

Living Well

A Guide for Men



The mission of 1in6 is to help men who have had unwanted or abusive sexual experiences in childhood live healthier, happier lives.

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INFO OPTIONS HOPE



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What is an unwanted or abusive sexual experience?

How people define their own experiences, and the labels they give to them (or don't), are very important.

We're not interested in imposing labels, or even providing definitions. For our purposes, that's not necessary or helpful. Instead, we're offering tools for thinking about childhood or adolescent sexual experiences that may have caused or contributed to current problems.

Of course, we had to choose some words. We settled on "unwanted or abusive sexual experiences in childhood."

This is how we refer, in this book, to childhood and adolescent sexual experiences that can cause a variety of problems, well into adulthood.

Our words are carefully chosen, because we strive to:

1. Respect every man's experience and point of view.
2. Avoid any definitions or labels that could drive away any man who could use this book to sort through his own unique experiences and options.

We also want to emphasize what "unwanted or abusive sexual experiences in childhood" does not mean...

By "unwanted" we do not mean that the experience had to be unwanted when it happened. For example, a boy may feel that he wants sexual contact with an adult (especially if the adult has manipulated him). Instead, when we say "unwanted," we mean:

- Looking back now, is that an experience you want to have

happened, to be part of your life?

- Do you want to be having negative thoughts and feelings and behaviors that, looking back now, you suspect or believe are (at least partly) caused by that experience?

The “or” in “unwanted or abusive” does not imply that any unwanted sexual experience was also “abusive.” We don’t believe this is true. We’re just hoping that “unwanted” works well enough when it comes to describing childhood or adolescent sexual experiences that may have contributed to problems you have now. (Or at least isn’t bad enough to drive you away.)

For some of you, that’s why you’re here right now. You’re trying to sort out, on your own terms:

- “What was that childhood (or adolescent) sexual experience really about?”
- “What effects has that experience had on me?”
- “Is that a reason why I’m struggling with _____?”

The question, “What was that sexual experience really about?” may be the most basic, and could take a while to sort out. It implies other questions, like:

- Was the other person in a position of power or authority over me?
- Was I manipulated into doing sexual things, or into believing I wanted to, even when I really didn’t?
- Did sexual activity change what had been a positive relationship into one that involved secrecy and shame?
- Was the other person using me and not really considering

my experience or my needs?

- Did the other person take advantage of vulnerabilities I had at the time – feeling isolated and lonely, feeling excited and curious but ignorant about sex?

These questions speak to possible exploitation, betrayal, and disregard for your well-being – experiences that can cause a variety of problems, right away and into adulthood.

Also, these questions apply to experiences with other children or teenagers, not just adults. No matter how old the other person was, if dominance, manipulation, exploitation, betrayal or disregard for your well-being were involved, the experiences(s) may have contributed to problems in your life now.



General information about this booklet

Who is this book for?

You might be reading this because of things that have happened to you personally, or to someone you care about. The idea is for this book to assist adult men who are dealing with problems related to unwanted or abusive sexual experiences, whether the abuse happened in the past or quite recently.

Men are not all the same!

Men face some common social pressures about 'being a man', but each man is a unique individual. Given that men are such a diverse group of people, there is no way that every single idea in this book will be helpful to every individual man. So please, take up the parts that make sense to you and leave those sections that aren't relevant right now, you can always come back later.

You don't have to do it alone

It's OK to ask for and accept help from other people, and to offer and give help to other people who need it too. Men who have had unwanted or abusive sexual experiences sometimes struggle to do things to care for themselves. Throughout this booklet, we want to remind you that you deserve to take care of yourself and to live a fulfilling life.

Ways of living well

Our hope is this booklet will provide some practical advice about 'living well'. What that means will be different to each person, but hopefully some of the ideas here will be of use to you.

Many of the ideas here could be helpful ideas for anyone. Other ideas are more specific suggestions about dealing with the problems that unwanted or abusive sexual experiences can bring into men's lives.

Taking a stand against sexual abuse

This might be your first step in looking for some useful information, or you might have been working through problems related to sexual abuse for a long time.

Either way, picking up this booklet suggests that you want to overcome the effects of unwanted or abusive sexual experiences and the problems it can produce. By facing the impacts of these experiences and reclaiming your life, you join many, many other men and women. It's worth repeating: you don't have to do it alone. See "Resources" at the back of the booklet for ideas about identifying resources in your area.

“It’s OK to ask for
and accept help
from other people,
and to offer and give help
to other people
who need it too.”

Tips for using this booklet:

Think about the right time and place to read this booklet.

Is reading this by yourself going to be the best for you, or will it be better to talk with someone supportive (like a friend, partner, or counselor) about the parts you find relevant?

Have a limit on what you will read at any one time (e.g. one or two sections).

Have a pen ready to mark the 'tips' that you find useful.

Allow some time - 10 minutes or so - after reading to reflect on what you've read and whether it is relevant or helpful to you. Some people might find it helps to have a journal to write or sketch their responses.

Plan to do something fun, relaxing or energizing after you have put the booklet down. It could be something you can do alone or with a friend or partner.

- Go for a bike ride, a run or a walk
- Listen to or play some music
- Prepare a meal with someone
- Dig in the garden
- Play a computer game
- Read a novel or the newspaper
- Go swimming

Or something else that's enjoyable to you and helps get out of focusing on abuse all the time.

PART 1: Living well in day-to-day life

Establishing a secure base

In this section (Part 1), the focus is on general, day-to-day things you can do for your overall health and well-being. You could think of this as establishing a “solid foundation” to work from. The topics covered here include:



Staying connected



Sleeping



Eating well



**Helping others/
helping yourself**



Exercise



**Living by
your values**



Relaxation



**Making change
happen**



Mindfulness



**Ideas about
being a man**

They are probably good ideas for anyone, not just men who are dealing with the legacy of unwanted or abusive childhood sexual experiences. We'd suggest coming back to this section if some of the later topics become overwhelming.

The idea of a solid foundation is about focusing on achievable goals, and putting 'first things first'. If the basics are not quite in place, like sleeping well and having strategies for dealing with day to day stress, other problems and challenges will be much harder to tackle.

It does not make the difficult stuff go away, but it does put you in a better place and frame of mind to deal with it.



Staying connected

Staying connected to people has a positive effect on your general well-being. Feelings of depression can thrive on isolation and loneliness (which is different from 'alone time'). Knowing that other people are there and care about you can make it easier to care for yourself.

Try to make time to catch up with people and avoid being isolated. Cell phones and the web are useful tools for staying connected when meeting people face-to-face isn't possible.

There might be a range of people in your life that you share different levels and kinds of connections with.

- A person you might have a coffee or drink with...
- A person you might share a meal with...
- A person you might do something fun or relaxing with...
- A person you could tell that you are reading this booklet...

Remember that not everyone in your life has to know everything about you.

It might be worth making that extra effort to connect with supportive people who give you positive energy, and taking a break from relationships that seem draining at the moment.

While ideally there may be a few people you would trust to talk to about problems related to sexual abuse, there are probably other people in your life as well.



Eating well

Eating well is about providing your body and mind with nutrients that keep you active and alert, as well as about enjoying the food you eat. Ideally you want to be eating five servings of vegetables and two servings of fruit a day. Keep your fluid intake up by drinking plenty of water.

In the last few years, a lot more people have become interested in nutrition and cooking, and it is certainly more socially acceptable for men to enjoy cooking than it was a generation ago.

