

Healing From Your Child Abuse Story Once And For All:  
A Step-by-Step Approach to Living a Peaceful, Confident Life after the  
Abuse

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## **Giving Yourself the Right to Feel Your Feelings: Step 1-A**

"Feelings are the language of the soul!"  
Neale Donald Walsch

It's not uncommon to shy away from sharing your feelings when you've been abused. When we hide our feelings, it feels like everything will get better, or the problems will magically go away on their own. However, many people fail to realize that the moment you begin hiding from your feelings, they begin taking over your life. What do I mean by this?

Well, your feelings go somewhere, whether you're aware of it or not. And if you don't address or acknowledge your feelings as soon as possible, they'll tend to show up later, as a mental illness, drug and/or alcohol issue, or as a physical, emotional, relationship or financial problem.

For instance, if you're angry about something and you don't express that anger in a healthy, non-violent way, that anger will show up later through violence, depression, or abuse.

Really think about this for a minute. Have you ever gotten into an argument with a parent and refused to tell him or her what you were upset about? Was your response, "Nothing is the matter. I'm fine!" When really you were angry and upset about how they treated you. Instead of dealing with the problem right away, you let the issue build up until finally you "exploded," which ended up causing more problems.

One of the best ways to overcome child abuse is to share your feelings. Yet, it's often very common for child abuse survivors to feel like they cannot express themselves. It's important to understand that you have the right to feel upset, angry, sad, frustrated, happy, confused, hurt, or however else you're feeling.

Once you give yourself permission to feel your feelings, you'll find yourself feeling mentally, emotionally, and physically better than before. Allowing yourself to "feel" is the best type of medication you can give yourself.

Although sharing feelings is an important ailment for healing from child abuse, there are some guidelines you'll need to follow during the process:

### **Share your Feelings in a Healthy, Nurturing Environment**

Sharing feelings in an unhealthy environment is a bad idea! **F.Y.I:** An unhealthy environment is any place or person that doesn't respect your feelings, needs, wants, or well-being. A good example of this is trying to better yourself in an environment with alcohol and drugs, or hanging out with people who devalue your self-worth - "You're too lazy to accomplish your goals!"

More likely than not, if you share your "true" feelings with someone who doesn't respect you, you'll feel worse because this person or environment will not want the best for you.

### **Expect to Feel Worse before you Feel Better**

I've had clients who have said that they felt exhausted and worse after a non-stop crying therapy session.

This is normal.

I like to think of it as "You're releasing toxins from your body when you've held your feelings in for such a long time." Anger, shame, guilt, and blame are poisonous feelings and they'll wear you out! And just so you know, these feelings are the most common when one has endured child abuse, which I'll talk more about later.

However, in time, expect to feel better after working through these feelings.

### **Do not Feel Sorry for Yourself and Don't Allow Others to Feel Sorry for you Either**

We have all either been the ones to feel sorry for ourselves, or we have listened to someone else talk about sorry events "I was abused as a child!" Or "My father was never around." Or "I can't believe my mother said this to me."

Everyone has the right to their feelings, but there comes a time and a place when feeling sorry for your circumstances does not do you or another any favors.

The best way to not feel sorry for yourself is to know when you've said too much about the sorry events; you do this by paying attention to how you feel (i.e., tired of feeling bad) and how others are responding to you (i.e., avoiding you). In time, if you do not put a stop to your "feeling sorry ways," you'll be sorry that you didn't listen to your gut when it said, "Stop feeling sorry for yourself!"

The moment you allow yourself to feel your feelings, and the moment you let them go, is the moment when you'll no longer need to feel sorry for yourself. The more you focus on your past, the more likely your past will always be your present.

And when others feel sorry for you, do not allow it! Once a person feels sorry for your past, you'll feel like a victim. The best way to overcome this is to look at your past in a positive way and respond like this... "Thanks for your concern, but I've learned a lot about myself from what I've experienced and I wouldn't change a thing."

### **Let the Feelings go After you Experience the Effect**

No matter how much we let our feelings go about our past, there will be days when those painful feelings come back up. It doesn't matter how much I say to let it go, sometimes the pain can feel too great. This is okay and normal. However, the important thing to remember here is this...

**"Allow yourself that moment, reflect on your feelings, and when the next day comes, let it go and do not allow yourself to take the past personally any longer."**

It's a great feeling to know that you can have bad days, but it's an even better feeling knowing that you are in control of how you'll react. So, when a bad day comes, let it be, and reflect on why you're having those feelings. Learn to grow from your feelings.

## **Learn How to Journal...So You Can Begin Ventilating Your Feelings: Step 1-B**

"Love is not the absence of an emotion, but the summation of all feeling. It is the sum total; the aggregate amount; the everything! Thus, for the soul to experience perfect love, it must experience every human feeling."

Neale Donald Walsch

Since I've learnt how to journal, I've discovered the benefits of this type of ventilation method.

And because I believe in the power of journaling so much, I often recommend that my clients keep one handy for individual (i.e., venting about everyday stressors, recognizing values/goals, discovering needs/wants, etc.) and therapeutic reasons (i.e., facing the past, awareness of bottled up emotions, awareness of unhealthy relationships, etc.)

Journaling is just you, your thoughts, and your notebook. And the beauty of having a journal is, you can write about your "true" feelings without having to share it with anyone. If you have never had a journal, I highly recommend that you buy one. There are many to choose from and they range in price and style.

I believe journaling is also a great way to discover your true feelings. For instance, if you've blocked your feelings your entire childhood and don't know where to start, journaling will be a great way to get back in touch with those lost feelings. Are you wondering what you would say or how you would say it? Don't worry! The beauty of journaling is you can write anything that comes to your mind and to your hearts desire.

Your true feelings are there, it's just a matter of allowing them to come out, and journaling is great for that. The more you write, the more you'll discover your feelings. And the important thing to remember is - you cannot heal from your childhood abuse until you've discovered your "true" feelings.

If you don't like writing much, speak into a tape recorder. After listening to your recording, it will feel like someone is speaking back to

you, and you may develop a better impression as to why you feel the way you do about the one who has hurt you.

If you would like to try another way of releasing your feelings, try sharing your story with others at <http://www.relationship-with-self.com/child-abuse-story.html>

So, if you understand the power of journaling and are ready to begin, here are some tips on how to journal. Before you start, understand that these journaling tips are intended to guide you into opening up about your past and exploring deep-rooted emotions you've held in for many years.

### **"How to Journal Tips:"**

#### **1. Find a Quiet Place**

Learning how to journal means you're willing to give yourself some "You" time. I like to journal either at the end of the night or during times when I'm reflecting on my day, week, or month. Set some time aside everyday in order to get in touch with your thoughts and feelings. If you do not do this, you may not get the full benefits of journaling. Make sure you can do this without any distractions.

#### **2. Pay Attention to the Urgent Times**

Learning how to journal means you're willing to pay attention to moments that call to you.

In other words when certain feelings keep arising over and over again (e.g., angry all the time, sad all the time, being very tearful for reasons you do not understand, feeling lonely, etc.), sit down and, take a moment to question these feelings and, pay attention to them. Ask yourself, "Why am I having these feelings?"

If it were something minor, these feelings would not keep popping up; however, if it's deep rooted there's something much more. Discover what it is.

#### **3. When the Feeling Reappears Over and Over Again, Write it Down**

If you're unsure how to journal number 2, here's what you do: Write the main feeling down (i.e., Explain the feeling in detail; How long have you been feeling this way? What do you believe caused it? Have you noticed anything that makes you feel better?, etc). Write about the relationships involved with this feeling (i.e., is there someone this feeling is directed towards? Is there someone that reminds you of another person from your past? Is this person abusive in anyway?, etc).

Write these questions down one by one and before you know it, you'll begin understanding where this feeling is coming from and you'll cope a lot better than before.

#### **4. Writing and Writing and Writing Some More**

When you learn how to journal, you'll begin noticing that your feelings and thoughts pour out on to that paper like they never have before.

As soon as your pen hits the paper, you're participating in a healing process. Let your mind take you to places where you've never been before. In other words, start knocking down those walls you've built, and begin allowing yourself to feel those emotions.

Practice the how to journal tips on a regular basis; make it a new habit and part of your daily ritual. It's a very important tool for healing from your child abuse story.

## **Coping with Emotions from Childhood: Step 2**

Step 2 in Healing from your Abusive Childhood teaches you the importance of coping with emotions left over from your childhood (i.e., anger, guilt, denial, blame, and shame). These emotions are the most common among individuals who have been sexually, physically, verbally, and emotionally abused. In addition, these are the feelings that can take over your freedom and keep you imprisoned in the past.

Yet, now you can learn another approach in dealing with your emotions in a healthy, loving way, rather than in a demeaning, punishing manner. You'll regain the emotional freedom that you had before the abuse occurred.

You'll discover how to do this by following the next steps..

"Negativity kept in harms the body and burdens the soul." Neale  
Donald Walsch

## **Dealing with Anger: Step 2-A**

“Anger is the agony of believing that you are not capable of being understood, and that you are not worthy of being understood. Until you have the courage to face and experience the pain that lies beneath your anger, you will continue to become angry.”

Gary Zukav

Dealing with anger from your child abuse experience is often the most challenging hurdle. Overcoming my anger towards my mother was a big struggle for me. I wanted to punish her with my resentment and anger. I thought if I was always mad at her, she would finally get the hint and correct what she had done. My anger was my protection, or in other words, my shield from letting her hurt me more.

I didn't realize that the anger was poisoning my well-being- nor did I realize that the longer I was angry, the longer the relationship suffered. The problem was, I didn't know how to deal with my anger. I often wondered how I could possibly let go of it without feeling vulnerable.

In time, however, I've grown in wisdom and have learnt the benefits of dealing with anger and how letting go of this nasty emotion can improve relationships dramatically. Vulnerability isn't that bad- actually it's a very humbling experience. It frees you and lets you focus on improving the present rather than continually focusing on the past.

You may be saying, “Well dealing with anger is not my thing right now. I have the right to be angry and I'm going to be angry at my mother, father, brother, uncle, or whoever until I get an apology!”

I know how you feel! However, you may never get an apology, so you may be angry for the rest of your life. The problem with this is, the longer you're angry, the longer you'll miss out on opportunities that are healing for your soul.

"I've learned that forgiveness allows us to let go of the burden of anger so that we can be free to love. I know that remaining angry hurts me, not my abuser, and I have worked hard to release my anger. But during these last few months I have become angry all over again." (7)

Mona Villarrubia

Mona recognized what anger was doing to her, but she didn't know how to handle the fact that her anger kept coming back.

Anger will come back to you, and when it does, it is usually about something else (not your childhood). However, many times there will be triggers in your relationships or experiences that will bring your past flooding back, and when that happens here are some tips:

### **Dealing with Anger Guidelines:**

#### **Face the Incident that is Causing your Anger**

Become aware of what is causing your anger. Do you get angry when you're around the one who hurt you? Do you get angry when a loved one fails to acknowledge the abuse? Do you get angry that your loved one continues to choose the same choices? Do you get angry that your loved one doesn't communicate with you or that this person puts you down in some way?

These are all questions you need to ask yourself when you're feeling angry about something, otherwise, the anger will continue showing up. If you don't take the time to discover the cause of your anger, you'll never know how to fix it. If you need help with this, don't be afraid to ask someone who may know what triggers your anger.

#### **Ask What it Will Take to No Longer be Angry**

This is an important question when dealing with anger. Instead of focusing on your anger, try focusing on what you can do to get rid of the anger.

To do this try something you have never done before such as "facing the cause of your anger" or take some "you" time to become

reacquainted with the past. Whatever the case, you are the main person who knows what it will take to no longer be angry.

