



MALE
SURVIVORS

For adult survivors of child sexual abuse

Male survivors

As an adult male survivor of child sexual abuse (CSA), you may be experiencing a wide range of effects, which have a significant impact on your life. The degree to which a survivor's mental health is impacted can vary significantly, as sexual abuse is an acute form of trauma that affects people in different ways, at different times, and can be influenced by different triggers. No experience of child sexual abuse is the same. It can be both physical and emotional and, regardless of when it happened, the trauma and suffering is real. Child abuse is always wrong and can affect people for the rest of their lives. How you are feeling is valid and the purpose of this workbook is to empower you through knowledge to take control.

This workbook contains lots of information, so please take it at your own pace. If you would prefer to view this information online, or view interactive information, visit My Support Space (mysupportspace.org.uk). If you need to speak to someone for support, you can call our free confidential service, Supportline, any time on **08 08 16 89 111**.

As a male survivor of child sexual abuse, you may share many of the same feelings experienced by other victims of abuse, such as shame, guilt, anxiety, depression, flashbacks, and eating disorders. Yet men face some additional challenges due to social attitudes and stereotypes about men and masculinity that exist not only in our society but also in your own cultural group memberships. Therefore, it is important that we recognise the harm abuse specifically causes to male victims, and the secondary harm men endure due to social stigma, and in doing so validate your feelings and experiences as survivors.



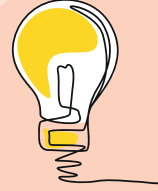
THINKING TIME

What do you think are the greatest challenges for boys and men to come forward and disclose details of abuse? Are they the same? If not, why not?



IDEAS TIME

Before we explore them, try to write down a list of all the social attitudes and stereotypes that you can think of.





Myths versus facts

There are many inaccurate myths relating to social attitudes and stereotyping that surround CSA experienced by men, all of which are extremely harmful. By recognising these myths and replacing them with facts, we can begin to change people's attitudes towards male victims and provide a greater opportunity for disclosure.

MYTH

Sexual abuse is more harmful to girls than boys. There is now a wealth of information disproving this myth showing that the long-term effects of CSA are the same for both males and females.

FACT

Male CSA is more often penetrative and more likely to involve physiological harm (CDC, 2020).

MYTH

Males can't be 'victims' of abuse and, if they are, they are not 'real men'. From the day that they are born, males are instilled with toxic ideas of what it is to be male and masculine; that men are not vulnerable, that they need to be physically and emotionally strong, and capable of protecting themselves. Boys are not men; they are children who are vulnerable to being coerced and abused by any adult in a position of power.

FACT

Research indicates that one in six boys experience some form of sexual abuse before they are 18 (MSP, 2020), a number which is lower than the actual figure as it does not include non-contact offences (Hopper, 2020).



FACT

Research conducted as part of the National Crime Survey 2015/2016, adult male survivors of CSA were almost three times as likely as adult female survivors to report being abused by 'a person in a position of trust or authority'.

FACT

While CSA, as a whole, is more commonly experienced by girls than boys, when it comes to institutional CSA, the majority of survivors are male (McNeish & Scott, 2018).

THINKING TIME

Think about how society defines masculinity. How do you think these ideas are harmful to young boys? How are they harmful to men?



More facts...

There are many more facts relating to CSA experienced by males:

- Most sexual abuse of boys is not perpetrated by homosexual males.
- A boy or adult male can experience an erection, sexual arousal, and even orgasm from abusive contact without being a willing participant or enjoying it.
- Boys can be significantly traumatised by sexual abuse and go on to suffer from PTSD, Dissociative Identity Disorder, flashbacks and other side effects in the same way as female survivors.
- Sexual abuse does not determine sexual identity/orientation.
- Male survivors are **not** more likely to become sexual abusers.
- Male survivors of child sexual abuse delay disclosure for, on average, 20 years.
- Boys and men may be and are victims of sexual exploitation/trafficking.

Remember if you are struggling with any of the content in these workbooks, please reach out for help.

Why do I feel so much shame?