Here are some simple tips about eating well:

- Eat a healthy breakfast
- Avoid snacking between meals or stick with healthy snacks like fruit or nuts
- Plan healthy, quick and easy meals for busy days
- Make use of the freezer - cook 2-3 meals worth at a time
- Enjoy cooking - experiment with new foods and try new recipes (there are literally thousands of recipes online)
- Make the most of foods in season
- Make mealtimes special occasions for the whole family
- Invite a friend to eat, or better yet, to help cook
- Focus on the activity at hand. Turn off the television
- Eat slowly and savor every mouthful
- Listen to your body - stop when you feel full
- Try growing your own vegetables, fruit or herbs



Exercise

Exercise and becoming active is linked to positive mental health. It has the ability to change your state of mind in both the short and long term in ways that give you more energy for dealing with life's challenges.

All adults benefit from at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity each day. If you can't do this every day, it still helps to try and exercise fairly regularly. This exercise does not have to be done all at once, you can break it down into sessions of at least 10 minutes.

Different types of activity suit different people. Some people prefer team sports, some people like individual sports. Some people prefer to play competitively, others like a more social environment. Some people prefer exercise rather than games or sports.

If you're not sure what would suit you, try a few things out.

You don't have to be an athlete to boost your fitness. (Yoga and Tai Chi are particularly recommended.) Some people find it really helpful to exercise with a partner or friend. Exercising with someone has the benefit that you can motivate, encourage and support each other to go for that walk in the middle of winter or to the gym when you are still aching from the last session. The main thing is that you find something that is fun or gives you a sense of achievement.



Tips for exercise:

As well as structured exercise or activities, there are day to day things you can do that don't take much time, effort or organization.

Work in an office?

- Keep your walking shoes handy and be active whenever you have the chance
- Park your car a few blocks from work
- Get off the bus or train at the stop beforehand and walk
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator
- Walk up the escalator instead of standing still.
- Walk the longer way around to the copy, printer or fax machine.
- Enjoy a walk during your lunch break, or walk with a friend after work.
- Walk to your colleague's office instead of sending an e-mail.

At home:

- Walk around while you're talking on the phone.
- Do some gentle stretches or sit-ups while watching TV.
- Use TV commercial breaks as a chance to do some household chores like washing dishes or putting stuff away.
- Do some energetic house-cleaning, gardening or odd jobs on the weekend.
- Park the car further away when going to the supermarket.



Relaxation

Basically, relaxation exercises are short, focused routines with a specific purpose in mind - usually to slow down your breathing or relax when you are tense.

The ability to gently slow your breathing, relax your muscles and calm yourself is a useful life skill. Learning to simply take some quiet time out, that is not about 'getting something done', can help you to relax and feel fresh and energized.

Some people who have survived trauma find that imaginative relaxation - focusing on an image or thought that is calming and soothing - works as well as body-centered approaches.

Men who have been subjected to traumatic experiences, including sexual assault, can find relaxation difficult. At one time, staying alert, constantly checking for danger might have been necessary in order to keep safe and reduce harm.

The first challenge can be to consciously notice when you are tense - your body and mind might have developed the habit of being on-guard to the extent that you hardly notice it.

So it can initially feel unsafe to drop your guard, and it can take practice and a bit of a risk to accept that there might be some places and times where you are actually safe from harm.

There are significant health benefits when you can learn to stop being constantly tense and on guard.



Tips for relaxation:

Learning to breathe deeply and relax your body helps with your general ability to rest, as well as being a useful tool for recharging your batteries. Below is one simple relaxation exercise that a lot of people find useful when they feel stressed or anxious. It involves deliberately tensing and relaxing your muscles.

1. Find a safe quiet spot and sit in a comfortable but upright position in a chair or on the ground (try not to slouch).
2. Plant your feet or hands firmly on the ground- push them into the ground and feel that the ground is solid.
3. Gently clasp your hands together in front of your stomach, just below your belly button.
4. Begin to notice your breathing - the pace, the depth, etc.
5. When you are ready, take a slow deep breath in through your nose.
6. Breathe in, without causing pain, for about 5 seconds.
7. At the same time as you breathe in, grip your hands together, like your hands are trying to pull in opposite directions. Use the muscles in your arms as well. Stop if you are hurting yourself, and try again with a bit less pressure.
8. Slowly breathe out through your mouth, releasing the air in a smooth controlled flow (again, about 5 seconds).
9. At the same time as you breathe out, relax your hands and arms.

Repeat steps 5-9 three or four times.



Mindfulness

You might have heard the term 'mindfulness'. This is related to relaxation but they are slightly different things.

Mindfulness is more focused on paying attention to things about yourself and your environment that would normally go unnoticed. Mindfulness allows us to step away from negative thoughts and feelings which often seem so compelling.

Practicing mindfulness is useful in and of itself, not just when you are having difficulties. You can incorporate it into your everyday routines, such as practicing mindful walking or mindfully drinking tea or coffee. By consciously using mindfulness in as much of your day as possible, you increase your awareness and enhance your sense of control and choice.

A 'trap' for men trying to use mindfulness is feeling pressure to 'get it right', or thinking that you 'just don't get it'. There will be times when you doubt your ability to practice mindfulness. Expect that you will become distracted and doubt your ability to 'do' mindfulness. This is part of the practice. Simply try and notice the doubtful thoughts, and return to your anchor ('anchor' is explained in the next section).

Another challenge: mindfulness goes against the idea that men are 'do-ers'. Learning to notice things without trying to assess them or change might feel difficult. The idea that you should do something will almost certainly occur; try to simply notice that thought, then come back to your anchor.



A short mindfulness exercise:

- Begin your practice by anchoring your attention to your breath. You can think “in” on the in breath and “out” on the out breath. Your breathing is your anchor. Return your attention to your anchor whenever you need to.
- Whenever a thought, feeling or sensation arises, notice what is grabbing at your attention and label the experience.
- Try to observe each thought that arises with an accepting, curious, welcoming attitude. Don’t judge the thoughts and label them good or bad, just observe them arise as you would leaves on a stream, watching each leaf go by.
- Let all thoughts drift out of awareness on their own. You don’t have to push them away because they will naturally pass on their own, in order to make room for the next ‘leaf’ to go by.
- After noting each thought, simply draw your attention back to the breath, and once again think “in” on the in breath and “out” on the out breath.

Try doing this for 5 minutes to start with. As you get more into it, you can try stretching out the exercise over a longer time.

This introduction exercise is adapted from ThinkMindfully.com



Sleeping

A good night's sleep helps to recover from the previous day and get ready for the next one. Sleep helps us to think more clearly, manage difficult situations better, and feel more energetic.

The most important part of sleep is the 'deep sleep' phase, the first 5 hours after you fall asleep. It's nice to sleep for 8 hours, but it's not always needed (and some people don't like sleeping that long). However, regularly getting less than 5 hours sleep a night can eventually take a toll..

Stress can get in the way of a good night's sleep. There can be a cycle of worry, where anxiety about not being able to sleep makes it even harder to relax. Being worried about having nightmares can also make it hard to relax and get to sleep.

Poor quality 'deep sleep' can lead to:

- Tiredness during the day
- Poor concentration
- Irritability
- Aches and pains in the muscles and bones
- An immune system that doesn't work well, leading to frequent illness
- Periods of depression



Tips for sleeping:

If possible, try to establish a consistent routine. Go to bed at the same time every night.

Spend 30 minutes doing something relaxing before bed. Although watching TV or playing a computer game might be considered relaxing, some people find it doesn't really help with getting to sleep. Try reading a book, or doing a relaxation exercise or taking a warm shower instead of watching TV for that last half hour and see if that makes a difference. Make sure your bed feels relaxing. It may be worth investing in comfortable sheets and pillows. Try to avoid drinking lots of fluid just before bed or clock watching.