### **Talk to Your Higher Power; Gain Trust**

This is essential for dealing with anger. Often emotions can overtake one's life leaving a person feeling lost. However, once you give yourself permission to build a relationship with a higher power, you'll begin noticing changes. You'll *want* to live a life of freedom, love, and happiness.

However, as I mentioned above, vulnerability can be a very difficult issue to face, which is what you'll experience when building a relationship with God. But, as I found out, vulnerability is a very humble experience, and when you choose to let a higher power help you in some way, you're allowing great exposure to your true self.

In other words, exposing your insecurities is like lying on a nudist beach for the first time. It feels awkward and uncomfortable at first, but once you get used to the idea of not hiding behind clothing, you begin recognizing the freedom of nothing weighing you down.

When you build trust and give heavy burdens like dealing with anger to a higher power, you'll feel free once and for all.

### **Gain a New Kind of Understanding of the Past. Take on a New Perspective**

The only harm you're causing by staying angry with the ones who hurt you is the harm you're inflicting on yourself. And the main reason one chooses to stay angry about the past is because he or she views the past as a negative experience: **abused + sadness + lack of control=ANGER!**

When one is in a situation where he or she is constantly hurt in some way, and this person feels there is no control over the event, you can guarantee there will be some anger involved; if not anger then depression and sometimes there is a little of both.

When dealing with anger, one needs to get past the abused + sadness + lack of control stage and change it to...**part of my experience + choice + growth = control over my destiny.**

If you choose to look at your childhood as a part of your “experience” rather than the whole experience, you'll automatically grow from that choice and you'll regain control over you life, which will leave you free from anger.

### **Let the Anger Go. It no Longer is a Part of You**

In the end, when you choose to let anger go, you'll allow this emotion to be something of the past. You may have bouts of it here and there, but it will never be like it was, that is, your anger will not control you- You'll control it.

No longer will the fact that your mother or father abused you continue consuming your life. No longer will the emotional and mental scars stop you from living a joyful, thankful life. You are the one in charge here. You are the one who is in control of your life, no one else. It's okay to be angry, just don't let it be forever.

### **Don't Listen to the Negativity of Others**

It's not uncommon for loved ones or acquaintances to automatically see the bad in your circumstances. It can be very difficult for some people to see the wisdom in another's circumstances, especially if the event was child abuse.

If you choose to listen to these negative perspectives, you'll find yourself getting more and more angry. In the end, trust yourself and know that the negative perspectives of others are not always the truth.

### **How to Say No to Denial and Blame: Step 2-B**

"Somewhere you've come across the idea that to deny yourself joy is Godly-that not to celebrate life is heavenly. Denial, you have told yourself, is goodness. It is neither good nor bad, it is simply denial. If you feel good after denying yourself, then in your world that is goodness. If you feel bad, then it's badness. Most of the time you can't decide. You deny yourself this or that because you tell yourself you are supposed to. Then you say that was a good thing to do-but wonder why you don't feel good."

Conversations with God: Book I, pg. 83

Learning how to say no to denial and blame often takes on an art form all of its own. Sometimes a person can go through his or her entire life not realizing that deep down he or she is in denial about what happened in the past, and when one does have a glimmer of the abuse, he or she will automatically blame it on the one who hurt them or will blame it on themselves in some way.

According to the Webster's Dictionary, denial is defined as "Refusal to acknowledge the truth of a statement," and blame is defined as "To hold someone guilty for something; to find fault."

Both of these definitions indicate when a person is in denial or uses blame, he or she is refusing to take "healthy" responsibility for his or her own thoughts and feelings.

Instead of saying no to denial and blame, one will choose to use these emotions as armor and protection from getting hurt again. However, the irony of this is, the more one holds onto denial and blame, the more he or she will suffer.

On the other hand, when a person learns to say no to these emotions, he or she will automatically regain a sense of freedom and fulfillment; the hard part is learning how to say no to denial and blame.

The good news is, you can learn how!

### **How to Say No to Denial**

1. Accept the fact that your abusive past is and will always be a part of who you are. Instead of viewing the past as something negative, look at what you can do to make it positive. When someone views an unpleasant event as a negative and damaging occurrence, this person typically struggles with facing the event.

Yet, when one views the changing event as a chance to grow into the person he or she wants to become, the ability to deal with the situation typically becomes easier.

2. When a person chooses to deny the past, this usually means that the person isn't ready to handle the emotions that come along with facing his or her fears of the past.

This is normal and okay. Allow this until you don't want to anymore. When you are ready to acknowledge the past and all the emotions that come with it, then you have learned how to say no to denial and you are ready for a new lifestyle; a life full of self love and peace.

3. Learn all about yourself; your needs, your wants, your goals, your passions, and so forth in order to stop the denial. I was in denial for many years pretending that my father was the best father in the world, until I realized that he didn't even know who I was.

So... when I started learning more about myself and what I needed from my father, I opened up and faced my biggest fears. I asked questions that I've avoided asking him for the majority of my life. Long story short, I would have never faced this denial if I didn't know the importance of self-respect.

Instead, I have faced my truth and stopped pretending, and I have to say it was one of the hardest things I have ever done, but I do not regret it what so ever!

### **How to Say No to Blame**

1. Blame is often an excuse to not change your current circumstances. Say no to blame by making a conscious choice to take responsibility for your thoughts, feelings, and actions. You are the one in control of your life now, not the abuser.
2. The longer you blame your abuser, the longer it will take to feel like you have "healthy" control over your own life. Healthy control is when you are aware of all the choices you make; good and bad; and about using your choices to help yourself and others. When you're busy blaming others for the way you feel about yourself, you miss out on opportunities to improve your self-esteem.
3. Recognize that blaming the abuser, and others for that matter, is a waste of precious energy. Save your energy for something positive like helping other people, reading inspiring material, taking a walk, or talking to a trusted friend or family member.
4. Stop blaming yourself for the past. Understand that you did not have any control over what happened to you, but you do have control over your life now. The best way to regain the control you lost as a child is to regain it today by talking better to yourself, avoiding all criticisms, and avoiding all "what if's," "should haves," "could haves," and "would haves."

It's too late to do anything about the past, but it's never too late to begin a better relationship with yourself, and it's never too late to learn how to say no to unhealthy emotions like denial and blame.

#### *A.B. 's story of dealing with self-blame.....*

*"My parents were both alcoholics. But at the time before my mother's death, I believe she was actually worse. Alcohol was her day and night, and for us children, it had hellish consequences. She and my father were in a constant state of verbal/physical altercations. As I would later learn, both my parents had been victims of child abuse themselves. I guess my story didn't really begin until after my mother's death, when I was 16 months old.*

*After mom's death, dad entered a world of drugs, violence, racial gangs, drinking and women. He sent me to live with my grandparents. For the longest time, he stayed away. Finally, he was left broke and without a home, which meant that he had to move into my grandparent's home.*

*One time my father was playing with a pistol in our basement and he asked that I sit on his lap. He kept pointing the gun upstairs, telling me he could shoot my grandma. When I became frightened, he handed me the pistol and told me to do it, or he wouldn't love me anymore.*

*My dad's temper grew worse over the years. As I got older, he began to take it out on me. At first it was threats and then it was physical. For example, my father loved fishing and on this particular fishing trip, he decided to take me as he did on occasion. As usual he was in a bad mood, and when I tangled my fishing lure in the weeds, he turned his rod on me. He was so angry he told me the lure was worth more than I was.*

*All my life, I have strived to become a part of my dad's life. I have struggled in vain to become a perfect child he always claimed he deserved. Now, I finally realize that it wasn't me. I was a good kid. I never got into trouble. I always made good grades. I could spend the rest of my life trying to please him, but he can never be pleased until he's happy with himself. He's mad at the world because he's never learned how to deal with his emotions. Out of all of this I've learned that when it reaches the bottom line people can only REALLY help themselves.*

*I am now 21 years old and through therapy and support, I've begun to overcome my depression. I'm also learning to love and respect myself. I have a great husband and a beautiful baby boy.*

*I hope my story will help others who blame themselves for their parent's behavior. It's not your fault! Your parents make their own decisions. The only thing you can do is live your life for you, and no one else!"*

*A.B.*

## **Dealing with Guilt and Shame: Step 2-C**

“Feeling guilty is a learned response. You’ve been told to feel guilty about yourself for things you did before you could even do anything. You have been taught to feel shame for being born less than perfect.”

Neale Donald Walsch

Dealing with guilt and shame is very important when healing from child abuse. It’s very common to feel at fault for the abuse because it's easy to believe that you could have done something about the abuse instead of allowing it to continue "over and over again," and trust me, guilty and shameful feelings can keep you trapped in the "should have," "could have," and "what if" way of thinking.

As a matter of fact, according to the Webster’s Dictionary, guilt is defined as “The fact of having committed a legal offense” and shame is defined as “A painful emotion aroused by the recognition that one has failed to act, behave or think in accordance with the standards which one accepts as good.”

Here’s the thing, typically abuse happens at a young age where one is still vulnerable, trusting, and forgiving (which by the way are God given qualities). However, the problem arises when an adult takes advantage of these qualities through bullying, selfishness, manipulation, and control (these are not God given qualities).

After the adult takes the child’s innocence and love for self away, confusion, guilt, and shame set in. However, here’s the catcher... While the abuse was occurring, the child knew it was not natural, yet he or she wasn't aware of the right to boundaries. In other words, the child did not know how to handle the situation, and he or she let it continue because at the time, it was all this child knew.

Once this child grows into an adult, he or she discovers the difference between healthy and unhealthy boundaries, which typically results in being upset with oneself for letting it happen in the first place. Over time, the adult (the abused child) continues to carry the burden on his or her shoulders, which is the reason I suggest dealing with guilt and shame in order to move forward.

So, since you're no longer a child, and you're tired of holding the burden on your shoulders, here are a few tips when dealing with guilt and shame.

### **Dealing with Guilt and Shame Tips**

#### **1. Stop Punishing Yourself**

You do not have to suffer for the rest of your life. Letting go of what you did or didn't do will free you. Don't expect that the past should have been different for you! What happened, happened. It's okay and you're free to let the guilt go so you can love yourself today.

#### **2. The Moment you Feel Guilty, Make a Conscious Choice to Change that Feeling into Self-Control**

When I've felt guilty about past abuse, I asked myself, "What can I do to make myself feel better?" and I've concluded with, "Make a choice to forgive myself and do not allow myself to focus on the guilt anymore!" This has given me the opportunity for healthy control that I didn't know I had as a child.

#### **3. You are Not your Abuser**

Out of this entire e-book, this piece of advice is the most vital. If you only remember one thing from this material, remember this "You are not your abuser!"

Although the abuser may have been someone very close to you, like your mother or father, these two individuals are completely different from you. It's important to separate your feelings and thoughts from those of the abuser.

You are now capable of making your own decisions, including how you're going to react to the effects of child abuse. The moment you separate yourself from the choices of your abuser, is the moment where you'll free yourself from guilt and shame.

I understand that dealing with guilt and shame is difficult; however, make it a priority to change these draining emotions. You'll see a huge difference in your self-respect and relationships once you make the change.

### **Ending Self-Mutilation: Step 2-D**

Wikipedia.org defines self-mutilation as, "deliberate injury inflicted by a person upon their own body without suicidal intent." Why do people do this to themselves? What is the point?

About two years ago I attended a conference facilitated by a man named Patrick DeChello. He had several years of experience with self-mutilators, and during this conference he stated, "As many as 90% of people that self-mutilate report being discouraged by their loved ones from expressing emotions, particularly anger and sadness." He also mentioned that a high percentage of self-mutilators have been sexually or physically abused as a child. (4)

On the other hand, those who have been abused are not the only ones self-mutilating. As a matter of fact, Jeffrey Kluger, the author of the article "The Cruellest Cut," indicated that self-mutilators also come from stable home environments. (5) In addition, Patrick DeChello stated that self-mutilators are "females, perfectionistic, range from 13-30 years of age, Caucasian, middle and upper class, and they have average to high average IQ's."

