

## **MODULE 3**

**What is abuse (sexual)?/Female Sexuality**

## Session III

## What is Abuse?

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### Meeting A

Sexual abuse

### Materials

Flip chart or chalkboard  
Copy of Maya Angelou's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings"  
Our Bodies Ourselves  
MH p. 109

Goal – members will be able to verbalize how sexual abuse has impacted their lives with regard to self-defeating thoughts and behaviors

Goal – members will begin to develop an awareness of their right to a healthy self-concept

### Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the tactics perpetrators use (violence, intimidation, coercion, force, etc.)?
2. After sexual abuse had occurred. What are some of the emotional aftereffects?

Review feelings (shame, guilt, fear, depression, etc.) and behaviors (strained interpersonal relationships, difficulties with commitment, trust, etc.).

### Activity

A reading from Maya Angelou's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings"

### Meeting B

Sexuality

### Materials

Pamphlet, "10 Ways to Make Love without Doing It"  
MH p. 69, 70  
Masters and Johnson charts pp. 1-4

Provide group peers with education and information regarding addresses and phone numbers to talk with local health-care provider.

Leader will reinforce healthy decisions members can make regarding sex (the right to say "no", avoiding STDs, preventing unwanted pregnancy, the importance of pride and self-respect, values, etc.).

## **TOPIC 9 Female Sexuality**

### **SESSION RATIONALE**

The session promotes bonding as women share their uniquely female experiences. Because their first sexual experiences were under someone else's control, many trauma survivors are unaware that they can control their own sexual pleasure. Trauma survivors often see sex as taboo and their own sexual responses as bad. The session allows women to discuss sexuality in an open, nonshaming format. The group allows a woman to see her own responses as normal and to begin the long process of accepting her body and its sensuality.

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**GOAL:** Each member will develop an understanding of female sexuality.

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### **QUESTIONS**

1. At what age do you remember first feeling aroused? What do you remember specifically?
2. How do you feel about touching your body to give yourself sexual pleasure?
3. When did you begin to think of yourself as a sexual being?
4. Do you still think of yourself as a sexual being? If not, when did you stop and why?
5. What factors increase (decrease) your sexual desire? Does a history of abuse affect it?

### **EXERCISE**

Leaders will ask group members to join them in a body wake-up exercise. The exercise can be explained as something positive that women can do every morning to wake up their bodies to a new day. Members will discuss their reactions after completing the exercise.

## LEADERS' NOTES

### QUESTION 1

At what age do you remember first feeling aroused? What do you remember specifically?

**TYPICAL RESPONSES** When I first touched myself and felt something  
When I slid down the banister  
When my stepfather touched my vagina  
When I played doctor with my friends  
When my friends and I rubbed up against each other  
When we all piled on top of each other and it felt good  
I used to fall asleep with a towel between my legs

For many women, this may be the first time they have shared early memories of arousal. They may be somewhat tentative or embarrassed as they tell their stories. Women who have experienced trauma often feel doubly ashamed of any sexual feelings at all.

### QUESTION 2

How do you feel about touching your body to give yourself sexual pleasure?

**TYPICAL RESPONSES** I feel embarrassed thinking about it.  
I can't imagine doing that to myself.  
I feel comfortable about it and enjoy how it feels.  
Guilty.  
I'm so closed off about sex with anyone else that I can't think about doing something like that to myself.  
I was told it was a sin.  
It's something I can control and pace.  
When I know how to touch myself, I can tell my partner what I like.  
I feel dirty afterwards.  
I like to do what I'm told not to do.

Often sexual abuse leaves women believing that touching and arousal in general are forbidden and disgusting. Self-stimulation rather than being a potential source of comfort or pleasure is viewed as a betrayal of the self and a collaboration with the enemy. If they are to have the option of enjoying sexual pleasure, women must see the distinction between stimulation that they control and touching that is forced on them.

### QUESTION 3

When did you begin to think of yourself as a sexual being?

#### TYPICAL RESPONSES

When I started menstruating.

When someone flirted with me.

All the men wanted me so I figured I must be sexy.

I still don't think I'm sexy.

When I got a bra.

When I was a girl, I used to flirt and wiggle a lot.

When I got my period, I became sexual.

After the abuse, I knew I could use my body to get things.

When I started dating, I felt sexy.

When I finally had sex with someone who was caring and kind.

