

PARENT SURVIVORS

LISTEN TO YOUR CHILD

- **Try to structure your life so you and your child have enough sleep and regular, nutritious meals.** If financial concerns or any other reasons make it hard to get healthy food and a safe place to live for your family, talk with an advocate about resources in your community that may be available to support you.
- **Sometimes, sexual abuse can cause survivors to set boundaries that are too open or too closed.** This may make it difficult for you to know when you need to be more protective or when you can be more flexible. Talk to an advocate or to friends you trust to help you respond appropriately to your child's needs for safety and independence.
- **There is a possibility that your trauma history may affect your ability to seek appropriate medical or mental health care for you or your child.** You may have a greater knowledge of and comfort with available resources, or you may find yourself avoiding needed services. An advocate can help you find professionals who really know and understand how to help survivors feel safe and respected.

HEALING IS POSSIBLE

- **Believe that both you and your child can have a happy, productive life.** Abuse affects you both, but it doesn't define you or your family. Acknowledging the trauma and getting help are steps towards a healthy future. Practice gratitude for the positive things in your life, focus on the best in your child, and hold onto your dreams for yourself.

YOUR CHILD'S ABUSE IS NOT YOUR FAULT

When Your Child Has Been Sexually Abused, and You Were Also Abused as a Child



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Content for this brochure was developed by the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs.

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REMEMBER YOUR STRENGTHS

- **You are a strong, loving parent.**
- **Your child's abuse is not your fault – it is the fault of the abuser.** Most parents of children who have been abused feel responsible in some way, because they feel they have failed to protect their child. You are not the abuser. Be kind to yourself.
- **Get help – from friends, family, an advocate, a therapist, a spiritual counselor, or anyone else who can provide true support.** If “it takes a village to raise a child,” it certainly takes a community of support to help you and your child heal and recover. You need love and support of your own in order to help your child.
- **If you were sexually abused as a child, it may be valuable to work with an advocate or therapist** of your own in order to be on solid ground to help your child with abuse issues. Even if you have accessed advocacy or therapy services in the past, seeing an advocate or therapist now can help you to address the new challenges involved in supporting your child. Advocates are available at community-based sexual assault programs, and provide free, confidential assistance to those affected by sexual assault or abuse.
- **Remember your own strengths as a survivor.** Your experiences may help you to better understand your child's needs and the resources available.

RECOGNIZE YOUR FEELINGS

- **Don't expect your child to react as you did.** Remember that you and your child are different people, and that your experiences are different. When your child is talking to you, breathe, focus, and try your best to remain fully present for your child, not centered in your own experiences.
- Because many children blame themselves at least partially for what happened to them, you may find yourself blaming your child for the abuse or for not telling you about it right away. **Children are not to blame for being abused – not your child, not your younger self. Ever.**
- **Give yourself time to grieve and accept your own emotions.** You may be sad, confused, or angry; you may feel other strong emotions such as shame or disgust; or you may feel numb. You may feel re-victimized because your child was abused.
- **You may even be angry at your child at times, for a variety of reasons.** Feelings are just feelings. Find a healthy way to express them (such as journaling, discussing your feelings in a support group, or talking to an advocate) so you don't direct them at your child.
- **Make a plan to deal with triggers,** which are any experiences that set off your feelings of being traumatized again. Your child's experiences and coping responses may trigger your own feelings from the past.

ASK FOR HELP AND SUPPORT

- **Educate yourself about how to help your child.** Your desire to promote a healthy, happy life for your child will help you both to cope and grow, despite the difficulties you may face. An advocate can help you with this.
- **A parent support group can be life-changing,** because it is easy to feel terribly alone as you go through this experience. The information and encouragement these groups offer can make a big difference for you and your child's healing.
- **Self-care is important for every parent, but even more so for parents who have their own abuse history.** Learn healthy ways to care for yourself--socializing, meditating, cultivating your spiritual life, connecting with supportive friends, and participating in physical movement, such as yoga, dance, or walking.
- **Identify a supportive person that you can talk to.** Your child may want to talk about the abuse, and it may be difficult to hear. It can be reassuring to know there is someone who will listen to your concerns and help you through your feelings about the conversation. Sometimes having an advocate can help when others in your life have a hard time hearing about sexual abuse.
- **Getting support can be a balance between sharing your feelings about your child's abuse and respecting your child's privacy.**

