

**"ANYONE WHO HAD A TROUBLED CHILDHOOD
OUGHT TO READ THIS BOOK."**

**-Anne H. Cohn, D.P.H., Executive Director, National
Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse**

OUTGROWING THE PAIN

**A BOOK FOR AND
ABOUT ADULTS ABUSED
AS CHILDREN**



ELIANA GIL, Ph.D.

**"THE BEST BOOK AVAILABLE TO
HELP SURVIVORS COPE AND UNDERSTAND."**

- Dan Sexton, Director, Childhelp's National Child Abuse Hotline

Outgrowing the Pain:

A Book for and about
Adults Abused as Children

Also by Eliana Gil, Ph.D.

OUTGROWING THE PAIN TOGETHER

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Outgrowing the Pain:

**A Book for and about
Adults Abused as Children**

Eliana Gil, Ph.D.

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To Carolita
with admiration and affection

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Introduction

As a therapist, I have seen many clients who have sought help for a variety of problems including finding or keeping jobs, problems with a drinking or abusive mate, depression, general dissatisfaction with life, or a feeling of "*wandering*" without clear direction or goals. When I inquired into their pasts, physical, sexual, emotional abuse and/or neglect often had occurred. I began to recognize similar patterns and difficulties in victims of past or current abuse.

I began running groups for adults abused as children, and the issues which arose and were discussed further substantiated some of my initial impressions. It is to the individuals who participated in these groups that I dedicate this book. They helped me gain insight and understanding of their current problems and struggles by allowing me to know their thoughts, feelings, perspectives, and pasts. They touched me and inspired me. They never ceased to amaze me with their unique survival instincts and strengths. They possess a special kind of courage that both permits and helps them to set off on a very long journey towards self-acceptance.

The information contained in this book is a result of my interactions with Terry, Joanne, Beverly, Susan, Laura, Maureen, Howard, Bill, Gladys, Lois, Carolita,

Leah, Nancy, Noreen, and Chris. I am grateful to them for reviewing the drafts of this book, and making thoughtful suggestions.

Other people helped with this project. Diane Lozito prepared the cover and generally encouraged my pursuit of this project offering her advertising and artistic talents along the way. Wendy Jung, owner of Letterperfect, edited my work and was in charge of the production including typesetting, graphic layout, and design. She brought her high standards to this book.

Christine Lines co-facilitated some of the groups, constantly contributing in her own unique style. Dr. Karen Saeger, Co-Director of the Redwood Center where I work, supports and encourages me. Most importantly, she believes I have something to say and offer. Dr. Saeger reviewed the manuscript and made many excellent comments and suggestions. I trust her with my life and my rough drafts. My thanks to Kathy Baxter-Stern, Executive Director of the San Francisco Child Abuse Council, where I also work. She provides me with spoken and unspoken support in all my endeavors, and helps create the kind of work environment where my creativity and range of interests can be pursued. I am very fortunate to be surrounded by friends at both work settings who inspire me and cheer me on. My appreciation goes to Dr. Robert Green, Mary Herget, and other staff members at the Redwood Center. Thanks to Elayne Savage, Laura Grandin, and Norma Sullivan who gave of their time and talents to the manuscript development. A closing expression of gratitude goes to my husband, John,

who has been excited and tired with me throughout this process, and who has extended a helping hand just at the right moment. I always have to thank my kids, Teresa, Eric, and Christy because they like the kind of mom I am, and are almost always very understanding when I hide out to work.

— chapter one —

IS THIS BOOK FOR ME?



you think you're crazy?

Do you think you're bad?

Do you have trouble finding friends, lovers, acquaintances?

Once you find them, do they dump on you, take advantage of you, or leave?

Are you in a relationship you know is not good for you? Are you getting beaten up? Does your partner drink too much?

Are things okay sometimes, but never for long enough?

Are you always doing for others, but finding no one returns the favor?

Are you distrustful and afraid of others?

Are you suspicious, resentful, angry at others, often explosive? Do you find others are always taking their anger out on you?

No matter how many good things others tell you, do you end up thinking they are lying to you?

Would you rather stay home alone, and lonely, than face people you don't know, who may not like you?

Are you still trying to figure out what you want to do when you grow up? Do you sometimes feel that you'll never grow up?

Do you have a terrible relationship with your parents, feeling bad around them all the time? Or do you constantly make efforts to please them, never feeling like you succeed?

Do you let people go on too long doing or saying something that distresses you before stopping them, and later find that you resent them?

Do you think you're good for nothing?

Are you drinking too much, eating too much, or trying to numb your pain with drugs of any kind?

Do you find yourself being abusive to your kids, or afraid to have kids for fear that you'll beat them?

Everyone has some of these feelings some of the time. But adults abused as children can have *many* of these patterns to extreme degrees.

Some people think they were not abused as children because they were never hospitalized, it only happened once, their parents didn't mean it, or didn't know better, or other people had it much worse. Abuse of any kind: verbal, physical, sexual, emotional or neglect, affects children. The after-effects can show up immediately or later in life.

Because abuse in one's past is difficult to admit, many of you may never have made the connection between

what happened to you as a child, and some of your current problems. It's an important connection to make, and it will frequently enable you to get unstuck and move on to accomplish some of the things you want.

Purpose of this Book

This book is not going to solve your problems completely. But it *will* help you explore the questions, "*Was I abused as a child?*" "*Has the abuse affected my life negatively?*" "*Am I doomed?*" This is an optimistic book. It emphasizes the importance of the past as well as the present and the future. It will help you sort out what was, what is, and what can be.

This book will outline some of the ways you may have been affected by any form of child abuse or neglect. It will also help you to recognize the changes that can be accomplished in breaking patterns and habits which resulted from the impact of abuse.

Abused children learn by their experiences to expect little of themselves and others. They are not usually taught to trust, and end up seeing themselves as bad, crazy, and unworthy of love or attention. Just as abused children learned to see themselves this way, they can learn to adopt more positive ways of viewing themselves and others.

Who Is This Book For?

This book is for any adult who was abused as a child, or witnessed abuse in his/her family, and is trying to make some sense of his/her experience. It is also for professionals who help others (mental health workers, alcoholism counselors, teachers, etc.). As child abuse continues to be recognized as a major concern, more and more adults abused as children need someone to listen to them and help them sort out their experiences and the powerful after-effects.



“More and more adults abused as children are looking for someone to listen to them...”