

**A resource for male
survivors of sexual abuse**
written by SurvivorsUK



SurvivorsUK support men and boys who have experienced sexual abuse, sexual assault and rape. We offer a range of services including an online webchat, group work, individual counselling and advocacy to support survivors in reporting to the police.

We understand that talking can be hard. That's why our team of professionals provide information and emotional support in a safe, confidential and non-judgmental space and will go at your own pace. We are an inclusive service and welcome anyone who identifies as male, trans, non-binary, has identified as male in the past, or anyone who feels that we are the right fit for them.

“No one is responsible for their abuse. No one should feel ashamed.”

Common Questions

What is male sexual abuse?

Male sexual abuse is any unwanted or non-consensual sexual act performed against a man or boy at any time in his life.

Who can it happen to?

Quite simply, it can happen to anyone. It could have happened while you were a child or teenager, or as an adult.

How often does it happen?

Much more often than people think. An estimated 12,000 men are raped in the UK every year, and more than 70,000 are sexually abused or assaulted.

Myth and Misconceptions

Myths and misconceptions about the sexual abuse of men can make the reality of being a survivor a difficult one, increasing isolation and maintaining stigma.

Below we dispel some of the common myths surrounding male sexual abuse.

Myth: Men can't be sexually abused.

Reality: They can. Any man or boy can be sexually assaulted regardless of size, strength, appearance or sexual orientation.

Myth: If I was drinking or taking drugs, it was my fault.

Reality: Nothing you do entitles another person to assault you. If you had been drinking or taking drugs and someone sexually abused you, that doesn't make it your fault or mean that you asked for or deserved what happened.

Myth: Only gay men and boys are sexually abused.

Reality: Heterosexual, gay and bisexual men and people who identify as nonbinary or trans are equally likely to be sexually abused. Being sexually abused has nothing to do with your current or future sexual or gender identity.

Myth: Only gay men sexually assault other men.

Reality: Sexual assault is about violence, anger, power and control over another person, not lust, desire or sexual attraction.

Myth: Sexual abuse makes you gay.

Reality: Sometimes survivors question whether the sexual abuse has had an impact on their sexual orientation. You may worry that you were abused because you were gay, or that the abuse 'made' you gay. In our experience, the majority of men sexually abused by other men in childhood identify as heterosexual in adult life. What research there is points to sexual abuse having no significant effect on adult sexual orientation. However, being a survivor can leave you uncomfortable or unsure about your sexual identity.

Myth: Men cannot be sexually abused by women.

Reality: Although the majority of perpetrators are male, men can also be sexually abused by women.

Myth: Erection or ejaculation during a sexual abuse means you "really wanted it" or consented to it.

Reality: Erection and ejaculation are physiological responses that may result from mere physical contact or even extreme stress. These responses do not imply that you wanted or enjoyed the assault and do not indicate anything about your sexual orientation.

Some perpetrators are aware how erection and ejaculation can confuse a victim of sexual assault — this motivates them to manipulate their victims to the point of erection or ejaculation to increase their feelings of control and to discourage people from telling their story.

Myth: Being sexually abused will make you an abuser.

Reality: The vast majority of men who have experienced childhood abuse or adult assault do NOT go on to sexually abuse.



The impact of sexual abuse

Sexual abuse affects everyone differently. The impact is deeply personal and unique to you, but you may find it influences your feelings about yourself, the world and your relationships with other people.

You may find that you 'forgot' what happened to you, until a later point in life when memories resurface, and/or you may find the memories are hazy and fragmented. This can make it harder to understand or speak about what happened to you.

You should not be pushed to talk about your experiences. Being pressurised to speak about it can feel retraumatising. It is vital that we talk about painful past experiences, whatever they are, in our own time and in our own way.

Some of the survivors who approach us have difficulties around some or more of the following:

- Use of alcohol and/or drugs
- Sexual addiction or compulsion/avoidance of sexual intimacy
- Struggles and difficulties in relationships
- Rage and anger
- The impact of post traumatic stress such as flashbacks and nightmares

This list is by no means exhaustive. As mentioned above, sexual abuse affects every survivor differently.

“It is vital that we talk about painful past experiences, whatever they are, in our own time and in our own way.”



Common feelings

Below are some of the feelings survivors often experience whether immediately following an assault or for many years after sexual abuse.

These lists are not all-inclusive or exhaustive. Everyone reacts to sexual abuse in different ways.

