

Symptoms of those Who have Suffered Sexual Abuse

The following list is a collection of observations by counselors of abused women and their feelings and coping mechanisms. Certainly this list is not exhaustive, nor does it mean that one has suffered sexual abuse if one has these symptoms. This list can help people discover how abuse has affected them as an adult. If you have suffered abuse, going to counseling can be helpful to help you deal with these symptoms.

1. Fear of being alone in the dark, of sleeping alone; nightmares; night terrors (especially of pursuit, threat, entrapment).
2. Swallowing and gagging sensitivity; repugnance to water on face when bathing or swimming (suffocation feelings).
3. Alienation from body -- not at home in own body; failure to heed signals of body or take care of it, poor body image; manipulating body size to avoid sexual attention.
4. Gastrointestinal problems; GYN disorders (including spontaneous vaginal infections); head aches; arthritis or joint pain.
5. Wearing a lot of clothing, even in summer; baggy clothes; failure to remove clothing even when appropriate to do so (while swimming, bathing, sleeping); other addictions, compulsive behaviors.
6. Eating disorders; drug/alcohol abuse (or total abstinence); other addictions, compulsive behaviors.
7. Skin carving, self-abuse (physical pain is manageable); self-destructiveness.
8. Phobias.
9. Need to be invisible, perfect, or perfectly bad.
10. Suicidal thoughts, attempts, obsession (including "passive suicide").
11. Depression (sometimes paralyzing); seemingly baseless crying.
12. Anger issues: inability to recognize, own or express anger; fear of actual or imagined rage; constant anger; intense hostility toward entire gender or ethnic group (race) of the perpetrator.
13. Splitting (depersonalization); going into shock, shutdown in crisis; stressful situation always is crisis; psychic numbing; physical pain or numbness associated with particular memory, . emotion (e.g., anger) or situation (e.g., sex).
14. Rigid control of thought process; humorless; extremely solemn.
15. Childhood hiding, hanging on, cowering in comers (security-seeking behaviors); adult nervousness over being watched or surprised; feeling watched; startle response.

16. Trust issues: inability to trust (trust is not safe); too total trust; trusting indiscriminately.
17. High risk-taking ("daring the fates"); inability to take risks.
18. Boundary issues: control power, territorial issues; fear of losing control; obsessive/compulsive behaviors (attempts to control things that don't matter, just to control something); power/sex confusion.
19. Guilt/shame/low self-esteem/feeling worthless/high appreciation of small favors of others.
20. Pattern of being a victim (victimizing oneself after being victimized by others), especially sexually; no sense of own power or right to set limits or say "no"; pattern of relationships with much older persons (onset in adolescence).
21. Feeling demand to "produce and be loved"; instinctively knowing and doing what the other person needs or wants; relationships mean big trade-offs ("love" was ~, not given).
22. Abandonment issues.
23. Blocking out some period of early years (especially 1-12), or a specific person or place.
24. Feeling of carrying an awful secret; urge to tell/fear of its being revealed; certainty that no one would listen. Being generally secretive. Feeling "marked" (the "scarlet letter").
25. Feeling crazy; feeling different; feeling oneself to be unreal and everyone else to be real, or vice versa; creating fantasy world, relationships, or identities (esp. for women; imagining/wishing self to be male, i.e., not a victim).
26. Denial; no awareness at all; repression of memories; pretending; minimizing ("it wasn't that bad"); having dreams or memories ("maybe it's my imagination") (these are actually flashbacks, which is how recall begins); strong, deep "inappropriate" negative reactions to a person, place or event; "sensory flashes" (a light, a place, a physical feeling) without any sense of their meaning; remembering surroundings but not the event. Memory may start with the least threatening event or perpetrator. Actual details of abuse may never be fully remembered; however, much recovery is possible without complete recall. God will release memories ~ pace you can handle.
27. Sexual issues: sex feels "dirty"; aversion to being touched, especially in GYN exam; strong aversion to (or need for) particular sex acts; feeling betrayed by one's body; trouble integrating sexuality and emotionality; confusion or overlapping of affection/sex/dominance/aggression.
28. Violence; having to pursue power in sexual arena which is actually sexually acting out (self-abuse, manipulation); abuse of others; compulsively "seductive" or compulsive asexual; must be sexual aggressor or cannot be; impersonal, "promiscuous" sex with strangers concurrent with inability to have sex in intimate relationship (conflict between sex and caring); prostitute, stripper, "sex symbol (Marilyn Monroe), porn actress; sexual "acting out" to meet anger and revenge needs; "sexaholism"; avoidance; shutdown; crying after an orgasm; all pursuit feels like anger; sexual fantasies of dominance/real rape (results of guilt and confusion).

29. Pattern of ambivalent or intensely conflictual relationships (in true intimacy, issues are more likely to surface; in problem relationships, focus can be shifted from real issue of incest). Note: Partner of survivor often suffers consequences of Post-Incest Syndrome (especially sex and relationship issues).
30. Avoidance of mirrors (connected with invisibility, shame/self esteem issues, distrust of perceived body image).
31. Desire to change one's name (to disassociate from the perpetrator or to take control through self labeling).
32. Limited tolerance for happiness; active withdrawal from/reluctance to trust happiness (ice = thin).
33. Aversion to noise-making (including during sex, crying, laughing or other body functions); verbal hypervigilance (careful monitoring of one's words); quiet-voiced, especially when needing to be heard.
34. Stealing in adults; stealing and firestarting in children.
35. Multiple personality.