 1-915-779-1800  
Site URL: <http://www.stars-elpaso.org/>

**Houston, TX:**

Houston Area Woman's Center: 1-713-528-7273  
Site URL: <http://www.hawc.org/>

**Odessa, TX:**

The Crisis Center: 1-866-627-4747  
Site URL: <http://www.odessacrisiscenter.com/>

**San Antonio, TX:**

The Rape Crisis Center for Children and Adults: 1-210-349-RAPE  
Site URL: <http://www.rapecrisis.com/>

**Waco, TX:**

Advocacy Center for Crime Victims and Children: 1-888-867-7233  
Site URL: <http://www.advocacycntr.org/Home.asp>

**Utah:** Utah Coalition Against Sexual Assault

<http://www.ucasa.org/home.html>  
1.888.421.1100

**Provo, UT:**

The Center for Women and Children in Crisis: 1-888-421-1100  
Site URL: <http://www.cwcic.org/>

**Salt Lake City, UT:**

Rape Recovery Center: 1-801- 467-RAPE (7273)  
Site URL: <http://raperecoverycenter.com/>

**Vermont:** Vermont Network Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

<http://www.vtnetwork.org/>  
1-800-489-7273

**Burlington, VT:**

Women's Rape Crisis Center: 1-802-863-1236  
Site URL: <http://www.stoprapevermont.org/>

**Middlebury, VT:**

WomenSafe: 1-800-388-4205  
Site URL: <http://www.womensafe.net/>

**Springfield, VT:**

New Beginnings: 1-800-228-7395  
Site URL: <http://www.vtnetwork.org/orgpages/newbeg.html>

**Virginia:** Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance

<http://www.vadv.org/>  
1-800-838-8238

**Alexandria, VA:**

Sexual Assault Response and Awareness Program: 1-703-683-7273  
Site URL: [http://ci.alexandria.va.us/oow/pgm/about\\_sara.html](http://ci.alexandria.va.us/oow/pgm/about_sara.html)

**Arlington, VA:**

Violence Intervention Program: 1-703-228-4848  
Site URL: <http://www.arlingtonva.us/departments/HumanServices/services/family/HumanServicesServicesFamilyChildrenFamily.aspx#violence>  
[Note: There are no spaces or underscores in above URL.]

**Fredericksburg, VA:**

Rappahannock Council Against Sexual Assault: 1-540-371-1666  
Site URL: <http://www.rcasa.org/main.htm>

**Lexington, VA:**

Project Horizon: 1-540-563-2594  
Site URL: <http://organizations.rockbridge.net/projecthorizon/>

**Williamsburg, VA:**

Avalon: 1-757-258-5051  
Site URL: <http://www.avaloncenter.org/index.html>

**Washington:** Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs

<http://www.wcsap.org/>  
1-800-562-6025  
1-800-775-8013

**Bellingham, WA:**

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services: 1-877-715-1563  
Site URL: <http://www.dvsas.org/>

**Olympia, WA:**

SafePlace: 1-360-754-6300  
Site URL: <http://safeplaceolympia.org/>

**Seattle, WA:**

Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress:  
1-800-825-7273  
Site URL: <http://depts.washington.edu/hcsats/>

**Spokane, WA:**

Sexual Assault and Family Trauma Response Center: 1-509-624-7273  
Site URL: <http://www.lcsnw.org/spokane/SAFeT.html>

**Tacoma, WA:**

Sexual Assault Center of Pierce County: 1-800-756-7273  
Site URL: <http://sexualassaultcenter.com/>

**West Virginia:** West Virginia Foundation for Rape Information

and Services  
<http://www.fris.org/>

**Elkins, WV:**

Women's Aid in Crisis: 1-800-339-1185  
Site URL: <http://waicwv.com/>

**Huntington, WV:**

CONTACT Rape Crisis Center: 1-866-399-7273  
Site URL: <http://www.contacthuntington.com/>

**Morgantown, WV:**

Rape and Domestic Violence Information Center, Inc.:  
304-292-5100 (Monongalia County)  
304-329-1687 (Preston County)

304-265-6534 (Taylor County)  
Site URL: <http://www.rdvic.org/>

**Wheeling, WV:**

Sexual Assault Help Center: 1-800-884-7242  
Site URL: <http://www.fris.org/Sections/02-VictimServices/2.07-SAHC.html>

**Wisconsin:** Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
<http://www.wcasa.org/>

**Appleton, WI:**

Sexual Assault Crisis Center: 1-800-722-7797  
Site URL: <http://www.sacc-foxcities.org/>

**Beloit, WI:**

Sexual Assault Recovery Program: 1-866-666-4576  
Site URL: <http://www.sarpwi.com/>

**Eau Claire, WI:**

Bolton Refuge House: 1-800-252-HELP  
Site URL: <http://webpages.charter.net/boltonrefugehouse/index.htm>

**Green Bay, WI:**

Family Services of Northeast Wisconsin, Inc.:  
1-920-436-8899 (Brown County)  
1-920-746-8996 (Door County)  
1-920-846-2111 (Oconto County)  
Site URL: <http://www.familyservicesnew.org/SAC.htm>

**Madison, WI:**

Rape Crisis Center: 1-608-251-7273  
Site URL: <http://www.danecountyrc.com/>

**Milwaukee, WI:**

Milwaukee Women's Center: 1-414-671-6140  
Site URL: <http://www.mwcinc.org/>

**Racine, WI:**

Sexual Assault Services of Racine County: 1-262-637-SAFE  
Site URL: <http://www.lsswis.org/Programs/programs.htm>

**Wyoming:** Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic  
Violence and Sexual Assault  
<http://www.wyomingdvsa.org/>  
1-800-990-3877

**Casper, WY:**

Self-Help Center, Inc.: 1-307-235-2814  
Site URL: [http://members.tripod.com/self\\_help\\_center\\_inc/](http://members.tripod.com/self_help_center_inc/)

**Cheyenne, WY:**

Safehouse/Sexual Assault Service, Inc.: 1-800-591-9159  
Site URL: <http://www.wyomingsafehouse.org/>