

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

It was seven o'clock in the evening. I walked unsuspectingly into my mother's bedroom to ask her a question about my homework. I stopped in my tracks at the doorway. She was dressed in her favorite turquoise dress, had her "going out for the evening" makeup on, and was spraying herself with perfume.

"What are you doing?" I asked in dismay.

"Tonight is my night to play cards with the girls. Remember?" she casually responded.

I had not remembered. The blood drained from my face as I realized that once again, this would be a night of terror. A night of trying to outrun, outsmart, outdistance my father. And once again, my mother was leaving me alone—unprotected and at the mercy of my father.

I WAS TWELVE YEARS OLD that night and believed I was the only person in the world who was living a nightmare. Thirty-seven years later, I know that there are literally thousands of kids who face this scene or something like it every day of their lives, kids who are trying to protect themselves from the very people who are supposed to love them and take care of them. These kids are being sexually abused by people in their lives whom they have a right to trust and believe will not hurt them. These are the kids for whom this book is written.

This includes guys, too. A lot of people think girls are the only victims of sexual abuse. Not so! Many guys are victims also.

It's difficult to get statistics on sexual abuse of boys because guys have a lot of trouble dealing with the idea that they are victims. In our society, men are never supposed to be weak or vulnerable, so if a boy is sexually abused, he may very well block it from his memory or decide that it wasn't really sexual abuse after all. In addition, many guys start thinking that they are homosexual if they are abused by a male.

William believed that. He thought his parish priest had specifically picked him out from the other boys because somehow he could tell that William was gay. Ridiculous! Guys are not homosexuals because they are abused by a male, just as girls are not lesbians if they are abused by a female.

The best statistics to date say that one out of every seven boys in this country, and maybe as many as one out of every five, will be sexually abused by somebody by the time they are eighteen.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

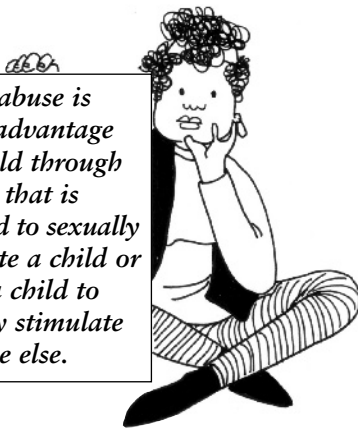
You may be reading this book as a friend of someone who has been sexually abused. You may be reading it because you're wondering if something that has happened to you is sexual abuse. Or you may be very sure that you have been sexually abused and want some information, some help.

Whatever circumstances have brought you to this book, I'm glad you're reading it. Take your time with it. Sexual abuse and incest are heavy topics. Don't push yourself. This book is designed to help you, not hurt you. Skip around and read the parts that relate to your life right now. Save the other issues for when you are ready to deal with them. If it's best for you, read the book cover to cover. The main thing is to use it for your benefit. If you find you're getting upset or scared, put it away for a while. Let this book work *for* you in your healing, not against you.

WHAT EXACTLY ARE SEXUAL ABUSE AND INCEST?

First, let's try to get down some definitions of what we'll be talking about. There are many different ways that people define the words *sexual abuse* and *incest*. People in the legal system, such as judges and lawyers, use definitions that talk about "degree" and "temporary care and custody." People in the mental health community (therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and others) talk about "betrayal" and "boundary infringement." Other people say, "There is no such thing, so get out of my face."

Well, there *are* such things as sexual abuse and incest, and for our purposes in this book, we are going to define *sexual abuse* like this:



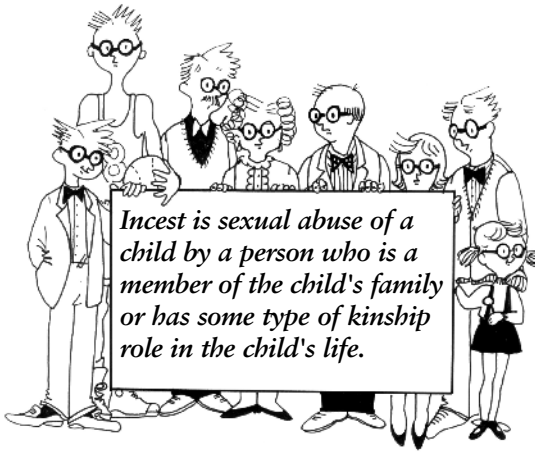
Sexual abuse is taking advantage of a child through any act that is designed to sexually stimulate a child or to use a child to sexually stimulate someone else.

