

Sexual Abuse

I heard you speak at my school and so much of what you said reinforced what we talk about in our group. It is a Survivors group for those who have been sexually abused. I had blamed myself and felt lower than dirt after I was raped by someone I was supposed to trust, and my group gave me a safe place to talk and work through my feelings. One of the hardest things I had to do was testify against this person in court, but I want to let others know that life can go on, even after bad things happen to you.

We get really sad and angry when we hear about someone who has been abused or hurt. Your story is especially upsetting because it was someone who you were supposed to trust, so that adds a whole new dimension of hurt and pain. As I'm sure you've learned from your support group, you shouldn't feel guilty or partly responsible at all – you were not to blame. Still, I know it's hard to accept it sometimes and there is a tendency to want to hide what really happened.

It hasn't been until recently that society has begun to open up and has become willing to discuss the prevalence of sexual abuse. Still, it's a really sensitive subject. But silence is no longer an option since one in three girls is sexually abused, and one in six boys, all by age 16. According to the FBI, rape is among the fastest growing crimes in the country, yet it is one of the least reported because of the feelings of shame, guilt and fear that the victim often feels. It's estimated that only 16% of these crimes gets reported. Despite many people's beliefs, rape is an expression of violence, not sexual desire. It's motivated by the need to dominate, control and degrade someone, and is never acceptable under any circumstance.

It was right for you to tell someone about it. You were very courageous when you faced your fears, and your abuser, by testifying in court. By doing that you may have helped other girls who might have been hurt by him in the past, or helped prevent future abuse. Whether it is someone older or younger, a stranger or someone close to you, sexual abuse and rape should never go unreported. Ever.

It thrills us to know that you're talking with others about it and are getting help. The saddest thing we see is when someone tries to deal with such hurtful things on their own. It seems we're always hearing messages that tell us to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. The world wants to convince us that we can handle it on our own and that we don't need anyone else, or that we shouldn't "bother" anyone else with our struggles. It's a lie. And when we believe the lie we feel a huge desire to find a release some other way – usually through bad choices. Sometimes it's our shame and guilt that keeps us from reaching out to others. This is especially true with sexual abuse. But that's another thing that needs to be overcome before we can really begin healing. So, it's awesome to see that you're working through this stuff and seeking the help of others around you who can relate and offer a comforting hand. But be patient. Healing from such trauma takes time.

I have often shared in my talks about value, courage and respect. It sounds like you have done well to display all three. You have recognized your value as a human being and know that you didn't deserve to be hurt. You had the courage to tell others about it and get help. And you showed respect by sharing your story so others may not have to go through what you did. Thanks for making a difference.

For those who are reading this and have gone through some of the same struggles, please seek help. We encourage you to speak with a school counselor, pastor, support group, or local agency that is specialized in dealing with sexual abuse. You don't have to go through this alone. There are people who care and are waiting to help.

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.

Life Promotions • Appleton, WI • www.lifepromotions.com • 800-955-5433