Some women may link becoming sexual with having been abused. You will want to make a distinction between being used sexually and being sexually mature or responsive. You may want to help members define what they mean by being sexual. Members also may distinguish between the act of having sex and feeling sexy or aroused. Accurate labeling helps women to make distinctions about just how they are feeling.

### QUESTION 4

Do you still think of yourself as a sexual being? If not, when did you stop and why?

- TYPICAL RESPONSES**
- No, I'm not interested anymore.
  - I'm too old, I'm 46.
  - I have never felt sexy.
  - I have outgrown my interest.
  - When I had children, I stopped wanting sex.
  - After my hysterectomy my desire went away.
  - I always feel sexy even when I'm not able to have sex.
  - I dress myself up to feel sexy.
  - I feel more asexual than really sexual.

Allow women who still feel sexual to express their feelings. For those who no longer feel sexual, ask what it would take for sexual feelings to return. This is also the opportunity to correct some of the inaccurate stereotypes about female sexuality and aging.

### QUESTION 5

What factors increase (decrease) your sexual desire? Does a history of abuse affect it?

#### TYPICAL RESPONSES

##### Decrease

- Not having any place to do it
- No privacy
- A bad experience
- No partner
- Medications (antidepressants, blood pressure medications, steroids, thyroid medications)
- Drugs
- Stress
- Being too busy and exhausted
- An abusive partner

##### Increase

- An exciting partner
- Setting the mood
- Liking how I look
- Drugs and alcohol
- Feeling safe
- Feeling loved and cared about

It is useful to distinguish among those factors that pertain to the individual, the partner, and the context. You also need to be explicit about linking past abuse to changes in sexual desire because the connection may not be obvious.

### ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

1. Can you distinguish between sex and sexuality?
2. If you were alone on a desert island, what do you think your sexuality would be like?
3. How do sex, sensuality, and eroticism differ? (This may work better for groups of women who enjoy philosophical or intellectual discussions.)

### EXERCISE 1

Ask group members to join together in a body wake-up exercise. Group members can remain sitting in their chairs. The group starts by rubbing their hands together to create warmth and then placing their warm hands over their eyes. The exercise continues by rubbing the hands together again and then placing the warm hands on both temples; then rubbing again, placing their hands on both sides of the neck, rubbing hands again and then placing hands on their shoulders.

Next, ask members to brush away the stress in their left arm by using their right hand starting at the shoulder and brushing down the arm, thinking about brushing out all the stress in the arm. Repeat this exercise for the right arm. Repeat the same process for both legs by starting at the hip and brushing the stress out and down the legs.

Now start again with arms and knead from shoulder to hand. Begin with the left arm and then right arm. Repeat the same for the legs by kneading each thigh with both hands as if you were kneading bread. Repeat the same for the calf muscles in the lower legs. When you have completed the calf muscles, then place your hands on your toes and run your hands up the front of your legs, the abdomen, chest, neck, and head and then extend both arms to the sky. Sweep arms down to the toes again and repeat the massage up the body for a second time.

Now ask group members how their bodies feel. Do they feel more awake and energized? Suggest doing this simple exercise when women feel tired and need to be awake.

### GAIL'S STORY

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I was married to Tom for 11 years and I bet we had sex less than 15 times. If Tom had pressured me for sex, the marriage would never have lasted that long. When we did have sex, it was because I felt like I should give him some since he so rarely asked, but I never enjoyed it. Don't get me wrong, I loved Tom. He was a sweet, caring guy who was fairly attractive. But there was nothing about the sex I enjoyed, not the kissing nor the touching nor the penetration. Now I was not laying there crying, I just didn't feel anything. I would be thinking to myself "when will this be over?" Since we've been divorced, I've had sex with three other men. It has been the same with them, too.

## **MODULE 3**

**What is abuse (sexual)?/Male Sexuality**

## **Male Session A**

### **Characteristics Often Seen Among Men Sexually Abused as Children**

#### **Objective**

To better understand the effects of childhood sexual abuse often seen among adult survivors

#### **Presentation Outline**

Males often do not believe that there are many (any) others who have experienced what they have in their abuse. This is especially true if they were abused by women.

Men often feel very alone in dealing with their sexual abuse with great shame and guilt responses. The inability to "tell" often leads to ineffective reactions in the attempt to control their own pain, as well as to control their environment.

