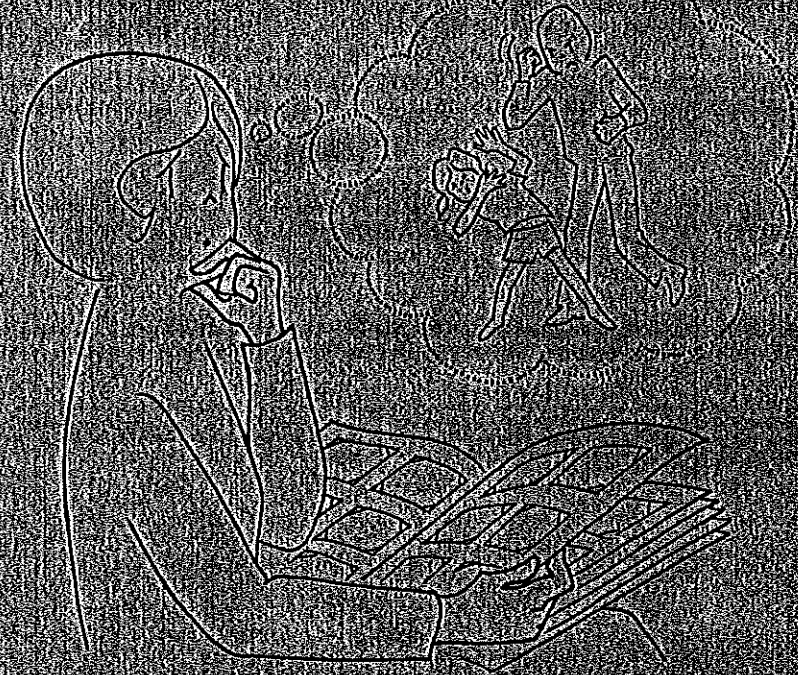


# ABOUT ADULTS ABUSED AS CHILDREN



**WHO ARE  
adults abused  
as children  
?**

They're grown-up survivors of child abuse. They come from all races, religions, and economic classes. Adults abused them in ways that may have been:

**PHYSICAL**

- beating, shaking, shoving, kicking, bruising, burning, choking, etc. Their physical needs may also have been neglected.

**EMOTIONAL**

- excessive yelling, criticizing, ridiculing; failing to provide guidance and love; threatening abandonment or physical harm.

**SEXUAL**

- seductive behavior, indecent exposure, sexual touching, fondling or gameplaying, oral, anal or vaginal intercourse. Boys as well as girls may have been sexually abused. Incidents may have occurred just once, or many times.

**MANY ADULTS ABUSED AS CHILDREN**

have blocked out the memory of abuse. Others remember, but don't recognize:

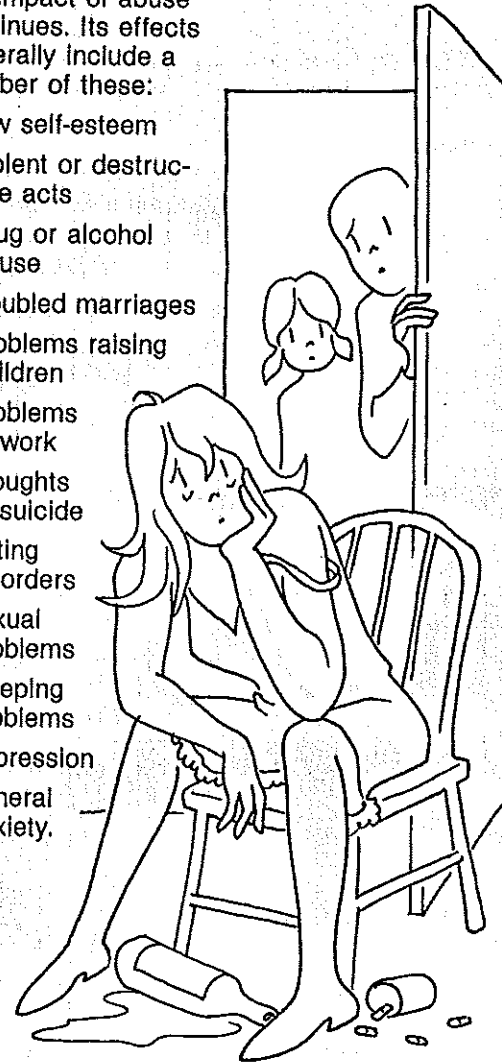
- THE COURAGE they showed as children
- THE IMPACT the abuse still has on their lives.

