HOW TO SUPPORT A SURVIVOR

- Take time to listen – try to understand their story.
- Let them know that they can share as little or as much about their experience as they choose.
- Let them know "Even if you don't want to talk right now I will still be here when you're ready"
- Ask them "what can I do to help you feel safe?"
- Allow them the space to feel whatever it is they need to feel.
- Show appreciation and support when they share their feelings.
- Demonstrate appropriate boundaries and understand personal boundaries for others. Boundaries are mental, emotional, or a physical limit you put in place between you and other people so that you can both be happy. Accept and understand a survivor's communication.
- Help them to gain back the power they lost because of their experience.
- Avoid putting any burdens or expectations for them to change when they are trying to heal.
- Don't push them to make decisions or take actions that make them feel uncomfortable.
- Be mindful of no judgement.
- Don't use the words like "get over it". This is incredibly harmful and is an unrealistic expectation.
- Don't say "Why didn't you tell? This could cause the survivor to feel more unfounded guilt and shame. The sad news is that children often don't tell anyone when they've been sexually abused and there are many reasons why. E.g. bribery, threatened, convinced it's normal, shame, they don't have the words, guilt because they believe it was their fault, confused because the offender is someone they know and trust and/or they don't even understand what it is etc.
- Keep in mind that the body may heal quicker than the mind or vice versa – it is a process of healing for both.
- Empower and assure them that the pain and hurt from their trauma can be used towards a greater purpose.

HEALING TAKES TIME!
IT IS A DIFFERENT JOURNEY FOR EVERYONE.

Resources in Bermuda
Psychological Counseling

Benedict Associates	295-2070
Milestones Ltd.	295-7766
Patterns	296-7288
Solstice	292-3456
The Family Centre	232-1116
Therapeutic Consulting	295-4250
MASC (Counseling for Men by Men)	601-6272
Dr. Tina Arorash, Ph.D.	drtinaarorash@logic.bm

RECOMMENDED READING

When a Woman You Love Was Abused
By Dawn Scott Jones

Healing for Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse
By Bonnie Collins EdM, CSW-R and Kathryn Marsh, CSW-R

Listening and Talking to Your Sexually Abused Child
By Dr. Lynn Daugherty

A Safe Place: Beyond Sexual Abuse
By Jan Morrison

Healing Together: A Guide to Supporting Sexual Abuse Survivors
by Anne Marie Miller

The Body Keeps the Score
by Bessel Van Der Kolk, M.D.

SCARS®
SAVING CHILDREN
AND REVEALING SECRETS

HOW TO SUPPORT A SURVIVOR OF CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE

Whether it's a child, a spouse, a partner, a friend, a family member, or a co-worker.

Email: info@scars.bm
Website: scarsbermuda.com

JUST IMAGINE THE EMOTIONS

To best support a survivor, imagine all the emotions:

CONFUSION: Many child victims do not understand what is happening to them, and if the adults in their life have not discussed body safety, then they may not even know what's happening is wrong. It can be very confusing for a child because the body responds to touch, and sometimes, the child may enjoy what is happening. This does not mean that they are wrong for feeling this way!

FEAR: An abused child will become fearful of the offender and may have thoughts such as, 'I want this to stop', 'will they do this again?', 'I don't want to do this', 'it doesn't feel right' and 'what if someone finds out?' Child sex offenders are often bullies who use sex as a means of obtaining power. Bullying behavior towards a child can be very frightening.

GUILT: Child sex offenders often blame the child victim to avoid taking personal responsibility. Many children question what they did to deserve the abuse and consequently end up blaming themselves.

SHAME: Survivors often experience feelings of shame, whether from embarrassment of the act itself, the confusing pleasurable feelings, knowing it's wrong, not being able to tell anyone or stopping it from happening.

SADNESS: Sexual trauma often causes little ones to feel hopeless and sad. If a child does speak up but isn't believed, or the abuser is allowed to remain in his or her life, then this can cause extreme depression.

ANGER: Deception often causes both repressed and expressed anger. Children are never meant to be used for an adult's sexual arousal. Adults are meant to be trustworthy and protective. Whether the perpetrator is a relative, friend or stranger, a survivor can experience anger and rage if the adults in their life don't protect them. Especially if those adults decide to bury the secret after becoming exposed. Anger can cause a child to disrespect and ignore people of authority. They can also harm others the way they were harmed. Anger can be turned inward through self-harm or outward, both passive or aggressive, thus harming their relationships with others and society at large.

BETRAYAL: If unprotected as a child, an adult survivor may become triggered or experience anxiety when feeling unsafe or not believed. This may cause the survivor to be triggered and become angry or shut down emotionally.

THE LAW REQUIRES THE ABUSE TO BE REPORTED TO:

Department of Child & Family Services Kids Line:
(278-9111) or (294-5882)

The Bermuda Police Service Vulnerable Persons Unit:
(295-0011) or (247-1461)

- **If the survivor is a child, under the age of 18, it must be reported.**
- **We are ALL mandated reporters in Bermuda.**
- **The survivor's power was taken from them, help them to get it back.**

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KEEP IN MIND

- There is no statute of limitations in Bermuda.
- The survivor may experience triggers that cause fear, anger, distrust, withdrawal, etc.
- Adult survivors must have the power over their decision to report their childhood sexual abuse.
- Survivors may be triggered by physical touch in certain areas of their body, senses like smell, particular words, events, surroundings or people.
- The survivor may need continued assurance to feel safe again.
- Children are manipulated, tricked, and deceived by abusers; in most cases, the perpetrator was some one in a position of trust and power. To regain trust, it will take ample time for the survivor.
- Although it is NEVER a child's fault, many survivors blame themselves for not disclosing or being able to stop the abuse.
- Survivors should never feel pressured, forced, shamed or guilted into attending any event, such as a funeral or wedding, where there is a risk that the perpetrator will be present. The only person that needs to be 'pleased' in these situations is the survivor!
- Forgiveness and reconciliation have two very different meanings.
- Forgiveness and trust are also two distinct concepts.
- A survivor has a better chance of living with confidence when their partner displays continued fidelity, loyalty, support and unconditional love.
- Remember healing is a process and is not a quick fix. Be patient.
- Abuse can be the ultimate form of betrayal.