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A
Mother's
Guide

TO MAKING AMENDS

After Childhood Sexual Abuse



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MY STORY

When my daughter was eight years old, she spent the night at a friend's house. She and her friend spent hours swimming in their community pool and Bethany came home with her face, arms and legs red and burning.

I was irate that the girl's mother allowed Bethany to be exposed to the sun for so long, especially without sunscreen. Arizona, where we lived, had the second highest rate of skin cancer in the world. Bethany blistered and peeled for a week.

That mother failed to provide her with basic protection and I was so angry that she was so careless with my daughter.

When I look back on that incident, I still feel awful for how much Bethany suffered that week. I eventually discovered far worse things touching my daughter than the sun's rays and this time, I was the one who left her exposed.

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When I was fifteen, my boyfriend told me we needed to talk. Sixteen year old boys don't usually have conversation on their minds, so I took it seriously. We had been dating about six months or so and I couldn't imagine what he would consider so important. My parents let me close my bedroom door so we could have some privacy.

We sat on my bed as he revealed that he had molested his female relative sometime before we met. When the abuse occurred, the girl told her mom so most of his family knew about it. My boyfriend thought it was behind him, but the girl was talking about it again and he was worried. The girl's parents suspected he was molesting her again, but my boyfriend claimed she was just having nightmares. It caused a lot of division; some relatives tried to protect her, while others tried to protect him.

When I sensed that my boyfriend felt threatened and I heard that some of his own family members turned against him, I felt so sorry for him. I considered his confession an indication of his trust in me and thought of it as a test of my love. I wasn't going to fail this test. If he needed my support, he would have it. He was charming, thoughtful, considerate, and generous and I wasn't going to lose him over something that was in his past. In my mind, the gravity of the offense was irrelevant since it wasn't happening again, either now or in the future. No one who really knew him would doubt that.

"He was charming, thoughtful, considerate, and generous and I wasn't going to lose him over something that was in his past."

That incident strengthened my bond with my boyfriend. That kind of intimacy was what I craved and I was eager to escape my lonely-making family.

When he seemed interested in marrying me, I was relieved. I finally belonged. We married soon after I turned seventeen when I got pregnant with my son. Our daughter was born the year after our son arrived.

SOMETHING BUT NOT ENOUGH

When my daughter, Bethany, was about one year old, I discovered blood in her diaper. I didn't want to think about why my baby would be bleeding, but I guessed the source.

My husband tearfully admitted that he had molested her but promised it would never happen again. He seemed very remorseful and I thought that since I caught him, he wouldn't feel safe repeating the abuse. He seemed afraid of losing his family so I thought that fear would stop him.

A few months or maybe a year passed and I had a sick feeling that I knew what was happening. I came home to find out that Bethany's dad had molested her again. He'd bought her a little yellow outfit because he felt bad.

This time, I was angry. He thought he could make up for what he did by buying her something. I knew he wasn't going to be able to stop without help, so I needed to do something.

I'd never read about sexual abuse and I'd only known one person who talked about her sexual abuse before this other than my husband. I didn't know where to turn so we met with our pastor. He talked as though this was something that could be handled very easily. He said a prayer and told me to just focus on our marriage.

I accepted the pastor's confident assurances that no further harm would come to Bethany. He gave me the assignment to focus on my marriage and to learn to trust my husband so I could save my daughter from his advances.

According to him, any suspicion on my part would divide us and put Bethany in harm's way. It was all up to me.

I tried to do everything I thought would help my relationship with my husband. I never said no to sex and I listened to everything he said.

THE TRUTH IS EXPOSED

After twenty-one years of marriage, I was emotionally exhausted. In spite of my best efforts, my husband still wasn't happy with me and I was done doing everything his way.

Shortly after the divorce, when Bethany was nineteen, she told me she wanted to talk. I already knew by her tone that she was going to tell me her dad molested her. All those years, I didn't know if she would remember those things since she was so young. If she did remember, I wondered if she would be mad at me for staying with her father after the first time I discovered the abuse. I felt so guilty that I hadn't stopped it from happening the second time.