This means that if someone in your life is doing one or more of the following things to you, then it's a good bet you are being sexually abused:

1. Penetrating your vagina or anus with fingers, a penis, or other objects
2. Getting you to touch his or her private parts (vagina, breasts, penis, backside)
3. Having you look at sexual pictures or making you pose for sexual pictures
4. Exposing himself or herself to you
5. Finding ways to see you naked or partially undressed
6. Touching you in ways that make you feel uncomfortable
7. Talking to you about sex in ways that make you feel nervous
8. Talking to you about your body or other personal things in ways that make your stomach get tight

This is not a complete listing of what sexual abuse can be. There are hundreds of ways to abuse kids sexually; these are just some examples.

So what about incest? I'm using the term *incest* when the person who is sexually abusing you is a member of your family or someone who has some sort of kinship role in your life.



A *member of the family* is someone to whom you are related by blood, such as your *biological*

- Mother or father
- Brother or sister
- Aunt or uncle
- Grandmother or grandfather
- Cousin

Someone who has a *kinship role* in your life would be someone who is not related to you by blood but has a family type of role in your life. This could be

- A foster parent
- A stepparent
- A guardian
- An in-law (brother-in-law or sister-in-law)
- Your mom's live-in boyfriend or dad's live-in girlfriend
- Anybody who becomes a member of the family through marriage, the law, or circumstances

A Legal Definition

It's important to keep in mind that most state laws define incest as *sexual intercourse between people who are related by blood* (like a brother and sister, a father and daughter, or a grandparent and grandchild). For

the purposes of this book, however, we are going to define incest as *any* type of sexual abuse by a family member or someone in a kinship role. This is a pretty wide definition of incest, and you may run into some people working in the field of sexual abuse and incest who use a more narrow definition.

The legal definition of sexual abuse also depends on where the abuse took place, the type of abuse, and whether the abuser had “care and custody” of the child.

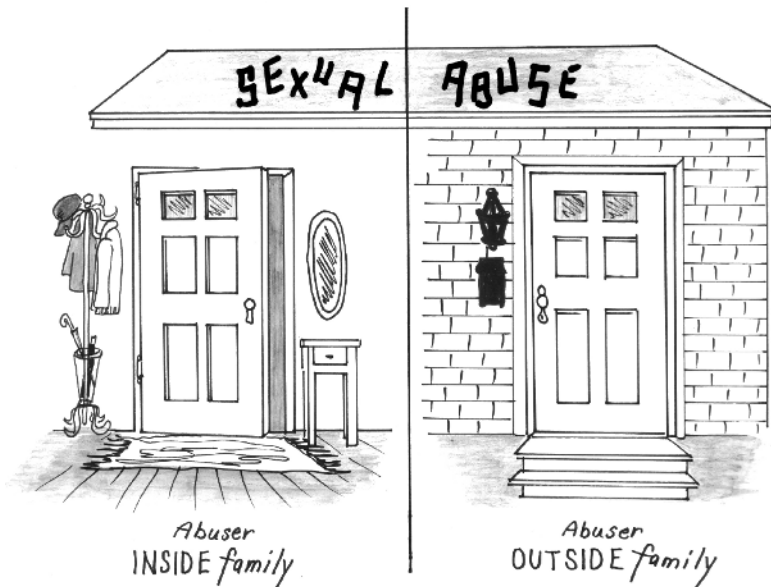
So don't let it confuse you if the definitions I'm using here don't match the definitions of lawyers or social workers or the police. The bottom line is that it is abuse, and it is against the law.

Abusers Outside the Family Versus Abusers Inside the Family

Let's go even further with our definitions and divide sexual abuse by abuser: abusers who are outside the family and abusers who are members of the family.

An abuser who is outside the family could be

- A teacher
- A coach



- A babysitter
- A religious leader, such as a priest, minister, or rabbi
- A school janitor
- A doctor
- A scout leader

If any of these people had sexual contact with a child, it would be considered *sexual abuse* because this person would have had *care and custody* of the child. This simply means that the child didn't have any choice about being in the situation. He or she was stuck with the abuser because at that time the adult was in charge of the child.

