

“What About Our Boys? Understanding the Challenges Facing Male Victims of Sexual Abuse and Assault”

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Myth # 1 Boys and men *can't* be victims of sexual abuse.

The ACE study confirms that 16% of males and 25% of females (1 in 6 males; 1 in 4 females) report “contact childhood sexual abuse” before the age of 18. Men report female perpetrators nearly 40% of the time.

Boys and men *can* be the victims of sexual abuse and assault.

Myth # 2 Sexual abuse is less harmful and less traumatic for boys than for girls.

The long-term consequences of childhood sexual abuse are similar for both male and female victims. The trauma is intensified when victims do not disclose or are not believed and supported.

Myth # 3 Most of the men who sexually abuse boys are homosexuals.

No, they are pedophiles. Most are heterosexual; many are married with children.

Myth # 4 Boys abused by males are, or will become, homosexual.

Sexual abuse has nothing to do with a boy's innate sexual orientation.

Myth # 5 If a boy experiences sexual arousal or orgasm during the abuse, it means he *wanted it*.

No. His body is just responding naturally physiologically.

Myth # 6 If the perpetrator is a woman, the boy should just feel “lucky.”

Whether the perpetrator is male or female, an underage child is too young to legally consent. It is child sexual abuse. It is rape. It is a crime.

Myth # 7 Boys who are sexually abused in childhood *will* go on to abuse others.

Male victims fear that if people find out they were abused, they will look at them as future child molesters. The vast majority of victims *never* abuse others.

They may even fear that they are somehow *destined* to become perpetrators.

-- <https://1in6.org/get-information/myths/>

Why don't boys tell right away? When the perpetrator is a stranger brandishing a weapon, victims are more likely to tell right away. *But most often the perpetrator is someone the child knows—a coach or teacher or older family friend or relative—someone who the victim trusts.* Perpetrators gradually and methodically *groom* their victims over time. They often have a highly developed plan to secure the trust of the victim, the victim's family and his community so that they can gain on-going easy, unquestioned access to the child. (*Jerry Sandusky a “pillar of the community”*)

Delayed reporting and initial denial of the abuse are common responses to the trauma. The boy may be showered with attention, affection and gifts. The perpetrator coerces his victim into the unwanted sexual experiences by telling him that he/she loves him and the sex acts are just “natural expressions of our affection.” The abusive acts *escalate slowly* and may be pleasurable. The behaviors may gradually progress from seemingly innocent touching and tickling games to “accidentally” touching the boy’s genitals, to masturbation, oral sex and sodomy. Victims are often confused and embarrassed while it is going on but do not know to label the initial behaviors as “abuse.”

Victims don’t know what to do. They want the abuse to stop but are *afraid* of what will happen if they tell. They are trapped. The perpetrator may tell them that no one will believe them or that it’s *their* fault—that they went along with it so *they* will be punished. The offender may threaten suicide. Fear can keep victims mute while the abuse is going on. Because of the myths about male victims, *fear and shame can also keep them silent for years, long after the abuse has long stopped.*

Victims may continue to associate with their abusers. The perpetrator may be the only person in the child’s or teen’s world who seems to really care about him. Manipulated over time, the victim is often deeply entrenched in a “relationship” with their perpetrator. Or the child victim may actually live in the same household as their offender. How can he tell on the person who feeds and clothes him? What would happen if he told? The offender would go to prison and the victim would be homeless?

The overwhelming majority of sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone the child, pre-teen, or teenager knows and feels that he can trust. They have an emotional bond, of varying degrees, with that perpetrator. Therefore, it is not just the sexual acts—which may range from non-violent and even pleasurable *to* brutal and physically damaging—but the emotional *betrayal* that is so overwhelmingly confusing and hurtful to the victim. This is especially true when the offender is a close relative—a father, mother, aunt, uncle, grandparent, older sibling, cousin. Victims of female perpetrators—either familial or non-familial, such as teachers—face additional obstacles and challenges based solely on gender of their perpetrator.

We must begin by acknowledging the sexual abuse of males and then seeking to fully understand their victimization in order to offer them meaningful, effective intervention, support and therapy services. They, too, *deserve* to heal and to live healthy, happy and fulfilling lives.

Sometimes it can be difficult for adult men who have never experienced any form of sexual abuse to believe that this happened to so many others. They may say, “Well, nothing ever happened to me or to the men in my family . . . or to any guys I’ve ever known.” Gently I respond: “They just haven’t felt safe enough to tell you yet.”

“Trauma informed” support/therapy with male survivors:

- Recognize the possibility of childhood sexual abuse within every client’s history.
- Understand how particularly difficult it can be for boys and men to disclose
- Communicate your knowledge, understanding and respect
Offer a welcoming, safe office—posters, brochures, books; agency website
- Give the client control whenever possible
Location where meet (privacy? safety?)
Choose gender of the service provider?
Pace
- Understand the different responses to trauma: “fight,” “flight” or “freeze”
- Accept his current (non-life threatening) coping behaviors—however self-defeating, until he can practice new, more constructive activities
- Use the “language of resiliency”—stress **“survivor”** rather than “victim”

References and resources:

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<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/attorney-general-eric-holder-announces-revisions-uniform-crime-report-s-definition-rape>

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<http://www.malesurvivor.org/> <http://www.malesurvivor.org/index.php>

One in Six <https://1in6.org/> <https://bristleconeproject.org/>

“Myths and Facts About Male Sexual Abuse and Assault” <https://1in6.org/get-information/myths>

RANN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), national anti-sexual violence organization
<https://www.rainn.org/about-rainn> <https://www.rainn.org/articles/sexual-assault-men-and-boys>

SNAP Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests

<https://www.snapnetwork.org/about>

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