

## Impact of Abuse

The impact of sexual abuse reaches all levels of a child's emotions. These emotions and the effects are listed below:

### Confusion:

This is usually the initial reaction of the child. They will usually question, "What is going on?" and "Is this right or wrong?". For a young child these types of questions can be an immense burden on their psychological development. Once the abuse begins the victim experiences a tremendous conflict with their emotions. They feel pleasure due to the attention they are receiving from the parent, as well as the sensual pleasure. On the other hand they experience pain, guilt, and anger for what is being done.

The question, "Is this right or wrong?" poses the greatest conflict within the child's mind. The abuse feels so wrong yet the abuser insists it is okay, taking advantage of the child's mistrust and naivety. Below are the thoughts of an abused victim as she thinks back to her abuse and questions her father. It is an example of this mistrust as well as the confusion which goes through a child's mind.

"Since I was a little ten-year-old child, I had to deceive and hide from the world and my mother that my father took a sexual interest in me. Remember how you taught me that art of deceit? First you put me in a situation that had to be kept a secret then you pledged me to secrecy...As a ten-year-old child, what was I supposed to do? You are an intelligent man-you figure out the options available to a

ten-year-old in that position." (Rush, 1980)

Guilt:

The abused will feel tremendous guilt for a numerous reasons: - They feel they did nothing to stop the abuse therefore they are responsible and it should continue.

- They felt uncomfortable but the abuse was sometimes pleasureable.

- They somehow deserved and/or caused the abuse. A victim will usually feel this way when their self-esteem has diminished and they have no more answers for what is happening.

"A nine-year-old girl had a nightmare and went to her father's room for comfort but instead he sexually abused her. The girl then concluded that she caused the abuse by going to his room. The abuse thereafter continued and she now felt she deserved for it to continue." (Landau, 1990)

This fictional example helps to further illustrate the final 2 points which were presented above. The guilt hits the child so hard that they are unable to clearly see reality.

Another major source of guilt comes from the mother. Often when the mother is told about the abuse she will not want to believe the accusations and will blame the child. Other reasons for why the mother may pass guilt: 1) she may feel inequipped to challenge the husband's domination in any area of life therefore she passes the husband's faults and looks at the child. 2) The mother doesn't want to lose her husband. She does not want

to give up the security provided by her husband and will block out the abuse.