Get up at the same time every morning, even if you had a bad night. Try to resist the temptation to have 'just a little bit more' sleep!

Do something to 'wake yourself up' in the morning, like a quick walk, run or bike ride.

If you have been having long-term sleeping problems, you know that it is not easy to change. It might be time to seek expert help. This could be your doctor or other health-care provider, or a counselor who deals with sleep problems.

If things are really serious, there are also sleep clinics that provide intensive treatment.



Helping others / helping yourself

Sometimes you can lose sight of the fact that you have something to offer. Doing things for other people actually has a beneficial effect on developing our own well-being. Recent research in neuroscience shows that helping others and working cooperatively activates and strengthens certain parts of the brain, enhancing well-being.

Doing things to help others influences your perception of yourself and the world. The more people see you as a person with skills and abilities, the more you are able to see yourself that way.

In putting this into practice it is important to take care of yourself, to check that you are not doing this out of duty or continuing a habit of always putting others before yourself.

For some men, accepting help becomes easier if they can also do something in return that helps someone else.

You could put this into action in any way that suits you. It might be volunteering with a formal organization, offering to help a friend or an elderly neighbour, or making time to listen to someone you know who is having a hard time.

In helping others, take time to notice the conscious choice you made to offer assistance and consider how this fits in with the kind of person you want to be.



Living by your values

Dealing with distressing experiences like memories of unwanted or abusive sexual experiences, anxiety, and depression take a lot of our energy, and at times it might feel like it takes all you've got just to stay afloat. In order to get ourselves in a better place to deal with these difficulties and life's problems in general, it is worth putting some time and energy into identifying what you stand for as a person: what you value.

Our values act as a kind of reference guide or compass for who we are, how we act in particular situations and where we want to go in life. If we possess a clear sense of purpose and direction, and act according to our values, then we are less likely to feel overwhelmed or be knocked off course when we experience challenging situations.

Our values might be based on how we were brought up, on religious or spiritual tradition, or a particular ethics or approach to life that we have adopted. We might value being calm, honest, considerate, treating people fairly, being creative, thoughtful, reliable, 'doing our best'. Whatever the history of our values, they are essentially our sense of the right way for us to live. When we act in accordance with our values, we generally see our life as purposeful and meaningful.

Tips for identifying your values:

We usually hold our values implicitly; in other words, we don't often consciously think about and name our values in a



structured way. By identifying our values, we establish a basic guide for us in our life.

Take some time to think about the following areas of life, and try to write or say a sentence or two about what is important to you; what kind of person do you want to be and how would you like to act in these areas of life? (Some possible values are listed).

- Family relationships - caring, supportive, respectful
- Parenting - loving, caring listener
- Friendships - honest, “good buddy”, ‘being there when needed’
- Work - hard working, acting with integrity, efficient, reliable
- Education – open-minded, informed, ‘doing my best’
- Recreation and leisure - fun, relaxing, life experiences
- Spirituality - consideration, tolerance, compassionate
- Community involvement - commitment, giving back, connecting with people
- Health and well-being - quiet time, variety, generosity to others

As you do this, you might identify some small steps that you can take in line with your preferred way of living. This approach to life does not mean we are never confronted by difficult situations, unwelcome thoughts and uncomfortable feelings. It is just that our focus is on calming and centering ourselves and acting in accordance with what we have established as our preferred, valued way of living life.



Making change happen

Change rarely happens in a neatly staged or organized way. Making changes to address unhelpful habits or to develop more useful patterns of behavior requires focus, effort and repetition. Below is a basic map to help 'track change'.

I don't know or want to know. You don't see a problem or need to change. Others' efforts to convince you of a need for change are generally ineffective.

I'm thinking about it. You see that there's a problem you want to get some control over; you're evaluating the pros and cons. Others hear you talking about problems and options.

I want to, I'm getting ready. You are ready to change and make things happen. Others help through encouragement and strengthening your motivation.

I'm doing it. You're taking active steps to modify your behavior and/or environment in your own unique way. Others can help by noticing positive changes.

I'm staying on track. Change has been made and maintained for a few months. Although, there are occasional 'bumps' in the road, you refuse to be derailed and know what it takes to stay on track.

When seeking to make change, remember that safety is a foundation stone of building a solid base for yourself and the well being of those close to you.



Ideas about being a man

Every man has their own experiences and beliefs about what it means to be a man. Gender is a significant part of personal identity, along with a range of other things that 'make up' our sense of who we are: cultural background, physical ability/disability, sexual orientation, religion, family, where we live... the list goes on.

While every man is unique, men face some common social pressures about how they should behave, feel and think. These pressures can influence how men respond to different situations at different times. Men can feel under pressure to:

- Deal with problems alone
- Always be in control
- Express only a limited range of emotions
- Never admit any vulnerability

There are times when these qualities can be helpful. In a crisis or emergency, and some kinds of work, the ability to 'keep a level head' or 'hold it together' are highly valued and sought after (such as ambulance workers, in the armed services, or business executives).

However, a difficulty with these expectations 'to be a man' is that they can become quite restrictive. They can lead to men isolating themselves, becoming reluctant to talk about what is going on for them. These expectations can lead to men becoming overly self critical. These judgments might come from people around them, too.



Unfortunately, these pressures can have men evaluating and judging themselves in unhelpful ways. They can lead to men being down on themselves for ‘being tricked’, for ‘not fighting hard enough’, for ‘not being able to cope’, for ‘not measuring up’, when they would benefit most from understanding and encouragement.

Unrealistic expectations to ‘man up’, to ‘push through’ and ‘just get on with it’ can lead to men feeling they have to work through problems alone. It can have men believing it is a sign of weakness to ask for help with personal problems, difficult thoughts or feelings. Yet in other areas of their life, men will routinely gather all the information and support they can. If you have a problem with your car you can’t fix, you take it to a mechanic or friend who knows about cars.

A challenge we face as men is to be aware of these expectations, while making sure they don’t restrict our choices and willingness to access support that helps build the kind of life we want to live.

Some questions to consider:

- Are there times you are particularly aware of expectations about how you should handle situations as a man?
- Do you sometimes find yourself wondering about these expectations, and whether they really help you or those around you?
- Have there been times when you’ve done what’s best, even if it has gone against some ideas about ‘being a man?’

PART 2: Living well in the face of sexual abuse or assault

In Part 2, we will be talking more specifically about some common problems faced by men dealing with child sexual abuse or adult sexual assault. The following issues are covered, and there are some practical tips on dealing with most of them.

- Recent unwanted or abusive sexual experiences
- Expectations and making changes
- Shame
- Deceptions and abuse
- Abuse in faith communities: spiritual & religious beliefs
- Physiological reactions and sexuality
- Social myths and unhelpful misunderstandings
- Trust, intimacy and relationships
- Flashbacks
- Nightmares
- Panic attacks and anxiety
- Deciding to tell?
- Suicidal thoughts
- Self-harm
- Alcohol and drug use
- What am I feeling?
- Parenting
- Justice
- Reporting Sexual Abuse seeking Compensation
- Celebrating life

Recent unwanted or abusive sexual experiences

Most of our focus in this booklet is on sexual abuse of boys. Although it is rarely discussed, rape and sexual assault can and does happen to adult men as well as to boys. The next paragraph may be particularly relevant for men who have recently been sexually assaulted, within the last few days, weeks or months. If this doesn't apply to you, feel free to skip forward.