### **Why Self-Mutilation**

Many of my clients who self injure do so because it feels "good." And although the act of cutting is self-destructive, the feeling of emotional release is much stronger. It's often the only way this person knows how to feel good.

For example, since releasing emotions was not tolerated in an abusive environment, the "one abused" learns to withhold his or her feelings until he or she cannot any longer, and compared to holding one's feelings in, cutting oneself is a well-received opportunity to feel "normal" for once. It's an unhealthy, yet functioning way for someone

who has endured abuse to express himself or herself. And because one is aware of the dysfunctionality of cutting, he or she often hides the scars from others. In a way, this is something that one is ashamed of, yet it's also a way for him or her to function on a daily basis.

### **Here are Some Examples of Self-Mutilation**

- Hair pulling
- Banging head on objects
- Punching oneself
- Cutting self with razor blade, knife, or another sharp object
- Skin picking
- Scab picking
- Scratching oneself in order to inflict harm
- Burning self with lighter, cigarette, or another flammable source

### **Self-Mutilation Triggers**

Overwhelmingly, self-mutilators say they began cutting for one of two reasons: to feel less or to feel more. Jeffrey Kluger

Patrick DeChello claims that self-mutilation triggers include "feelings of abandonment, disappointment, isolation, low self-worth, feelings of emptiness, the need for self-punishment, and difficulty ventilating secrets from the past." The self-punishment trigger, in my professional opinion, seems to be the biggest trigger for self-mutilation, especially when one was sexually abused.

I believe that the need for punishment falls into the category of guilt and shame. You can read more about it in Step 2-C of this e-book.

All in all, if you're tired of self-mutilating and you're ready to move forward, do so by practicing the following tips:

### **Self-Mutilation Tips**

#### **Face Your Feelings**

It's very important that you allow yourself the opportunity to feel, and it doesn't matter what feeling it is, just allow yourself to have it. There is nothing wrong with your feelings.

### **Learn Assertive Communication**

This allows you the freedom to assert your feelings while also respecting the feelings of another. This is a big self-confidence booster and it's a great habit to develop in order to feel heard, understood, and appreciated. Once you learn the importance of asserting yourself, you'll notice a difference in your mood and relationships.

### **Build your Self-Esteem**

One of the best ways to decrease self-mutilation is to develop a better picture of yourself. Do this by reading positive material; associating with positive, inspiring people; developing positive self-talk; and setting goals for yourself. Create a purpose for yourself and your need for mutilation will automatically decrease.

### **Help Others**

It's a great self-confidence booster to help other people. Once you help others (in a healthy balance with taking care of yourself), you'll notice that your emotions improve for the better. As soon as you find yourself with the urge to self-mutilate, find someone you can give an encouraging word to; this will automatically take your mind off of hurting yourself.

### **Replace your Negative Coping Skills with Positive, Healthy Coping Skills**

During the self-mutilation conference, Patrick indicated that one of the best coping skills for self-mutilators is to "put a rubber band around their wrist and snap the rubber band as soon as he or she has the urge to cut." I'm assuming that this coping method provides relief from the urge and it's a healthy alternative to cutting. He also recommended rubbing "Ben Gay" on the skin where you plan to cut. This gives the illusion of "blood," which also satisfies the urge to harm. He also discussed drawing a red line with a felt tip marker on the area.

There are several other coping skills that are just as beneficial. You could try taking a warm bath or going for a walk when you have an

urge. You can also call the **self-mutilation hotline at 1-800-dontcut** to speak to a professional about your urges.

You will overcome self-mutilation, but you need to make a choice to do so. It always starts with you first. If you're reading this, you're taking the first step toward recovery. Do not let your past reflect how you're going to treat yourself today. You have the right to be heard and you have the right to feel your feelings-in a healthy, loving way.

### **Putting an End to Suicidal Thoughts and Attempts: Step 2-E**

"I am a mother of a son who was sexually abused by our parish priest. When our son Peter was 10-years-old, he became an altar boy. It wasn't long after he began his training that he was raped. Grammond (the priest) told him he would be killed if he told. I'm still haunted by the fact that I saw the blood in Peter's underpants in the laundry. When I asked him about it, he said he hurt himself on his bike. Peter remembers coming home that day and seeing his dad reading the paper at the kitchen table. He felt such shame and guilt that he couldn't talk to him. The rape and torture he endured was the first of many Grammond inflicted on him.

We buried Peter on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. He was one of many who have committed suicide because of sexual abuse by a priest. He could no longer live with his terrible memories." (6)

The causes of suicide are too great to fully understand, yet there is a story behind each cause; a story of someone who has felt violated, lost, unloved, misunderstood, unheard, confused, conflicted, and hurt.

In other words, there was a son, daughter, mother, wife, brother, husband, aunt, grandmother, grandson, or another loved one who never spoke up about his or her feelings, or worse yet, became trapped in those "unloving and unforgiving" emotions of guilt, shame, anger, blame, and denial.

### **Here are Some Common Causes of Suicide**

- Difficulty expressing emotions to others
- Feeling alone and isolated from others

## Healing from Child Abuse

- Unexpected event occurs (e.g., sudden death of a loved one, loss of a job, etc.)
- Negative persona of self (i.e., low self-esteem)
- Poor coping skills
- Abuse (i.e. sexual, physical, verbal, domestic, emotional, mental, peer abuse)

According to a recent study, adolescents who have been sexually abused reported higher rates of depression and hopelessness than adolescents who have not been sexually abused. This study also indicated that the depressed adolescents reported more suicidal thoughts, plans, and attempts than those who were not depressed. These individuals accounted more for adolescent girls than adolescent boys. (2)

As a mental health therapist, I help clients cope with suicidal thoughts and plans on a regular basis. When looking at these client's assessments, many of them were either sexually or physically abused as a child. In addition, I've noticed when a client has been sexually or physically abused, there's always an indication that verbal, emotional, and mental abuse was present in the home as well. It's rare to be physically or sexually abused without ever being downgraded verbally or emotionally!

So, imagine the effects of physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse and what they can do to someone's self-worth! When you take into consideration the difficulty many abused children have with loving themselves, you'll then begin to recognize the causes of suicide.

For instance, if an abused child's "trusted adult" criticized, degraded, and violated his or her worth all throughout childhood, it's difficult for that child to escape from those memories, which often leads to feeling like "What's the purpose of me being here anyway; my own father or mother doesn't even want me here."

However, this isn't about blaming the abuser; it's about recognizing that the abusive adult doesn't determine one's destiny. It's never too late to change one's environment and negative circumstances.

Here's what you need to do to refrain from falling "prey" to the causes of suicide.

### **Make a Promise to Yourself**

In order to prevent the causes of suicide, it's important to stay true to yourself by honoring your life. You are here for a reason, trust that reason, and trust that you are worthy just like anyone else.

### **Make a Promise to a Trusted, Supportive Family Member, Friend, or Professional**

Make a promise to a loved one or professional that you will never intentionally hurt yourself. This promise is a contract that not only involves you, but another. It's great practice to become aware that your emotions not only affect you, but others as well. It's important to understand that suicide is a very selfish act; not loving by any means! When you are having suicidal thoughts, make a contract with someone else to help keep you focused.

### **Put your Faith into a Higher Power**

When you trust that God put you here for a reason, you'll be motivated to discover what that reason is, which is a great way to stay determined to live your life to the best of your ability.

### **Create your Purpose**

The final-and most important-way to avoid suicide is to create a "healthy" purpose for yourself. Whisk yourself away from unpleasant emotions by focusing on the good in life and the purpose you're meant to serve.

You'll see what your purpose is by paying attention to what you're good at; by noticing what others say about your abilities; and paying attention to what makes you feel good. A purpose can be anything. However, it's your job to create that purpose instead of waiting for it to happen.

### **Understanding Your Abusive Parents and Others Who have Hurt You: Step 3**

Underneath all the lies, the pain, and the behavior, are abusive parents/individuals who also want to be loved for who they are and who they want to become.

However, abusive parents have never fully understood how to reach the levels of freedom and happiness they desire. Instead of learning appropriate, healthy behaviors, they decided to believe the lies that were instilled into them when they were children. It's not that your parent/s want to hurt you, it's just that they are afraid to "truly" love you because they don't know how that feels or what it is.

Understanding where your parents have come from, or why they are so destructive with themselves and other people, can be an eye-opening experience. However, keep this in mind - Just because your parents were mentally, verbally, physically, or sexually abused as a child, doesn't give them the right to continue the abuse with you! Understanding someone's past is different from allowing the abuse to continue (more on that later).

In other words, understanding your parents says, "I value your past and respect what you have gone through." This opens doors for improving your relationship because I can bet that your parent has never heard that before. Give them a taste of what love is all about. Don't play the game of lies, anger, and resentment. Instead, respect yourself and your parents by giving unconditional love. And unconditional love is all about respecting yourself enough, "first," in order to give the same respect to another.

On the other hand, we often react negatively to abusive parents, and although you're entitled to be angry, the anger usually works against you. It's important to reach a point in your life where you no longer focus on "being abused," and instead focus on "who am I now," and how can I use what I've learnt from the past and apply it to better myself and others?

Before you learn how to understand your abusive parents, or the ones who have hurt you, you need to decide whether or not you're ready. You will not open your mind to the idea unless you're ready. So, in the meantime, while you're debating, read further to help you understand your abuser.

### **Why Did They Do this to Me?**

Here are my "personal" beliefs

- The abuser had difficulty controlling his/her emotions, stress, and behaviors (i.e., acts on impulse and is unclear about effective decision making skills).
- The abuser set unreasonable expectations.
- The abuser never learned the difference between unhealthy vs. healthy boundaries.
- He or she experienced abuse as a child.
- The abuser had low self-worth.
- He or she was using alcohol or drugs.
- This person failed to put themselves into -your shoes.- In other words, the abuser was selfish with his/her desires, wants, and needs and didn't think about the effects of his/her actions.
- The intimate, sexual, and personal relationship between the "abuser" and his or her significant other was strained and unhealthy.
- There was a lack of healthy communication within the family.

### **Is it My Fault? How to Understand Why you Feel Responsible**

Many times it feels like you had something to do with the abuse; however, this is not the case. Although you were apart of the equation, you were a part of it against your will. The reason it often feels like it's your fault is because the abuser blamed you for the encounter or you blame yourself because you felt that you could have stopped it.

### **Here are Some Reasons Why you May have been Unable to Stop the Abuse**

- You were too young to know the difference between unhealthy vs. healthy behavior (i.e., confused with what was right and wrong) so the abuse came across as normal or as a way of living.
- You were threatened
- You were isolated
- No one believed you
- You didn't have the right resources to help you stop the abuse
- You were protecting your siblings.
- You were scared

Whatever the reason, it's important to become aware that it was not your fault, and it's important to tell yourself this over and over and over again until it feels like the truth.

Abusive parents or other abusive people will often blame you or make it seem like it's your fault because they are afraid to take responsibility for their behavior. Deep down, the abuser knows what he or she is doing and is aware that it is wrong and inappropriate; however, the abuser often fails to listen to that inner voice. In addition, the abuser is often selfish with his or her wants and is manipulative in order to get what he or she needs.

Overall, understanding your parents, or others who have been abusive in your life, allows you the opportunity to never take your abuser's behavior personal, that is, never again taking accountability for your abuser's actions.

### **Understanding Verbal Abuse: Step 3-A**

Verbal abuse cuts your heart, rips out your emotions, and stomps on your dignity. This type of abuse is an insult to the gift of uniqueness and a burden to healthy growth. It's unfortunate that many families use this type of abuse as a way to communicate, not realizing the damage it causes, because he or she grew up knowing this language as the norm.