I never expected to hear what Bethany told me. Her dad sexually abused her until she was eleven or twelve years old and then again when she was sixteen. She kept silent for fear of splitting up the family.

It hadn't stopped. She wasn't safe. I didn't protect her. I was shocked.

I called my ex-husband. When I told him what Bethany told me, his defiant response was "Yeah, so?" My daughter confronted him after I did and he showed the same lack of remorse. He only offered the excuse that he was abused by his parents.

We discussed the possibility of reporting him to the police. Bethany was still adjusting to the divorce, so she decided to wait until she was certain she was making the right decision.

"Yes, I had been fooled by my husband, but I had also fooled myself."

Almost five years passed and Bethany called me around midnight. Something was weighing on her and she needed to talk. She was ready to report her dad. Since it was going to be a matter of public record, she wanted to tell me exactly what he did to her so I'd be emotionally prepared to hear her testimony.

The things Bethany revealed made me sick. When she disclosed her abuse to me after the divorce, my impression was that her dad had done his best to resist, but occasionally gave in to temptation. In reality, he abused her daily. On many occasions, he planned in advance to be alone with her.

I also imagined that all he did was fondle her. That's bad enough, but how did I think a little fondling would leave blood in her diaper? I had minimized the abuse in my mind to protect myself from the truth—and the guilt that came with it.

First, I was nauseated by what her father did to her, then by what I had done—or rather, neglected to do. Denial, mixed with naiveté about abuse issues, kept me from delving deeper into the molestation of his female relative before I even married the man. I was in denial when he told me it had stopped. Both times. But even after Bethany told me about the years of abuse when she was nineteen, denial kept me from anything but surface acceptance.

I was disgusted with myself. Being a great mom was so important to me, but I was a failure. I made Bethany vulnerable by marrying a man I knew had abused another little girl. Then I had allowed him to stay after he abused Bethany. Yes, I had been fooled by my husband, but I had also fooled myself.

Bethany was facing one of the most difficult times in her life, so no matter how I felt about myself, I couldn't focus on that. I had failed her in her childhood and I was desperate to do better.

Yet my feelings about myself were in the way of doing what was best for Bethany. To be available to her, I had to stop punishing myself through my sabotaging thoughts. "Who was I to help her when I wasn't there for her as a child?" My guilt would never let me be a healthy support.

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I couldn't let anything I did in an effort to "help" be a way to "make up" for what I'd done. No matter what good things I did for Bethany now or in the future, I could never change the past. Forgiving myself was one of the hardest things I've ever done, but removing my offense toward myself freed me to support Bethany instead of digging myself out of my guilt-pit.

Facing My Past So I Could Be Present

I faced the hard feelings I had about myself, but I still hadn't faced what led to the choices I'd made in the first place. As long as I put my issues aside so I could "put my daughter first", I still acted out of my brokenness. Leaving Bethany in danger was the result of my unresolved pain from childhood sexual abuse and neglect. As long as I was still thinking and feeling like an abused little girl, I didn't have any power to help my child.

FACING MY PAST SO I COULD BE PRESENT

My first abuse memory is when I was about one and a half years old. My uncle got me alone and starting touching me in a sexual way. Terrified and confused, I squirmed and kicked. He mercilessly grabbed my legs, held me down and threatened me. My pain didn't matter; he would have his way and I was terrified.

I had many abusers after that—the primary one was my father—but the lesson I learned from my first abuse was that I had to comply OR ELSE! Resistance was dangerous and useless. After that, whenever I felt threatened, I froze. As I got older, I still carried the belief that I was at everyone's mercy. I still felt like a powerless child.

When I discovered that Bethany had been abused, I vegetated on the couch for two days. Finding blood in her diaper was finding blood in my diaper. I was transported to my own abuse with the same feelings and response: I froze as though my only choice was to lie still and stay quiet.

I didn't feel capable of making my own decisions or of taking care of myself. I looked like an adult, but I was a fraud. Part of my attraction to my husband was that he was a take-charge kind of guy. I didn't have to make any decisions with him.

