

Women Caring for Women: Sexual Abuse CBC Sunday School January 25, 2026

Discussion question: What messages did you hear growing up about stranger danger or safe or unsafe touches?

What is sexual abuse/assault?

- 1) It is broader than just "a completed sexual act" (penetration).

"Sexual assault is any type of sexual behavior or contact where consent is not freely given or obtained, and is accomplished through force, intimidation, violence, coercion, manipulation, threat, deception, or abusive authority." *Rid of My Disgrace*

"[Childhood] sexual abuse is any contact or interaction (visual, verbal, or psychological) between a child/adolescent and an adult when the child/adolescent is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or any other person." *Dan Allender*

- 2) In the majority of cases, it is perpetrated by someone the victim knows and trusts.

"Sexual assault is not just rape by a stranger with a weapon. Approximately 80 percent of victims are assaulted by an acquaintance (relative, spouse, dating partner, friend, pastor, teacher, boss, coach, therapist, doctor, etc.)" *Rid of My Disgrace*

- 3) It is extremely prevalent and particularly harmful.

"The number of occurrences of sexual assaults is staggering. At least one in four women and one in six men currently are or will be victims of sexual assault in their lifetime." *Rid of My Disgrace*

"Sexual assault causes more harmful psychological effects that are more severe than effects of other crimes." *Rid of My Disgrace*

Discussion question: Does this information differ at all with what you typically think of as sexual assault/abuse?

What is lost by the victim of sexual abuse?

1. Loss of control over her own body
 - a. She was not treated as an image bearer ought to be treated – with dignity and respect. She has been treated like an object. If the abuse was from someone she knew, she was probably groomed, a process that involves lying, manipulation and deep rejection.
 - b. The most intimate part of her – her sexuality, which is deeply connected to her soul – was invaded by someone who meant her harm. This is deeply wounding.
 - c. She may be deeply confused if she experienced any kind of arousal during the abuse. Arousal is a physical response to being touched in a certain way; it does NOT mean that the victim "wanted" the abuse.
 - d. Sexual abuse causes harmful physiological effects;
 - i. Depression, nightmares, flashbacks, headaches, difficulty concentrating, panic attacks, OCD, various phobias, aggression, changes in appetite, eating disorders, self-mutilation, sexual dysfunction, gastrointestinal disturbance, PTSD and more.
 - e. She may have an STI or physical injuries (if the assault was violent)
 - f. She may have had (or been forced to have) an abortion to cover up the abuse, which will leave additional wounds.

- g. The trauma may cause problems with intimacy in a later (or current) relationship. Even playful touches by a loved one may trigger memories or flashbacks. She may feel out of control in her reactions as her body responds to trauma.
- 2. Loss of her childhood (if she was assaulted as a child)
 - a. Sexual abuse can rob a child of normative childhood experiences. Instead they live in fear, confusion, secrecy and a warped sense of self (they may feel dirty, or that they are to blame for the abuse).
 - b. Science tells us that our connection to our caregivers plays an enormous role in our future mental and relational health. A child with a confusing, abusive relationship with caregivers, or one who could not let her caregivers know what was happening to her may suffer long lasting difficulty in future relationships (marriage, motherhood, etc)
- 3. Loss of a protective/nurturing family or appropriate role models
 - a. She may have learned about sex and/or had her sexuality “awakened” by an abuser who used her for their own pleasure, instead of from a trusted parent. Consequently, there will be lies to sort out. She may believe that her abuser loved her. Sexual abuse does NOT come from a place of love, and this can create many confusing ideas about what love is and can affect future relationships.
 - i. Her understanding of healthy sexual dynamics may be deeply distorted, which can lead to promiscuity or using others for sex. Because she was used by another, this can feel like a way to regain control. This distortion can also create fertile ground for future abuse—even within marriage—because abuse has become her primary context for sexuality, and even pain can feel familiar or normal.
 - b. Her parents were not able to protect her from the abuse (or – in some cases – did not try.)
 - c. If the abuser was a family member she may feel the immense burden of trying to keep the family together. She may be under threat that if she does not continue being abused/keeping the secret, the family will fall apart and loved ones will be harmed and/or “hate her.”
 - d. Her family may not listen or care if she tells about the abuse. “Families and friends often encourage denial and minimization because the facts are uncomfortable to hear, they don’t know how to respond, or they are worried about embarrassing the family.” *Rid of My Disgrace*
- 4. Loss of trust
 - a. Sexual assault perpetrators are usually someone the victim knows, someone they should have been able to trust. This grave breach of trust can lead to a shift in worldview in which *everyone* becomes untrustworthy, dangerous and incapable of providing love and safety.
 - b. Since most abusers are male, she may believe men cannot be trusted.

