

# Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

How it can affect you and how  
counselling or therapy can help



[helpauckland.org.nz](http://helpauckland.org.nz)

# HELP

Preventing sexual abuse.  
Supporting survivors.

## **If you experienced sexual abuse as a child, no matter how long ago, we're here to help**

As a survivor of sexual abuse, you may find that many different life events, like recent trauma or stress, starting a new intimate relationship, or having your own children, stir up memories and feelings.

It's not uncommon for the experiences of the past to become more present and it can feel like it was only yesterday... but you don't have to cope with your experiences on your own. At any time, you can contact a HELP Counsellor to discuss your needs for support on **0800 623 1700**, our 24/7 HELPLine.

Seeking support may feel scary or overwhelming, or you might worry that it won't help if the experience was a long time ago. But it's important that you take that step towards finding a therapist who will help you make sense of your emotions, and support you in recovering from the trauma that you might have lived with for a long time.

As a child, it might have been difficult to talk about what was happening, so it may be the first time that you're ready to speak about the abuse. The right therapy will help you wherever you're at, allowing you to talk about what you want to, when you're ready.

We are constantly striving to best meet the needs of our diverse communities. If you have any cultural or other needs related to disability, religion, gender or sexual identity, please let us know.

You do have  
someone to talk to  
... we can listen,  
and **we can help  
you heal.**

## **Help is at hand**

You don't have to cope with your experiences or feelings on your own. Even though talking about sexual abuse can be difficult, research has shown that people who seek therapy are less likely to suffer ongoing physical and mental health problems.

Therapy involves talking about yourself and your experiences, often over some time. Everything discussed during a therapy session remains confidential between you and your therapist, unless there's a risk of harm to yourself or others, or if information is required legally. Even then, your therapist would take care to protect your privacy as much as possible.

Therapy doesn't mean that you are required to report what happened to the Police, or to confront the person who hurt you. Therapy only progresses at a rate you're comfortable with - you're in control.

Many people find it useful to engage in therapy with someone who understands the kinds of pain and trauma that sexual abuse can bring and the support you might need to heal.

**Give us a call on our 24/7 HELPLINE if you  
feel ready to access our therapy services:  
0800 623 1700.**



**It feels like you are all alone but people are there for you. The people at HELP guided me through the process and were wonderful every step of the way.**

MARGARET, SURVIVOR

## **How therapy can help**

### **A therapist will:**

- Provide a safe environment in which you can explore and make sense of your feelings and experiences
- Give you information about the common effects of abuse, which may change the way you think and feel about yourself in helpful ways
- Offer you skills and strategies to support your wellbeing
- Help you deal with trauma-related issues of anger, trust and intimacy that can negatively affect relationships
- Assist you to understand helpful and unhelpful family patterns of relating
- Help you to reflect on what kind of life you want and teach you the skills to move towards it
- Your therapist can also help you prepare for legal or court processes, talk about safety and give you information and resources about other services available

# The common effects of sexual abuse

It's not unusual to experience difficulties long after sexual abuse has occurred. Everyone reacts and copes differently and there's no right or wrong way.

## Some common effects include:

- Moods which often go up and down, without you knowing why
- Embarrassment and shame, tied up with the sense that it might have been your fault, even though that is not the case
- Low self-esteem
- Anger and irritability
- Feeling overwhelmed and often tearful
- Emotional numbness
- Flashbacks, which are memories of the abuse, or parts of it, which can make it feel like it is happening again
- Nightmares or sleeping difficulties
- Finding it difficult to concentrate
- Feeling isolated or lonely - some people may be estranged from their families
- A pattern of trying to numb or control feelings with drugs, alcohol, gambling, sex or self-inflicted physical pain, under or overeating
- Feeling mistrustful of others or generally unsafe
- Anxiety and depression

**Even if your experience of sexual abuse was long ago, some of these responses may remain as a way of coping or may come back when an experience somehow reminds you of the abuse - that's normal.**

It's **not unusual to experience difficulties** long after sexual abuse has happened.

"Sexual abuse is definitely not something that you should process on your own. **It's not shameful to ask for help** and support and it can just make things so much better."

MEG\*, SURVIVOR

## HELP is here if you need us

### 24/7 HELP



0800 623 1700



Text 8236



[gethelp@helpauckland.org.nz](mailto:gethelp@helpauckland.org.nz)



[helpauckland.org.nz](http://helpauckland.org.nz)



[dearem.nz](http://dearem.nz)

Connect with us



# HELP

Preventing sexual abuse.  
Supporting survivors.

\* Name changed to protect identity