

Getting Together

Helping You to Help Yourself



Elizabeth D. Drake, M.Ed. and Anne E. Gilroy

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CHILD ADVOCACY

PUBLICATIONS

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This book is for you.

It was written especially for girls who have been sexually abused. You've done the right thing by telling what happened to you. Now you can get help with the serious problem of sexual abuse.

We know that sexual abuse is hard to talk about. You may have many questions and fears that are difficult to put into words. You aren't alone.

There are many families in which sexual abuse has happened. Experts know that when a child has been sexually abused, the whole family needs help. You will meet many people ready and able to help you and your family so sexual abuse doesn't happen again.

Sometimes the process of getting help is confusing or frightening. This book was written to tell you about some of the things you will face as you get help with this problem. We hope the information in this book guides you, answers your questions, and gives you courage.

Elizabeth D. Drake
Anne E. Gilroy

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The secret is out...what now?

Now that the secret is out, a big part of the problem is over. But there is more to do so you and your family can understand how this happened. There are many people who want to help you and your family. You need to know what these people will do for you.

- b *They will believe you.*
- b They will be sure that you are taken care of and that you have a safe place to live.
- b They want to be sure your parents understand what has happened and that they believe you.

You may be asked to talk about sexual abuse more than you think you can. It will be hard to do, but talking about what happened is the first step toward helping yourself. Talking about it will make you feel better.

What is sexual abuse?

The law says that any time an adult or teenager uses a child in a sexual way, it is *sexual abuse*.

It is sexual abuse when an adult touches a child in a sexual way or when a child is made to touch an adult. The touching may be gentle or it may be painful. Clothes may be on or off. It is sexual abuse if the touching happened many times, or if it happened only once. All of this is *sexual abuse*.

The law says that adults cannot use children for sex. It says that children are too young to give permission to adults for any sexual activity. Some men and women break this law and use children in a sexual way. This happens to boys and it happens to girls of all different ages.

It is never okay for an adult to use a child for sex. Laws against sexual abuse were made to protect children, and the person who abused you broke the law.

You may hear the word *incest* (in-sest). This word is used when a man sexually abuses any child that is related to him. If a man uses his daughter, niece, or sister for sex, it is *incest*.

People may use the words *offender* and *victim*. The legal word for the man who sexually abused you is the *offender*. The law says you are a *victim* of the crime of sexual abuse.

Who has this problem?



Many families face this problem. There are other kids in your school who are keeping the same secret. Experts believe that one out of five girls and one out of ten boys need help with the problem of incest or sexual abuse.

An abuser can be a man or a woman, or sometimes an older boy or girl. Sometimes sexual abusers are strangers. Most of the time the sexual abuser is an adult man who is a friend or relative of the child he decides to use for sex.

Both boys and girls find it hard to tell about any kind of sexual abuse, and adults sometimes find it hard to listen. But more and more children are able to talk about it. And because, like you, they are able to talk about it, adults have learned how to help.

Getting help

What has happened to you may bother you in many different ways. You may have headaches or nightmares. Your stomach may hurt. You may feel like crying and not know why. You may feel afraid. You may think about things you wish you could just forget. You may not enjoy being in school or being with your friends. You may think you will never be happy again.

It is perfectly normal for girls who have been sexually abused to feel stress and confusion. Feelings of anger, shame, and guilt will be tangled up inside you. These feelings can keep you mixed up and unhappy until you get a counselor's help to sort them out.

b Getting help means learning to talk to your mother and father about yourself.

b It means looking forward to the future and not letting the past overwhelm you.

b It means untangling your feelings so you control them and they don't control you.

b Getting help means learning that you are not powerless and you do not have to be a victim of other people's power.

b Getting help means learning that it's OK to be angry about the sexual abuse.

b Getting help means understanding that this problem is too big for any family to fix without help.

We all want to forget the bad things that happen to us, but pretending that bad things don't matter only makes the problems last longer.

It's not your fault

What happened is not your fault. It wasn't because of the way you dress or the way you look. A girl sometimes feels she must have done something to give the man the idea. *This is not true.* The abuser is responsible for what he did to you.

You may feel guilty because you think you let this happen. You didn't. There are many ways a man can force a girl into having sex with him. He may threaten or scare her. He may even be able to make her feel that she gave him permission for the sexual touching.

A man may trick a girl into having sex with him. Because sexual touching feels good, he may try to make her think that sex between a child and an adult is OK.

Sometimes a girl is ashamed if some of the touches felt good. She can be mixed up by her guilty feelings and think she somehow made the sexual abuse happen.

The people who are helping you and your family know you never had a choice. No matter how it happened or what you said to the man, the sexual abuse was not your fault. The abuser is responsible and has broken the law.

The sexual abuse is not your fault, but it is your job to help yourself now.

*"Even though it upset me,
sometimes it felt good to
be touched and I was ashamed"*

CONTINUED...
IN ORIGINAL BOOK,
15 MORE PAGES WILL FOLLOW.