Discussion question: How can we live compassionately, knowing that a quarter of the women around us are suffering from these devastating losses?

Where is God in the pain?

- 5. God hates sexual abuse. In fact, it is God’s very wrath over sin – including the sin of abuse – that motivated him to send a rescuer. Jesus came to die for sins done against you.
- 6. God knows the cost of sin
 - a. “But the way of healing is not an easy one for Yahweh; Yahweh goes through loss, anguish, rage, and humiliation. The healing costs the healer a great deal.” Walter Brueggemann
 - b. Most of all, sin cost Him the life of His Son.
- 7. God felt the shame sin brings
 - a. Jesus was stripped naked so we could be robed in righteousness

- b. "While I stooped naked—my humiliation laid bare before cruel eyes - heaven wept. Jesus grieved as one who had been through His own, deeply painful, humiliating ordeal, naked and bleeding, mocked and despised, at the hands of the very people He had created." - Mez McConnell
- c. "He understands our sufferings. His identity was attacked. He was rejected and betrayed by others. He was abandoned. He was lied about, slandered, and personally attacked. He was humiliated. He was in emotional agony. He was in physical agony from being beaten and tortured. He was murdered. He experienced the worst agony imaginable, not only physically on the cross, but also emotionally and spiritually as well. At one point, he cried out: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" *Rid of My Disgrace*

Discussion question: When you think of Jesus on the cross, do you think of his shame? How is this contrasted with God the Son in eternity past and the Lion of Judah in John's vision in Revelation?

What does healing look like?

8. Break the Silence

- a. No More Denial – Denial of the assault and its effects leads to isolation and loneliness
 - i. Say: "Yes, I was assaulted, and those who hurt me took something away I could never get back."
 - ii. Tell someone what happened. This engagement of your emotions, feelings of helplessness, revisiting trauma...it will be painful. The grief may be excruciating. But grief is a necessary step for healing.
 - 1. "We must name the troubling past truthfully – we must come to clarity about what happened, how we reacted, and how we are reacting to it now – to be freed from its destructive hold on our lives. Granted, truthful naming will not by itself heal memories of wrong suffered: but without truthful naming, all measures we might take to heal such memories will remain incomplete." Miroslav Volf
 - 2. "In such trials, there can be no comfort for us so long as we stand outside weeping. If only we will take the courage to fix our gaze deliberately upon the stern countenance of grief, and enter unafraid into the darkest recesses of our trouble, we shall find the terror gone, because the Lord has been there before us, and, coming out again, has left the place transfigured..." Geerhardus Vos
- b. Admit the Damage – You must stop convincing yourself and others that you're just fine. Sexual violation always has a cost to your soul.
 - i. "Minimizing your loss may seem courageous and charitable, but it helps no one. You do not help yourself by living in the darkness of denial." *Rid of My Disgrace*
 - ii. What lies are you believing? You can't confront lies until you know what they are.
 - 1. Common lies sexual abuse victims believe: Nobody is safe. Nobody will protect me. Nobody can be trusted. Nobody wants to be around me. Nobody can understand me. Nobody cares about my needs. Nobody could love me.

9. Believe it's Not Your Fault

a. Guilt

- i. No matter the circumstances, sexual assault is never the fault of the survivor. Feeling responsible or blaming oneself is a natural response to the stress and trauma of sexual abuse, but it is a lie.
- ii. The person who did this to you is to blame. They are responsible for their actions. They made the choice to commit sexual assault.