**WHEN A CHILD'S TRUST IS BETRAYED**

by an adult, the child feels depressed, insecure, angry -- and more.

**IN ADULT LIFE,** the impact of abuse continues. Its effects generally include a number of these:

- low self-esteem
- violent or destructive acts
- drug or alcohol abuse
- troubled marriages
- problems raising children
- problems at work
- thoughts of suicide
- eating disorders
- sexual problems
- sleeping problems
- depression
- general anxiety.



**IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO GET HELP!**

Many adults struggling with these problems have no idea that abuse in childhood may have been the cause. Fortunately, treatment services are available.

**BY TURNING TO THESE RESOURCES,**

adults abused as children can move forward to a happier life.

Learn more...



# ABUSED CHILDREN LEARN "SURVIVAL SKILLS"

To protect themselves emotionally and physically, children may respond in different ways. For example, they may:

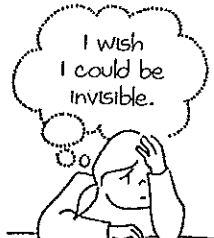
## DENY

that the abuse is occurring. Some daydream that they're elsewhere, or that the abuse is happening to a stranger. Others block out the memory of the abuse.



## WITHDRAW,

since adult attention so often brings abuse. These children learn that it's not safe to express themselves or take chances.



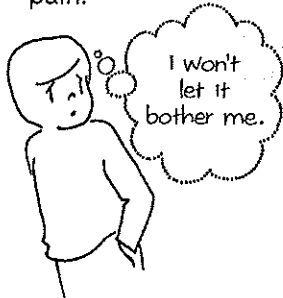
## SEEK APPROVAL

from adults by being "perfect" – being the best in school, doing extra chores, helping others, etc.



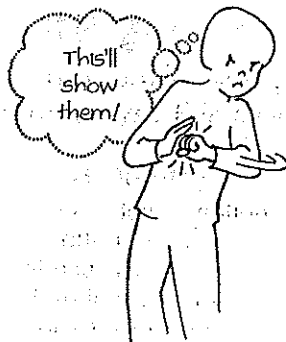
## TURN OFF FEELINGS,

both emotional and physical. By not allowing themselves to feel, they protect themselves from pain.



## MISBEHAVE

to express anger and frustration, or to get attention -- even if it hurts.



## TAKE THE BLAME

for the abuse and think they're "bad." (It's hard for children to recognize that adults aren't perfect.)



# THEY MAY CARRY THESE PATTERNS INTO ADULT LIFE

The results can be:

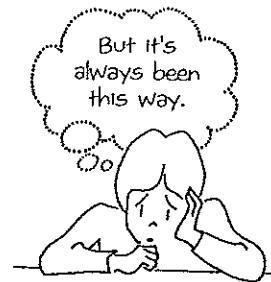
## A LACK OF TRUST

Adults abused as children may believe that it's dangerous to trust people – or their own feelings. (Or, they may be loyal beyond reason to people who don't deserve their trust.)



## A FEAR OF MAKING CHANGES

Old patterns of living and relating to others feel familiar and "safe" – even if they're really destructive.



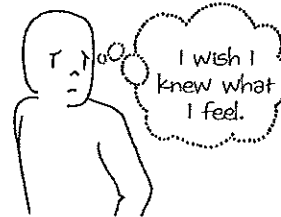
## CARING "TOO MUCH"

Many help others through nursing, social work, etc., trying to give the world the love they never had. Some wear themselves out because they try so hard.



## TROUBLE RECOGNIZING OR SHOWING EMOTIONS

It is hard for some adults abused in childhood to be aware of their feelings, share them with others, or ask for help.



