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ABOUT ADULTS ABUSED DURING CHILDHOOD

When a child's trust is betrayed by an adult, the child feels depressed, confused, insecure, frightened. When that child becomes an adult, the impact of experiencing neglect and/or physical, emotional or sexual abuse continues to influence that person's life. Abused children learn "survival skills" like withdrawing and distancing themselves from all adults or trying to be perfect to seek approval from adults; creating fantasies to escape from the realities of their lives; turning off feelings and/or misbehaving to express their underlying hurt and anger. Because they are not able to comprehend why the abuse keeps occurring, the children conclude that it must be because they are "bad" and take the blame for the abuse.

Abused children frequently carry these coping skills into adult life with results ranging from difficulties in developing and sustaining relationships, making poor selections in who they become involved with, having fears about making change(s) to trouble coping with stress, trouble recognizing or showing emotions, caring "too much" for others at the expense of their own needs, and not being able to accurately assess their own worth. Many adults struggling with these problems often have no idea that the abuse/neglect in their childhood may be causing these difficulties. They often find it problematic to even talk about their problems with anyone because of the guilt and shame they have carried. Secrecy about their past and/or minimizing their abuse experiences continue to be one of their "coping methods".

The road to recovery includes acknowledging the abuse, letting the memories surface despite the pain, and replacing responsibility for the abuse where it belongs – *on the abuser, not on yourself*. In addition, it also takes learning to free up emotions, and actively learning to reduce the level of shame felt. Finding out how to effectively handle anger, acknowledging your courage, identifying your strengths, and being patient and compassionate with yourself are other skills that support the healing process.

Since the problems stems from a relationship, it requires a healing relationship to begin to undue all the harm the abuses have caused. You cannot make this journey alone. It is imperative that you seek out a professional that has expertise in working with survivors to guide you as you make the journey to a much more enriching life.

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