Many men who have experienced sexual abuse struggle with shame. Shame relates to who you think you are. It involves feeling unworthy of respect from others, feeling like you deserve to be judged, criticised, and feeling embarrassed. The shame is caused by the subordination, power and control that CSA entails and can cause a person to experience:

Poor mental health



Relationship struggles



Anger



Humiliation



Low self-esteem



Physical pain

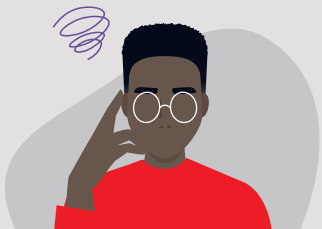


Blame



THINKING TIME

How many of the impacts of shame listed on page 5 do you feel that you identify with? Do you feel like you need additional support?



Everyone experiences mild levels of shame in their day-to-day lives, which acts as a boundary checker, preventing us from going against social norms and generating feelings of self-consciousness and embarrassment. It is not to be mistaken with guilt, which is the negative response to making a mistake relating to behaviour. Shame is a negative judgement against the self (Lewis, 1971).

Society often tells us how they think men and boys should act, how you should react to things and how you are expected to feel. We are often told:

- What society considers to be the image of a 'real man' and this can be very damaging.
- Men need to be resilient and self-sufficient.

Feelings of shame can be hard to live with. For men who have experienced sexual abuse, there can be extreme feelings about ways they have responded to sexual experiences and the people involved in the abuse. It's common to feel shame about:

- Not saying "no" or physically resisting.
- Having physiological responses to the abuse, which they find confusing.
- Feeling you let another person take advantage of sexual ignorance and curiosity.
- Becoming sexually aroused or experiencing sexual pleasure when you didn't want or like what was happening.
- Not protecting a brother, sister, friend, or other child from someone doing the same things to them.

THINKING TIME

Take a minute to think about your own feelings. How many of the ones discussed have you felt?



The shame you feel is a normal human reaction and you certainly shouldn't feel you are wrong for having these feelings, but they are not based on an accurate or objective view of what happened. It does not reflect the fact that there was nothing you could have done as a vulnerable child to prevent what happened or to respond differently.

Much of the shame you may feel is extreme and harmful. It can contribute to low self-confidence, low self-respect, depression and constantly feeling judged by others, all of which can cause serious difficulties in the long term. Overcoming feelings of shame can start with a journey of compassion and validation. Your experiences and feelings need to be validated; you can do this by:

1. Letting yourself know that you are not wrong for having these feelings. They are your feelings.
2. By speaking to someone, a therapist/support worker, or a close friend, who can compassionately support you and your feelings.

By validating your feelings, you gain power over them and the ability to control how they affect you. A key to achieving this is through self-compassion, which needs to be practiced daily.

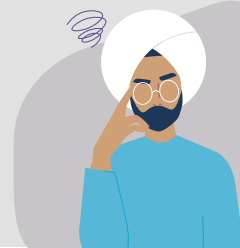
IDEAS TIME

Write these down in a journal and add to the list as often as you can to give yourself an appreciation boost.



THINKING TIME

Take a deep breath and ask yourself this question: 'what are three things I can appreciate about myself?'



Self-compassion

Low self-esteem can lead to difficulties in trusting your own judgment, feeling your views are not important or being unable to express them, having feelings of guilt and overwhelming shame, and can involve staying in a relationship that is not good for you. To tackle these feelings and behaviours, it is important that you not only remind yourself every day how amazing you are, but also do the following:

1. **Stop your inner critic** – when your inner critic starts talking, telling you negative things, say STOP or NO. Refocus on the positives and remember your daily goals.
2. **Use healthier motivation habits** – the inner critic can motivate you but, at the same time, can drag your self-esteem down. Choose a healthier alternative. Remind yourself of the change you want to make and the goals you want to achieve. (Write these down and stick them onto your wall, so you can see them every day.)
3. **Take a two-minute self-appreciation break** – if you spend just two minutes on this every day, it can make a huge difference. Take a deep breath and ask yourself this question: "what are three things I can appreciate about myself?"
4. **Self-appreciation journaling** – in the evening, ask yourself the same question again, but this time write the answers down in a journal. In a few weeks, you can read through all the answers to get a good self-esteem boost and change your perspective on days when you may need it the most.
5. **Look after yourself** – by doing so, you raise and strengthen your self-esteem. Eat breakfast, go for a brisk walk, shower, chat to friends. Make sure you start your day off in a positive way, setting the tone for the rest of the day.





