

Abusive Home Life

My girlfriend told me that her dad tackled her and hit her and that this stuff has happened more than once. Could you give me some advice because I just can't stand to see him hurt her any more? Please help me however you can.

Wow. This is tough stuff. You have a right to be concerned. It is important to help friends who may be in a situation where they are unable to help or defend themselves. Here are some things that you can share with your friend, but it's important for you to know that you can also take these steps on behalf of your friend if you feel she is in danger of further harm.

You may think that your situation looks hopeless and impossible. I want you to know that you are not alone in your pain and struggles. You are not "singled out" for bad things to happen to. Victims often feel they are somehow responsible for being abused, but this is never true. Yes, you are a victim - and it's not right that you have been treated in this way. You were not created for this kind of pain. God did not intend that for you.

If there is any kind of abuse still going on in your life, it is important to tell someone. Sometimes abusers scare or threaten kids so they won't tell, but it's just another form of abuse. Tell a teacher, counselor or school nurse. Do you have a relative you trust that you could stay with or call? Perhaps an aunt, uncle or older sibling? You need to share what is happening with other trusted family members. It's good to know that you have family members you can stay with in the event you have to call the authorities and/or you need to seek safety.

Bottom line... Find an adult you trust and tell them what is happening. If they don't believe you, keep telling until someone does believe you. Even if you have told the person who is abusing you that you will keep a secret about the abuse, it is okay to get help for yourself if the abuse continues. And you haven't mentioned it, but where is your mom while all this is happening? If she does not live with you, tell her what is going on. If she is also participating in the abuse or silently allowing it, you will need to protect yourself, get yourself out of that situation, and report it. The kind of abuse you are describing is never justified. We encourage you to also check out an on-line website that can help you know further how to get some help. It is www.childhelpusa.org. They have numbers for child abuse hotlines and other information that is helpful.

Making it through the abuse you have experienced is a very difficult thing. Here's an even more difficult thing: forgiveness. Forgiveness means not holding something against those who have wronged you, even though you might be "justified" in doing so. Now, forgiveness is not the same as excusing the behavior. When you do your best to forgive those who have wronged you, the bitterness and anger stop eating away at your heart. It may take a long time, but real forgiveness helps relieve the pain a little more each day. This isn't a magic formula to take away all your pain. You have been abused, and it won't erase the painful memories. But I believe it will help you to see that you are more than a "victim" – you are a valuable and cherished person who was created to be loved, not abused!

You can find purpose, worth and life even if your dad never changes. We have shared this before, but think of a \$10 bill. If I offered that money to someone, they would want it, even if it had been crumpled up, abused and dropped in the dirt. The value of that \$10 bill is not in what happened to it, but rather in the value it was given by the government. That's how we are. We have been given value by our Creator, and other people may tell us we are worthless or abuse us, but that doesn't change our value. The danger is to allow your father's actions to penetrate your soul and convince you otherwise.

Articles are written by Bob Lenz, Tiffany Thompson and other national youth communicators with Life Promotions Inc., a non-profit youth organization committed to instilling hope, worth and value in youth.

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