Lots of kids in this country are sexually abused by people who are not members of their families. In fact, studies show that one out of every three women in this country will be sexually abused by someone outside her family by the time she is eighteen.¹ Just ask Heather, who was sexually abused by the father of the children she babysat every Saturday night; or Justine, who was sexually abused by her softball coach; or Gwen, who was sexually abused by her science teacher.

In all these cases, the abuser was someone the victim knew, maybe even someone she liked and trusted. The majority of kids are abused by people they see regularly in their lives, people they have a right to believe will not hurt them. Very few kids are sexually abused by strangers. Unfortunately, parents generally tell their kids only to be careful of strangers and never mention that someone they know, or even love, can sexually abuse them.

More commonly, kids are sexually abused by members of their family. Remember, an *abuser who is inside the family* or who shares a kinship role with the victim could be a *biological, step, or foster*

- Mom or dad
- Sister or brother
- Grandmother or grandfather
- Aunt or uncle
- Cousin

or any in-law (brother-in-law, sister-in-law, and so on). We are calling this type of sexual abuse *incest*.

Incest is set apart from other forms of sexual abuse by the element of family or kinship. As many as one out of every four girls in this country

will be sexually abused by someone *in* her family. Girls like Sharon, who considered her mother's boyfriend a member of the family until he began to fondle her and treat her like a girlfriend; or Yvonne, whose stepfather fondled her from the time she was six and then raped her when she was eleven; or Belinda, who was tortured and sexually abused by her mother and grandmother. All these girls believed that the people who abused them cared about them or loved them. They felt that these abusers were members of the family circle and therefore safe to trust.

Trust is one of the most important things that sexual abuse destroys. And unfortunately, the closer the abuser is to the abused, the bigger the break in trust. When someone whom you consider to be "family" sexually abuses you, it can be even harder to pick yourself up and move on.

Abusers Who Fall into the Gray Area

We know that when abuse is committed by people outside the family who have charge of the child (care and custody), it's called sexual abuse; when it's perpetrated by people inside the family, it's called incest. But what about those people who fall into the gray area between inside the family and outside the family? Or people who aren't really responsible for the child's care or custody?

SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T HAVE CARE AND CUSTODY If the person who is abusing you does not have care and custody of you—does not have charge of you for periods of time as does a teacher or a coach or a scout leader or a parent or a relative—then the law in many states would call this type of sexual contact *sexual assault* rather than *sexual abuse*. This differentiation is important in terms of how the courts would handle this crime. Yes, sexual assault, just like sexual abuse and incest, is a crime. This differentiation doesn't mean a thing when we talk about the damage this abuse may have caused to your life.

ALMOST FAMILY Then there is the abuser who isn't a bona fide member of the family but lives in the same house with the victim. This is what happened in Darnella's case. Her brother's best friend moved in with the family because his own family was so abusive. After two months of living with Darnella's family, the friend began to find ways to brush against her, fondle her, and eventually rape her. Darnella had a right to believe that this boy would not hurt her. She was not being stupid when she looked at him as another "brother." He was invited to become a part of her family, and she viewed him that way. The fault is with her brother's friend, the abuser.

In some states, this abuse would be considered sexual assault because this boy did not have care and custody of Darnella. In other states, this abuse would be considered sexual abuse because the boy was a member of Darnella's household.

Don't let the language throw you. No matter who does it, what your state's laws call it, or how often it happens, it still hurts, it's still a crime, and it still needs to be dealt with.

RELIGIOUS LEADER Toward the end of the 1990s, kids and adults started coming forward and talking about being abused by their clergy—especially by priests. Adults who were now in their thirties were talking about being molested by priests when they were fourteen and sixteen. Kids as young as eleven and twelve were breaking their silence and telling about being abused by their priest. This caused an earthquake in our country and especially in the Catholic Church. People really had a hard time at first believing that a “man of God” would do anything so vile as to sexually abuse a child.

Unfortunately, priests aren't immune from the sickness that every sexual predator has. Just because they are priests doesn't mean they can't do unspeakable, hurtful things to kids. If you are one of those kids, please, please, please tell someone. Not just for your own sake but for the sake of every kid with whom that priest *has* come in contact and *will* come in contact.

Think about how many kids a priest—or any religious leader—comes in contact with in the course of his or her career. By the time he died in August 2003, ex-priest John Goeghan had 130 people claiming he had sexually molested them—*one hundred and thirty*.

