

Possible Lasting Effects of Childhood Sexual Abuse

Research on long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse in men's lives show these are some of the long term effects of abuse on men, as studied by By Jim Hopper, Ph.D. (last revised 3/23/2008).

Of course the sexual abuse of male children can lead to a variety of problems and suffering. But it's not that simple. My aim in this section is to provide some basic information that, while conveying the possible effects of the sexual abuse of males, helps people appreciate the complexity of this issue and avoid unnecessarily pessimistic beliefs.

- All human beings suffer painful experiences, and some of these occur in childhood.
- All caregivers of children are sometimes unable to protect them from painful experiences.
- We all need love and support to deal with the effects of painful experiences.
- Everyone must find ways to cope with the emotions generated by painful experiences - whether or not we get love and support from others.
- Many coping or self-regulation strategies work in some ways, but also limit people in other ways. For example:
 - Ignoring painful feelings may reduce one's conscious experience of them. But it also prevents one from learning how to manage them in smaller doses, let alone larger ones - which makes one vulnerable to alternating between feeling little or no emotions and being overwhelmed and unable to cope with them.
 - Avoiding getting close to people and trying to hide all of one's pain and vulnerabilities may create a sense of safety. But this approach to relationships leads to a great deal of loneliness, prevents experiences and learning about developing true intimacy and trust, and makes one vulnerable to desperately and naively putting trust in the wrong people and being betrayed again.
 - At the extreme, getting really drunk can block out painful memories and feelings, including the feeling of being disconnected from others - but cause lots of other problems and disconnections from people.
- Some people suffer more painful experiences than others, and abuse is one of many possible causes of extreme emotional pain (others include life-threatening illness, death of a loved one, physical disfigurement, etc.).
- Some people get more love and support from their families and friends than others, and families in which abuse occurs tend to provide less of the love and support needed to recover from abuse. But families in which abuse does not happen can also experience significant problems, and can make it hard for family members to deal with the inevitable painful experiences in life.
- Finally, because everyone needs caring relationships and love, emotional neglect can be more devastating than abuse, particularly in the earliest years of life.