#### **If You're not Familiar with Verbal Abuse, Here are Some Examples**

- Calling someone hurtful names (e.g., slut, bitch, fatso, loser, etc.)
- Downgrading someone's importance; belittling (e.g., "You're not needed here!")
- Blaming (e.g., "You're the reason why this family is falling apart!")
- Criticizing (e.g., "What were you thinking; you should have known better!")
- Using words to control someone else (e.g., "You cannot make it without me!")

Although this type of abuse can have detrimental effects on another person's well-being, it's very important to realize that if you allow words to determine how you're going to feel about yourself, you'll constantly find yourself feeling very defensive and angry. In the words of Dr. Phil,

**"You teach people how to treat you!"**

A loved one will continually badger your self-worth with hurtful words if you allow them too. However, it's important to understand that you can put an end to those demeaning words just by paying attention to your feelings and doing something about it. The moment you realize

that it's wrong for someone to put you down, is the moment you'll begin to change.

The reason that people allow abuse to continue is because they feel in some way that they deserve it or that they feel bad about themselves. Yet, when you realize you have personal rights, regardless of how you feel about yourself, you'll no longer allow others to put you down.

### **Verbal Abuse Tips**

- 1.) Pay attention to the words of your loved ones. Anytime you hear something that feels hurtful, honor your feelings. Let that person know how you feel, and if this person continues to disrespect you, it's time to end the relationship.
- 2.) Understand that verbal abuse is anything but normal.

It's not okay for others to put you down. The longer you allow others to put you down, the more they'll continue to put you down, and you'll continue to feel worse about yourself.

If anything, remember this...

"When you build a better relationship with yourself, you'll begin noticing the abuse that others will inflict on you. You'll then decide what you'll tolerate and what you'll not tolerate."

### **Understanding Emotional and Mental Abuse: Step 3-B**

Mental and emotional abuse is difficult to recognize during childhood and even adulthood for that matter. We are taught, in society, that the only recognizable abuse is physical abuse. However, both mental and emotional abuse can have lasting effects on a person's well-being just as much as, or even more, than physical abuse.

#### **What is Mental Abuse?**

In my opinion, this is any comment, look or action intended to manipulate another person into believing that he or she is mentally incompetent (e.g., "You're the one who is mentally insane. You're the one seeing a psychiatrist, not me!").

#### **What is Emotional Abuse?**

This is also any comment, look or action intended to disrespect another person's emotional boundaries and well-being. (e.g., giving someone the impression that you are to be seen and not heard. Telling someone to stop that crying, you baby! Or telling someone, I don't care how you feel, etc.).

Often, however, the abuser isn't aware that he or she has inflicted mental or emotional abuse on you. As a matter of fact, I can guarantee that mental and emotional abuse was also a factor in your abuser's childhood. Unfortunately, according to the abuser, his or her comments are the norm and will continue to be "the way of living." I can assure you this is not normal behavior, nor is it healthy.

#### **Here are Some Examples to Help You Become Aware of Whether or Not Emotional and/or Mental Abuse was an Issue during your Childhood**

- You constantly felt guilty for everything you did and you felt that your parents were the cause of that guilt.

- You felt responsible for your parent's feelings, behaviors, and choices because he or she communicated this to you on a regular basis (e.g., "I'm sick of you! I wish I never had you. You're the reason why I'm so stressed out!")
- Your feelings and beliefs were not accurate or good enough. You were made to feel that your feelings and emotions didn't matter.
- You always felt emotionally abandoned by your parents, that is, they didn't ask you about your day, how you're doing or what was going on in your life.
- Although you felt that your parents loved you, the feeling felt forced or unnatural.
- Your parents ignored your needs and wants.
- Physical, mental, sexual, or verbal abuse was present in your household.
- You feel today that you have a need that was never fulfilled (i.e., never feeling loved or accepted, feeling alone, or feeling different from others, etc.)
- Your family roles were reversed and taken for granted (i.e., your mother or father were absent and you were forced to take on the caretaker role to help provide for the family).
- You were isolated from age appropriate activities due to the need to care for a sick loved one, an alcoholic parent, or because the needs of the family became before your own.

It's important that you become aware of the emotional and mental abuse that occurred during your childhood, but it's unhealthy to continually focus on what your parents failed to do for you. Here are some tips on how to get out of the habits of emotional and mental abuse:

### **Tips for Overcoming Emotional and Mental Abuse**

1. Become aware of whether or not you are inflicting this type of abuse on yourself and others.
2. Feel your feelings and allow yourself to have whatever feeling you need to in order to feel good.

3. Make a decision to change your self-talk and communication habits.
4. Stand up for your emotional rights as a human being.
5. Ignore all insults that attack your personal well-being and focus on your positive qualities instead.

*K.G.'s Emotional and Mental Abuse Recovery Story...*

*“It started harmlessly enough. Bronx, NY 1950, born of middle class “royalty” so to speak. My father was an engineer and my mother was a homemaker. My sister and I, two little children, expected only to behave and grow from little people into bigger people. But then the promotions for my dad, the social climbing itch, which caught my mother by the apron strings, things started going south, or should I say Midwest.*

*We moved to Illinois in 1958 and no sooner had I become a teenager when suddenly I was being compared to my mother’s best friend’s son. Billy does this, Billy does that. It seemed I was expected to compete with him academically as well as in every other area so my mom could compete with her friend and say, “Well, my son did such and such so he is as good as yours.”*

*Expectations I never seemed to live up to. I always felt a failure in her eyes and though it may not have been true, I also felt it from my dad too. “Why can’t I do better in school?” Why do I seem to pursue good grades for their sake rather than my own? Perhaps the expectations were too high. But I never quite felt good enough. Even in praise, my sister and I heard, “that’s wonderful, but...” always the “but.”*

*As if succeeding was to be followed by failure. In later life, it has molded me into someone who just can’t quite carry confidence with me. I am always feeling like I need to aim low and just be sure that it is where I can land safely.*

*However, I have learned through years of experience, good friends and great therapy to accept and like me. But it has not been easy. My advice is to be yourself and find your own peace in life. Understand that you must achieve for yourself and not for others. Know that you are doing the best you can for you.*

*I will never change my parents and they will never change me. However, we have developed an acceptance and appreciation for each other over the years. I do think now they have accepted me and I actually feel that I am a good person, despite everything.”*

*k.g.*

### **Understanding Physical Abuse Effects: Step 3-C**

A good way to overcome the effects of physical abuse is to gain an understanding of why the abuse occurred in the first place.

It's hard to understand why your parents physically abused you, however, it's important to realize that the physical abuse was a result of your "abuser's" built up frustration, anger, guilt, and unhappiness.

Instead of your abuser resolving his or her emotions in a healthy manner he or she took those emotions out on you and/or your siblings.

In addition, often physical abuse is also a result of substance or alcohol problems, which again, results from the abuser failing to deal with his or her emotions in a healthy, appropriate way. It's also not uncommon for the physical abuse to be directed towards the other parent, or towards another adult.

You may be asking, **“Why didn't my mother or father do something about the physical abuse?” “Why didn't he or she leave?”**

Those are excellent questions that deserve an honest response! There are several reasons why one chooses to stay, but I'm going to tell you the main reason.

**“Your mother and/or father was not happy with herself or himself, and more than likely she or he felt they deserved the abuse in someway.”**

As long as one of your parents doesn't feel worthy enough to deserve a healthy, non-violent home, you, as the child, will continue to suffer and learn that the abusive behavior is acceptable, which is the reason that many "abused children" continue with the cycle of abuse.

That's why it's so important to learn from your parent's mistakes and learn what's healthy and loving compared to what's abusive and unloving. Additionally, that's why it's so important to love yourself.

If you are currently in a physically abusive relationship, or any other type of abusive relationship, it's important to put an end to it for you and your children's safety and well-being.

There is no excuse and no reason why you cannot leave; however, it's your choice and it will continue to be your choice. But just remember, in order to honor and love yourself, you need to be aware of what you'll tolerate and what you won't, and in my opinion, physical abuse is the last thing you need to tolerate.

The way to overcome the effects of physical abuse is very similar to overcoming the effects of verbal, emotional, and mental abuse.

### **Overcoming Physical Abuse Effects from Childhood**

- 1. If you were physically abused as a child, understand that your parents and/or other trusted adults failed to recognize how their actions were affecting you.**

It's important to become aware of how you felt about the physical abuse. Recognizing your feelings is what you can do to give yourself what your abuser never did; respect!

- 2. You are not a result of your abuser's behavior, and what I mean by that is, your self-worth is not tied to how your abuser treated you.**

I have come across many people who believe they are unworthy and undeserving of loving themselves because their needs and wants were neglected during childhood. However, the good news is, the abuser's behavior doesn't limit your right to the basics and the luxuries of life.

With some of the child abuse stories I've read, I've discovered that many of these individuals were never given the freedom to "sleep in their own bed or even eat when they were hungry" without being physically punished in some way. These basic human rights were stripped from these individuals.

However, whatever you grew up with, know that you have rights to the basics (i.e., food, water, rest, clothing, shelter, etc.) and the rights to live a happy, fulfilling life without any type of physical, mental, emotional, or sexual abuse!

If anything, remember this-"Physical abuse may harm the body, but these effects can never damage the soul...never!"

### **Sexual Abuse Effects: Step 3-D**

#### **Sexual Abuse Effects Guide #1: Understanding the Differences b/w Molestation and Curiosity**

First of all, it's important to become aware of whether or not you were sexually abused as a child, or if it was curiosity. Here is the rule of thumb to follow, based on my own personal and professional opinion.

"If it happened once or twice from the hands of a child below the age of 14, and you were the same age as the child, agreeing to explore as well without feeling uncomfortable, then it was curiosity. However, if the exploration continued to occur, against your will and comfort level, then it was abuse."

I believe that children are unaware of inappropriate and appropriate sexual boundaries until around the age of 14, or at least until a parent explains the differences. Often times, a child will need to question those boundaries through experience and exploration.

Fortunately, it's instilled deep inside of us what feels right and wrong. So, in turn, when a person explores and discovers it doesn't feel right, the exploration typically stops.

However, if a child's boundaries have been violated by an adult, the child will feel confused about what's right and wrong. Thus, the child will continue to practice this confusion with younger or same aged children (many times occurring into adulthood) until he or she is either stopped or meets consequences for his or her actions.

Deep down the abuser (who once was that child who was confused) knows it's wrong, but his or her experience doesn't reflect that. Unfortunately, the abuser has learned that it's okay to violate another person's personal space for his or her own sexual gratification, mainly because this abuser has never been stopped. That's why it's so

important to trust yourself when something doesn't feel right so you can be the person to stop the abuser's inappropriate behavior.

Your intuition will never let you down! Put an end to your abuser's behavior as soon as possible; work past that fear of what will happen if you tell. You will be so proud of yourself when you tell someone.

Tell, tell, and tell some more until you come across someone who will help you! It's not okay for the abuser to continue to hurt you! Telling someone will be the most loving thing you could do for yourself and for the abuser.

### **Sexual Abuse Effects Guide #2: Understanding Why Your Mother Didn't Believe You?**

This effects of sexual abuse guideline arises frequently during therapy. Many of my clients hold a lot of anger and resentment towards their mother for not believing that the sexual abuse was occurring.

The reason that many mothers tend to disregard the abuse is due to being in denial that her significant other could possibly be responsible for sexually abusing her child. It may also be due to the mother's own insecurities such as the fear of being alone, the fear of raising a child on her own, or being afraid of whatever else she fears.

I know this is hard to believe and often very difficult to take in, but it's very important on your healing and well-being, to learn to not let your mother's insecurities, wrong choices, and denial obstruct your recovery.

