

Sense of Betrayal

Sibling sexual abuse is a gross abuse of trust. Survivors often reveal feeling betrayed by their sibling who they feel they should have been able to love and trust. They may also feel betrayed by parents who failed to protect them.

Shame

Many survivors describe their childhood as a lonely time, with their experiences of abuse leaving them feeling isolated from, and different to other children. Survivors will often reveal feelings of shame and deep embarrassment connected to being sexually assaulted by a brother or sister.

Adult survivors can wrestle with especially shameful feelings if they feel they did not fight off a sibling's sexual advances or if they sought out that affection. These feelings can be particularly strongly felt if the age difference between the siblings is not great.

Grief and Loss

It is common for survivors to express feelings of sadness over the loss of a normal healthy sibling relationship. Feelings of grief for the past and future relationship can be deeply felt.

For some, the realisation that their relationship with a brother or sister, their closest genetic relative, is not as they wished or hoped it to be, comes with an enormous sense of sorrow.



Information about Sexual Abuse

If you wish to discuss sexual abuse issues please contact:

South Western Centre Against Sexual Assault (SWCASA)
299 Koroit Street Warrnambool
(03) 5564 4144

We provide free and confidential counselling and advocacy for survivors of sexual abuse. When people come for counselling they usually want to talk about their experiences in privacy and to hear that there is hope for resolution of their difficulties.

SWCASA is one of 15 Centres Against Sexual Assault located in Victoria. For further details contact:

SWCASA (03) 5564 4144

CASA House (03) 9344 2210

Victorian Sexual Assault Crisis Line (after hours)
(03) 9349 1766 Melb
1800 806 292 Rural

OR

www.casa.org.au

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SIBLING SEXUAL ABUSE

Information for adults abused as children

Produced by
South Western
Centre Against Sexual Assault (SWCASA)

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SWCASA is a department of
South West Healthcare.

What is sibling sexual abuse?

Like all forms of sexual abuse, sibling sexual abuse (sibling incest) is an abuse of power, where the more powerful sibling abuses the less powerful. Power can be physical, intellectual or emotional. Sibling abuse is sexual contact between siblings who are of a different age, size, strength or developmental level.

Sibling sexual abuse often, but not always, involves some form of force, manipulation or intimidation. Sibling incest can involve forms of non-contact abuse, such as forcing another to view pornography or exposing of genitals.

In most cases, sibling sexual abuse does not occur in isolation but alongside physical and/or emotional abuse.

The term sibling includes all children who grow up together in the same family, including step, foster and adopted children.

Minimisation

Sibling sexual abuse is as traumatic as sexual abuse by a parent (or any other form of sexual abuse) and has a lasting impact on the victim. Studies have shown that sibling abuse often includes the most serious forms of abuse.

However in spite of this, sibling sexual abuse is more likely to be overlooked, normalised and discounted by families and the wider community. This minimisation by others can mean that survivors themselves are less likely to view their experiences as abuse and also find it more difficult to talk about.

Silence

Survivors of sibling incest often describe spending their childhood in fear, unable to tell anyone of their abuse for fear of being blamed, not believed or suffering retaliation.

This fear, along with shame surrounding the 'incest taboo', can mean the victim's silence extends over the years of childhood, and for some, continuing into adulthood.

For those who did speak out, many report being further harmed by their families response, with the abuse being ignored, excused or worse still, the victim blamed.

It's more common than you think

Sexual abuse by a brother or sister is not uncommon, with studies suggesting it is more common than parent-child incest. Some studies contend it is the most common form of child abuse.

Impact

Sibling sexual abuse can have serious immediate and long term effects on victims. Some of these include:

Feeling Responsible

Many survivors state they feel they were in some way to blame for their abuse. This can be particularly so when they were close in age to the abusive sibling. This feeling of "being in it together", of being a co-conspirator rather than a victim, does not acknowledge the power dynamics that existed, and further adds to feelings of guilt, shame and embarrassment.

Some survivors may feel responsible for the "fall out" that follows a disclosure of sibling abuse, or may feel responsible for keeping the family together.