- iii. You deserve support, care and healing.
- b. Shame
 - i. Shame takes a painful truth—"Something bad happened to me because the world is broken by sin"—and quietly reshapes it into a lie: "Something bad happened to me because there is something wrong with me. I am unacceptable. I am worthless."
 - ii. Theology of shame
 - 1. Humanity was created in an absence of shame. *Adam and Eve were naked and not ashamed.* (Gen 2:24)
 - 2. Shame came because of the guilt of sin; being vulnerable wasn't safe any more. *Adam and Eve created the sinner's recipe for dealing with shame: cover it up, hide it, and blame someone else.*
 - 3. Shame is what the soul does who knows deep down they were meant for intimacy to a holy God. We want to be clean, to be near a holy God and since we are not, we feel shame.
 - 4. Shame's power is not broken by finding self-worth.
 - a. "In an attempt to counter your negative self-image, others may encourage you to see yourself in a story of self-love, self-reliance, and self-healing. But the identity that comes from that story is even darker disgrace and even more pain in the longer term because the self-made illusions about self cannot be maintained." *Rid of My Disgrace*
 - 5. Shame's power is broken only by looking to a holy God who loves the unworthy, the unclean, the guilty. He loves and accepts them not because they deserve it but because *He* is loving.
 - a. "What I feel most is a glob of unworthiness...What I need is a sense that God accepts me, owns me, holds me, affirms me, and will never let me go even if he is not too impressed with what he has on his hands." Lewis Smedes
 - 6. Shameless saints will fill the halls of heaven – they will have nothing to hide or cover up from *anyone*. They will enjoy perfect intimacy with a holy God who has washed them clean by the blood of Jesus Christ.
- 10. Find Freedom through Forgiving
 - a. Forgiveness is like a merciful knife that cuts the connecting cord between us and those who have hurt us. Until we cut it, they can continue to hurt us.
 - b. Your abuser does not have to repent for you to forgive him.
 - c. Your abuser doesn't need to know about the forgiveness. Forgiveness is primarily for your own soul. As Nicole Braddock Bromley said: "Unforgiveness doesn't hurt the one who harmed you; it only hurts *you*."
 - i. "Forgiveness is not ignoring harm and acting as if nothing happened; it's the opposite. Forgiveness requires acknowledging the harm and calling it what it is – sexual violence, sin, evil – and calling the perpetrators what they are – evildoers and sinners. It also means acknowledging the consequence of God's judgment for the sins committed, and then not holding the charge against them. However, the perpetrator must deal with God at that point. The victim's forgiveness is not the declaration of God's forgiveness. Forgiveness is costly for the victim, but it is not a naïve, foolish, simplistic, look-the-other-way pretense that is all is well and parties should return to relating as they did before the assault. Forgiveness also does not mean that the victims should feel like they need to prove their forgiveness by any interaction with the perpetrator." *Rid of My Disgrace*

- d. Even secular scientists have found that forgiveness has positive effects on our mental and physical health. They report that forgiveness lowers stress, helps our hearts and immune systems function better, and helps ease anxiety and depression.

Discussion question: "What do you think forgiveness is not when it comes to abuse, and how might that misunderstanding make healing harder?"

What can comforters do?