Learn to separate yourself from your mother so you can make better decisions for yourself and for your current or future children. Decide whether or not you want to continue the relationship with your mother. If you choose to stay connected, it will be best to discuss your feelings, set boundaries, and forgive her. If you decide to end the relationship, go your separate ways, but choose to forgive her mistakes so you will no longer have a burden on your shoulders. Being angry will not punish her in anyway; it will only hurt you.

### **Sexual Abuse Effects Guide #3: Understanding Why You Have a Fear of Sexually Abusing Others**

Don't worry, this fear is very common among individuals who have been sexually abused as a child. Why? Well, as I said above

"If a child's boundaries are violated by an adult, the child will feel confused about what's right and wrong. Thus, the child will continue to practice this confusion with younger or same aged children (many times occurring into adulthood) until he or she is either stopped or has consequences for his or her actions."

Before you become paranoid, I'm not saying that you will go out and abuse someone; I'm saying that although you have managed to not cross those inappropriate boundaries "physically," you still have that confusion in your head, which results in the fear that you may sexually abuse someone.

The way you can break past this fear is by practicing positive self-talk. Here's how you do that.

1. Tell yourself that this is a past thought and that you will no longer allow it to take root in your life.
2. Tell yourself that you are not an abuser and you will never be. Also tell yourself that you can trust yourself around children. You are a loving and respectful person. You will never cross inappropriate boundaries (i.e., you know how it feels to be abused and you would never inflict this on anyone else).

### **Sexual Abuse Effects Guide #4: Understanding Why You Continually Find Yourself in Sexually Abusive Situations**

It's important to understand why abused individuals will themselves in abusive situations, whereas non-abused individuals will not.

Those who find themselves in multiple abusive encounters do so because they do not respect themselves enough to trust their instincts; that is, they have never understood their own worth as a unique, lovable person.

Thus, these people will continually attract others who take them for granted because that is what they are use to. "Oh, why fight it; I'm always getting taken for granted. I don't have the right to ask for more. I don't have the courage to fight back. I must deserve this!"

Unfortunately, this mentality attracts victim-mentality and you receive what your mind focuses on.

If you haven't read the book "**The Secret**", I highly recommend it. It teaches you how to change your mindset from attracting unhappiness and lack to attracting abundance and joy. This resource will help you understand why you attract abusive people into your life.

## **Sexual Abuse Effects Guide #5: How to Enjoy Your Current Sex Life with Your Partner**

Sometimes being sexually abused can interfere with your sex life. Here are some tips to enjoy your sex life after being sexually abused.

### **1. Take your Time and do not Pressure Yourself**

If you're not ready to have sex, honor yourself and don't have sex until you are ready. If your significant other or spouse is impatient with your pace, make sure you explain that you are respectful of their need for sex, but that you need them to wait until you're ready in order for sex to be enjoyable for you and them.

### **2. Only Allow Yourself to be with a Partner that is Respectful of Your Past and your Feelings**

If your significant other doesn't respect your past or feelings, it's time to reevaluate this relationship. Loving someone says "I value you and respect your wishes." Not loving someone says "I don't care about your needs; what about my needs?"

### **3. Face your Past and Deal with the Effects Outside of the Bedroom**

Following these e-book steps are a great way to deal with the sexual abuse effects outside of the bedroom. You will know when the abuse doesn't affect you anymore when you can have sex and enjoy it.

### **4. Take Baby Steps into Enjoying Sex again with Positive Conditioning**

A great way to deal with the effects of sexual abuse is to learn how to associate sex with positive feelings instead of negative, hurtful feelings. The more you allow yourself the chance to view

sex as a painful experience, the harder it will be for you to enjoy the true pleasures of sex.

The way you start enjoying sex is by talking positive to yourself during the moments you feel bad. For example, when you're having sex and all you can think about are the times when you were abused, replace that thought with, "I am comfortable with sex and sex with my partner is okay and healthy. I am at ease when I am having sex with my partner." Do not allow yourself to fall back into the abuse when you're having sex. Learn to focus on the here and now.

*J.M.'s Sexual Abuse Recovery Story...*

*"My mother was a perfectionist. The last thing she wanted to see every night was me sleeping on the couch. I was pretty happy about going into the bedroom to sleep anyway, that way I didn't have to sleep on plastic anymore.*

*When I started sleeping in the bedroom, my stepfather who was a periodic alcoholic was on a binge at the time, which lasted anywhere from a week to six weeks; he'd stay gone the whole time. So I had the bed all to myself for the next couple of weeks till my mother got home toward the morning. After he sobered up, came home, all was well once again and I expected to be back on the couch, not so.*

*My mother decided there was no reason for us to not share the bed. When she came home from work, it'd be time for him to get up to go to work. She had already told me it wasn't natural to sleep with a bra and underpants under pajamas. She was very intimidating to me, so I did what she said without back talk, silently trying to figure out how am I going to get out of this situation.*

*I had just gone to bed when he came in that night, and I could smell the booze when he walked by my bedroom door to the bathroom. I really thought nothing of it, I'd pretend to be asleep thinking he'd come to bed and pass out or go right to sleep...didn't happen.*

*After a bit, he came into the bedroom, sat down on his side of the bed and laid down. The next thing I felt was him snuggling my neck with his booze smelling mouth, all I did was lay there and freeze. His hand was rubbing my back, getting lower as he went. Finally, he was under the top of the pajama panties. Then I felt his fingers running down my butt toward my private parts. I was still "frozen," I couldn't move nor could I tell him to stop.*

*I still don't blame my stepfather. I know in my heart that my mother put me in his bed to keep him happy in some way. She knew that I was too intimidated by her and that I wouldn't say anything, feeling too ashamed to.*

*Regardless of what I experienced in childhood, I now live the way I always should have. I didn't really know what peace of mind was, but I've always wanted it. As I am now, I never thought in a million years I could feel as well as I do mentally, as well as emotionally."*

*J.M*

### **Dealing with an Alcoholic, Drug Addicted, and Mentally Ill Parent: Step 3-E**

Dealing with an alcoholic, drug addicted, or mentally ill parent is not an easy task. Actually, I've personally experienced what it's like to live with an alcoholic, drug addicted, and mentally ill parent.

I have also professionally experienced what it's like to counsel clients with these ailments.

As my mother's daughter (my mother is an alcoholic, has been a drug addict, and was diagnosed with bi-polar), I've learnt to depend on myself for the things I need and want.

I have also learnt to feel and communicate my feelings until I'm blue in the face (i.e., this is the best way to get through the difficult times.)

In addition, I've learnt to never take my parent's comments or actions personally. My mother has a habit of blurting hurtful things out before she thinks about how it will affect her children. However, I know deep down that I'm not my mother's words, nor am I part of her insecurities.

As a counselor, I've learned that when dealing with an alcoholic, drug addict, or the mentally ill, to look past their addiction and mental state and see what's behind their self-destructive habits. This is what I've discovered...

#### **1. Low Self-Esteem**

My mother says things to herself like "I'm so stupid" or "I can't even talk!" or "I'm so fat" and "I'm so ugly!" My mother and my clients have little respect for themselves and they don't believe they deserve respect.

## 2. **There is a lot of Guilt and Shame**

Because of the effects of alcoholism, drug addiction, and being mentally unstable, many individuals feel tremendous shame for not being the parent they wanted to be, or not living the life as they would have liked.

Unfortunately, shame and guilt are nasty emotions that keep the alcoholic, drug addict, and mentally ill parent trapped in "hell;" It's like a never ending cycle. The individual feels guilty so he or she drinks to remove the remorse, then this person does or says something he or she regrets while drinking; so again, this person will find oneself back at square one with another drink in his or her hand.

It's all a matter of not wanting to face their thoughts, feelings, and life choices.

When dealing with an alcoholic, drug addict, or mentally ill parent understand that you do not have to make the same choices as them, but you can try to see the good in who they are. Look past their self-destructive habits and choose to live your life differently.

### **Letting Go of Your Need for Approval: Step 3-F**

"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."  
Eleanor Roosevelt

The need for approval is often the biggest struggle for those who have been abused. However, it's important to realize that you do not need approval from your parents or someone else who abused you in order to be content with yourself.

The longer you allow yourself to exert all of your energy into needing approval, the longer it will take to gain the approval that you really need; approval of yourself.

"The intention to become what you think another person wants you to be disrupts harmony, even though it may temporarily reduce tension."  
Gary Zukav

#### **How to Let go of the Need for Approval**

- 1. Accept the Fact that You do not Need the Approval of Your Parents/Abuser in Order to be Happy with your Life**

I know this is a difficult concept to embrace, but it's absolutely essential for healing. It's important to realize that your abuser has a difficult time approving of oneself, and if you expect to get approval from someone that cannot approve of themselves, then one thing that you will be able to rely on is disappointment.

In other words, you have a choice to accept the fact that you're okay without the abuser's approval, or you can keep counting on being disappointed. And when you choose the latter, your self-esteem will always be dependent upon how the abuser treats you.

- 2. Start Approving and Accepting Yourself for Who you Are**

You'll find a whole variety of information about accepting yourself for who you are throughout Relationship-with-Self.com. Once you start approving yourself for who you are the need for approval will slowly, but surely, dissipate.

3. **Understand that You and Your Parents/Abuser will have Different Perspectives, Choose to Appreciate that, but don't Make their Beliefs and Views your Own**

Once you separate yourself from your abuser's words and actions, you'll no longer associate your well-being to the need of approval. You may have based your self-worth on your abuser's reactions in the past, but that is no longer the case for you, if you choose it to be.

The best thing that you can do for your sake and the abuser's sake is to ignore all insults, all criticisms, and all attacks that are directed towards making you feel bad about yourself.

And when the time comes that you find yourself getting angry and hurt because your abuser has put you down, remember to tell yourself "I am not my abuser's words, and I respect myself enough to no longer allow the abuse to continue."

You will need to practice positive self-talk on a regular basis in order to replace all negative thoughts that have developed over time. Shortly, I'll launch another e-book teaching you how to do this. It's very important that you speak positively to yourself in order to stop the need of approval.

### **Understanding Why it's Hard to Forgive the Ones Who Have Hurt Us: Step 4-A**

It's often very difficult knowing how to forgive the ones who have hurt us.

However, it's important to realize that forgiving the abuser doesn't mean that you're justifying his or her actions. What forgiveness means is, "I will not allow the abuse to go with me into my adult life. I will no longer let the abuser's actions control me, so for that reason, I have chosen to forgive my abuser!"

Forgiving someone is a very vulnerable thing to do, which is the reason many people don't do it.

As a matter of fact, the person who is hurt often believes that not offering forgiveness is the only thing that he or she can do in order to gain "control" over the abuse.

So, instead of forgiving the abuser, the person who is hurt holds onto the abuse for years before he or she will even consider forgiving the abuser.

I also understand the difficulty in forgiving an abuser, especially when the abuser continues to put you down with his or her words and actions.

Below you'll find two tips for overcoming this difficulty:

#### **Seeing the Beauty of Forgiveness**

The beauty of forgiveness is it sets you and the abuser free! And that's the best gift of love you could ever give yourself and another human being, especially someone who has hurt you.

You can forgive even when the abuser isn't aware of it. You don't have to tell the abuser that you've forgiven him or her. As a matter of fact, it's not about the abuser; it's about you and what you need to do in order to feel better about yourself.

## **Letting Go of the Need of "I will not forgive until I get an apology"**

This isn't uncommon. In fact, it's the biggest reason why people choose not to forgive.

It's easy to believe that the only way to forgive someone is to have the person who hurt you approach you first with an apology; however, usually, this doesn't happen. The abuser often has a difficult time recognizing what he or she has done, leaving the responsibility of forgiveness up to you.