Medical treatment

You may need medical attention. You are entitled to have a support person with you if you need to go to a hospital. You can also choose whether or not you want a forensic medical examination, where the doctor will collect medical evidence that might be able to be used to prosecute the offender(s). After the assault occurs, there is a time limit within which forensic medical evidence needs to be taken. If you are not sure, you can talk to a counselor/advocate from a sexual assault crisis center (if you're not sure where to start, look at the back of this booklet for useful contacts).

Legal options

You have the right to make a statement to the police, but no-one should force you to do so. A police statement usually involves giving a lot of detailed information, so it can be distressing and re-traumatizing. Having a counselor or advocate from a sexual assault/rape crisis center can be a valuable support through this process, whether you decide to make a statement shortly after the assault, at a later time, or never.

Coping with trauma

Extremely traumatic events can leave you feeling as if your world has been turned upside down. You have been in a

dangerous or life threatening situation that was beyond your power to control.

Unwanted or abusive sexual experiences can produce physical and emotional responses or unwelcome thoughts from “out of the blue”. You may feel and experience emotions and physiological sensations that you have never felt before.

You might feel severe pain, shock, tremors of arms and legs, stomach problems, nausea or vomiting, loss of appetite, constipation, diarrhoea, nightmares and/or sleeplessness, headaches and dizziness.

You may find yourself spacing-out as a way of coping. Some people have flashbacks, when memories of the rape intrude at different times.

These responses to trauma are often called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). To be diagnosed with PTSD, there are specific criteria that have to be met, and the diagnosis can only be formally given by a clinical psychologist or a suitably qualified medical practitioner, including psychiatrists. The word ‘disorder’ may be a little misleading.

As strange as it may seem at first, this is your body and mind coping the best way they can; they are *normal* reactions to out-of-the-ordinary events (although not everyone has any or all of these responses). The experience differs for everyone.

Remembering this can help keep at bay thoughts that you’re ‘going crazy’ or becoming ‘mentally ill’.

Try to restore some normality and control

While the world may previously have felt like a reasonably safe place, it might now seem dangerous and leave you feeling insecure. It can be helpful to try and get some parts

of your life back to normal. This can help to get back some sense of control and choice in your life. It will probably take some time to get any sense of routine back. It can help to try small things such as taking a walk, breathing exercises or making a favorite meal, to give you some sense of normality.

As you manage to take these steps, take time out to recognize that you are taking back control of your life - it is an achievement worth noticing.

Seek support

You might feel like shutting yourself away from the world. This is a normal response. However, if you can let someone know what's going on, it can help you to feel less isolated. It can also be good to know that there is someone to make sure you are looking after yourself in practical ways, like eating.

Go easy on yourself; it might take some time to get back to a routine. This isn't because you're doing something wrong, it is because people naturally need time to recover from the overwhelming, frightening and confusing reality of sexual assault.

Tips for regaining control

Take things slowly and don't pressure yourself with unrealistic expectations. It usually takes some time to restore some sense of normality. Remember that all the feelings and physical sensations listed above are common responses to a traumatic event. They are not a sign that you are 'going crazy'; you are processing an extremely distressing violation of your personal integrity.

Some people find the following things helpful:

- Exercising
- Studying

- Reading
- Working
- Drawing or painting
- Listening to music
- Playing sports
- Writing (writing can be particularly useful for getting stuff out of your head and organizing your thoughts)

Others find counseling, meditation or spiritual practice and prayer to be sources of strength.

If flashbacks or nightmares are a problem, see the upcoming pages for some ideas.

This is the end of the section dealing specifically with recent sexual assault. However, the information in the rest of the booklet is still relevant whether the assault(s) was recent or in the past.

Expectations and making changes

For some people, picking up this booklet might be a sign that you are ready for major changes in your life. You might have a sense that this isn't going to be easy and might be a bit of a struggle sometimes.

At the same time, it might feel like things are a struggle already and it's time for things to change as soon as possible. There can be a real sense of 'c'mon, I'm ready, let's get on with it!'

It's important to try and stay realistic about how much can change and how quickly. You can make changes for the better in your life one step at a time.

Trying to work it all out can become overwhelming and frustrating. It can feel like everything in your life is beyond your control.

At times like this it can be helpful to try and focus on something you can control - it might be your breathing or what food you are going to eat tonight. These might seem like small decisions but they are important.

Making change happen requires focus, effort and repetition.

Shame

Shame can be an extremely powerful feeling. It can have men feeling that they were somehow responsible for the unwanted or abusive sexual experience, or should have seen it coming, or should have been able to stop it. The fact that the abuse was sexualized may make the feelings of shame more intense. Remembering the sexual contact can make men feel 'dirty' or confused, and shame is often associated with physiological reactions such as blushing or feeling drained.

Shame can stop men from speaking up about the unwanted or abusive sexual experience.

It is a profoundly unfair legacy of sexual abuse that the person who was abused often ends up left with feelings of shame. It can be helpful to remember that the unwanted or abusive sexual experience was not caused by you, and that you were not responsible.

For some people, this sense of shame comes from thinking about how they could have avoided the experience. There is nothing wrong with thinking about this. However, there is a difference between wishing you could have done something to stop the abusive interaction, and being responsible. This might become clearer if you imagine how you might offer safety advice to a child who is going down the park to play with friends. By offering advice, that does not mean you would hold them responsible for the actions of an adult or older child who hurts them.

Deceptions and abuse

A useful 'anti-shame' exercise is to examine the deceptions often used by those who are abusive.

While this can be very confronting, it can help a man to get clear about just where the responsibility for the abusive interaction lies and who should be accountable for the consequences. This can be particularly helpful for men who were abused as boys or teenagers; it can also be helpful for men sexually assaulted as adults.

The deceptions of abuse are the dishonest things the abusive person(s) did, or said, or threatened to do, to enable them to commit the abuse and to try to keep it secret. They might have included 'tricks' or 'special gifts' to get you thinking that you were somehow to blame or at fault.

Sometimes the deceptions of abuse can only be seen for what they are when you look back at them. For example, it is easy for an adult to convince a child that the child will get in trouble if anyone finds out. Of course as an adult we can see that this is a deception and not the truth; but a child has no way of knowing that.

In looking back and reviewing what happened be careful not to use the knowledge you have now to judge your decisions and actions back then. Take time to remember the context, how old you were, your physical size or maturity, what information you had or didn't have about sex, what support was available?

When reviewing deceptions of abuse, take care to adopt a compassionate, understanding attitude to yourself and what you might have done to survive.

Abuse in faith communities- spiritual and religious beliefs

Sexual abuse by clergy and members of faith communities and the failures of religious organizations to report criminal offenses or deal with allegations in appropriate, just, or healing ways, has had a profound impact on individuals, families and communities.

Spiritual and religious beliefs and practices, and being part of a faith community, can offer many people a sense of purpose and belonging in their lives, as well as valuable support and encouragement during tough times. However, having unwanted or abusive sexual experiences within religious communities can disrupt a person's faith, trust, and belief, resulting in some people breaking away from a particular church, group, or organized religion.

Those sexually abused within religious contexts experience particular difficulties. Some boys and men do not tell of unwanted or abusive sexual experience out of concern it will distress religious family members.

The shame and guilt that some associate with same-sex sexual contact and the threat of disconnection from faith community can be used by those perpetrating abuse to maintain silence.

A number of religions promote 'forgiveness' as a pathway towards healing. For some, offering 'forgiveness' can be personally empowering, whereas, for others offering 'forgiveness' to those who sexually abuse is insulting and unthinkable. Genuine forgiveness can only be given freely, by someone who feels it is a choice. Pressure to forgive can feel like a continuation of the abuse.