When we turned to our pastor and he took command, I was comforted not to have to decide the best course. My assignment to work on our marriage gave me a sense of control. It was the same illusion of control that I clung to in childhood. In my mind, the abuse was my fault. My dad wasn't bad; I was. If I tried really hard to be good, I could stop him from hurting me. That belief kept me from being swallowed by hopelessness, rage and terror.

I disconnected from my body and emotions during my abuse. My numbness prevented me from grasping the physical or emotional injury that was thrust upon me. Feelings weren't allowed in our home and there was no safe person to confide in. I grew into adulthood as an empty body.

Even motherhood didn't awaken my feelings. I was cut off from Bethany's pain, too. When she hurt herself, I'd order myself to scoop her up and soothe her. Comforting care didn't come naturally. When I discovered her abuse, I was disconnected from it. I didn't feel its gravity and I interpreted that to mean that it wasn't very serious.

Believing those lies helped me survive my childhood, but they endangered my child. The truth freed me:

"Placating and appeasing abusers doesn't stop them. I'm empowered as an adult to really affect change through direct actions instead of passive ones."

- I was powerless when I was a child. Compliance was a smart response then, but I'm not a child anymore. I'm empowered to use my voice and actions to protect my life and anyone else who may be in danger.
- I never had any control as a child and there wasn't anything I could do to prevent my dad from hurting me. I didn't do anything to bring it on myself and the abuse wasn't my fault. Placating and appeasing abusers doesn't stop them. I'm empowered as an adult to really affect change through direct actions instead of passive ones.
- Shutting down my feelings during the trauma was the only way to help myself. There wasn't any protection or refuge then, but there is now. It's safe to feel. I listen to my feelings, express them and respond to them. Now, I feel compassion for myself and can empathize with others.

"My healing work resolved things within my heart, but it didn't resolve anything in Bethany's heart and it didn't entitle me to a new relationship with her. "

Continuing to work on my issues as they surfaced allowed me to provide healthy support through Bethany's court ordeal with her dad, through her healing journey and beyond. I'm modeling healthy behavior to her and treating her with the respect and love that she always deserved.

My healing work resolved things within my heart, but it didn't resolve anything in Bethany's heart and it didn't entitle me to a new relationship with her. She still needed to address her own pain, recognize my part in it and choose how that would affect our relationship

Bethany diligently worked through her own healing and is doing very well. The effects of my past could have permanently wounded my daughter and damaged our relationship, but as we both worked through our issues, we've become much closer than most mothers and daughters I know.

While there's no map because each person, relationship and circumstance is unique, here are some guidelines that will help you heal your part of the relationship.

Note that you have 100% responsibility for your 50% of the relationship. You can do everything right but you still can't control the other 50%.

HOW TO RELATE TO YOURSELF

How you relate to yourself needs to be different than how you relate to your child.

1. Have compassion for yourself and acknowledge how difficult this is. You likely never intended to hurt your child. Maybe, like me, you weren't given the tools to parent correctly. Your needs weren't met so you weren't equipped to meet your child's needs.

As you face these issues, you may be grieving from two types of losses:

- the losses you experience from your parents
- the losses you experience from the way you parented

Both of those are very painful. Grieve those losses and reach out to others for comfort and support. Provide the support for yourself so you have support to offer your child.

2. Forgive yourself. It does your child no good to focus on your failings and imperfections. It doesn't benefit your child if you punish or criticize yourself. Focusing on those things leaves you less time and energy toward creating and loving.

3. Accept the past as a lesson so you can move on. What can you learn from this? How will you be different going forward? Be specific.

4. Heal your past. Yes, healing your past is important for your child but it's important for you too. The more you heal, the more capacity you have to love your child, you, and anyone else you want to direct your love toward.

HOW TO RELATE TO YOUR CHILD

Your child needs you to take responsibility for the ways you left him or her exposed or unprotected. Not only that, there are likely other unmet needs.

If your child wants to tell you how you hurt them, listen with understanding and without defending yourself. No matter your intentions or how accurately you think your child perceives things, to them, they are real. It's important to be present and ask yourself how what they are saying might be true.

