

CHAPTER THREE

ADOLESCENCE SEXUALITY, SPIRITUALITY, SELF-ESTEEM

Surviving Childhood Abuse or Trauma

All children experience some type of abuse or trauma, by other people or by circumstance. Many of these experiences cannot be avoided, and are a part of living in a world where situations cannot always be prevented or expected.

Many adults, who endured any type of childhood trauma, can recall special circumstances that ultimately challenged them during puberty and adolescence. For the boys who survived intentional childhood abuse, trauma or neglect, adolescence gave them the opportunity and power to face their abuser and to stop the insane behavior. They were strong enough and could use physical force, if necessary, to fend off their abusers. The girls, however, often experienced increased abuse, especially if their abuse was sexual in nature. The girls lacked the physical strength that their male counterparts possessed, and many remained victims of their abuse. Both boys and girls, however, found that these situations were often unbearable, overwhelming, and degrading, and they were left lacking in self-worth and feeling hopeless.

Abusive situations in childhood leave the victim with a lifelong struggle to reconnect with their spiritual nature. Abuse often disrupts the connection between the abused and his sanctity and purity. Many have wondered why the abuse was allowed to continue. "Where was God when I needed Him"? "Why wasn't He there for me"? "Am I so bad that He couldn't love me"? are just a few of the thoughts that flood the mind of the abused person. One begins to believe that he is really bad; that he is at fault, and that God doesn't love him because he is not lovable. He begins to move away from a concept of a good and protective God or Deity, to a distorted belief that he is innately bad and undeserving, not worthy of anyone's love and protection.

Others, especially those who are abused by their fathers, find no trust in a God or Deity as a father, as their image of a father is badly damaged. They fear that if their earthly father abuses them, God's treatment of them will certainly be worse. They cannot put their life in a positive or normal perspective, and they begin to develop a concept of self that fits their negative experiences. Delinquent acting out or passive isolation becomes the norm for them, and they begin to develop certain personality traits, that take the form of a false-proclaimed self, in an effort to fit into society somehow. These adolescents are rarely a part of the in-group, and will seek out a more rebellious group of friends as a way of feeling accepted. Both boys and girls may begin sexual acting out, some quite promiscuous, both for acceptance and attention. Little attention is paid to protected or safe sex, either for the prevention of pregnancy, or from sexually transmitted diseases.

Although not a basis for all same-sex relationships or attractions, some adolescents, both girls and boys, may experience homosexual episodes. These experiences may

bring with them feelings of guilt and shame. As a result, the adolescent may find himself repeating the experience, not out of desire but out of fear. He thinks that if he can learn not to like the experience, then he is certainly not homosexual. An obsessive/compulsive component can develop from the anxiety, and the person can develop an overwhelming fear of both homosexual and heterosexual experiences. The fear overcomes the normal sexual desires and an addictive quality to sexual experiences and self-worth may be developed.

Adolescents need correct and healthy information regarding sex, physical changes that occur, and the appropriate responses to make when face with sexual decisions. When an adolescent relies on the misguided information he receives from his peers, he cannot make appropriate choices. He may be left with a belief system that challenges, rather than supports healthy sexuality. This can produce a number of sever problems that lead to dependent behavior in adulthood. Depending upon the type of abuse experiences, the adolescent may continue to subconsciously desire abnormal abuse experiences, such as the desire to be sexual with a parent or sibling. Although these experiences may be subconscious in nature, they bring up a conscious feeling of guilt that destroys the possibility of a healthy sexual relationship with an appropriate partner.

Please answer the questions below. The information will help you understand why you may be having problems in your current relationships.

DIRECTIONS:

After reading the question, write down what comes to your mind immediately. Do this with all of the questions. After completing the entire exercise, re-read the questions and your answers and “think” about them. Additional memories will probably emerge. Write them down also.

What have been your experiences as outlined in the proceeding paragraphs?

Distortion may come when a person is emotionally too young to understand a sexual experience. The motivating factor for an adolescent sexual experience may be peer pressure or the desire to please another. Not being emotionally capable of making an informed decision about sex can eventually lead to feelings of anger, resentment, disappointment and guilt. This tends to prevent normal sexual and emotional growth. Guilt prevents the person from talking about the feelings, and can result in an obsessive need to repeat the behavior over and over again.