I know that besides your parents, your minister, priest, or rabbi may have the most authority or respect in your life. That doesn't mean you can't tell. That doesn't mean people won't believe you. I won't kid you: it will be hard. Telling about abuse at the hands of *any* abuser is hard, but this may seem even harder because it's one of “God's guys.” Trust me on this: God is on your side. He never intended for this kind of horror to be visited on kids. Please tell.

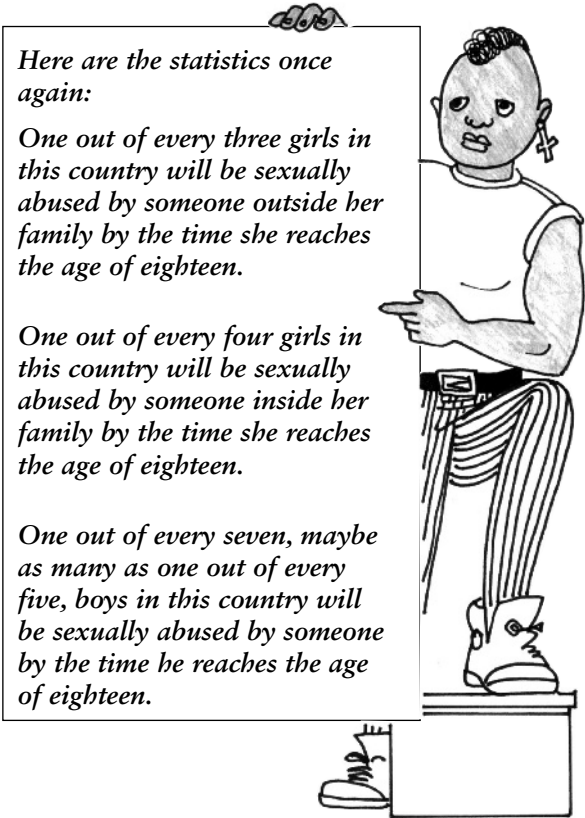
Remember: you don't have to deal with this by yourself, and you're not the only kid struggling to cope with this mess. Thousands of kids in this country are being sexually abused or are trying to heal from the effects of sexual abuse.

The purpose of this book is to help you become a part of the group that is healing. Believe it or not, it's possible. But first you have to accept the fact that you were a victim.

BELIEVING THAT YOU WERE A VICTIM

The current term for people who have been sexually abused is *survivor*. Some folks say that if you were sexually abused and are still standing, then you are a survivor. I sort of agree with that.

But being a survivor is the *goal*; you have to be a victim of something before you can be a survivor. And that's exactly what you were—a victim—and you were the victim of a crime.

A hand is shown at the top of a rectangular sign. To the right of the sign is a cartoon illustration of a man with a mohawk hairstyle, wearing a white tank top, a black belt, and striped pants. He is pointing towards the sign. The sign contains three paragraphs of text.

Here are the statistics once again:

One out of every three girls in this country will be sexually abused by someone outside her family by the time she reaches the age of eighteen.

One out of every four girls in this country will be sexually abused by someone inside her family by the time she reaches the age of eighteen.

One out of every seven, maybe as many as one out of every five, boys in this country will be sexually abused by someone by the time he reaches the age of eighteen.

Sexual Abuse Is a Crime

Sexual abuse is a crime in every state in this country. Whether the crime is considered a *felony* (resulting in severe punishments) or a *misdemeanor* (resulting in less severe punishments) varies from state to state. This variation occurs because each state is allowed to decide what circumstances make the abuse a felony or a misdemeanor. The bottom line is still that all sexual abuse is some sort of crime in all states.

The Abuse Was Not Your Fault

I'm going to tell you this over and over again, so make sure you get it: the abuse was not your fault!

I know it may be a very difficult concept for you to accept. You may have been told by the abuser that the abuse is all your fault, that he wouldn't be like this if it weren't for you. Junk! Garbage!

The abuse is never, *ever* the fault of the victim. Understanding this will be your first step to becoming a survivor. If you don't believe it right now, don't worry; you'll hear a lot more about this later on.

For now, let's see what we've learned:

1. Sexual abuse is the big label, and incest refers to sexual abuse committed by a family member or someone in a kinship role.
2. Abuse is never the victim's fault; the responsibility is always the abuser's.
3. Sexual abuse does happen; it's not something kids make up or lie about; it's a real problem in our society.
4. You're not alone; sexual abuse is happening to a lot of kids out there.

Now let's talk about what may be happening in your life.