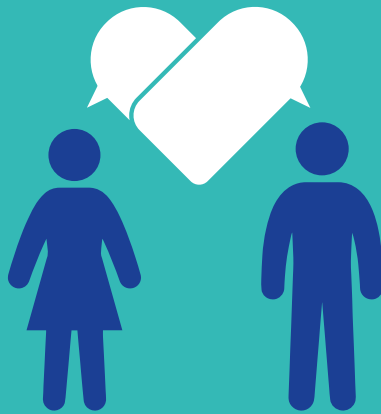


Help!



I need someone
to talk to

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Hi. You can call me Sam, but that is not my real name. Even so, this booklet deals with real-life stuff that I have had to face over the last couple of years. I hope that my true and honest comments throughout this booklet will help you deal with the experiences and emotions that I too have gone through.

I was sexually abused as a younger child. It's really important that you find someone to talk to about it...

But it can be difficult to talk to someone because of all the mixed up feelings the experience has probably left you with.

The person who abused you may well have tried to make you keep it secret. But if you can tell someone what's happened, not only will it help you, but you can also help to stop the abuse happening to anyone else.

You need to know that, whatever the abuser said to you, **IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT.**

They were in a position of power and they have taken advantage of you.

You are not in any way to blame for what has happened.

Talking to somebody about the abuse is the way to begin to get over it. Bringing it into the open will also make sure that you and other children and young people are kept safe.

Who should I tell?

You will know who it's best to talk to about what's been going on. It may be a parent or relative, friend, teacher or someone you trust at church or club. This person cannot promise to keep what you have told them to themselves, but they will be able to help you through the next steps. If the first person you try to talk to doesn't listen or fails to do anything

then tell somebody else. Some young people find it easier to talk to someone they don't know and this is where the telephone helplines listed at the end of the leaflet can help.

First things first

Whenever someone says they have been sexually abused, Children's Social Care and the police have a duty to make sure you and others are safe but also investigate what has happened. This may sound scary but these people are here to help you! Part of their job will involve you telling them what has happened. The person who has abused you will also be interviewed and this may eventually lead to them being charged with a sexual offence. The reason for the investigation is to get the facts straight.

Although it may be upsetting and difficult for you, the people you talk to, whether it's the police or a social worker, are used to dealing with these situations. They will be patient and listen carefully and sympathetically to what you have to say. The person who has abused you will be kept away from you whilst they make their enquiries and won't be able to put you under any pressure to change anything.

What will happen next?

So, you've told a trusted adult about the abuse and they have got in touch with Children's Social Care or the police. The next thing that happens is that you will be contacted by a social worker who will arrange for you to be interviewed. This interview will probably need to be video recorded because it may be used as evidence in a future court case. Children's Social Care and the Police will listen carefully to what you have to say and, if you don't want the person who has abused you to be prosecuted, they will try to respect your wishes. But whether or not there is a court case, this interview is very important and will be carried out by people who are specially trained. One of the good things about the video interview is that it will save you from having to tell your story over and over again.

Young people being interviewed in this way may choose to have someone they trust at the interview with them. The trusted adult you first talked to may be a good person to be there to support you whilst you tell your story. Whatever your feelings at this point you need to remember that a crime has been committed against you and the person who abused you is the one who has done wrong.

Will I be taken into care?

If you have been abused by someone who lives with you, Children's Social Care need to be sure that you are safe. However, if this means someone having to move out, they would try to make sure that the person who has abused you leaves rather than you. Some young people who have been sexually abused do have to move for their own safety, but this only happens when there is no other way of keeping them safe. Usually young people remain with the parent who isn't involved in the abuse but they may stay with a relative, friend or foster-carer during the investigation. Even if you do need to live somewhere else for a while, it's in everybody's interests to get you back home as soon as it is safe for you to return. If the person who has abused you doesn't usually live at your house then your parent/guardian will make sure that there is no contact, and you are kept safe.

Your feelings

Everyone is different and your reaction to the abuse will depend on lots of things like who did it, how often it happened and how old you were when it started. Young people tell us that being sexually abused leaves them with all sorts of mixed-up emotions. Abuse can

leave you feeling dirty and also guilty, as though what happened was your fault. You may feel even worse about it if the abuse sometimes felt nice, but it's reassuring to know that experiencing pleasant sexual feelings is perfectly normal and just means your body's working properly.

As well as mixed-up feelings, abuse tends to make young people unsure about who they can trust. This is hardly surprising after someone who claimed to care has abused this trust. Often young people just don't want to talk about it and don't want people prying into their thoughts and feelings. This, again, is a perfectly understandable reaction.

Getting help if you need it

Sometimes, young people who have been abused benefit from extra help. Not every young person wants it, but if your experiences have made you confused and unhappy then it's important that you get the help you need. The main thing is that you feel ready, and it's usually better to wait for a bit before arranging anything. The social worker or your GP should be able to put you in touch with someone who is experienced and skilled in helping young people. Sometimes there are local groups where you can meet up with other young people who have had similar

experiences, and this alone can be a very good way of helping you deal with the effect the abuse has had on you. If it seems to be taking a long time to get over it, don't worry! Everybody's different and for some it may take longer than others.

Can prayer help?

Christians believe that God cares about everything that happens in their lives. So when horrible things happen it's good to be able to talk to God about how we feel. God understands and can help us to face and deal with all the uncomfortable feelings we don't know what to do with. If there is a mature Christian you trust and you feel comfortable with, then it can help to talk and pray together. You shouldn't feel under pressure to talk only about the abuse but, as you share your feelings, it is likely to crop up. Some young people find it a very healing experience to be able to talk and pray in this way, particularly when they are reassured God cares for them and is working things out for their good. Healing is often a gradual process so don't worry if it you experience a few setbacks and feeling better takes longer than you'd hoped.

What about forgiveness?

Forgiveness is always difficult when you have been hurt by someone in this way. Feelings of anger towards the person who has abused you are only natural. Nobody can force you to forgive and you shouldn't feel under pressure to forgive either. Forgiveness, like healing, can't be rushed. Some people choose not to forgive those who have abused them and nobody can blame them for this. It may help you to realise though, that forgiving doesn't mean the abuser is let off. It just means you are leaving them and the situation with God for Him to sort out.

Coming through

You may feel that things are never going to get back to normal and, in one way, they won't because the abuse has happened and no-one can pretend it hasn't. From time to time your experiences may come back to you in things such as flashbacks or nightmares, but the effect the abuse has had on you will hopefully, over time, begin to fade. Although something really bad has happened to you things will get better.

Resources

CCPAS

Provides training and advice on all areas of child protection and good working practice to churches, organisations and individuals across the UK as well as a 24 hour helpline service for young people and all affected by abuse.

0845 120 45 50

info@ccpas.co.uk

www.ccpas.co.uk

Childline

24 hour helpline for children and young people.

0800 1111

NSPCC

National Child Protection Charity.

Helpline: 0808 800 5000

Info & ordering publications tel:

0207 825 2775

www.nspcc.org.uk

Kidscape

National charity publishing booklets and information on self-protection skills for children and how to keep children safe.

Helpline: 0845 120 5204

0207 730 3300

www.kidscape.org.uk

ACC

The Association of Christian Counsellors facilitate provision by Christians of quality counselling and pastoral care.

0845 124 9569

www.acc-uk.org

This is one of a series of **Help!** leaflets published by CCPAS.
For our full range of resources and for more information
visit our website www.ccpas.co.uk



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