Let go of your assumption you have the full story. Lean in with curiosity. Ask questions. Seek to understand before you respond.

Don't interrupt. Pause before you speak. Engage in heart-listening.

Denying responsibility only contributes to your child's pain. You may have been fooled, you may not have known, you may have felt that the situation was out of your control, but it's a parent's job to be their child's protection. Failing to protect is abandonment, whether you meant to or not and abandonment is often the most painful form of abuse. Whether your child acknowledges your role in their abuse or not, you owe your child an apology without any excuses attached to it.

As harmful as sexual abuse is, as long-lasting and as damaging its effects, having a parent's understanding and love makes the healing process so much easier. A parent has the ability to prolong the pain or to substantially ease it.

BRIDGE BUILDING APOLOGY

1. **Listen with the intent to learn.** Understand the impact of your words or actions. Ask questions if you need clarification.
2. **Say, "I know I hurt you. That causes me pain. I'm truly sorry for [specific thing]."** Express your regret, your empathy for causing pain, damaging trust, causing disappointment, or even causing damage.
3. **Say, "I was wrong."** Accept responsibility without justification or blaming the other person or circumstances. No apology followed by "but..." as an excuse.

This is not an apology: "I'm sorry you got hurt." That shifts the blame to the other person.

4. **Say, "I'll make it right."** Consider what the other person lost and aim to make make restitution.
5. **Say, "I want to change."** An apology is hollow if the pattern of behavior is repeated. Repentance means change. What can you do beyond only hoping you won't do the same thing again?
6. **Ask, "Will you forgive me?"** This is a request, not a demand. Forgiveness doesn't mean trust is restored. It means they are willing to co-create a road back to the relationship.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

One of the deepest sources of pain for sexual abuse survivors is the lack of support from family members, especially from parents. Over and over again, survivors of abuse have expressed the feeling that as destructive as sexual abuse is, it's the abandonment and betrayal of their parents that hurt the most.

Conversely, when a child is believed and supported in childhood, the effects of the abuse are significantly diminished. Many parents don't learn about the abuse until their child is grown, but understanding and support remain important even for adult survivors.

I asked survivors to share their stories and feelings about their abuse and the rejection of their parents. This is a collection of their thoughts, from their hearts, in their own words.

Hear Me

I want more than anything for my mother to HEAR me...Just HEAR me. I was told to shut up. From that I learned that I didn't have a voice. I was never safe in my own home, nor was I ever protected. I was stripped of MY innocence. What could I have done so bad to deserve that abuse? I still can't get my mother to see the pain I'm in.

I'm beyond angry and hurt but if they are at least WILLING to HEAR and VALIDATE my feelings, that could be the first step to the truth and a new beginning. My mother doesn't love herself, nor is she willing to get past denial. After all I have been through—as I sit here and type, I bawl my eyes out—I only wish my mother could UNDERSTAND that it's not the sexual and physical abuse I endured that causes me ALL the pain. It is her DENIAL as well. Maybe it's the child in me wanting a mother's love but raping and beating didn't break my heart. Her DENIAL, LIES and BETRAYAL did.

Anonymous

Don't Tell Me To Be Strong—YOU Be Strong

Dear Mom,

When I was little, you let me know that I could never go to you with a problem. You would yell at me whenever I asked, "Mom?" If I even had the courage to go on and ask you or tell you what I wanted to, you'd yell at me, "Ahh, great, just great! Don't you think I have enough problems?" I was seven, Mom. And since I was seven, I've been trying not to be a problem, Mom.

I didn't want to be bad, I didn't want to cause you anymore problems, so when the babysitter's friend started molesting me and forcing me to give him oral sex, I was nine, and I was confused, but I wanted to be good for you, Mom. I didn't want to be the problem. And when I spoke up, where were you? When I talked to that detective, that night, I didn't cry on your shoulder, you cried on mine, you asked me to forgive you. I was exhausted, I just wanted to sleep... You never asked me if I was okay, or if I wanted to talk about it sometime, or if it was even okay for you to touch me at all, you just drenched my shoulders in your tears. I was the strong one for you. You had been devastated by the truth that your child was the victim, but instead of helping me, you asked me to make you feel better... so I did... I told you it was okay, that you were okay.