You may find yourself waiting a long time before you receive an apology from the one who hurt you. So, why not take action yourself and choose to forgive, regardless of whether or not the abuser acknowledges his or her behavior.

As I mentioned before, "forgiveness isn't about the other person, it's about you." The other person does not need to be involved in your forgiveness.

Although forgiving is beneficial for both parties, my main concern is helping you move forward from the abuse. That's why the focus is on you.

Follow the tips I've given you throughout this e-book (beginning with the first step) and you'll be on the way to forgiving those who have hurt you. Here are a few more tips to keep in mind:

- 1.) Forgiveness takes time. You need to move at your own pace.
- 2.) Only forgive when you feel it's the best thing for you. Don't forgive just to please the other person or another family member.

## **How to Forgive Yourself: Step 4-B**

When we speak of forgiveness, it's often forgiveness of another. However, what we fail to recognize is that, we need to forgive ourselves and let go of the critic within before we can forgive another.

It's important to understand that you are not at fault for the abuse. Although it feels like you took part in it, the truth is, you were too young to know what was right or wrong, especially if the person who was supposed to teach you, was the one person abusing you.

Even if you agreed to the abuse, it was still not your fault. For instance, let's say your uncle made passes at you when you were 10-years-old. At first you thought he was just being really nice, but after the second and third times of your uncle touching you, you knew you could have stopped it, but you didn't.

As time goes on, you start "beating yourself up" saying things like "I should have said something. I should have yelled or ran out of the room. Why did I let it go on for so long? Why did I agree to him touching me? Why did I agree to do whatever he said?"

The longer you beat yourself up for the past, the longer it will take to build your self-esteem and self-respect. Also, the longer you struggle with low self-confidence, the more frequently you'll find yourself in unhealthy relationships, and the more unhealthy relationships you're in, the higher your chances of entering into another abusive relationship that's similar to your childhood experiences.

So how do you fight past feeling at fault for the abuse? How do you leave the never-ending circle of feeling low about yourself? Below you'll find tips on how to forgive yourself.

### **Tips on How to Forgive Yourself**

#### **Tip #1: Watch those thoughts**

It's important to pay attention to what you are thinking about; this is where feelings of fault begin. When you are thinking, "I should have said something. I should have yelled or ran out of the room," you set yourself up for self-punishment becoming a downward spiral.

**Tip #2: Practice Positive Self-Talk**

It's a difficult habit to break, but change negative, self-punishment thoughts into positive thoughts of, "It's okay if I didn't say anything, I was scared, but now I am strong and I will no longer continue to punish myself for what happened; I am not responsible for my abuser's behavior." In time, you'll notice that practicing positive thinking keeps you feeling "sane" and not at fault for the abuse.

## **Understanding the Differences between Inappropriate and Appropriate Boundaries: Step 5-A**

Boundary setting is about learning how to trust yourself and the world around you. However, when your world has been influenced by abuse, it may become a struggle knowing the differences between inappropriate and appropriate boundaries.

### **Here are the Differences**

#### **Inappropriate Boundaries**

- When boundary setting inappropriately, you are allowing others to disrespect your personal space, or you're disrespecting another's personal space (e.g., disrespecting the need for privacy).
- You're allowing others to disrespect your emotional, mental, and physical well-being with their actions and words, or you're the one disrespecting the well-being of others with your actions and words.
- You are pleasing others only out of guilt and shame (e.g., difficulty saying no, doing things you do not value) or manipulating others to feel guilty or shameful (e.g., saying things like, "You don't care about me if you don't answer your phone").
- You do not know your values, needs, or wants and you allow others to define this for you, or you believe you know what's best for someone else. (e.g., being told that you need to go to school when that is not your intention, but you do it anyway to please someone else).
- You practice selfishness when you have inappropriate boundaries. In other words, the term "no" often means nothing to you. If you can aggressively push yourself on someone else (mentally, physically, sexually, or emotionally), even after he or she has told you no, then you have crossed that person's boundaries. This shows that you have no respect for the other person and you're only thinking about your own needs and feelings.

### Appropriate Boundaries

- When boundary setting appropriately, you're able to assert your needs, wants, and feelings to others without feeling guilty about it. You're also able to respect what others have to say.
- You know your value as a worthy human being and you respect the value of others (e.g., Never using name calling to devalue someone else in order to make yourself look good. Knowing when you need personal time for yourself).
- You practice self-control and self-respect.
- You practice the right for making your own choices.

Boundary setting is very important for living a life free from abuse. If you allow others to cross your boundaries, you'll continually find people who take you up on the offer. As soon as you put up the stop sign, however, you'll attract people who are respectful of your boundaries.

My hope is that you'll begin practicing healthy, appropriate boundaries in order to improve your overall well-being. And don't worry; it doesn't matter if you've let people walk all over you for your entire life, it's never too late to change your behaviors. I want to show you how you can do this!

Here are some boundary setting examples according to Rhonda Britten from the book "Fearless Loving":

- "I don't like it when you call me names, ridicule me, or belittle me in private or public."
- "I don't like it when you lie to me, hit me or physically hurt me in any way."
- "I don't like it when you're unfaithful to me."
- "I don't like it when you spy on me."
- "I don't like it when you say things that make me doubt myself."

- "I don't like it when you use hurtful events against me to make me feel bad about myself."
- "I don't like it when you pressure me to cut ties with my family and/or friends."
- "I don't like it when you refuse to communicate with me."
- "I don't like it when you undermine me in front of my friends/family or at work."
- "I don't like it when you attempt to turn my children against me."
- "I don't like it when you intentionally hurt my children in any way."
- "I don't like it when you're overly critical, assuming that I don't do anything right."
- "I don't like it when you force me to have sex with you when I don't want to."
- "I don't like it when you blame me for your faults and choices."
- "I don't like it when you intimidate or threaten me." (From Fearless Loving, pg. 155)

### **Boundary Setting Tips**

#### **Tip #1: Regain Trust for Yourself**

The only way to begin practicing healthier boundaries is to believe that you deserve respect and value from yourself and from others.

If you continually find yourself feeling unworthy of respect, it will be very difficult to draw respect into your life. For instance, if you feel that you cannot say no to others, they will pick up on this and continually ask you to do things you do not want to do because they'll know you will not say no.

The same thing applies to abuse. When you allow your abuser to continually put you down with words because you're afraid of what they'll do or say if you stand up for yourself, you're allowing them to walk all over you as well.

When setting boundaries with others, tell yourself that you are worthy of respect; otherwise, you'll never get it. When your abuser calls you names, for instance, tell them, "I don't have to listen to this and I deserve a lot better."

I can guarantee once you start standing up for yourself, you'll shock your abuser and you may catch them at a loss of words. Or, on the other hand, you may give them a lot more abuse to verbalize, "Who do you think you are? You're nothing! You're not special!" If this happens, IGNORE it! Go to another room or another place in your mind and keep telling yourself, "I deserve respect and I do not need the approval of my abuser to be happy with myself!"

If you are afraid to stand up for yourself vocally, do it in your head. Shut the abuse off and focus on the good.

### **Tip #2: Know your Limitations**

When setting boundaries, it's important to know what your boundaries are in order to feel good about yourself. For instance, do you need to learn how to say no to others? Do you need to learn how to not feel guilty for standing up for yourself? Do you need to know what you're uncomfortable with and comfortable with?

Discover what your boundaries are and make it a priority to stay true to those boundaries. These boundaries will be tested, but one thing will be different, and that's the confidence you'll have in yourself.

Boundary setting is all about loving yourself and others. And this is by no means a selfish act, but an essential tool for living a life free from abuse.

## **Ending Unhealthy Relationships: Step 5-B**

Ending a relationship or setting boundaries with your abuser is a must in order for you to have a healthy, loving relationship with yourself.

As long as you continue associating with abusive people, (even when the abuser is a parent or another authority figure), you'll continually find yourself in hurtful, demeaning situations.

I also believe that ending a relationship with an abusive person will improve your self-confidence as well as your ability to attract respectful people into your life.

Although you may be afraid of ending the abusive relationship, the reward of feeling better about yourself is enough to outweigh the fears of loneliness or insecurity.

It's also important to realize that you do not have to end this relationship suddenly. You can ease yourself out of it, going at your own pace, and setting boundaries in order to feel comfortable and not alone after ending the relationship.

Below you'll find some tips to help you through the process of ending a relationship in a way that is healthy for both you and the abuser.

### **Tips for Ending a Relationship with an Abuser**

When I say end the relationship, I'm not suggesting that you should never speak again, although this is obviously an option. What I am recommending is that you end the "abuse" aspect of it.

In order to end the abuse, you will have to do three things: recognize how you feel around the abuser, communicate your boundaries, and respect yourself. Here is the step-by-step way to do this:

1. Recognize what your abuser is doing and/or saying that makes you feel unworthy. Do this by paying attention to your feelings. If you're feeling upset, angry, sad, criticized, or devalued, that's an indication that the abuser's verbal and physical behaviors need to stop.

2. Make these behaviors stop by saying, "I don't appreciate how you are treating me. I ask that you stop doing this." If the abuser continues to disrespect your wishes, you say it again, "I don't appreciate how you are treating me. I ask that you stop!"
3. If the abuser does not respect your feelings after you've communicated your needs, it's time to set some new guidelines.

Say, "I don't deserve this kind of treatment and you have failed to respect my requests for you to stop, so I feel it's best that I go." If you cannot leave the situation, make it a priority to respect your needs the next time the abuser asks that you associate with him or her. Remember how you felt the last time they disrespected your feelings and ask yourself whether or not you can tolerate being with this person again.

4. If you decide to be around this person again, be cautious of how much you give yourself to the abuser. Do not do things that make you feel uncomfortable and don't fall "victim" to manipulation, control or guilt from the abuser. Stand your ground and respect yourself. You have every right to your needs and boundaries, regardless of who the person is.
5. If you decide on ending a relationship with the abuser, be aware that it will not be easy, especially if the abuser is your mother or father. Regardless of what they do, they are still your parents, right? They have the right to treat you however they choose to right?

Wrong. I know religions teach you to honor your parents, and I am all for that, but only to a certain extent.

I'm a believer of creating a family that you have close connections with, as well as respect for. Just because this person is family doesn't mean that you must have a relationship with this person.

You can be respectful even when that person is not, but the abuser does not have to be a priority in your life. You are who is in control of who you will associate with. You are the manager of your own life! Create the family you have always wanted by choosing people (they don't have to be family members) you feel connected to.

After you have made your decision to end the relationship, what do you do when the abuser wants to make amends?

1. Accept his or her apologies.
2. Make a conscious decision whether or not you want to re-enter this relationship and take your time considering.
3. Trust your gut and conscious first. Remember this isn't about pleasing the other person; it's about trusting yourself and choosing what's best for you.

## **Learning How to Be Assertive with Abusive People: Step 6-A**

A word of caution before learning how to be assertive. Dealing with someone who has been abusive to you in the past will not be an easy task. You can expect fear, anxiety, worry, flashbacks, depression, and other intense emotions that you've felt before.

I do not encourage you to do this if you are not ready.

If you are not ready, you'll know it. Please do not feel pressured to this step if it doesn't suit you. The most important thing here is to trust and respect yourself, and you don't have to communicate with the abuser in order to do that.

But, read on and learn some tips on how to do this when or if the time is ever right for you. And if you choose to communicate with the abuser, do so at your own risk.

## **Learning How to Be Assertive with Abusive People**

Many people are not aware of how to practice the "Gem" of assertiveness. Yet, being assertive is a very simple and effective way of living a confident, self-assured life.

The only problem with assertiveness is that it takes practice. It can be difficult asserting yourself with family members who are abusive, controlling or aggressive. But, once you learn this valuable tool, you'll be able to handle any type of conflict thrown your way.