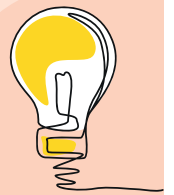
- 6) **Try something new** – when you try new things and challenge yourself, your opinion of yourself goes up. Think about how you feel when you achieve something or finish something. You may not have done what you intended to do, but at least you tried, and that in itself is an amazing achievement.
- 7) **Spend time with positive and supportive people** – limit how much you time you spend on social media and avoid reading information that will affect your perspective on life in a negative way. Use your free time to be with uplifting people and read sources that will lift you up, not bring you down.
- 8) **Remember** – remember the most important reason why you are doing this is to stay motivated to make your self-esteem an essential priority. You will remind yourself that it will help you to live a simpler, lighter, happier, and more stable life, to self-sabotage less and to practise self-compassion.

Building your resilience

Resilience is the capacity to recover from difficulties and tough situations, to manage crisis and upset. Knowing how to build your resilience can ultimately allow you to feel more in control and less vulnerable to your own thoughts and feelings.

IDEAS TIME

Think about how long it takes you to get back to feeling like yourself. Do you bounce back easily or do you struggle?



Top tips for building resilience

1. **Journal** – journaling helps you to process all you may be feeling and going through, putting this onto paper. This will help you feel less weighted down and will help you to move on quickly with your day.
2. **Build a support system** – support can be online or in person. This could also be a counsellor or a support worker.
3. **Take care of your basic needs** – these include being tired, hungry and your health. If you are hungry, you need to eat. If you are tired, you need to sleep.
4. **Notice yourself talk** – check your confidence and feelings; notice if you are being kind and compassionate or if you're being angry and aggressive. You could use your journal to write down what you like about yourself and what you don't in relation to that day to help you process your feelings.

5. Live with purpose – a big one – this is a lot simpler than you think. This can be raising awareness of a cause, getting involved with sports, joining a book club, going walking, etc. You could research anything you have an interest in or start a short course.

6. Become friends with your feelings – feelings can be easy to ignore and can build up until they finally explode. Track them often and try to do a feelings chart. Try to notice three to five feelings you are feeling each day – identify them using your journal to describe why you feel the way you feel (back to step 1).

7. Manage impulses – get to know your impulses. These could be urges to shop online, use alcohol or sabotage a relationship. Once you know what they are, you can use an impulse log – what do you want to do, what happened, what is it that you want to feel or do and what can you do instead.

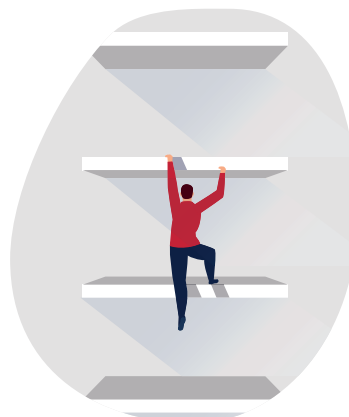
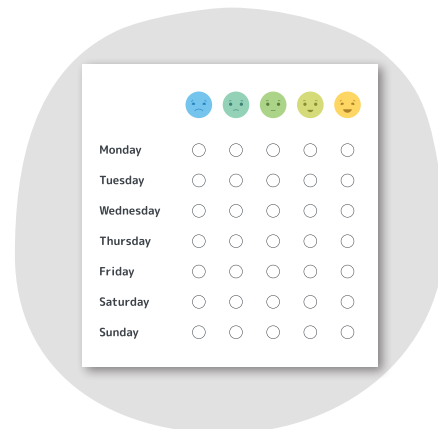
8. Learn to problem solve – overcoming obstacles can be difficult. Write out what the problem is, what you feel, what's the worst thing that can happen, what you want to happen and what's the best thing that could happen. Read over the steps - what can you control and what can you not? Let go of what you can't control.

9. Develop a list of healthy coping skills – these are things you can do instead of using unhealthy coping skills. Make time to do these, check them regularly to make sure they work and change them if they don't; it will help you build more and more resilience each day.


10. Be kind to yourself!

11. Speak or write a letter to your inner child – the child that experienced the abuse is stuck in that place of trauma. By talking or writing to your inner child with your adult voice, you can help the child to heal.

12. Contact Victim Support – call **08 08 16 89 111** to speak to one of our trained professionals. You are not alone.







We are an independent charity offering free, confidential support to people affected by crime and traumatic incidents.

For information and support, contact us by:

- calling: Supportline **08 08 16 89 111**
- using Next Generation Text (add **18001** before any of our phone numbers)
- Online: **victimsupport.org.uk**
- Live chat: **victimsupport.org.uk/live-chat**

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