Faith, religion and spirituality can be a supportive, personal journey of discovery. For those who are interested, it can be useful to seek out someone who will support you, without pressure, to explore how you might choose to incorporate faith and spiritual practices into your life.

Physiological reactions and sexuality

If at the time of the unwanted or abusive sexual experience, a man developed an erection or became aroused in some way, this can make him even more reluctant to speak about sexual abuse.

These physical responses do not mean that a man wanted to be sexually used in any way. Some people who sexually abuse others will deliberately manipulate the boy or man to develop an erection, then use this as false evidence to say the abuse was 'wanted'.

We cannot always control how our body reacts, especially in stressful situations. A boy or man might develop an erection as an unwanted response to fear or physical stimulation. These physiological responses do not say anything about his desire or sexuality.

Physical arousal can cause a great deal of confusion for men. Some men feel aroused when they recall the abuse and worry about what this means.

It is an unfortunate reality that an experience of sexual abuse can influence sexual intimacy. It can both make men hyper interested in sex or particular sexual acts, and also make them feel overwhelmed or uncomfortable about sexual contact with a partner, whereby they start to avoid sex and isolate themselves.

If sexual thoughts, reactions or difficulties are distressing or

bothering you, it is a good idea to find a trained counselor who understands sexual abuse and sexuality to help you make sense of this.

Separating sexuality from sexual abuse

Homophobia and confusion regarding sexuality can stop men from speaking about sexual abuse.

If a man identifies as straight and was sexually abused by a man, he may be concerned that people will think he is gay and discriminate against him. If he identifies as gay or bi-sexual, and was abused by a man, he may fear that his orientation is the result of the abuse, or that the abuse was deserved and that people will blame him because of his sexual orientation. In either case, this confusion can lead to some unhelpful ideas about being gay.

If he was abused by a woman, regardless of his orientation, he might worry that people will not take his complaints seriously, and that he should be okay about it. In addition, if he identifies as gay or bi-sexual, he may be concerned that his orientation is somehow a reaction to the abuse.

These unhelpful ideas are based on a false belief that sexual assault somehow says something about the sexuality of the person who was abused.

The reality is that sexual abuse does not reflect the sexual orientation of either the person who is abused or the abusive individual. For example, the majority of adult males who sexually abuse boys identify as straight.

Sexual assault is an abusive act that takes advantage of a difference in power. It is not caused by the sexuality, or any other characteristic, of the person abused. That would be like

saying that the victim of a robbery was robbed because they have psychological issues with money. Like any other act of violence, sexual abuse is caused by the decisions and actions of the person committing the violence.

Given societal homophobia and widespread confusion around questions of sexuality, it can be worth taking some time to consider and think through what are your sexual attractions and choices. You might talk with a partner or qualified counselor/therapist and identify how you most like to express affection and your sexual energy in enjoyable ways in the present.

Social myths and unhelpful misunderstandings

The reality is that the vast majority of boys and men who are sexually abused don't ever commit sexual abuse of any kind. There is a common, destructive misunderstanding that men and boys who have been sexually abused are likely to sexually abuse children. Studies have repeatedly shown that is not true.

Knowing only too well the distress caused by abuse, most men who have been abused are horrified by such a suggestion. Some choose to become advocates speaking out against sexual abuse and violence.

The confusion caused by the widely-held myth that "victimized boys are likely to become abusive" itself impacts men's lives. The idea that he is 'infected' or 'contaminated' can lead to fears of harming children despite having no conscious intention, inclination or thoughts of doing so. This confusion can lead some men to go to great lengths to avoid interacting with children or to avoid relationships. The

fear that others will see him as a potentially abusive toward children can be a major obstacles to men telling anyone about their experiences of sexual abuse.

If as a consequence of being abused, a child acts out sexually, it can add to these worries about 'becoming abusive'. It is important to remember that the 'reactive', coerced behaviors of a traumatized child, even if they were pressured to do sexual things to other children, are very different from an adult making a conscious decision to commit abuse.

If anyone, whether they were abused or not, is having sexualized fantasies about a child, or worried they will hurt someone, they should speak with a qualified counselor or health professional as soon as possible. (See resources at the back of the booklet for more information)

There is a more detailed discussion of men's fears about becoming abusive on the 1in6 website.

Trust, intimacy and relationships

Men who have experienced unwanted or abusive sexual experiences in childhood or other kinds of abuse or neglect can face the same pressures that all men face about self-reliance, dealing with things yourself, and other socialized expectations of males. However there may also be other struggles that are connected to sexual abuse when it comes to closeness and relationships.

Trust is often an early casualty when a child experiences abuse, especially child sexual abuse. Such a profound betrayal of trust can lead to the conclusion that trusting people or getting close can be dangerous. This conclusion is not necessarily 'wrong', because it is a sensible conclusion to draw from your experience. While being careful and

not automatically trusting people can be important in some circumstances, it can get in the way of intimate, close relationships with people you really care for in ways that may also hamper your recovery. If you want to feel closer to the people you care for, it might take time and feel like a slow process, but it is possible. The first thing to realize is that you can't build intimacy by yourself - it is a shared project.

Some men have said they struggle with some of the following things, related to this betrayal of their trust.

- Reluctance to trust someone or let anyone get close
- Perceiving any expression of care or attention as a sign of sexual interest, or an attempt to get something from them
- Feeling vulnerable
- Wariness about sharing personal information
- Feeling uncomfortable with gentle touch or touch without prior specific agreement
- Difficulties with any sexual intimacy

These issues can make for unsatisfying relationships for both partners. Many men feel frustrated that they just can't seem to get close to people, including their partner.

It is important to remember that it is not trust that causes sexual abuse, but the misuse of trust. In fact, children need to trust adults in order to survive. You did not cause or deserve to be abused because you trusted someone. The abuse happened because someone abused that trust.

Intimacy means more than sexual intimacy. It is also about sharing special and important moments with close friends. Intimacy can develop through connections you make with a friend or partner; spending time, playing together, discussing ideas, including disagreeing, shared parenting experiences,

supporting family members, enhancing spirituality.

This way of relating is profoundly different to abuse. The dynamic of abuse is where one person's ideas and wishes are important and the other person's wishes and needs are not considered at all. Intimacy is about developing mutuality, equality and negotiation.

It can be helpful for you and your partner to talk about some of the things that bring you together, to work out what ideas you share about your relationship and what differences can be appreciated and respected, as well what areas could do with some extra work and time being put into them. You could take some quiet time to consider:

- What kind of relationship would you like?
- What brings you closer to people, what pushes you away?
- Are you aware of your friends or partner's likes or dislikes?
- What builds connections in your relationship with them?
- How close a relationship do you/they want?
- What time and energy are you willing to put in to developing intimacy in this relationship?
- How might you start to do this?

Flashbacks

Many men who have been subjected to sexual abuse experience flashbacks. Flashbacks are memories or fragments of memories from recent or past events. They can be jarring, painful and intrusive. Flashbacks can last a few brief seconds or be very drawn out and detailed.

Flashbacks can be visual, auditory (sounds), emotional, physiological, and/or smells, tastes, or touch.

One of the most confusing things about flashbacks is that

they can seem like you are right back in the situation. If the flashback is related to times when someone was doing something sexually abusive to you, this can be extremely distressing.

Flashbacks are often triggered by things or events in the present. Triggers can be very specific, like a certain smell or sound, or general, like some kind of personal crisis.

