

Emotions, Thoughts, and Behaviors Commonly Experienced by Survivors of Sexual Abuse

Learning the emotions, thoughts, and behaviors that may result after sexual trauma can help you recognize signs of abuse. It can also help you understand and empathize with victims and encourage them to seek help. While the root of these emotions, thoughts, and behaviors is the abuse, the effects can be seen in many areas of a victim's life.

EMOTIONS	THOUGHTS	BEHAVIORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Struggles with self-doubt and confidence. • Feels shame. • Is confused about identity. • Feels angry at self and others. • Struggles with excessive guilt. • Is fearful and struggles with trusting others. • Hurts all the time; feels exhausted. • Feels like everyone is looking at them and can see right through them. • Experiences quickly changing moods. • Experiences depression or anxiety. • Is indecisive. 	<p>Wonders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is this happening to me? • Why don't people love me? • Why can't I be good? • What has happened to me? • Why don't they leave me alone? • Why can't I be like others? • Why does it always happen to me? • Why doesn't God or someone else stop it? <p>Blames and condemns self:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I must have caused it somehow. • It must be my fault. • I must be a very bad person. • There must be something terribly wrong with me. <p>Sometimes believes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God doesn't love me. • My parents can't love me. • My situation will never change. <p>Additional thoughts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doesn't trust own judgment. • Believes the world would be better off without them. • Can't keep up with everyone else. • Has an "I don't care" attitude. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdraws or lashes out at others. • Becomes extremely religious. • Struggles with authority, including Church leaders. • Develops medical problems. • Attempts suicide or engages in self-harm. • Engages in unhealthy sexual behaviors; may experience sexual problems in marriage. • Has unhealthy relationships and allows others to take advantage of them. • Often takes the blame; accepts guilt and responsibility. • Tries to be perfect. • Feels intense compassion for others. • Over-focused on others' needs (including family) above their own. <p>Additional behaviors in children and teenagers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cries easily. • Wants and craves attention from adults, maybe even the offender. • Avoids or is uninterested or overly interested in age-appropriate discussion about sex. • Has many unexplained fears. • Neglects schoolwork, or escapes through excessive schoolwork, sports, or other activities. • Lies easily. • Rebels against parents and teachers. • Runs away from home.