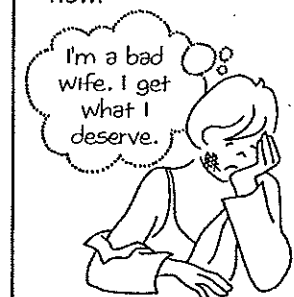
## TROUBLE COPING WITH STRESS

When things go wrong, they may turn to food, alcohol or other drugs, violence – even child abuse.



## LOW SELF-ESTEEM

Some adults still think they're "bad" or worthless, and that they deserved abuse then – and now.



# YEARS LATER,

the abuse still takes its toll through:

## DEPRESSION

Symptoms may include excessive sleeping, listlessness, and thoughts of suicide.



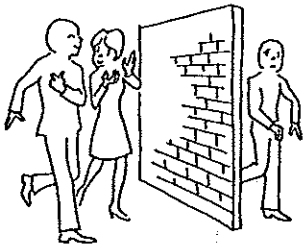
## A SENSE OF "DRIFTING"

numbly through life, without pleasure or goals.



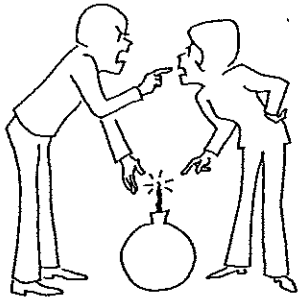
## FEELINGS OF ISOLATION

Adults may feel "different" from others.



## TROUBLED RELATIONSHIPS

Adults abused as children may be unable to form close relationships. Some allow themselves to be abused again, because the role feels familiar and secure -- and it's the only one they know. Others become abusers themselves.



## SELF-DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR

Adults who think they're bad may subconsciously "punish" themselves through:

- eating disorders (overeating, anorexia, bulimia, etc.)
- prostitution
- abuse of alcohol or other drugs.

Others may cause problems at work and destroy their chances of advancement -- or even lose their jobs.

# Adults abused as children may have PROBLEMS RAISING CHILDREN

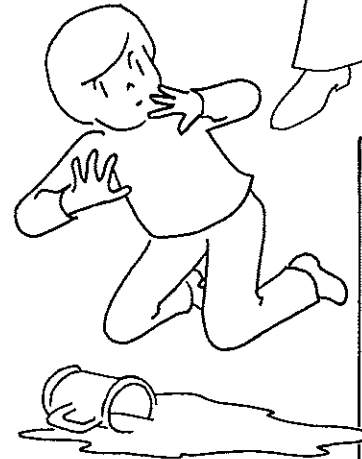
Abused children see few good examples of parenting while they're growing up. If they later have children of their own, they sometimes:

## DON'T KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT

from children at different ages. For example, a parent might assume that an infant can be toilet trained, or that a 5-year-old thinks like an adult.

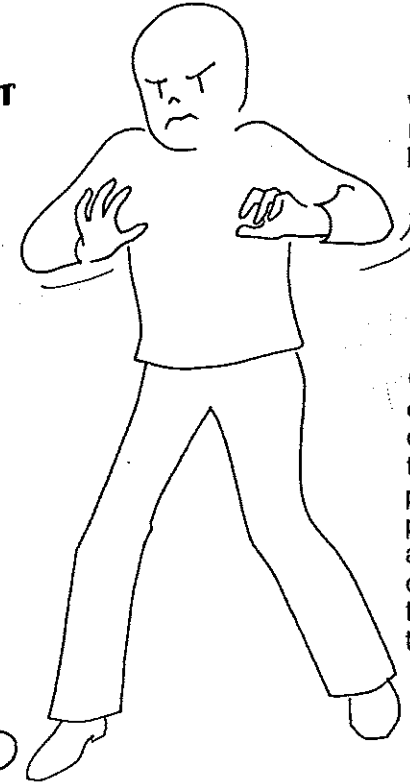
## ABUSE THEIR CHILDREN,

because their parents taught them that it's ok to abuse the ones you love.



## CAN'T COPE

with the stress that raising children can bring.



## CAN'T FEEL

close to their children, although they want to. Some parents who were physically or sexually abused as children are afraid to touch or hold their own children.