Common feelings

- **Emotional Shock** – I feel numb. How can I be so calm? Why can't I cry?
- **Disbelief and/or Denial** – Did it really happen? Why me? Maybe I just imagined it. It's not important.
- **Embarrassment** – What will people think? I can't tell my family or friends.
- **Shame** – I feel filthy, disgusting, like there's something wrong with me. I can't get clean.
- **Guilt** – I feel as if it's my fault, or I should've been able to stop it. If only I had done...
- **Depression** – How am I going to get through the day? I'm so tired! I feel hopeless. What's the point of going on?
- **Powerlessness** – Will I ever feel in control again?
- **Disorientation** – I don't even know what day it is, or where I'm supposed to be. I keep forgetting things.
- **Flashbacks** – I'm reliving what happened. I keep seeing, hearing and smelling things that bring it right back and I feel like it's happening all over again.
- **Fear** – I'm scared of everything. What if I have an STI or HIV? I can't sleep because I'll have nightmares. I'm afraid to go out. I'm afraid to be alone.
- **Anxiety** – I'm having panic attacks. I can't breathe. I can't stop shaking. I feel overwhelmed.
- **Anger** – I feel like hurting the person who attacked me or lashing out at the world.
- **Physical stress** – My stomach (or head or back) aches all the time. I feel jittery and don't want to eat.

Grooming

Effects of male sexual abuse

The long-term consequences of sexual abuse are extremely varied, and again there are no definitive effects that all survivors will experience. The documented effects include, but are not limited to:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Low self-esteem
- Drug and alcohol misuse
- Difficulties managing feelings and relationships, sometimes leading to the diagnosis of a personality disorder
- Difficulties with sleep (too much, too little, nightmares)
- Eating disorders
- Psychosis
- Grief
- Post-traumatic reactions
- Sexual dysfunction
- Difficulties in creating and maintaining relationships/ friendships/social connection
- Poor self-worth
- Difficulties in education and employment
- A range of physical symptoms
- A number of mental health diagnoses have been associated with a history of childhood sexual abuse

Grooming can be defined as the process that an abuser uses to desensitise you – to make you less likely to reject or report abusive behaviour.

Grooming can happen when there is a power differential within a relationship, which the abuser exploits for their own gratification.

This is most commonly recognised as a tactic used by perpetrators of child sexual abuse, both on children and parents. However, adults can also be groomed.

Child grooming

Age difference is one example of a power differential. Children are taught to respect older children and adults – many abusers take advantage of this.

If you were groomed as a child your feelings may be very mixed. The abuser may have taken an interest in you and shown you affection in a way that other adults did not, or perhaps allowed you to do things other adults did not.

Whether consciously or not, the abuser did this as a way of gaining your trust and make it less likely that you would risk losing the 'special relationship' by talking to others about the sexual abuse.

Adult grooming

While grooming is most associated with child sexual abuse, it is also possible for adults, especially adults at risk to be groomed – or prepared – for abuse.

As with children, this is more common in situations where there is a power differential – for example by someone older or physically stronger, or by a professional who has a measure of control over you, such as a doctor or a teacher.

Many gay men arrive in London having fled homophobia in other environments and throw themselves into the gay scene. You might have then been coerced or encouraged into doing things – for example you might have met someone who encouraged you into the chemsex scene, saying that it is the norm, that it's just what happens in the gay community, something like a rite of passage.

In expensive cities like London this could also take the form of people offering cheap or free accommodation in exchange for sex, leaving you feeling trapped in a situation whereby if you refuse sex you might then be made homeless.

Grooming can also happen in domestic and relationship settings where the abusive partner, over time, introduces abusive acts that you feel coerced into allowing. In these situations, consent is coerced and therefore is not consent.

The effects of grooming

One of the key results of grooming is that the survivor is left carrying the shame of the events, often represented in a sense of complicity – that you let it happen.

This self-blame once again makes the abuse difficult to talk about. Grooming makes it more difficult to identify when abuse is happening, and more difficult to identify and talk about in retrospect. The law is clear; when consent to sex is coerced, including emotionally coerced sex, it is not consent.

The legal bit:

male sexual abuse and the law

From a legal perspective, sexual abuse of men can be divided into two categories: abuse against children and abuse against adults.

Abuse against children

Abuse against children (up to the age of 16) is generally referred to as Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) and happens when an adult or older adolescent uses a child or younger adolescent for sexual stimulation.

CSA can take many forms including asking or pressuring a child to engage in sexual activities (regardless of the outcome), exposure of the genitals to a child, displaying pornography to a child, actual sexual contact with a child, physical contact with the child's genitals, viewing of the child's genitalia without physical contact, or using a child to produce pornography.

Abuse against adults

Abuse against adults falls into the following broad categories:

Rape

Under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, it is an offence for any male to penetrate with his penis the vagina, anus or mouth of a female or male without their consent. Male rape became recognised in law in 1994 but the 2003 legislation made victims of rape gender neutral.