You have never let me talk to you about it because you get too emotional about it. Suck it up! It happened to ME! I WENT THROUGH IT, and YOU can't EVEN stand to hear it? How DARE you expect ME to be STRONG when YOU can't even LISTEN to ME!

I will not go to you for support because you haven't shown me I can trust you, you haven't shown me you care about what I went through. You haven't shown me it's okay to talk about it. You have protected yourself from any possible damage it may cause to listen to me. You kept your distance away from me and my demons to protect yourself. You are selfish and I don't want to be near you either. You never created a safe environment for me to show you my wounds. Why would I want a hug from you? Or for you to play with my hair? Or for you to rub my back? You have hurt me and you touching me at all makes me sick.

Heather Franklin

Pay Attention to My Pain

I was sexually assaulted at age eight by a babysitter's teenage son and molested repeatedly over several months after that. From the time that I told my mother about the sexual abuse, not only did she not ask me what had happened to me, but completely moved on, and eventually moved our family across the street from the babysitter's family for her own convenience. I had to be in close proximity to the abuser and his family, who teased and mocked me.

My father knew I wasn't being treated well at home, and did I nothing to help me. When I looked to him for support because of the sexual abuse, he blew me off, like I was asking him for something trivial.

Both my parents EXPECT me to keep in contact with them and GIVE the privileges other grandparents have. They mostly seem inclined to blame me for being estranged from them, or behave as if we are on some kind of two-way street. No way, not when it comes to my children. From where I'm sitting at this time in my life, that would not be wise for me or my family, especially since they have still failed to earn my trust, by making no effort to change.

Anonymous

Sit With Me In My Pain

My experience is a little different but my needs are still the same. I was sexually abused by both parents and it was very hard to begin the healing process. I felt I was crazy and that no one would believe me.

A lot of my memory of the abuse had been pushed back. When it started to surface, my whole world came crashing down. I had to completely leave my family and had no support system. That was when my mother's best friend said: "I believe you and I'm here". That was the beginning of my healing journey. She became my parent figure and it made a world of difference to know someone was on my side. It's so important to have someone to say, "I believe you. It is not your fault. We will work through this together. They can't hurt you any more."

Malisia Mckinney

Don't Blame Me

My dad had the privilege of knowing my vulnerabilities and weaknesses and unfortunately used this sacred knowledge to his benefit when he wanted to hurt me...He accused me of being cold and unwelcoming, of shutting him out throughout my teenage years. His tone was much like a little boy who felt rejected, spitting and spewing and crying on his own offspring.

He didn't have the capacity or maturity to see that his teenage daughter's "coldness" was a defense mechanism to try to block out unwanted sexual behavior. "DO I HAVE TO SPELL IT OUT?!" I wanted to scream. "You are an over sexual, drunk freak unleashing all your anger and sexuality on your children. Why do I have to teach YOU what is appropriate? You are the parent. You are supposed to know better!!! You are confusing me and hurting me, dammit. Leave us alone, you damn freak!!"

Finally, finally, I got the courage to start asking my mom questions, looking for that shred of leftover childhood hope that somehow she would rescue me. My wish was that we could travel back in time and she would rescue me from him. She responded with, "I told your father not to drink so much." And "Well, I wasn't going to divorce Daddy." Then in the same conversation, "Absolutely not—that never happened."

It's not about "getting over it" or maintaining a relationship with sick people. It's about me putting all my energies towards healing myself whether THEY understand, support, disavow, condemn or even, still love me after the truth is spoken. When my mind was still open and I was still vulnerable to needing comfort from my mom, she said, "You wanted it." God. That one hit my soul. She's my mom after all, she knows me best, maybe I really did "want it" as a toddler... Thankfully, I have now had much time away from her to know that her statements are utterly impossible.