## BUT THESE PARENTS CAN BREAK THE CYCLE OF ABUSE

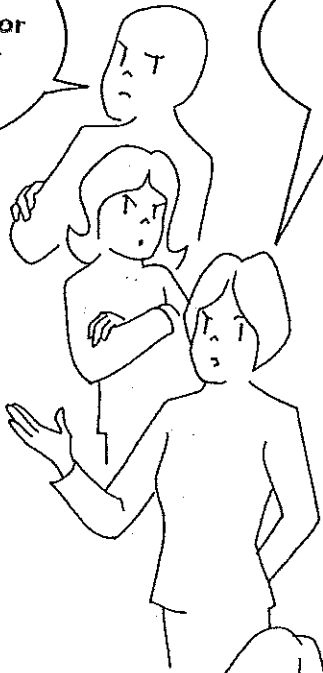
if they:

- UNDERSTAND why they behave as they do
- LEARN new parenting skills
- RECEIVE NEEDED SUPPORT during their child-rearing years.

# SOME MYTHS ABOUT CHILD ABUSE

**If a child doesn't report the abuse or run away, it can't be that bad.**

Don't believe it! A child can still love an abusive adult and crave his or her attention, even if it hurts. Children often think the abuse is "normal." Others think they won't be believed. Children know they can't survive on their own, and they may be reluctant to give up friends, school, etc.



**Abusive parents hate their children.**

Not so. Many of these parents are emotionally immature. In times of stress, they vent their frustration on the nearest things within their power -- their children.



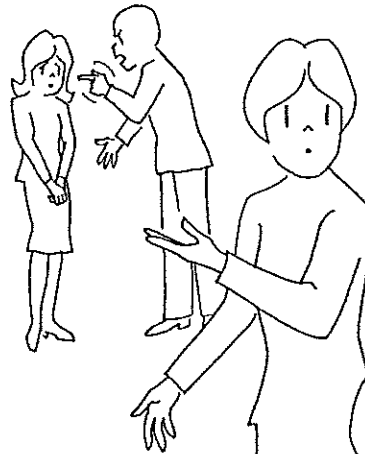
**Adults abused as children are doomed to abuse their children.**

No. They're more likely to become abusive than adults with a "normal" past, but many will not -- especially if they seek help for the problems their childhood pain has caused.



**If adults abused as children are attracted to people who abuse them, they must enjoy it.**

No! These adults aren't "gluttons for punishment" -- they're just drawn into relationships that re-create the roles they learned in childhood. They may even mistake the calmness of a healthy relationship for a lack of interest or desire.



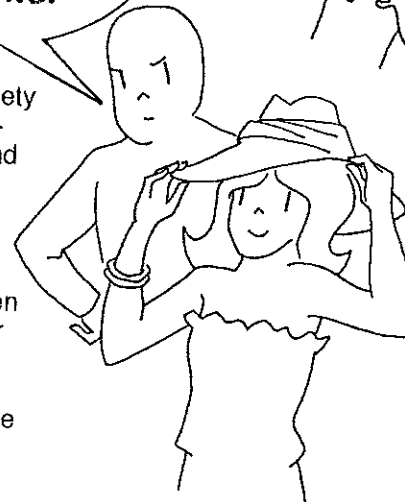
**Parents have a duty to discipline their children.**

True -- but "discipline" is not the same as physical punishment. Discipline teaches children rules and self-control. Beating, shaking, etc. teaches them to hurt others to force obedience.



**Children encourage sexual abuse by acting seductive.**

No. Today's society encourages children to dress and act in a manner beyond their years, and calls them "cute" -- but these children aren't looking for sex, they're just trying to please. Any kind of abuse is entirely the adult's responsibility.