Although flashbacks can be very unwelcome and distressing, often they can contain information and feelings that fill in gaps in your memory. Some men have said they provided the 'piece in the jigsaw' that helped them make better sense of what happened, especially if their memory is foggy or unclear.

It can be a good idea to find a counselor to help you work out how these memories 'fit' into place. See resources at the back of this booklet.

Tips for dealing with flashbacks:

When the flashback happens...

Try to bring yourself back to the 'here and now'. Deliberately and slowly notice what you can see, hear, and touch where you are right now. Touch your chair or the fabric of your clothes, and describe the texture to yourself (rough, smooth, etc).

Focus on your breathing. Deliberately slow down your breathing in and out. Count to 5 while breathing out. Try to breathe deep into your diaphragm.

Remind yourself that you are not back where the original event happened, but here in this place, in this time. Some people find it useful to ground themselves by touching their watch, wrist band or a piece of jewellery that they have now, but did not wear back then.

Asking yourself these questions can help bring you back to here and now:

- How old am I now? Where do I live/work now?
- What options do I have now that I didn't have then?
- Who can I ask for support and encouragement?
- How do I like to spend my time?
- Where do I want to put my energy now?

After the flashback has passed...

Be kind to yourself

After experiencing a flashback you might want to rest or distract yourself for a while, take a nap, have a warm drink, relax and listen to some music, watch TV, play a computer game, do some gardening or just take some quiet time for yourself. Words of support and encouragement to yourself are more likely to help you deal with flashbacks than questioning and evaluating yourself.

Try and work out the triggers. Choose a time when you are feeling safe and steady, and think about your last flashback:

- What was happening when the memory appeared?
- Where were you? Who was around? What were you feeling? thinking? smelling/hearing/sensing?
- Does this relate to an event in your past?

If you can identify the triggers, your reactions begin to make more sense and become less confusing. You might still get triggered by these things, but it will be easier to anticipate them, put them in their place, understand what is going on and get yourself back on track.

You might want to explore these questions with the help of a counselor. It is not always helpful to explore this by yourself

if you are feeling unsteady, so try not to put yourself under pressure to 'work it out' on your own.

Nightmares

In some ways, nightmares can be like flashbacks you have when you are asleep. They might be very clear reminders of the abuse that you experienced, and can have the same unsettling, confusing and distressing after-effects as flashbacks. However, while flashbacks are usually recognizable memories of actual events, the content of nightmares can be less specific or directly related.

Nightmares might also be of things that represent the abuse or trauma in some way. It might not always be clear exactly what they mean. They might seem very odd or bizarre, yet leave you with a definite sense of being afraid, scared, alone or disorientated. They might also trigger feelings of shame or anger that are related to the abuse without your making that association.

Similarly to flashbacks, nightmares can seem to come from 'out of the blue', and leave you feeling out of control.

As well as the emotional and psychological aspects of nightmares, they can also have physiological effects (sweating, increased heart-rate, breathing troubles). If nightmares happen regularly, they can also bring about anxiety about sleeping.

The same ideas that can help deal with flashbacks are also useful for nightmares. Again, there are 2 parts of this. First is the immediate work of calming or grounding yourself just after a nightmare; and second, you may like to explore their meaning in more depth. On the next page is a specific exercise that helps some people to deal with persistent

nightmares.

What you can do if nightmares persist...

If, in the morning, you can put aside the nightmare and concentrate on getting on with your day and doing what is important to you, then do it. If, however, a nightmare persists or becomes particularly disruptive you might try the following exercise.

1. Pick an unpleasant dream/nightmare, one that is not a direct replay or a re-enactment of a distressing event and write it down.
2. Write the unpleasant dream down in as much detail as you can. Only in this telling of the dream you can change the ending, so that it ends safely for you. Remember it is your choice to do this and that you can stop writing or thinking about the dream and do something else any time you want.
3. Now, get to know this new preferred version of the dream, rehearse it each night for about 5-15 minutes prior to going to sleep.
4. Once you have rehearsed the dream, perform a relaxation exercise, one that you are familiar with and helps you to fall asleep peacefully. If you wake up, it can be useful to repeat this relaxation exercise, breathing deeply and slowly.
5. When you are satisfied that you have re-storied the unpleasant dream to work better for you, you can choose to work on another nightmare that is slightly more intense than the last. Make sure that this process is a gradual increase in intensity and do not work with more than 2 nightmares in one week. Also take care of yourself; you do not have to over describe the upsetting content within the dream.

Panic attacks and anxiety

A common issue for people who have experienced sexual abuse is intense anxiety and panic attacks. This can take the form of distressing physiological symptoms (difficulty breathing, or shaking, or tightness in the chest), coupled with thoughts that prompt dread or fear (being convinced that something bad will happen).

The combination of physical and psychological aspects can lead to a kind of vicious cycle which can be debilitating. People find themselves worrying that they are going to have more panic attacks, which can prompt more anxiety, and so on. People often say it feels like they are 'going crazy'.

Some tips for dealing with panic attacks...

- Learn the signs of your panic attacks.
- When you notice the signs, say to yourself 'I know what is happening, it's just a panic attack'.
- Remind yourself that you have gotten through this before and you will get through this.
- Use your sense of touch- deliberately pay attention to the feel and texture of your chair or clothing.
- Get yourself a glass of water if you can (don't ask someone else to get it for you).

You can also try some of the tips for dealing with flashbacks and nightmares. Again, when you are in a quiet, safe place, you might like to try and work out the triggers.

Give yourself a break

calm
take
time
relaxation
be generous
kindness
to yourself
care
rest

Deciding to tell

There are lots of reasons why someone might choose to keep unwanted or abusive sexual experiences secret. Shame, confusion, a misguided sense of blame are all common reasons. For some people, keeping the abuse secret might literally have been a matter of life and death at one time. The person that carried out the abuse might have made threats to hurt or kill them or people they cared about, or some other awful threat. The decision to not tell may have been the safest thing to do.

If you have already tried to tell someone, either in the past or recently, and they did not respond in a very helpful or supportive way, it can be hard to work up the courage to tell someone else.

Who can you tell?

While it can be helpful to find someone you can tell about your experiences, it is also important to take care about how you do this. Not everyone you know will be ready to hear about your experiences or what you are dealing with. Even friends or family who you get along well with are not always going to be able to support you in the way you would like. It can be useful to ask yourself:

- What am I looking for from this person?
- What kind of response would I like?
- What tells me that this person will be able to hear what I am saying?
- What are my worries and concerns?
- How might I prepare them for what I am about to say?
- How might I take care of myself and not place too high an expectation on this person?
- What do I want and not want....how do I make sure I

remain in charge of my process?

Remember it is your decision if, who, when and how much of your story you want to tell. If someone presses for details that you are not ready or willing to share, it's OK to let them know this.

If you feel unsure about what someone is thinking, try asking them; sometimes their silence might be because they are uncertain what to do, not because they are making judgments.

Telling people about your experiences of abuse is not necessarily a one-time event. It is often more of a process, involving a lot of thinking, hesitations, 'checking out' people's responses, and so on.

Unfortunately, sexual abuse is such a secretive issue that you might have to educate your 'supporters' about how to help along the way. Some people might want to be there for you but simply don't know what to do. Let them know that just being there to listen or to be with you is helping; that takes the pressure of both of you. You might like to show them this booklet or some of the other resources at the back of this booklet.

Suicidal thoughts

Thoughts of suicide are more common than you think, especially among men who have experienced sexual abuse.