So, why do I have to teach THEM? Why do I have to open up my heart and mind for MORE poisonous confusion? Sexual abuse is the ultimate betrayal between a parent and a child and it cuts to the core. It's not about "getting over it" or maintaining a relationship with sick people. It's about me putting all my energies towards healing myself whether THEY understand, support, disavow, condemn or even, still love me after the truth is spoken.

Phoenix Rising

Tell Me I'm Worthy of Protection

All I ever wanted from my mom was love and nurturing but all I got was hate and blame. I told my mom what was happening when I was twelve. She said, "Oh well" and went to bed, never doing anything to help me at all. My Grandma told the cops. They believed me, but my mother told the detective that my grandma and grandpa put words in my mouth, so he didn't believe me.

When I turned twenty-one, I moved to a YMCA self sufficiency program to get away from the abuse. I longed for that love I never had, so I moved back. Things always got better for a short time and started again. On Easter, my mom made the comment that she would never let anyone abuse her granddaughters, my brother's kids. But it was okay that the man she is now married to and lives with hurt her own daughter?

I have no contact with father's family now and see my mom twice a year but only when I'm with someone. It's been hard because my real mother and father never loved me so how can anyone? Everyday, I feel like a nothing.

Angela Sorenson

Accept Responsibility For Failing To Protect Me

My mother told me at eighteen that her father had abused her. My reply was, "Then why the heck did you send me there on my own for holidays then?" My mother has never accepted any responsibility for my childhood, in fact she says that I abused her emotionally from the age of eleven months.

I was so angry at her. She knew what her father was like. And then to dismiss my words as she had been hurt more than me, because she married my father instead of getting me aborted like her mother wanted. It was your choice to have me, not mine, so it ain't my fault. I was the child not the adult. I couldn't speak to her for months without sniping at her because of her disbelief and denial of blame.

She doesn't like the fact that I do not blame my father as much as I do her. Well sorry, Mother Dearest, but your influence hit hardest and lasted longest. You deny my facts and experiences because they do not reflect what you want it to, and then still try to control me. The time for your dominance is over and I guide my life now and it is a lot less stressful now that you are not in it very often.

Carol Anne Derry

Don't Expect Me To Make The Decisions–You're the Adult

I had been fantasizing about my disclosure for years. I had dropped subtle hints to teachers and trusted adults, which were either ignored or which went right over their heads. What I wished for more than anything was someone to say, "I will protect you as best I can, and I am proud of you for the courage it took to say these words to me. I will be here for you if you need me, whether to talk or not talk, to cry or not cry, and to know you are safe."

I decided to disclose everything to my mother, but I knew that my "father" was also home. I was late coming home and when I walked in the door, I was bombarded with angry faces and words, so I shouted out, "You want to know why I'm home late? I was trying to decide whether to go to the police because dad has been sexually abusing me for years!"

After a moment of shock, he denied everything and she accused me of lying. After relaying details that I felt could not be the product of "making something up", he finally admitted to it and she grabbed a knife and started to go after him with it. I stopped this attack by yelling, and much of what comes after is a blur.

She could not make a decision to "break up the family" on her own, and they told me that I would decide what happens next. As a seventeen year old, what I wanted was safety and validation and love. At the same time, I didn't want my siblings or extended family to blame me for causing a family rift. I told them I just wanted to be left alone, wishing she would say that she had decided to leave him, but knowing unless I could say the words that wanted to come out so badly, "LEAVE HIM! LEAVE HIM! LEAVE HIM!" Nothing would change. I could NOT, in fact, make these words come out.

I am an orphan who went from having a huge extended family to having maybe six family members who I can trust and who expressly support me. I refuse to feel ashamed and I refuse to keep the secret although it has made others' lives uncomfortable to have this information "out there".

Sexual abuse of a child is an uncomfortable subject. I get that. But sexual abuse of YOUR CHILD is something that YOUR CHILD will deal with on some level for the rest of his or her life. Wishing it away does not work. Making the subject feel taboo (even in subtle ways) is something that can scar YOUR CHILD perhaps as much as the abuse itself. If you can't find a way to open yourself up to the needs your healing child has, please find someone to help you learn how to do so. Your support or lack of support can make a huge difference in the adult your child becomes.

