

Effects of Child Abuse and Neglect

All types of child abuse and neglect leave lasting scars. Some of these scars might be physical, but emotional scarring has long lasting effects throughout life, damaging a child's sense of self, ability to have healthy relationships, and ability to function at home, at work and at school. Some effects include:

- **Lack of trust and relationship difficulties.** If you can't trust your parents, who can you trust? Abuse by a primary caregiver damages the most fundamental relationship as a child—that you will safely, reliably get your physical and emotional needs met by the person who is responsible for your care. Without this base, it is very difficult to learn to trust people or know who is trustworthy. This can lead to difficulty maintaining relationships due to fear of being controlled or abused. It can also lead to unhealthy relationships because the child did not have an adult model of what a good safe relationship is.
- **Core feelings of being “worthless” or “damaged.”** If you've been told over and over again as a child that you are stupid or no good, it is very difficult to overcome these core feelings. You may experience them as reality. When the child grows up, they may not strive for more education, or settle for a job that may not pay enough, because they don't believe they can do it or are worth more. Sexual abuse survivors, with the stigma and shame surrounding the abuse, often especially struggle with a feeling of being damaged.
- **Trouble regulating emotions.** Abused children cannot express emotions safely. As a result, the emotions get stuffed down, coming out in unexpected ways such as anger or rage. Adult survivors of child abuse can struggle with unexplained anxiety, depression, or anger. They may turn to alcohol/drugs to numb painful feelings.