Suicidal thoughts can range from fantasies, through to detailed plans. Even if your thoughts seem like they are 'just' passing ideas or fantasies, it is still important to find someone to talk to. The more detailed your thoughts about suicide, the more important it is to get help.

Thoughts and actions are not the same thing. Suicidal thoughts are one way of your mind telling you 'I am not happy with things the way they are'. The important thing is that you talk with someone who is going to help you improve the situation.

Be persistent. Keep asking until you find the help you need.

Finding help

If you think you might harm or attempt to kill yourself call for help immediately.

- Reach out to someone you trust and ask for help. Tell them honestly how you feel, including your thoughts of suicide.
- Call 911 or nearest police, ambulance, or fire service or,
- See resources at the back of the booklet for crisis response options.
- Go, or have someone take you to your local hospital emergency department or mental health crisis center (usually listed in the front of the phone book).

Self-harm

When someone is hurting themselves, it is not always an attempt to kill themselves.

Self-harm can be a way of both expressing and managing the physical and psychological pain you are experiencing. Many people say that self-harm serves a purpose, usually to do with the idea that feeling physical pain seems easier than dealing with intense emotional or psychological pain. Other people describe self-harm as a way of feeling something.

Self-harm can be quite controlled and deliberate with the specific purpose of causing pain and/or injury. Examples may include, punching walls, cutting oneself or provoking fights. Some forms of self-harm are more easily hidden, such as over

work, over-exercising, or taking extreme risks.

Self-harming behaviors can escalate over time, as both your tolerance and desire for pain increases. In some cases it can lead to permanent injury and disfigurement.

The difficulty is that self-harm often only works for a short period, when you are looking for more effective long term solutions that allow you to get on with your life.

Learning some techniques to tolerate and contain distress can be helpful alternatives to self-harm. The relaxation and mindfulness exercises in this booklet might work for you. Writing or drawing, talking with someone, setting and achieving small goals, and staying healthy can reduce distress.

Alcohol, drugs and self-judgment

If you have made a decision to stop or cut down on alcohol or drug use, it can be a positive step. Keep in mind, however, that using alcohol or drugs is a common coping strategy for dealing with uncomfortable thoughts and feelings and that when you take the 'numbing' effect of alcohol and drugs away memories can return with force. It can get tough if there is nothing else to fall back on.

Depending on the extent of dependence on alcohol, medical assistance may be required to assist the body adapt.

The challenge of stopping using alcohol and drugs can be added to by negative judgments about yourself or about the process of change. Common self judgments include:

- I'm too damaged to get through this
- I'm not strong enough to handle it
- I'm really losing it/going crazy
- It's easier not to feel all this

- I wanted to feel better but all this is making things worse

Some men have spoken about the benefit of taking a questioning stance around self judgment, checking in with themselves and asking 'Is this judgment useful for me right now?'; and 'Do I want to spend time with it?'

If the answer is no, then it is best to leave the judgment and to focus on doing things that are useful for you right now.

Remember that these judgments are not truths about you; they are ideas and pressures that men can face. It's OK for you to decide that some judgments are not really useful for how you want to live your life.

What am I feeling?

When you are asked 'how are you feeling?'; it can sometimes be difficult to know how to answer. This not because men don't have feelings; obviously we do.

When thinking about sexual abuse, sadness, shame and confusion are common emotions. These are normal feelings to have when treated in such an unfair, hurtful way. Yet it is also quite understandable to want to avoid these intense emotions.

Distraction, 'numbing' or avoiding emotions are strategies for dealing with intense emotional pain that are sometimes useful in stopping us from feeling overwhelmed.

One emotion that men are often quite familiar with is anger. Anger can be useful in encouraging action against injustice, however, it can also lead to aggression and become a 'cover' for some uncomfortable yet important emotions

What we hear from a lot of men, however, is that eventually these difficult emotions find ways to grab your attention,

often at a time of crisis. We also hear that when shutting down has become a habit, it can make it more difficult to experience pleasant feelings or any sense of joy in life.

Tips for making sense of emotions:

The idea of making space, room, or time for all of life's emotions can be helpful. It is not about some emotions being good or bad, but being able to tolerate and experience a range of emotions as part of living life to the full.

You might be ready to start taking some risks with allowing yourself to really notice what you are feeling.

This can be extremely challenging, because it can initially feel like things are getting worse. Feelings that have been buried or ignored for a long time are starting to be noticed and experienced.

As we said before, this is why it can be important to have a reasonably 'solid foundation' to work from when doing this work. Without a secure base, it is very difficult to experience distressing feelings without getting thrown off course.

As you get used to these feelings, you slowly begin to realize that you can actually cope with them. Over time they will become less daunting, and you might even find that you experience other, more positive feelings, in a different way too.

Below and on the following page is a step-by-step process that can help with making sense of emotions.

An exercise to get to know your emotions:

1. Try to pay attention to your physiological responses to different situations. This includes your heart rate, breathing, sweating, shaking/trembling, tension in some muscles, 'the hairs on the back of your neck standing

- up...all these are clues to what's going on emotionally.
2. Start with 'big' categories. Is my heartbeat fast or slow? Is my breathing deep or shallow? Does my face feel hot or cool? Then try narrowing it down with more precise descriptions (cool as tap water or cold like ice?), or making a visual scale rating how fast or slow (from 1-10), how hot or cold, etc.
 3. Once you've noticed and described these physiological sensations, try naming the emotion that goes with it. Start big (e.g., sad, mad, glad, anxious), and then get more detailed (e.g., grief, regret, disappointment).
 4. Once you have given it a name, consider: I feel _____ because I think _____.
 5. Are there social judgments about men expressing this emotion? Who with/where would it be OK to express this feeling without being negatively judged?

Getting to know your feelings and emotions in this way can gradually help with making decisions about whether to try and 'stay with' your feelings. (See resources at the back of the booklet for more information)

Parenting

Becoming a parent can be a challenging time for anyone. Men who had unwanted or abusive sexual experiences in childhood often may also have experienced physical or emotional abuse or neglect as well and commonly face some added pressures.

Key times that can trigger difficult thoughts and feelings can include finding out about the pregnancy, the birth of the child, and when then child approaches the age that you were when the abuse was happening. Difficulties might be related to memories of the abuse itself, about your abilities

as a parent, or both. It might also be fears about your child's vulnerability to abuse.

Some men worry they will hurt or abuse their children and limit their involvement, especially with tasks that require close physical contact such as bathing and diaper changing. Sadly this can lead to men missing out on important parts of their child's development and life.

Remember that parenting is a challenging and sometimes overwhelming experience for most people. Despite the challenges, many men, including men who have experienced sexual abuse, find ways to be caring, protective, and nurturing parents and grandparents.

Take time to work out your own thoughts about the kind of parent you want to be. We are not born with parenting skills.

Justice

"Justice" means different things to different people. Some see imposing a punishment on the person who caused the harm as real justice. Others might be more satisfied with verbal or emotional validation or acknowledgment of harm from the person who hurt them. When people talk about "justice" in relation to childhood sexual abuse, many immediately think of holding the man, woman, boy, or girl who committed the abuse accountable – usually by creating a consequence for the harm they caused. Anyone affected by sexual abuse has an absolute right to seek justice.

Justice based on punishment - or retribution - for wrongdoing is sometimes called "retributive justice." Most court-involved criminal proceedings are founded on theories of retributive justice. Another approach, often called "restorative justice," has a goal of restoring relationships by

acknowledging the harm and finding ways to heal it.