Alisa Whitmer-Wynn

Don't Ask Me To Have a Relationship With My Abuser

My parents have continued to show support and love to the ones who did the abusing. One was an older neighbor and the other was my deaf sister. Before I was age twenty, they had been informed twice I had been abused. Both instances left them blank faced and not one physical touch of comfort or one word of support or love.

I can't say I expected my parents to respond immediately, but twenty plus years later, I did expect some words of acknowledgment. An apology possibly for what they didn't see or know—any words expressing sorrow at my loss of innocence would have met my needs.

I had never asked for side taking or any act of correction be given to those people. But I remain shocked and dismayed when the end result is the old man finished his life with my parents still caring for him and his wife until passing and that my sister remains in contact with my parents while I have been removed. I have been removed due to the fact I set a boundary with my abuser and since I won't forgive and forget I am now being punished for it. I guess forgiveness would come quicker if any had ever been sought or asked for.

I lived for forty-four years ignoring the topic and doing my best to not make any waves. After a few instances of being rejected for not loving my abuser unconditionally, I took a stand and wouldn't allow the topic to remain silent any longer. That act sealed my fate.

Kimberly Schoolcraft

ATell Me I Didn't Deserve It

I told my mum directly after my abuse happened. I was crying, so she asked me and I told her. She told me never to tell my father because he was mentally ill. After that, great silence—never speaking to me.

I was the one who was treated like I was bad. I wasn't the abuser, I was the victim. One time she faced me with my private notebook where I wrote the story of what happened to me. She grasped me by my hair, dragged me and demanded to know who the boy was. I was screaming and crying, trying to get away from her.

How dare you do that! You didn't listen to me!! I told you when I was young!!! I was the one who was treated like I was bad.

It makes me so angry to be treated so unjustly. I wasn't the abuser, I was the victim. I'm so alone. My mum does not respect my feelings and my dad does not even care. I have no worth and nobody can care or love me. When I'm suffering or in pain, I have to go through it alone. At the same time, they expect that they have the right to be in my life in the time they choose. Not me, I have no rights.

Martha Mouner

Believe Me

My mother used to be one of my best friends. I disclosed everything to her shortly after the memories of the abuse started resurfacing as an adult. I expected her to believe and support me. I was shocked when she didn't.

She never blatantly accused me of lying because she had decided that there must be something mentally wrong with me. It was easier for her to believe I was crazy than to believe that my father had molested and raped me until I was twelve.

I've made tremendous progress with my healing in a relatively short period of time. But it feels like I'm having to heal from so much more than just the abuse. For the first time ever, I'm seeing my mother's role in all of this. I don't believe she knew what was happening. But she saw a depressed, withdrawn five year old who would fly into rages toward her father, only her father—a five year old who had insomnia and night terrors almost nightly—a five year old who was suicidal and hurting herself.

My mother did nothing then. But I've forgiven her for that. I've begged HER to let go of the past and make different, healthier choices right now. To be my mother now, to see, hear, believe and support me now. Her response was that she would never stop supporting him, even if he was a demon from hell. She said she made vows that she will always respect and honor, even if he did rape me for years. She said she believes that is the right choice, that God will support that decision. Really? Really? I love this woman so deeply and I mean so little to her? I've always meant so little to her?

Her reaction to my disclosure, her disbelief, her twisting reality around, her not caring about me has been the hardest, most devastating aspect of my healing process. At times, her rejection feels even more traumatizing than the actual abuse. I'm learning that just like my father, I lost her decades ago when she decided it was easier for her to just stop looking at me. My heart is so completely broken.

What would it mean to me if my mom supported my healing? Made an effort to understand my pain? Stopped telling me I was crazy? I would feel safe and protected, the way I was never able to feel as a child. I would know that I was worth being saved, even if she didn't see it then. I would feel loved. My inner child, that child who endured a horrific crime would finally be able to hold her mommy's hand and feel comfort.