For example, let's look at how to be assertive through the eyes of an abused child.

The abused child often feels very insecure about asserting their needs and wants because they've been taught that their opinions and feelings don't matter. However, once this abused child begins learning the art of assertiveness, their insecurity will gradually fade away and they'll finally receive the respect that he or she desires so much.

And here's the "true" beauty of learning how to be assertive. Even if you don't get the respect that you deserve from your abuser, it won't matter because you have gained a newfound sense of security with your assertiveness skills and respect of the self.

So, what exactly is assertiveness anyway? Let's explore.

### **Examples of Assertiveness**

- I value you and I value myself.
- I will not tolerate any abuse of any kind.
- I will not tolerate being called names and I will not call anyone else names.
- I have the right to stand up for myself and I have the right to say no.
- Even though you're my parent, that doesn't give you the right to put me down.
- I am interested in what you have to say, and I need you to listen to what I have to say as well.
- You have the right to your opinions and beliefs and I have the right to my opinions and beliefs.
- You and I are different and that's okay.
- I have the right to my feelings and you have the right to your feelings.
- I need to share my thoughts just as you have the right to share your thoughts.
- I have the right to let you know when I feel uncomfortable just as you have the same right.
- I have the right to change my mind just as you do too.

So as you can see, assertiveness is about being confident with your thoughts, words, and actions as well as being respectful of others at the same time. And when you genuinely care about yourself, you will not tolerate others, even family members, to put you down or abuse you in anyway.

If you're not sure where to begin when learning how to be assertive with your abuser, follow the steps below and you'll definitely be on your way!

## **Step 1: Making the Choice to Confront the “Abuser”**

In a recent article, it stated that those who have been sexually abused should never confront the abuser about the abuse. I'm not exactly sure why this person was against this, but she had done 50+ years of research in this area and found that approaching the abuser is not conducive to healing.

Although I understand her position and agree that each person should be cautious of approaching their abuser, I do, in my own opinion, based on experience, not research, believe that it can be healing to approach the abuser (not just regarding sexual abuse, but other types of abuse as well).

This is a decision that needs to be contemplated and decided by you. Think about what you need to say to the abuser and how you would like to confront the person (in a healthy, non-violent sort of way, whether it's best that you're alone or with someone else; in a public place, etc.) before you approach the abuser.

### **Here are some ideas on what to say when learning how to be assertive.. (Make sure you pay attention to how you've felt over the years.)**

1. "I've been thinking a lot about my childhood and how I have felt. I want you to know that I've felt\_\_\_\_\_ (hurt, neglected, let down, criticized, violated, etc.) by your actions and I would like to know why this happened!"
2. "If you do not have an answer, that's okay! I just want you to know that I have been very hurt and affected by the way I was treated growing up. I don't feel it was right, but I now know that I didn't deserve what happened. I now know that I am not to blame for your choices."
3. "I have held you responsible for what you have done and I have taken responsibility for how I feel, and I have chosen not to let your choices affect me any longer! You do not define who I am, I make that choice, not you!"

After you have said your piece, listen to what the abuser has to say! Either he or she will be remorseful about their actions or they will not take accountability, that is, they will not acknowledge the fact that they abused you in any way.

The fact of the matter is the abuser probably doesn't realize the difference between what is abusive and what is not abusive. However, you know the difference and that is what matters.

The important thing I want you to remember, during your meeting, is to air your feelings in an assertive manner. State how you have felt and what you are going to do now to take responsibility for your life. You are not being disrespectful of the abuser, but you're also not allowing him or her to control you any longer.

Now, for the "where to meet" part.

Whether you want to meet in public or private, is your choice. Choose what you feel most comfortable with. When learning how to be assertive, understand that your assertive techniques may be skewed when around other people.

Don't let your support network (the person or people who are there with you during the meeting) change the way you assert yourself. Keep a focused mindset on you and the abuser. This is about you and the abuser, no one else! The fact that you have someone there with you is more for safety reasons, rather than for an extra opinion.

## **Step 2- Learning How to Be Assertive when you Cannot Communicate with an Abuser**

Sometimes one is not able to confront the abuser because he or she doesn't know where this person is today or who this person is. One may have been raped by a stranger or abused by a neighbor who no longer lives next door.

When this occurs, the only thing you can do is communicate assertively with yourself or with a trusted family member or friend. It is important, as I mentioned in the first step of this e-book, to ventilate your feelings in order to heal! You can assertively express yourself by writing a letter and you'll discover how to do this in Step 6-B.

Just because you don't know the abuser, that doesn't have to stop you from expressing yourself in a loving manner.

### **Step 3-Learning How to Be Assertive with an Aggressive, Controlling Person**

This has been a struggle for me throughout my life. I have often felt very intimidated by aggressive, controlling people; however, I no longer feel this way because I have learned how to handle these situations.

I used to get defensive when an abuser was putting me down. I would find myself wasting precious energy and emotions in order to get this person to accept me and understand my perspective. I usually felt worse after attempting to get my point across.

Now I listen to what this person has to say and tell myself, "I don't need to explain myself to this person and I am not going to accept their feelings as my own. I will no longer take on his or her words as my truth." And PRESTO, I feel much better as you will too once you practice this type of thinking!

### **How to Write a Letter: Step 6-B**

If you need to resolve issues with family members, friends, or other loved ones, learning how to write a letter is a great way to make amends.

A while ago I wrote a letter to my mother about how I "truly" felt about our relationship. This was very hard to do; yet it was also very empowering.

I felt so refreshed after I wrote the letter, that I questioned why I didn't write it earlier.

Unfortunately, my mother wasn't very happy when she received it. But, I wasn't expecting her to be jumping for joy; it was something I had to do in order to move forward with my own life.

After the chaos blew over, she and I were able to move on because we learnt how to understand each other's point of view. I will never regret writing that letter to her and I highly recommend writing a letter about your personal issues.

### **Here are a few things to keep in mind when learning how to write a letter to an abuser**

1. Only write and "send" the letter if you believe it will truly help the relationship. If it won't help, write the letter for your own sake and don't send it. Writing the letter without sending it may be therapeutic enough for you to move on.
2. Try not to attack, assume, and include downgrading remarks or any other critical words. These forms of communication will make the relationship worse. Stick with your feelings in an assertive way, without putting anyone down in the process.

Recently, I wrote my first letter to my father. This is the part of my childhood that I have had a very difficult time moving forward from.

For the past 20 plus years of my life, I avoided telling my father how I felt, until a few months ago (January, 2008). I knew I had to let him know how I felt, and I figured that since I teach others how to heal from child abuse, I needed to do this for myself.

I took a chance of a lifetime, bit my nails, picked up my pen, and started writing. My heart was pounding as if he were standing right there. After I wrote the letter, I tore it up. I thought, "I can't send that. What if he never speaks to me again? What if his responses to my questions aren't what I want to hear? How will I handle this?"

After a few attempts of writing and rewriting this important letter, I finally sent it (February, 2008). I remember putting it in the mailbox before I went to work so I wouldn't have the temptation to shred it again.

After I got home from work, the letter was sent. I thought to myself, "Okay, this is it. My truth and my feelings are finally out there."

I have to admit, I felt very vulnerable. I didn't feel empowered and refreshed like I did with my mother's letter. I felt worried and anxious. It was on my mind almost every day, until I finally told myself, "It's okay if he doesn't respond, I'll be okay."

On Tuesday March 11, 2008, I received a card from him. First of all, this is what I asked him in the letter:

- "My mom said you didn't think I was your kid. Do you still feel that way?"
- "Why have you never said that you love me?"
- "Why don't you show affection?"

When I received the card, it said in big words: "I Love You. Just a Little Sign of my Affection." Then he wrote, "Love Always, your dad. P.S. Come bye one of these days."

I have to admit that I didn't believe it was from him at first. I thought it was my stepmother who picked the card out for him to sign, but I now believe he did it all himself.

Once again, knowing how to write a letter, and taking the chance to share my true feelings was worthwhile.

Nevertheless, not all parents will respond to your letter. There are many different types of parents. But, it's not about your parent, it's about you.

It's about honoring yourself enough to know you have the right to assert your needs, wants, and desires. In order to heal from your childhood abuse, you need to assert yourself in order to move on, not in order to expect the approval from your parents. You may never get that.

One important point to remember when learning how to write a letter is this:

“Don't merely use your words to describe your situation; use your words to change your situation.” Joel Osteen

The whole point of knowing how to write a letter is to get your feelings out there so you can finally live a fulfilling life.

I've designed a letter template, which you'll find in Appendix A, to ease your anxiety of knowing what to say in your letter and how to say it.

## **Taming the Control Freak in You: Step 7-A**

The control freak is in every one of us, some more than others. If you have been abused as child, chances are, your need for control is “more than likely” greater than it is for someone who wasn’t abused.

In a way, trying to control one’s environment is a way to feel “safe” in an “unsafe” world, especially through the eyes of an abused child.

I understand the need for control based on my own personal experience. I believe growing up in an environment where I wasn’t unconditionally loved brought out the control freak in me. I thought that if I were in control of everything in my life, I wouldn’t be let down.

However, controlling everything does not stop you from experiencing let down and disappointment. Ironically quite the opposite happens; you experience more let down and frustration because you are not trusting the universe or yourself.

The need for control equals anxiety, worry, doubt, and fear. And believe me; I am all too familiar with those feelings. “Unhealthy” control does not bring you stability or peace, but it does provide what you are trying to avoid—chaos and uncertainty.

You don’t have to give up complete control in order to heal from abuse. As a matter of fact, having “healthy” control over your life is a good thing. So, in order for you to move forward I believe it’s important to recognize the differences between unhealthy and healthy control.

### **Unhealthy Control**

1. You cannot enjoy your day because you are overwhelmed and preoccupied with “everything that has to be done today!”
2. You do not feel fulfilled.
3. Your relationships are suffering because of your need for control.
4. You are unhappy.
5. You become resentful and angry when you cannot escape your “own” expectations.

## Healthy Control Signs

1. You set realistic goals for the day and are able to enjoy yourself even if you were unable to meet all of your goals.
2. You feel fulfilled.
3. Your relationships are based on mutual understanding and respect. You know that you cannot control another person and you communicate this on a regular basis.
4. You are happy.
5. You do not hold any resentment or anger toward yourself or others because your expectations are not too high.

I have come across a wonderful book called *The Control Freak's Guide To Living Lightly* by Gail Barker and Gail Nielsen. (1)

This book will teach you everything you need to know about letting go of the need to control. Firstly, the authors explain what it means to be a control freak, then they quiz you to find out whether or not control is a personal problem. At the end of each chapter, you'll find detailed exercises to help ease the control freak in you.

You'll also find great stories and helpful insights all throughout the book. In chapter 3, you'll learn why the need for control has gotten out of hand.

And in the remaining chapters, you'll find great tips on how to turn the "unhealthy control" into "healthy control." After reading this book, you'll be "lighter" with your need for control and happier with yourself. You'll learn how to build more trust, energy, confidence, love, compassion, forgiveness, gratitude, time, beauty, and fun!

## **Healthy Coping-Skills: Learn How to Handle Life Stressors in a Healthy Manner: Step 7-B**

Coping skill is a type of behavior used to manage stressful events. We typically learn how to cope by witnessing the actions/reactions of our parents. So, think back to the stressful events that occurred during your childhood. How did your parents react during these situations? Did either of them respond like this...

- Yell?
- Wouldn't talk to anyone?
- Eat a lot of unhealthy food?
- Worry?
- Get into an argument with someone?
- Resort to using drugs or alcohol?
- Work excessively?
- Try to control your every move?
- Get angry?

Now think about how you currently respond to stressful situations. Do any of these above examples sound familiar to you?

Unfortunately, many of us aren't aware of how we deal with stressful events. Usually, we cope in unhealthy ways, which is why it's important to begin paying attention to how you are coping to daily stress.