11. **Listen:** When a friend tells you of her abuse, immediately affirm her bravery in telling you. Let her know she hasn't "stained" you and that you love her just as much (if not more!) because you know her story. Believe her, love her and follow up!
 - a. Sample response: "She hugged me and told me that it wasn't my fault, that I didn't deserve it, and that she didn't think any differently about me. In fact, she cared for me even more." *Nicole Braddock Bromley*
 - b. Encourage her to tell the whole truth – all of it. This will be difficult/painful for you both – as a listener it will cost you, but in doing so you are sharing her burden and showing her that her pain is not too much for you, and it's not too much for God.
 - i. "The refusal of others to speak about sexual assault and listen to victims tell the truth is a refusal to offer grace and healing." *Rid of My Disgrace*
 - ii. The very act of feeling a bit of another's pain may help to ease theirs.
12. **Speak truth**, but don't tell her "not to feel that way." Abuse scars ARE her reality and It will take time for her traumatically altered worldview to shift.
 - a. **Truth: A woman who has been sexually abused has not lost her worth. She remains a precious image bearer, cherished by God. In Christ, she can be fully redeemed, and one day she will stand before Him as His beloved bride—pure, wanted, and adored. Her wounds can be healed. And when healing feels impossible, she can look to the wounded hands and feet of Jesus as proof that He understands suffering and redeems it completely.**
 - b. Give her the gift of Scripture: "But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless." Psalm 10:14
13. **Be proactive** – We must talk about this with our kids. Staying silent because of our embarrassment could be costly for them.
 - a. "We need to start talking young because 1 out of 5 kids will be victims of childhood sexual abuse before their 18th birthday." Justin Holcomb
 - b. Talking to your kids about how to protect their bodies "builds trust so that if something happens, if they are exposed to something...they are going know, 'Mom and Dad know about this. They talked to me about this. They are safe and understand this...We are all about swimming safety, bicycle safety, wearing your helmet, getting in your car seat, and wearing your seat belt. Add this to that: This is body safety. This is prevention and awareness. Lump it into that category, and feel empowered in your role as their advocate." Lindsey Holcomb
 - c. **For teens:** Be wary of the pitfalls of "Purity Culture"
 - i. Maggie says, "When I was a teenager, I heard multiple times that for a girl to be sexually impure was like presenting your future husband with an unwrapped candy bar that a stranger had already taken a bite from. In this analogy, single girls were the candy bars. While I understand the intention was to promote abstinence, I cringe when I think of the girls around me who were being sexually abused and then hearing a youth leader tell them—whether intentionally or not—that they were unwanted, unworthy, and undesirable.

We also were taught that we needed to dress modestly so we wouldn't 'make boys stumble.' Again, my heart breaks for the girls who heard that message and concluded their abuse was their fault—believing that if they had just dressed more modestly, the man who molested them would have been able to control himself.

We should be careful to teach sexual purity in a way that does not create a culture of shaming victims, blaming victims, and creating unsafe spaces for naming sin. Girls do not cause others to abuse them by dressing provocatively. And girls who have been sexually abused are not dirty or unwanted. Another person's sin has left them wounded—but there is a great Healer."

Have you been wounded by sexual abuse and you're ready to find healing?

We recommend talking to a trusted friend and/or a professional counselor.

For professional help: Lisa Moore at Christ First Counseling in Shawnee
(www.christfirstcounseling.com) For appointments call (785) 272-0778

Recommended Resources

- Rid of My Disgrace* by Justin & Lindsey Holcomb
- The Wounded Heart* by Dan Allender
- Hush: Moving from Silence to Healing after Childhood Sexual Abuse* by Nicole Braddock Bromley
- Shame Interrupted: How God Lifts the Pain of Worthlessness & Rejection* by Edward T. Welch
- The Creaking on the Stairs: Finding Faith in God after Childhood Abuse* by Mez McConnell

For Parents:

- Video Interview on Protecting Your Child From Sexual Abuse
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/episodes/broadcast/protecting-your-child-from-sexual-abuse/>
- God Made All of Me: A Book to Help Children Protect Their Bodies* by Justin & Lindsey Holcomb

Women Caring for Women: CBC Sunday School Syllabus

Part 1

- Oct 5: Introduction to loss, grief, suffering and healing
- Oct 12: Infertility & Miscarriage
- Oct 19: Depression
- Oct 26: Chronic Illness & Terminal Illness
- Nov 2: Post Abortion Syndrome
- Nov 9: Divorce

Part 2

- Jan 18: Domestic Abuse
- Feb 1: Sexual abuse
- Feb 8: Addiction
- Feb 15: Pornography & Infidelity
- Feb 22: Same Sex Attraction

Questions or feedback? Contact us!

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