It is very important to understand that each person has individual reactions to abuse. Although there may be tendencies or trends based upon type or intensity of the abuse, gender, age of onset, perpetrator variables, etc., keep in mind that the reactions of individuals may vary greatly.

Elicit additional ideas from group members on ways survivors may respond to a history of childhood sexual abuse.

#### **Recommendations for Group Leaders**

As women feel alone and isolated in their abuse, men may feel even more so. Be prepared to deal with the sense of isolation, inability to confide about their abuse, and the belief that, because this just doesn't happen to boys, they are somehow different from others, in a most negative way.

Just because we as therapists may believe a person is likely to (should) feel, think, or act in a certain way about their experience, check first to see how your client has reacted to the abuse. It is often instructive for survivors to look at other ways of viewing one's experience. Seeing that there are options is often a surprise and can be enlightening and empowering to the survivor.

Remember that this is an educational group and care must be taken to not get into a therapeutic stance in the session.

This session content may be used in addition to or in conjunction with the session entitled "Effects of Abuse on the Individual" from *Understanding and Dealing with Sexual Abuse Trauma: An Educational Group for Women*.

#### **Thought for the Day**

Understanding the results of childhood sexual abuse on your life as a man is a first step in healing

#### **Materials**

Handout: Characteristics Often Seen Among Men Sexually Abused as Children

## **Handout for Male Session A**

### **Characteristics Often Seen Among Men Sexually Abused as Children**

Aggressive behaviors (externalizing rather than internalizing)

Controlling behaviors

Highly sexualized language and behaviors

Confusion over sexual identify

Inappropriate attempts to assert masculinity

A vulnerability toward compulsive behaviors

Homophobic concerns

A greater difficulty than women dealing with shame

A greater reluctance than women to seek treatment/help

Strong tendency to minimize abuse experiences

Greater tendency to dwell on revenge against the perpetrator and in a more violent way

Experience sexual dysfunction

A feeling he let down not only himself, but his gender by not preventing the abuse from occurring

Intense feelings of being different from others

Sense that he is the only one this has happened to

Suicide ideation and attempts

Impaired ability to trust or to feel close

Nightmares

Flashbacks

Sleeping disorders

An action or cognitive approach rather than affectively dealing with abuse issues

## **Male Session B**

### **Common Myths About Males Sexually Abused as Children**

#### **Objective**

To identify and explore myths of males who have experienced sexual abuse as children

#### **Presentation Outline**

What we believe about a situation is usually more important than the reality in determining our physical and emotional reactions. Therefore, we tend to react in a manner that is consistent with our beliefs and thoughts about an event, rather than what actually occurred.

For this reason it is important to develop an understanding of the myths or false beliefs commonly held about sexual abuse; the sexual abuse of males; and the sexual abuse of males by women.

#### **Recommendations for Group Leaders**

Without consideration of alternative ways of viewing a situation true choice does not exist. As long as only one possibility is present, then one cannot choose a different way of thinking, feeling, and behaving.

Challenging some of these beliefs may be difficult for group members. The myths were learned many years ago and have been reinforced over time by socialization as well as self-indoctrination by male survivors.

Be vigilant for signs of distress as long held belief systems are challenged. Be very supportive and encouraging of exploring "other" belief systems about one's abuse. Encourage discussing the personally held (and potentially distressing) beliefs with his primary therapist.

Cognitive behavioral challenges (as in Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy) may be useful in exploring myths in this session.

#### **Thought for the Day**

Many boys, as well as girls, are sexually abused as children

#### **Materials**

Handout: Common Myths About Males Sexually Abused as Children

## **Handout for Male Session B**

### **Common Myths About Males Sexually Abused as Children**

1. If I had sex with a man as a child then I must be gay
2. If a male selected me to have sex with, then there must be something about me.
3. If I had really wanted to stop it I should have been able to.
4. I must not have tried hard enough to stop it, or I could have.
5. How could a woman actually abuse a boy, anyway?
6. I must have wanted it because I had a hard on.
7. My friends say I was lucky to have sex with a woman at 6. They had to wait till they were in their teens.
8. I liked the closeness, so I must have really wanted the sex too.
9. Ok, so at five I couldn't stop it because he was so big, but by 10 or 11 I didn't stop it either. I must have wanted it.
10. I mean, there must be something about me that made them pick me out. I must be different from other kids.
11. Men who sexually abuse boys must be gay or they wouldn't choose boys like me.
12. I mean, I am the only boy I ever heard of that had sex with a woman at 6. It must only happen one time in a million.
13. Maybe my memories of being abused aren't real at all. Maybe it is because of my mental illness that I think these things.
14. She was only trying to teach me about sex.
15. She didn't physically hurt me or anything. How could it have been abuse?

