

Confronting Your Abuser (in your life and in your mind)

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Deciding To Confront

Directly confronting your abuser and/or those who knew of the abuse but did not try to help you is not for every survivor, but it can be a dramatic, cleansing tool.

If you feel you need to confront your abuser, do it, before the person dies and you never have the chance again; don't let that desire haunt you forever.

Reasons to confront:

- 1) Validation of memories
- 2) Make those you confront feel the impact of what was done to you
- 3) See your abuser suffer
- 4) Revenge seeking
- 5) To seek payment for therapy
- 6) To try to establish a real relationship

Questions to ask yourself before you decide:

- 1) Whom do I want to talk to and why?
- 2) What do I hope to gain? Is this realistic?
- 3) Am I willing to lose contact with those who also know the person?
- 4) Am I stable enough to stand being challenged?

Keep in mind:

- 1) Abusers don't like to feel out of control and don't like to be confronted.
- 2) Your abuser will probably not admit to the abuse or even think what s/he did was abuse.
- 3) It's a good idea to bring a friend for support or have someone to meet up with afterwards.
- 4) It's okay to change your mind about the confrontation; don't feel obligated to follow through if you change your mind or have doubts about the outcome.

How To Confront

Focus on doing the encounter for yourself, not for the response you want to receive. Set the boundaries, choose the timing, and choose the location to be comfortable and convenient for you. Practice role playing with a therapist or someone you trust. Write out the main points you want to make and memorize them. Imagine the worst reaction you could get and if you would be able to handle it. Remember that the purpose is to speak up for yourself, say what you want to say and ask for what you want, whether you will receive it or not, and know that you took charge of the situation. This will completely flip the situation around from what it was during the abuse; confronting is very powerful.

If you fear retaliation

If you are unsure if the reaction will be a violent one, keep it to a public place, bring friends as witnesses, and don't give out your current address or phone number.

If Confronting Is Not For You

Not confronting is a perfectly fine option as well. Don't feel pressured to confront because of encouragement from others or from hearing positive stories of confrontation. You're not more of a survivor or any better healed by confronting if it's not for you. Don't do it if you're not ready, your support group isn't strong enough, or there's real danger involved.

Confronting Mentally or Symbolically

If you cannot confront because you do not know who your abuser was, or your abuser is dead, you can still work out a confrontation in your mind. Many survivors who cannot physically confront their abuser fantasize of killing or otherwise hurting their abuser; this is perfectly normal in thought and is a healthy way to own your anger and feel powerful and in control.

Confronting the deceased

An obvious way to confront your abuser if s/he is dead is to do so at their grave. This may yield a more fulfilling result than simply voicing your feelings elsewhere.

Symbolic ways to confront:

1) Write a letter and don't send it.

- 2) Gather the things that remind you of the abuse and bury them or burn them. If burning, consider keeping the ashes to spread or let fly on the wind.
- 3) Contribute to a survivor newsletter or other publication.
- 4) Organize or participate in Take Back The Night (<http://www.takebackthenight.org/>) or The Clothesline Project (<http://www.clotheslineproject.org/>).
- 5) Contribute time and/or money to an organization that helps survivors.
- 6) Act out the confrontation with others.

Resources:

-The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis, pp. 133-148.

-VOICES In Action, Inc., "How To Confront Your Perpetrator: Living or Deceased," <http://www.voices-action.org/confront.pdf>.

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