Either approach can be used independently. In some places, restorative justice concepts are interwoven into the criminal justice proceedings from the outset, or may be initiated at some point after a conviction. In other situations, a restorative approach may be used instead of the criminal process. (See below under “Confrontation” for more about restorative justice.)

Achieving an absolute sense of justice through any procedure can pose significant challenges. By maintaining a realistic appreciation of the risks and of the possible outcomes, it may be possible to lessen feelings of powerlessness simply by participating in any process seeking justice, regardless of the end result.

Reporting sexual abuse

Sexual abuse of a child is against the law.

You have every right to report what happened to you to law-enforcement authorities. They may involve child protection services if there are any children who could be at risk of abuse by the person who abused you.

As a result of the police and child-protection investigation, services may be offered; charges may be filed; a minor child may be removed from an unsafe situation; or the report may be “unsupported” or “unfounded,” and no further action taken at that time. Even when no immediate action is taken, the report generally will be kept on file for future reference.

It is very common for people who have suffered sexual abuse to delay reporting it to the police until they are well into adulthood. Despite laws in some jurisdictions that limit the

amount of time after a crime is committed to file criminal charges (statutes of limitation), it is possible and may be very worthwhile to report child sexual abuse to police even if it was many years ago.

If you are an adult who experienced the abuse in childhood, it's entirely your choice about whether to report the sexual abuse or not. The first step can be talking to a friend or counselor who will not pressure you one way or another, but will help you to think through in a realistic way the reasons for reporting or not reporting.

Many police departments now have officers specially-trained to understand and be alert to how well you are coping with the process. Prosecutors also may have advocates specifically trained to support victims of sexual assault. Be aware that the expertise of the legal system and level of support resources may vary from community to community.

Even with the best intentions, in order to do their job, the police and prosecutors will ask you about intimate details of your experience. Some of these could be the very details you have been trying your best not to think about for years.

Generally, giving a statement to police about sexual abuse is an exhausting and possibly painful process. It is common to initially feel quite depressed or distressed afterwards. It's important to have realistic expectations about both the process and the eventual outcome, and to have a good support team in place.

Enormous progress has been made over the last 30 years in law enforcement's understanding of sexual abuse, prosecutors' willingness to file criminal charges and courts' ability to convict. But for a variety of complex reasons, the majority of even those charged with sexual abuse are not

convicted in court. The reasons may include:

- an absence of other witnesses
- a lack of physical evidence
- frequent fragility of the child victims
- “statutes of limitation” in some jurisdictions, which limit the number of years that can pass between the abuse and the filing of charges
- and a widespread tendency to assume that an otherwise respectable person would not sexually abuse a child

The laws about sexual assault are different among jurisdictions.

(See resources at the back of the booklet for more information)

Seeking compensation

A person who experienced abuse may also be able to file a civil lawsuit seeking compensation for harm from those responsible, especially if the abuse happened in an institution such as a school, church or residential facility.

While the amount of compensation will rarely feel like it comes anywhere close to adequate, it can help with the cost of things like counseling, or other expenses related to recovering from sexual abuse.

As in any legal matter, it is worth getting quality legal advice. In cases where lawyers offer to waive up-front fees, it is useful to keep an eye on legal costs being incurred and how much will be deducted from any compensation obtained.

Beware revenge

When an individual who abused a child is not charged or is found not guilty, the man who was abused and those who support him may feel immense frustration and anger.

It is completely understandable and legitimate to want those who commit sexual offenses held accountable, and to have the injustice of the abuse acknowledged by the courts (which hold a special position as a kind of ‘representative’ of society). When this doesn’t happen, ideas of revenge can start to appear.

Male social norms may cause a man to feel pressure to take matters into his own hands and personally seek revenge from those who commit abuse.

Revenge can get confused with justice, and when this happens, it rarely leads to a positive outcome. It may result in further abuse and violence, increased frustration, or, at the extreme, can result in you being charged with a crime.

Confrontation

Some people may feel that they need to confront the person who committed the abuse, to have them acknowledge their actions and to hear the impacts. In our experience, this is only helpful when it has been carefully planned with professional support. The person who committed the abuse must be willing to acknowledge their behavior and take some steps towards accepting responsibility for the harm.

The most successful forms of restorative justice involve a carefully structured and planned process aimed at restoring harmony in a relationship or group. The injured person’s participation must be voluntary in order for the meeting to be safe and productive, and they must be allowed to withdraw at any time. However, if the abusive person is not willing to admit to their actions or to respectfully hear the people who have experienced abuse speak about the impact, such meetings have the potential to increase distress, anger and feelings of powerlessness.

‘The best justice is to live well’

It is important not to lose sight of the bigger purpose of these thoughts about justice, revenge, and so on: to live a satisfying, fulfilling life. Try to focus on your own priorities and preferences for your life.

Celebrating life

It is worth noticing that despite whatever abuse you have experienced and whatever problems this may have brought into your life, you are still here.

And you are doing things to build the life you want,, rather than accepting a life that is determined by your experiences of abuse.

Take time to acknowledge what you have achieved. What do you feel good about? What are you proud of?

It could be a relationship, parenting, success in work, or sports achievements. It could be something you have done to help someone else. It could be standing up against injustices, no matter how small or large.

It could be anything that reflects the life you want to build for yourself, based on your own values, beliefs and preferences.

Useful contacts

1in6 OnlineSupportLine.....1in6.org/SupportLine

1in61in6.org

Hotlines

The Childhelp National

Child Abuse Hotline [1-800-4-A-CHILD \(1-800-422-4453\)](tel:1-800-4-A-CHILD)

National Sexual Assault Hotline [1-800-656-HOPE \(4673\)](tel:1-800-656-HOPE)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline [1-800-273-TALK \(8255\)](tel:1-800-273-TALK)

Stop It Now! Hotline [1-800-PREVENT \(773-8368\)](tel:1-800-PREVENT)

Web resources

Beyond Blue beyondblue.org.au

Black Survivors blacksurvivors.org

Childhelp childhelp.org

The Child Welfare Information Gateway childwelfare.gov

Faith Trust Institute faithtrustinstitute.org

FORGE forge-forward.org

National Center for Fathering fathers.com

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network rainn.org

Suicide Prevention Resource Center sprc.org

Sidran Institute sidran.org

Stop It Now! stopitnow.org

Sexual Abuse by Women female-offenders.com

SNAP (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests) snapnetwork.org

Surviving Spirit survivingspirit.com

Trevor Project thetrevorproject.org

Dedication

This booklet is dedicated to the memory of
Heidi Sommer VavRosky
(1968-2014)

May the spirit of her life of empathy
and compassion live on through this booklet.

This booklet is written to provide men with some practical information and support about dealing with the effects of sexual abuse. We have tried to keep it manageable, both in terms of it's size and the level of detail.

Most of all we hope that it offers some useful ideas about taking care of yourself.

— Cameron Boyd and Gary Foster, PhD

1in6 extends our special thanks to Gary Foster and Living Well for permitting 1in6 to revise and publish the valuable information in this booklet. For additional information about the organizations and individuals who contributed to its creation, see the link on livingwell.org.au or visit us at 1in6.org for more in-depth resources.

Words of encouragement

"By focusing on my life, my health, my well-being, I can be a better man, partner, friend and father."

— Man, age 35

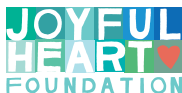
"I realize I don't need to be defined by what happened to me. I can create a way of living according to my own interests, on my own terms. Having these ideas detailed in specific terms is motivating."

— Man, age 27

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INFO **OPTIONS** HOPE



Partnering to raise awareness about the impact of childhood sexual abuse on men

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