List your experiences as outlined in the preceding paragraph.

Sometimes girls are taught that men are not interested them, but only in having sex with them; sometimes boys are taught that they must be macho, experienced and great lovers. These beliefs are destructive and damaging to a healthy attitude toward fulfilling sexual experiences. Have you been affected by either of these attitudes; where did you learn them; can you see a family pattern expressed in your attitude toward sex?

Were you a troublemaker or rebel; if so, in what way; did you do destructive things; get arrested; spent time in jail property; did you abuse drugs and alcohol?

Did you resent authority figures or leaders; what would you do to show your resentment?

Did you resent not being the most handsome; beautiful or popular person at school; how did that bother you?

Did you feel you were a coward because you didn't want to physically fight; did you like to fight; were you a bully?

Did you feel embarrassed because boys/girls made fun of you; or girls/boys avoided you?

Were you exposed to other children in gym class or in rest rooms? Were older children mean to you; did they tease you because you weren't as developed physically; some people don't develop physically until late adolescence, were you like that?

Some people feel inadequate as adults because of experiences that they had in childhood. Although the experiences may not be conscious memories, they still affect a person's belief about himself. If you feel uptight or sensitive in any areas of your life, write about them; include your feelings.

Did you resent not being a part of the in crowd; not being a leader; were you shy/outgoing; have you changed your approach to people; does any particular type of person make you feel shy/outgoing; which type of person do you get along with better?

If you did not complete school, explain your reasons why; what were your feelings then/now; how has that affected your life; do you regret it?

Did anything happen to you during your high school years that were a continuing source of shame; confusion; guilt?

Did your parents compare you to other family members or to friends; did you resent them for that; did they wish you to be someone other than who you were; did you respond to their wishes?

How did you get the attention of your family; did you pout; sulk; get angry; throw temper tantrums; act funny; stupid; become the good kid?

Do you remember lies you told; about what; why did you lie; did you get caught; what happened; how did you feel?

What was the most embarrassing incident of your adolescence; how did you respond to it; did your family know about it; how did it affect your life?

Were there any other incidents that you remember that affected you; how did you handle with them; who did you confide in; do they still bother you?

If sexual feelings were discounted or disregarded in your family, there is a strong possibility that you will feel guilty about your own sexuality. As children, we automatically assume the attitudes and beliefs of our parents and grandparents, whether they are spoken or not. These unexpressed attitudes can cause dysfunctional behavior in both children and adults. Children may respond by acting out these attitudes by becoming overly sexually inquisitive or by engaging in sex play. Adolescence may respond by becoming sexually active and promiscuous at an early age, and adults may respond by engaging in multiple sexual relationships, with little commitment or satisfaction, experiencing performance anxiety, developing frigidity, or becoming non-sexual. In many cases, men and women develop a dislike their own body, distrust their feelings, or engage in unnatural or uncomfortable sexual behavior.

Do you think that you developed any of these attitudes? Do you see yourself engaging in any of these behaviors currently; in the past; if so, what did you do about them?

What were your thoughts and feelings about your first sexual encounter; did you have sexual intercourse; did you feel guilty; were you disappointed; was it what you expected; better; worse; who did you tell; how did it affect your life?

Did you have any homosexual experiences; what did you do; who was it with; did you enjoy it; who did you tell; did you feel guilty; ashamed; did you have any other feelings; did the experience(s) change your life?

Have you had masturbation fantasies; who/what were they about; do you still have them; do they interfere with your normal sexual activities; are there any other sexual activities that you remember; how did they make you feel; do you still feel that way; did they change your life?

Did you become pregnant before you were married; get someone pregnant; what did you do; who did you tell; how do you feel about your actions now; how did it change your life; would you do the same thing now?

Were you ashamed of your parents; were they too old; too drunk; too sloppy; too fat; too poor; glad you had the parents you had?

Did you wear the kinds of clothes that other kids wore; were you fashionable; funky; embarrassed about your clothes; didn't care?