## SOME SOURCES OF HELP

Your local department of social services can refer you to resources for adults abused as children. Or you can contact them directly. For example:

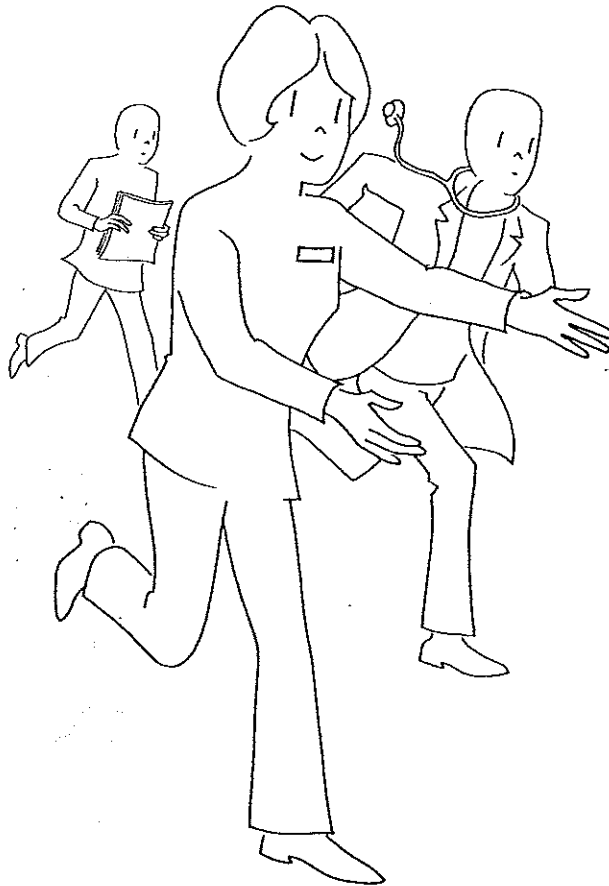
### THE NATIONAL CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE

can give adult survivors counseling, information and referrals 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call: 1-800-422-4453.

Local child abuse hotlines can also help.

### THE SURVIVORS OF CHILDHOOD ABUSE PROGRAM

offers counseling, referrals, information and public education. Contact this program through The National Child Abuse Hotline.



## HELP FOR OTHER PROBLEMS

is also at hand!

### AL-ANON

support groups help the adult relatives and friends of people with drinking problems. (In some areas, there are groups specifically for adult children of alcoholics.)

### ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

support groups help problem drinkers stay sober.

### SHELTERS

offer counseling as well as emergency lodging and protection.

### PARENTS ANONYMOUS

support groups help abusive parents and their children.

### OVEREATERS ANONYMOUS

support groups teach people with eating disorders how to eat sensibly.

### PARENTS UNITED

support groups help couples in which one member has sexually abused his or her child.

### DRUG ABUSE HOTLINES

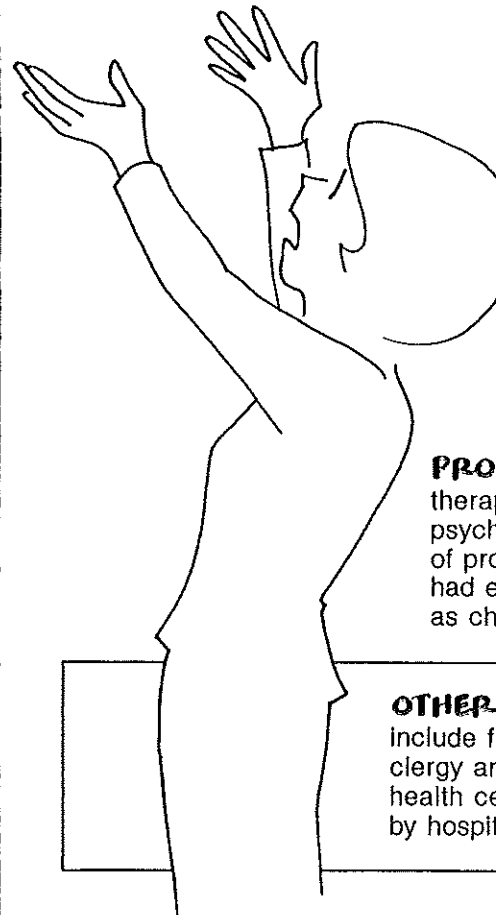
provide telephone counseling and referrals.

### PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS,

therapists, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, etc., can help with a variety of problems. Select professionals who have had experience working with adults abused as children.