Assault by penetration

This happens if any male or female penetrates the vagina or anus of another person without their consent. The offence is committed where the penetration is by a part of the body (for example, a finger) or anything else (for example, an object) for sexual intent.

Sexual assault

Where any male or female intentionally touches another person sexually without his or her consent.

What does 'consent' mean?

In simple terms, it's all about permission (or agreement). This is something that must be clearly established between two people before any kind of sexual act or behaviour and you can change your mind at any time.

It is important to be clear:

- If you are under 16, you are not able to give consent
- If you are under the influence of drugs or alcohol, you are not able to give consent
- If you are an adult at risk who, because of learning or mental health difficulties doesn't have mental capacity, you are not able to give consent
- If you are asleep, you are not able to give consent
- If you are physically or emotionally coerced or controlled or if you are blackmailed in any way, you are not able to give consent

So what can I do?

Mind management

If you are a survivor of sexual abuse or supporting someone who is, there are a number of ways which you can explore to help you cope. Below are just a few thoughts from the counsellors here at SurvivorsUK. The list is not exhaustive and it can help to make your own:

Speak to someone

You don't have to deal with this alone. Speak to someone you can trust. A friend, family member a professional or a helpline. Think who you might be able to speak to today.

Find your anchor

Having something you can consistently turn to when you are disturbed by unwanted memories can help bring you back to the present, but also support you to manage different emotions when they feel they are getting out of control. Most people think of "anchors" as something they can hold, but some of us find things that stimulate other senses more helpful.

For example, an essential oil or herbal teabag might work if you find different scents grounding. Tasting something sharp or comforting can be effective in cutting through difficult thoughts and feelings; listening to music or any other sound (it can be as random as the sound of a fan whirring to a bell ringing) can bring us back to a place of equilibrium. Having an image of somewhere we feel safe and people in our lives who we love when we feel close to meltdown can take us back to a feeling of security. And, if touch is your thing, experiment with different

textures – whilst a cool smooth pebble or jewellery works for some people, something soft like a piece of fabric or leather works for others.

Do something

If you feel yourself sliding into a state of anxiety, fear or even anger that feels overwhelming – or know that something that might provoke such a feeling is around the corner – having an activity that will take you away from those feelings can be an effective way of managing. Anything that you find mentally absorbing will not only act as a distraction, but also help you to relax as your mind turns away from whatever is causing you distress.

Again, different things work for other people – sudoku and crosswords suit some, following a recipe and cooking something new does the trick for others. Finding something physical to do can keep our minds busy and our bodies active, whether it's trying out a climbing wall or getting stuck into some DIY. Doing something creative like painting or playing a musical instrument might also help – but remember, the aim is to make you feel better, so no pressure if your doodle isn't worthy of a spot in the National Gallery!

“ You don't have to deal with this alone. Speak to someone you can trust. ”

Stay in the present

It's hard to escape from talk of mindfulness these days, but being able to be present in the moment can help us manage a whole range of unwanted thoughts and feelings. If we are re-living a past trauma, finding something that reassures us that what we are experiencing happened in the past can be incredibly reassuring – and sometimes stop the flashback in its tracks. Look at the date on your phone, pick up the newspaper, turn on the telly – anything that confirms where you are and when you are can be effective.

If your feeling of anxiety isn't being caused by a memory, taking a moment to really take in your environment can, like the activities described above, take your mind away from what is bothering you. Choose something in sight and take in every single detail – the texture of a tree's bark, the patterns in the brickwork of a building, the different flecks of colour in your dog's coat.

Choose a mantra

For some people, having a phrase that they can repeat to themselves – in their head, on paper or out loud – not only calms them when they are feeling overwhelmed, but also give them something positive to focus on. A good mantra can act as a reminder of the journey that we are on and the difficulties we have overcome. There is plenty of inspiration on Instagram and Facebook, but a couple of good ones includes "peace begins within me" and "everything will pass". Can't find one that fits? Make up your own – the more it means to you, the better.

Remember:

It was not your fault

You are not alone

You don't have to stay silent, you can speak to someone in confidence



Support

If you have been affected by male sexual abuse, whether you or a friend or loved one are a survivor, and wish to speak to someone then you can contact SurvivorsUK via their online helpline at [survivorsuk.org](https://www.survivorsuk.org).



The London Survivors Gateway offers victims and survivors of rape and sexual abuse help to access specialist services in London.

We provide information on what support is available after rape, sexual assault, sexual abuse or any form of sexual violence and can help survivors to access these services. We work with anyone aged 13 or above regardless of gender, sexuality, disability, language, ethnicity or immigration status.

The Gateway is a partnership between the four London Rape Crisis Centres, Galop, SurvivorsUK and the Havens and is run by the Women and Girls Network.

www.survivorsgateway.london
0808 801 0860