Nikki Kluj

Don't Treat My Abuser Better Than You Treat Me

My uncle came to live with us when he was ten and I was eight. He was my mom's half-brother and he made my life a living hell. He had me do things that were forbidden by my parents, then I'd have to submit to whatever he wanted so he wouldn't tell. Sometimes he'd still tell and I'd still get in trouble. In August of 1984, he took that a step further. That's when he started to initiate sex with me. Initially, I didn't think anything of it, so I submitted to it. Then it was used as a form of manipulation.

In March of 1985, my uncle wanted to go back home to his mom (my grandmother). Not long after that, I told a classmate what my uncle did. I thought it was all fun and games. That spread throughout the school and the next thing I knew, I was sitting in the principal's office telling them everything that my uncle did and that's how my parents found out about it.

I lied and said that it only happened once because I was afraid that I'd get in trouble. My uncle was so good at manipulating me, to the point that my parents considered me a natural-born liar.

The next year, my uncle was failing at school again and my mother wanted to bring him back into the house. My sister and I protested but we lost. My mother told me that what he did wouldn't happen again and I still had to love him. I was so angry.

The sexual abuse did stop, but he still physically and verbally abused me. I would tell my parents about the abuse, but he would say something else and I'd get in trouble for lying.

When it comes to my father, he questions my sexuality. According to him, I need to be out there with the women getting my groove on. It hurts that my parents don't believe me when I say that I'm not gay.

When I was twenty-two, I finally told my mom the truth of what my uncle did. She seemed so nonchalant about it. In fact, she said, all I can say is I'm sorry. Truthfully, I feel better not speaking to her. I love her, but need to keep my distance because it does not bring peace to my spirit. Until she can understand what she allowed me to suffer and more importantly, admit that she screwed up, we need to be apart. I've made it this far without her support, so she can stay out of my life.

Tremayne Moore

Don't Tell Me To Get Over It

You would never cast off a cancer survivor and tell them to get over it once it's "stopped", however parents not supporting their own children are leaving them to fend for themselves in a life long cancerous battle.

It would mean the world for me to have my family support me in this struggle. It would mean Christmases and birthdays, Easters and weddings. It would mean spoilt grandchildren and life lessons and stories passed down.

I have not only lost one set of parents through this abuse. I have lost two families and all of my family history. To have my family's support would be far more than just physical or emotional comfort and belief. It would be a gaining of the past and an opening and welcoming of the future.

Sandy Tai

Don't Pretend That Nothing Happened

My father abused me for years. I tried to tell my mom and she got so angry and told me to shut up. Even though my father abused me, I had a better connection with him than with my mom. Even to this day, when I think about it, I get that feeling in my stomach and I hate myself.

If parents really want to help their children, they must not go on as if nothing happened! At sixteen, I ran away, They found me after two days and when I tried to tell my mom again, she only listened for a day a two. After that, everything went back the way it was. I didn't have friends and was doing bad at school. I squeezed a whole bottle of hand cream into my mouth and swallowed it. After that, I took a few pills at school. Still nothing came of it.

I'm 45 years old. I'm married with three children, and it took me that long to realize MY MOM DOES NOT LOVE ME. I keep that for myself and it hurts. If parents really want to help their children, they must not go on as if nothing happened! Don't smother the child with love all of a sudden. Just show you care, and be there for them. Just maybe if I had that...

Anonymous

Hi!

I'm Christina Enevoldsen



I help childhood sexual abuse and incest survivors leave the effects of trauma in the past so they can live fulfilling, empowered lives.

As a survivor of incest, sex trafficking and a 21-year abusive marriage (now remarried to an emotionally healthy, loving and supportive man) I bring personal experience, empathy and insight as well as professional training to help survivors of sexual abuse thrive.

I'm the creator of Flourish Healing Program, a 12 month group program for the healing of childhood sexual abuse. I'm a Certified Life Coach and the author of **The Rescued Soul: A Writing Journey for the Healing of Incest and Family Rejection.**

Since 2009, I've worked with childhood sexual abuse survivors in their healing journey through the online support website I cofounded, OvercomingSexualAbuse.com

I'm honored to walk alongside courageous people ready to do the work to go from surviving to flourishing.