### OTHER RESOURCES

include friends, your family physician, clergy and religious groups, mental health centers, and programs offered by hospitals and employers.



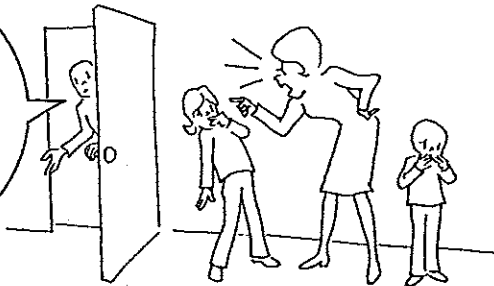
## SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



Why didn't other adults protect me from abuse?

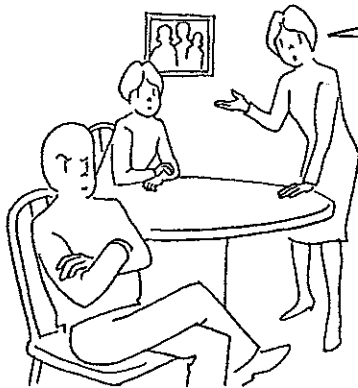
They may have been unaware of the abuse, told themselves it couldn't happen, or simply didn't know what to do. The spouse of an abusive parent may have been afraid.

Are other children in the family affected when a brother or sister is abused?



Yes. Many feel guilty for not stopping the abuse or sharing the pain. They may fear that they're "next," and try to be "perfect" to avoid abuse.

Should I confront my parents if they abused me as a child?



It's up to you, but consider talking it over first with a counselor or support group. If you do confront your parents, don't expect them to change, admit the abuse or beg for forgiveness. Instead, direct your energy toward a future as an independent, confident adult.

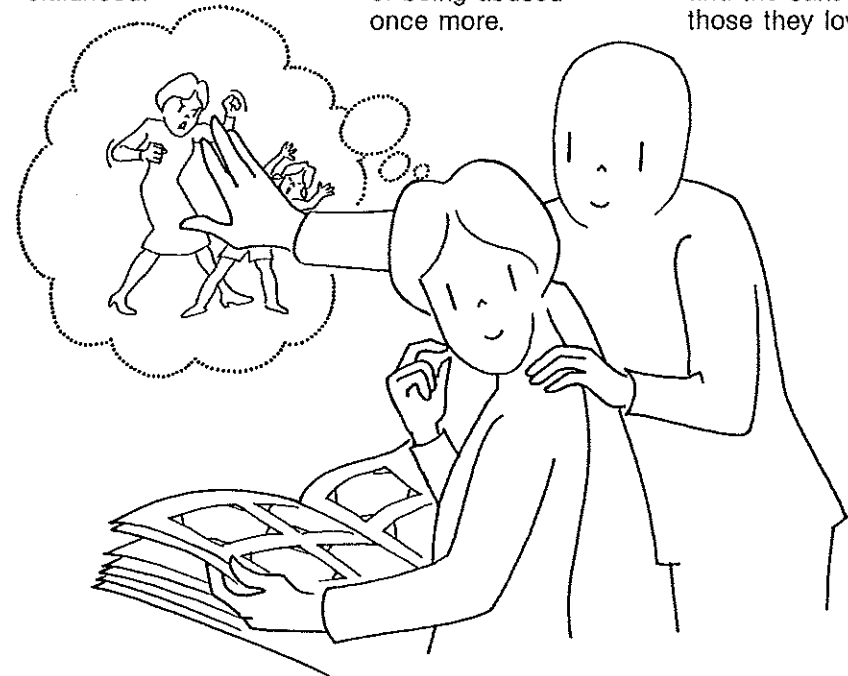
## So-- ADULTS ABUSED AS CHILDREN ARE SURVIVORS

-- but they may carry hidden scars.  
It's important that they:

✓ **RECOGNIZE**  
how adult life can be affected by abuse in childhood.

✓ **REALIZE**  
that they run a risk of repeating the abuse -- or of being abused once more.

✓ **SEEK**  
help in dealing with the past -- for their sake, and the sake of those they love.



If you were abused as a child, it was not your fault then -- and you're not alone now!