

Breast-Feeding as a Rape or Sexual Abuse Survivor

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By Melinda

Survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) often have conflicting feelings and opinions about the child they were at the time of the abuse. A CSA survivor might be mad at the child they were back then for not fighting back, not running away, or not telling. There might be the feeling that this child caused the abuse and therefore is responsible for the pain being felt now as an adult. Many of these feelings end up internalized as anger or resentment towards an inner child, representative of a childhood self.

Some CSA survivors may have the feeling that their abused child self is someone else, not themselves at a younger age, and acknowledging that you are the adult version of this child who experienced the abuse can be scary. You did go through the abuse as a child, and you survived. Reconnecting with, forgiving, and healing this hurt inner child can be an important part of healing from CSA.

Healing your inner child can be very intense work, and it is recommended that you have a strong support system and be in a good place in your healing before starting; if you are in therapy, consult with your therapist before beginning this work on your own.

Reconnecting

How Do You Feel About Your Inner Child?

An important step in this process is assessing how you feel about your inner child now. Are you angry at that child? Are you sad for that child? You may feel that the child was gullible and should have known better, particularly if the abuse was a repeating pattern. You may wonder why the child didn't simply tell, especially if telling was met with positive reactions or a stop to the abuse. Understand how you feel so you can have a focus for what you want to work on.

Understand How You Thought as a Child

Children are naturally trusting and most children are abused by people they should be able to trust. Children also need affection, reassurance, and unconditional love and strive to receive these from the adults in their lives. As an adult, it may be difficult to remember how a child thinks, but reaching this understanding can help you understand why you acted and/or reacted the way you did as a child. You may have sustained repeated abuse, or even welcomed an abuser's advances, because you needed attention and abuse was the only way you received it. Your abuser may have said you were sharing a special secret, making you feel important and loved by the abuser. If an abuser threatened you or told you lies to keep you from disclosing the abuse, you probably believed what they said because you thought this was a person you could trust and/or someone you loved. Behaving this way doesn't mean that you were stupid or should have known better; it means you were a child and there was no way you could have known better.

Writing Exercise – Building Connections

Take some time to write to your inner child to share how you feel about him or her. It is okay if you don't feel love or compassion for your inner child at this point; you should simply strive to make a connection. If you feel up to it, try writing to yourself as your inner child: how does your inner child feel treated by your adult self? Once you feel a real connection to your inner child and have an understanding of the relationship you share, you can begin to work with your inner child to heal your relationship.

Forgiving

You Were Only a Child

Though you know it, comprehending what it means can take time: you were only a child. This can be especially difficult for CSA survivors who felt very responsible and grown-up as children. You may have had to take care of yourself a good deal and acted as your own parent, perhaps even taking care of others in your family, making it even more difficult to understand what it means to be "only a child." It may help to look at a photograph of yourself at a young age, or at an age when you were being abused. What do you see in this photo? How big are you? You are probably much too small to have fought back, and what fears must this child have worried about if he or she told? Realizing this can answer some of the questions you have about your childhood self. Looking at your younger self, would you consider this child as an adult, capable of handling such adult concerns? Just because you were responsible or acting like an adult doesn't mean you should have had that burden; be gentle on your younger self.

Remembering Your Childhood

Once you can accept that your child self was really just a child, can you remember what life was like as a child? It may be difficult to remember what life was like back then, especially if childhood is several decades behind you, and you will undoubtedly recall painful memories. Many CSA survivors grew up in tumultuous family environments where the abuse experienced first-hand wasn't the only problem in life. There may have been fighting or substance abuse or other family issues going on in addition to your abuse; at the time, the abuse may have seemed minimal compared to these other issues. It may be painful, but can you remember how you generally felt as a child? Were you scared or anxious? Can you remember what you did to cope back then; what soothed you or comforted you when you were experiencing these feelings?

This child had no one to comfort him or her, no one to share these secret problems with, no one who understood. This child probably felt very alone. Can you see why this child acted the way he or she did back then? There were reasons; these were coping mechanisms you developed. Some of them may help you now and some of them may hinder your life, but none of them were your fault. Can you forgive this child?