### **How do You Begin Coping in a Healthier Way**

What many people don't realize is that healthy coping is instantly gratifying with long-term benefits. Healthy coping skills helps you feel mentally, physically, and emotionally in tune with yourself.

Here are some examples of how to cope in a healthy way:

- Thinking before reacting
- Exercising
- Assertively Communicating
- Taking a breather, a moment to yourself
- Doing something relaxing that doesn't alter your mind
- Taking breaks during long periods of work
- Eating healthily
- Putting your trust and faith into a higher power
- Self-Hypnosis/Meditation
- Building a supportive network of friends and family

However you choose to cope is entirely up to you. Sometimes even the most unhealthy way of dealing with stress is the best thing for you at that time.

In time, you may become tired of living life on edge, being controlled by your emotions, having unstable relationships, and feeling unattached from yourself.

Learning how to practice healthy coping will keep your emotions in check, your relationships stable, and your peace of mind. Because of this, you will feel more at peace with yourself and your confidence will flourish.

### **Improving Self-Esteem: Step 7-C**

The most difficult part of improving self-esteem is learning how to change your belief system. As a child, we develop our inner worth based on the words and actions of our parents and other care providers.

Although we come to a point in our life when we are no longer under the influence of our elders, we continue to carry the same beliefs that were instilled into us as a child. If these beliefs were negative and abusive, you will continue to feel critical of yourself, and that's why it's hard to improve your self-esteem; your thoughts and feelings are attached to what your caretakers believed about you.

The trick to improving self-esteem is to believe that you are separate from your parents and care provider's beliefs. Once you are able to separate yourself, you will be able to develop confidence. And this is how you do that:

1. Become aware of **your own** feelings and beliefs. In other words, detach yourself from the beliefs of your elders and learn more about your own individual needs.

This is a very important step because you will not be able to claim your confidence when you are dependent on your caretaker's opinion. Journaling is one of the best ways to begin getting in touch with yourself.

2. Do not allow the critical, judgmental voices to enter your head and control your life. The fact of the matter is you will encounter critical words, if not from an abusive parent then from an insecure peer, whose main intention is to destroy your life. When this happens, your best bet (to keep your sanity and self-confidence) is to not make his or her words your truth.

For example, if someone calls you a loser, let those words roll off your shoulders and tell yourself, "I am not going to listen to someone who has the audacity to put someone else down! I will trust myself over this person and I believe that I am intelligent and wise." If you allow "loser" to creep into your head, you will become exactly what that peer called you, not because you are, but because that is what you allowed yourself to believe.

3. Only, and I stress "ONLY" allow yourself to be surrounded by people who are healthy. These people will never put you down, are emotionally and mentally stable, and have goals and self-respect.

Those who have close "unhealthy" relationships in your life, you can do something about it. Set healthy boundaries and honor yourself **first** in order to improve the relationship. If you are someone who has the habit of putting others down, you need to take responsibility for yourself and get the help necessary in order to keep the ones you love in your life.

**Improving self-esteem is an ongoing journey and a choice only you can make. You can allow yourself to continually fall victim to the words of your caretakers or you can make a decision to separate yourself from your care provider's words and beliefs.**

## **Choosing Healthy Relationships over Unhealthy Relationships: Step 7-D**

There are way too many unhealthy relationships out there. Yet, it's not like people are aiming to be miserable with someone else. It is more likely that people do not understand the differences between what is a healthy relationship and what isn't a healthy relationship, especially if they grew up in an abusive environment.

After today, you will no longer lack this awareness; today you'll understand the differences. So, let's get straight to the point..

### **What are Unhealthy Relationships?**

- Boundaries are violated.
- Manipulative, controlling, submissive (e.g., giving the silent treatment, saying nothing is wrong when something is wrong, etc.), and aggressive (e.g., "It's my way or you can get out of the house!") communication skills are used.
- Feelings, beliefs, needs, and goals are disrespected.
- Independence and autonomy are not reinforced; as a matter of fact, co-dependence (e.g., depending on another person to feel good about yourself) is often the underlying reason for unhappiness in a relationship.
- Feeling good about yourself is often a threat to the other person.

### **What are Healthy Relationships?**

- Healthy relationships are pretty much the complete opposite of unhealthy relationships.
- Your thoughts, needs, wants, goals, and feelings are respected.
- In healthy relationships you'll find support, affection, assertive communication, and appropriate boundary setting.
- You can be yourself without the fear of how this will affect someone else.

- Your self-worth is built up rather than torn down.

If you continually find yourself in unhealthy relationships here's what you can do.

1. Change the self-talk and perception of yourself. It's important that you **believe** you deserve healthy relationships in order to receive them.
2. Become aware of your passions in life; that is, discover if having a loving, healthy relationship is actually a priority or passion for you. A great book for this is called  
  
"The Effortless Path to Discovering Your Destiny: The Passion Test" by Janet and Chris Attwood.
3. Once you become aware of what you want from your relationships, communicate this to others. If your loved ones have a hard time understanding your newfound needs, set a personal time limit (e.g., a year to notice significant changes such as suggesting counseling/self-help material during this time period) geared toward seeing changes. If you do not see any changes, make sure you honor your time limit and either leave the relationship or set up new boundaries. Whatever you do, don't accept the abuse any longer than you have anticipated. This is very important for your self-worth.

## **What is My Purpose: Developing Awareness of What You Have to Offer Others: Step 8-A**

When you've been abused as a child, you often question, what is my purpose? "What is the point of me even being here, especially when my *own* parents don't even like me?"

However, the truth is, you can use your abusive childhood experience to find your purpose. Take for instance, Dave Pelzer a #1 New York Best Selling author of the book "A Child Called It!" He was able to take his horrible childhood experience and use it for the benefit of others.

I often recommend to clients and Relationship-with-Self viewers that you choose how you're going to react to what has happened to you. When you choose to look at your experience as part of your purpose, you often become thankful that you have had the chance to overcome all the obstacles.

On the other hand, when you choose to look at your experience in a negative manner, you feed the feelings of low self-esteem and mental illness (e.g., anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder), and from my personal and professional opinion, these uncomfortable feelings are unnecessary.

It's important that you recognize your purpose, regardless of what has happened in your life. But, you're still probably wondering, "what is my purpose anyway?" Here are my thoughts:

### **How to Develop Awareness of your Purpose**

1. Take the assessment test at [www.assessment.com](http://www.assessment.com) to discover what you are good at.
2. Afterwards, think about your experiences and what life has taught you. Once you have this in your mind, think about how you can use this to help others. Can you teach others what you know? Do you want to be the mother you never had? Do you have a talent for writing? Are you creative? Like making music or writing poetry? Combining what you're good at with helping others is, in my opinion, what loving yourself is all about.

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3. Just remember, it doesn't matter that you have been abused or neglected almost your entire life. It's never too late to begin living your passion and purpose. All you need to do is make a choice to do so.

## **When to Ask a Therapist or Another Professional for Help: Step 9-A**

The best way to tell if you need to ask a therapist or another professional (e.g., psychiatrist, school counselor, etc.) for help is by paying attention to your emotions and actions.

If your emotions and actions are unbalanced, such as you're crying a lot, feeling overly anxious, sleeping too much, having problems with your relationships, having anger outbursts, experiencing nightmares, or cutting yourself, it's time to ask a therapist or another professional for some help.

Counselors, social workers, therapists, psychiatrists (medical doctors who specialize in mental disorders and prescribe psychotropic medication), and psychologists (e.g., Dr. Phil) have been trained to help people overcome their mental, physical, emotional, spiritual, and relationship problems. The only differences depend on the specific training the professional received.

When you decide to ask a therapist or another professional for help, try not to feel embarrassed or ashamed for seeking professional help. You are to be commended for taking the necessary and final step, if need be, for moving past your child abuse.

As a matter of fact, it's not uncommon for people to never deal with their childhood issues; however, the sooner you dive into your problems, as suggested in the first step of this book, the sooner you'll begin feeling better about yourself. And sometimes it takes the help of an "outsider" to ensure you live the free, peaceful, and fulfilling life you've always dreamed about!

### **Therapy Suggestions**

1. Search your local phone book under counselors, psychologists, social work, or psychiatrists. Or you can look online.. "Psychology Today," is an excellent magazine for finding a qualified therapist in your area. You can check it out by going to: [http://therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms/prof\\_search.php](http://therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms/prof_search.php)
2. Once you find a qualified professional, make sure you feel comfortable enough to open up to this person. If you feel uncomfortable (i.e., judged, beliefs/values are different, like you're not being listened to, etc.), politely let this professional

know that you appreciate his or her services but that you're going to look elsewhere.

3. When you find "the right fit," try to understand that you are the one responsible for your healing. The professional is only there as a guide, not a "fixer" of your problems. If the therapist assigns homework, make sure you participate; otherwise, you are wasting your time and the professional's time. Of course, your therapist is also there for support, but this is not the primary purpose of therapy; it is to guide you through solving your own problems, not depending on the therapist for answers.

The "Healing from Your Child Abuse Once and For All" e-book is aimed toward guiding you towards living a life of freedom; however, this advice may not be enough. You might need to ask a therapist or another professional about your personal experience. The most important issue is to let yourself heal from the past so you can live a fulfilling life.

I commend you for taking the time to better your life. I hope that you continue to live a life of peace and fulfillment. It is important to understand that in order to overcome child abuse one must commit to researching different ways to heal. This e-book is just one step in that direction.

If this book has been helpful, please leave a testimonial at:

[www.relationship-with-self.com/contactform.html](http://www.relationship-with-self.com/contactform.html)

With Love,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brandy Shirley, M.A." The signature is written in a cursive style.

Brandy Shirley, M.A.

## Appendix A

### Letter Template:

#### A Template Designed to Help you Communicate to Your Abuser

Below is a letter template designed to help you communicate with your abuser. The purpose of this template is to assertively communicate your feelings to the people who have been abusive to you throughout your life.

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Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am writing to let you know that I can no longer hold my feelings in about my past. I am in the process of healing, and in order for me to move forward, I need to assert my feelings. I cannot let the things that have happened between us affect me any longer.

I do not take accountability for the abuse that I endured during my childhood. However, I do give this responsibility to you. I now know that it was not my fault and I will no longer punish myself for your actions. I believe that you crossed my boundaries and disrespected my needs. And because I am building a better relationship with myself, I now know that I deserve better and have the right to voice my opinions.

I will not excuse your behavior as being okay because your actions were inappropriate; however, I've decided that I am no longer going to hate or resent you. I do know that I cannot have a relationship with you, at least until you take responsibility for the hurtful things you have done. If you do not know what you have done, let me tell you...

[\(Share your feelings here...\)](#)

I am open to hearing what you have to say, but I do not need your response in order to move forward. Since I've been able to express myself, I am now free and able to live a life of love and abundance!

Sincerely,

  

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**End Notes:**

(1.) Barker, G. & Nielsen G. (2006). *The Control Freak's Guide to Living Lightly: Manifesting a Life of Total Trust*. Canada: Power of Two Publishing

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(4.) DeChello, P. (2007). Mental Health Conference in Carterville, Illinois. DeChello is the "founder and senior partner of D&S Associates, an international training and consulting company serving the mental health and substance abuse treatment fields." D&S Associate's number is 1-800-950-5559 if you are interested in hiring him for a conference in your local area.

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(6.) Ryan, J. (August 2005). A mother's anguish. *U.S. Catholic*. 70(8), 50.

(7.) Villarrubia, M.H. (Sept. 16 2002). Forgive and Forget? Moving Closer to Forgiveness After Dallas. *America*. 187(7), 16-18

(8.) <http://wikipedia.org>

(9.) <http://www.theseecret.tv>