## INTERNET RESOURCES RELATING TO THE SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN

Hopper, Jim, "Sexual Abuse of Males: Prevalence, Lasting Effects, and Resources"  
<http://www.jimhopper.com/male-ab>

Matthews, Frederick, "The Invisible Boy" and online multi-chapter book  
<http://www.travel-net.com/~pater/invis.htm>

"Female sex abusers not common, rarely reported" - article  
<http://www.s-t.com/daily/07-96/07-15-96/c05wn074.htm>

GhostWolf - Out of the Abyss  
<http://www.nemasys.com/ghostwolf/>

Moffat-Vallance, Andrew, "It's My Party and I'll Cry if I want To"  
<http://users.netaccess.co.nz/amv/Abuse/Abuse.htm>

David Baldwin's Trauma Information pages  
<http://www.trauma-pages.com/>

Dissociation and the Fragmentary nature of Traumatic memories: Overview and Exploratory Study.  
Van der Kolk, Fidler.  
<http://gladstone.uoregon.edu/~dvb/vanderk2.htm>

Approaches to the Treatment of PTSD. Van der Kolk, van der Hart, Burbridge.  
<http://www.trauma-pages.com/vanderk.htm>

The Body Keeps Score: Memory and the evolving psychobiology of post traumatic stress. Van der  
Kolk  
<http://trauma-pages.com/vanderk4.htm>

National Organization on Male Sexual Victimization (NOMSV)  
Men Assisting, Leading, Educating (MALE): Men Who Have Experienced Sexual Abuse  
<http://www.malesurvivor.org/>  
<http://www.malesurvivor.org/linkss.html> (Good links to other sites)

Ross Cheit Recovered Memory Project  
[http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Taubman\\_Center/Recovmem/Archive.html](http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Taubman_Center/Recovmem/Archive.html)

Men's Issues  
<http://www.vix.com/men/index/html>

Listserves for male survivors  
<http://www.onelist.com/subscribe.cgi/MaleSurvivors>

**Kevin's Survivor's Page**

<http://members.home.net/tat2bear/index.html>

**Adult incest survivor resources in New York City:**

[http://www.zianet.com/ISRNI/NEW\\_YORK\\_RESOURCES.HTML](http://www.zianet.com/ISRNI/NEW_YORK_RESOURCES.HTML)

**Incest Survivors Resource Network International (ISRNI)**

<http://www.zianet.com/ISRNI/>

**Male Abuse Survivor's Support Forum (excellent source of male survivor autobiographies):**

<http://www.noahgrey.com/massf/>

**Menweb**

<http://www.vix.com/menmag/sexabupg.htm>

**Downeast Maine Survivor's page:**

<http://incestabuse.miningco.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://www.geocities.com/HotSprings/8163/index.html>

**Male Survivors of Incest and Sexual Child Abuse:**

<http://www.theviproom.com/visions/sexabuse.htm>

**Rainbow Male Survivors Network for Gay and Bisexual Survivors of Sexual Abuse**

<http://yarranet.net.au/rmsr/rainbownet.htm#index>

## Session III

## What is Abuse?

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### Meeting A

Sexual abuse

### Materials

Flip chart or chalkboard  
Handout A

Goal – members will be able to verbalize how sexual abuse has impacted their lives with regard to self-defeating thoughts and behaviors

Goal – members will begin to develop an awareness of their right to a healthy self-concept

### Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the tactics perpetrators use (violence, intimidation, coercion, force, etc.)?
2. After sexual abuse had occurred. What are some of the emotional aftereffects?

Review feelings (shame, guilt, fear, depression, etc.) and behaviors (strained interpersonal relationships, difficulties with commitment, trust, etc.).

### Meeting B

Sexuality

### Materials

Pamphlet, "10 Ways to Make Love without Doing It"  
Handout B

Provide group peers with education and information regarding addresses and phone numbers to talk with local health-care provider.

Leader will reinforce healthy decisions members can make regarding sex (the right to say "no", avoiding STDs, preventing unwanted pregnancy, the importance of pride and self-respect, values, etc.).