Writing Exercise – Expressing Forgiveness

Try writing a letter to your inner child now. Can you express the sadness you feel towards the loss of

your childhood innocence? If you were angry with your inner child, can you share your feelings of forgiveness? You may want to apologize to your inner child for being so hard on him or her. Can your inner child forgive your adult self? How does your inner child feel at this point? He or she may still feel very alone and scared. Hopefully you feel a true bond growing between your adult self and your inner child. What sort of a relationship do you hope to have between your inner child and your adult self? Once you have a goal, you can work towards healing this broken bond to build that relationship.

Healing

Be a Parent to Your Inner Child

Someone who has a wounded inner child may describe themselves as not feeling in control of their life. They may, in fact, feel as though their inner child is behind the wheel. If this child feels hurt, they can lead you to do things that you feel unable to control or understand. You need to learn how to be a parent to your inner child; perhaps being the parent that you never had growing up.

Earn Trust

Hopefully by now your inner child can trust your adult self. Something to help build this trust in your adult self's ability to be a good parent to your inner child is to list the things you can do now that you couldn't do as a child. You can also list what you can do now to protect and comfort your inner child that wasn't done for you in childhood. Tell your inner child about all the things you can do now. You are quite impressive and surely capable of being a good parent! To maintain this trust, be honest with your inner child in your parenting role.

Learn to Parent

Though it may not seem like it at first, good parenting comes from good discipline. Good discipline is nurturing discipline, not painful, demeaning, or hurtful discipline. Without discipline, an inner child has no rules to live life by. Remember that discipline isn't just a list of things not to do, it is a set of rules to live your life by. Bradshaw lists these rules to teach your inner child:

1. It's okay to feel what you feel.
2. It's okay to want what you want.
3. It's okay to see and hear what you see and hear.
4. It's okay and it's necessary to have lots of fun and play.
5. It's essential to tell the truth at all times.
6. It's important to know your limits and to delay gratification some of the time.
7. It's crucial to develop a balanced sense of responsibility.
8. It's okay to make mistakes.
9. Other people's feelings, needs, and wants are to be respected and valued.
10. It's okay to have problems.

Hopefully, with these rules, you can learn to let your inner child, and your adult self, be whoever they are. Though you may have upheld a role growing up, whether you were the perfect child,

the problem child, or any child in between, you don't need to act out that role anymore; you can simply be your wonderful self.

Keeping Your Inner Child Safe

Though you are now a good parent to your inner child, there are still other things that may threaten your inner child's sense of safety. Even something like seeing a child who is at the age when you were abused, just being an innocent child, can hurt your own inner child. When things like this happen you need to remember to give special attention to your inner child. Ask how they are doing, what they are feeling. Have an honest dialog and work through things if you can, using your parent-child relationship.

Be a Kid Again!

If most any child is asked what is his or her favorite thing to do, it will almost always involve play time. It is important to give your inner child play time. It can be in the form of a night out with friends, playing a video game, or even getting out a coloring book and crayons. Don't deny yourself time to play and rejuvenate. If you can remember your favorite play time activity as a child, try that out, or try out something you always wanted to do but were never able to. Go to a toy store and buy your inner child a toy, or sleep with a stuffed animal, and simply be a kid again.

Affirmations Exercise

Remember to tell your inner child how happy you are to have him or her back in your life! Make a list of the things you like best about your inner child and the reasons you are glad to have him or her. Read these to your inner child when he or she is in need of your support. If you wish, you can also write affirmations from your inner child to your adult self including the reasons why he or she is glad to have you for a parent.

**“And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.” –T. S. Eliot**

Further Reading/Resources

[Healing the Child Within](#) by Charles L. Whitfield M.D.

[Homecoming](#) by John Bradshaw

[The Right to Innocence](#) by Beverly Engel

[The Courage to Heal](#) by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis (pp. 111-115)

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