

Childhood Abuse and Trauma

Parents love their children and want to raise them to be healthy functioning people. Most parents do not set out to abuse their children and are shocked when they are accused of abuse. Child abuse can occur in any family regardless of education, race, culture, income level or neighborhood. An allegation of abuse does not mean that the parent is a monster or that they do not love their child. Many parents who abuse their children believe that they are doing it for the child's own good. Usually these parents were beaten and abused by their parents as a form of corporal punishment in their childhood so they in turn do the same to their own children. This is called the cycle of abuse. This cycle can be broken with help from counselors and through attending parenting classes to learn better ways to cope and improve on parenting skills.

All abuse is traumatizing to children and anyone who has been abused as a child has been traumatized. The word "trauma" is used to describe hurtful experiences or situations that are emotionally painful and distressing, and that overwhelm a person's ability to cope, leaving them feeling powerless and outside the realm of normal human experience. If you have a history of child abuse you most likely have unresolved feelings, anger and pain which can interfere with your ability to parent your child.

Having your own children can remind you of strong childhood memories and feelings that are too painful for you to think about. These are often called "triggers". Your children can bring back these memories and painful feelings. You may not even be aware that you are being triggered by past childhood experiences. You may find that your trigger causes you to be **overwhelmed by anger** and causes you to lash out at your child without understanding why. Or you may find yourself avoiding a parental duty to avoid re-living the upsetting feelings. There is hope. You can break the cycle and begin to deal with your own trauma through counseling and learning ways to cope with your feelings. Healing is possible.

Remember, you are the most important person in your child's world. It's worth the effort to make a change, and you don't have to go it alone. Help and support are available through local counseling services and family support programs. If you think you may have unresolved childhood trauma that could hurt your children you can speak to a professional staff at the Family Help Center who will listen to your needs and help you with finding the right supports in your life. Call the Family Helpline at 716- 892-2172 anytime 24 hours a day, any day of the year. ■