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Dear Stop It Now! Helpline,
*My adult child just disclosed
they were sexually abused*

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Content warning:
Child sexual abuse

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Objectives

- Describe experiences and feelings of adult survivors
- Identify barriers in children speaking up
- Discuss relationship of survivor voices to prevention
- Discuss ways parents can support their adult children after abuse has been disclosed
- Expand knowledge of complex questions parents of adult survivors ask

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What Do I Do?




My daughter is 22 and told me a few years ago about abuse by my husband. I had absolutely no knowledge this was happening and was totally blindsided. I went into a depression that I am just now coming out of. My husband has been ill for years and has also struggled with addiction. My daughter will not tell me any details of the abuse. We have always been extremely close and this is heartbreaking to me. She is pushing me to leave my husband. Today I spoke to a lawyer. What is the best thing for me to do? I feel like I will lose my relationship with my daughter if I do not leave him.


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Welcome!



MOSAC MOTHERS OF SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILDREN
Information, Resources and Support



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Why Didn't They Speak Up?

Parents are thinking:

- But I told them to tell if anyone was hurting them!
- Why didn't they trust me?
- Why did they wait so long?
- I need all the details!


Children feel:

- Scared
- Ashamed/guilty
- Responsible (especially when older)
- Threatened
- Don't know it's abuse
- Worry about adult's response
- Concern that abuser will turn to other child




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Where Do I Start?




My 27 year old daughter just shared with me that her stepfather, my husband of 20 years from a very happy marriage, was sexual with her while in middle school. I am shocked and devastated and confused. My daughter has no real motive to make this up yet I have a terrible time believing yet alone accepting. How sure can we be? I don't want to rip our lives apart without being sure that this happened. Where do I start?



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Believability and Betrayal



My child must be misremembering or confused...

This can't be true! My sister was such a loving aunt!

Why would my child lie about this? To get back at me?

I feel so betrayed -- I trusted him!


Was our whole relationship a lie? Is divorce my only option?

What will happen to my partner? Our family?

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Other Common Reactions



I'm so ashamed. I really failed my child.

I feel so guilty... How could I not have known?

Is my brother going to go to jail? I can't face our family in the news like this...

We'll be ostracized... no one will support my family now.


I can't tell anyone. What will this say about me as a parent... I let this person into our lives!

How could my best friend have done this?!

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Seeking Justice as a Response




My adult daughter disclosed that a former girlfriend of her father's molested her at the age of 6 numerous times. My daughter has struggled with alcohol abuse and left law school after taking a big nose dive. I'm not sure if she's ready to press charges, but this woman needs to pay for what she has done to my child. I need concrete action steps, please!


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Justice in Action


- Survivor's wishes
- When a child's safety is at risk
- Reporting
 - CPS
 - Police
- Professional support (i.e. lawyer)






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He Won't Seek Help...



We just found out a week ago my son, who is 18, was sexually abused by his older brother growing up – my oldest child. He is having memories that are haunting him, but he will not see a counselor. He refuses to come to family events and is very depressed and suicidal. I think he blames me – that I should have known. How can I help him?



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Worried How Survivor is Coping

- Refuses professional support
- Shut down
- Increased risk taking behaviors
- Substance abuse
- Experiencing intimate partner violence





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Survivor's Experience

Survivor's Feelings

- Anger that they were not protected
- Betrayal by person who abused/harmed
- Shame around abuse – couldn't stop it, didn't resist/say no
- May still care about the person who abused/harmed them

Survivor's Needs

- To hear they are believed
- Abuse was not their fault
- Respect of personal boundaries
 - Not asking for abuse details
 - Wishes for self
 - Way they want to interact with family, etc.
- Resources if they ask for them



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Healing


- MOSAC
 - <https://www.mosac.net/>
- TAALK's Peer Support Group
 - <https://www.taalk.org/get-help/help-for-parents-of-abused-children>
- Daily Strength's Parents of Children Who Have Been Sexually Abused Chat Group
 - <https://www.dailystrength.org/group/parents-whose-children-have-been-sexually-abused/>
- M'OASIS
 - <https://www.moasisupport.com/>
- Help For Survivors
 - <https://helpforsurvivors.org/help-parents-caregivers-children/>






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Questions?



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