

# Survivors?

napac

The National Association for  
People Abused in Childhood

*“The physical abuse I suffered from my brother was not acknowledged. I was told I did things to deserve it and that he could not help it, he was ill and I should stop being so self centred. I believe there is a culture not to acknowledge the affect of abuse committed by those with incapacity as it is seen as anti-disability. Sadly the effects are still very real.”*

# Survivors?

**What is a survivor? How do you know if you're a survivor? What is child abuse? Why isn't there enough support for survivors? What makes somebody abuse children? Does the fact that I was abused mean that I am now a danger to children? I want to make the world a better place. I want to shout and scream and make abusers stop!**

The word '**survivor**' can have different connotations in different circumstances but here at NAPAC 'survivors' are adults who were abused as children. It's not a description that everyone is necessarily comfortable with but the term survivor seems to have been adopted by those of us who have survived childhood abuse. Often people refer to survivors as those that have escaped car crashes, or fires, or airline disasters... or the Nazi death camps of World War 2. The sad fact is that some things happen that should never happen – and anyone who survives such things has the right to call themselves a survivor.

Many of us were quite surprised when we were told we were survivors. We didn't feel like survivors. Instead we felt like failures and good-for-nothings. We felt low and we were hurting. We had some good days but we had a whole load of bad days. We felt like imposters when people called us survivors.

**There are many different types of child abuse and it exists on a huge scale.**

But the truth is that childhood abuse has many devastating effects. Being survivors doesn't mean that we have to have everything sorted out. Being survivors means we have recognised that we have been through something that should never have happened and we now want to let our wounds heal. If you were abused in any way as a child then you have the right to call yourself a survivor.

**All abuse is serious & fits into a number of categories which include:**

- **Physical**
- **Sexual**
- **Neglect**
- **Ritual**
- **Emotional/Psychological**

# Physical and sexual abuse.

Physical abuse involves contact intended to cause feelings of intimidation, pain, injury, or other physical suffering or harm.

## Some things that physical abuse can include:

- Throwing or knocking down
- Burning or scalding on purpose
- Threatening with a knife or gun
- Giving a child harmful drugs or alcohol
- Hitting (with or without an implement)
- Punching
- Kicking
- Shaking
- Choking
- Poisoning
- Slapping
- Biting
- Beating up
- Smothering
- Drowning

Sexual abuse happens when a child is involved in any sexual activity (contact or non-contact).

## Some things that sexual abuse can include:

- Oral sex
- Explicit sexual talk
- Inappropriate kissing
- Showing pornography
- Vaginal or anal penetration
- Lack of privacy to bathe or undress
- Exposing sexual organs to the child
- Touching a child's genitals or breasts
- Encouraging a child to touch another's genitals or breasts
- Watching or encouraging children to engage in sexual activities

**All abuse is wrong.**

**No child should ever be abused.**

**Child abuse is never the child's fault.**

**You are not alone.**

# Emotional abuse.

Psychological/Emotional abuse happens when children are subjected to psychologically harmful behaviours which cause a child to lose confidence and their sense of self-worth. It is associated with situations of power imbalance.

## Some things that psychological/ emotional abuse can include:

- Threats
- Name calling
- Constant put-downs
- Withholding love and affection
- Frightening & intimidating a child
- Silent treatment / ignoring a child
- Caregivers abusing drugs or alcohol
- Being treated differently from siblings
- Public and/or private ridicule / humiliation
- Giving conflicting and/or inconsistent messages

Neglect happens when the responsible adult fails (beyond the constraints imposed by poverty) to adequately provide for the needs of a child. There are 4 main areas of neglect; physical, emotional, educational and medical.

## Some things that neglect can include:

- Throwing or knocking down
- Failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, hygiene or supervision
- Failure to satisfy a child's normal emotional needs
- Displaying behaviour that damages a child's normal emotional and psychological development
- Failing to see that a child receives proper schooling (either persistent truancy not being addressed or a child being denied an education)
- Failing to seek medical care for the child when appropriate

# Ritual abuse.

One definition of ritual abuse is when one or more children are abused in a highly organised way, by a group of people who have come together and subscribe to a belief system which, for them, justifies their actions towards that child. This usually extends into family involvement and may have been practised as a religion or a way of life for years. Although survivors speak of differing experiences, many elements are common.

## Some things that ritual abuse can include:

- The use of mind control
- Being used in prostitution
- Photographing or filming the abuse
- Being forced to take drugs and/or alcohol
- Being tortured (sometimes to the point of death)
- Systematic emotional, physical and sexual abuse
- Being forced to participate in the abuse of others

- Elaborate rituals, “games”, “set ups” and “ceremonies”

Given that the above descriptions of abuse happens to countless children on a daily basis within the UK and given that most of those children survive into adulthood... a question that frequently arises is “why isn’t there enough support for abuse survivors?”

There isn’t enough support for adult survivors of abuse mostly because supporting survivors is a tacit admission of failure and we all know that we have failed children as a society and continue to do so.

We should never forget that the perpetrators of abuse are ultimately responsible for that abuse – but it is such a wide spread societal problem that it needs to be tackled far more seriously than it currently is.

Furthermore, abuse is primarily perpetrated behind closed doors and perpetuated using **fear, silence, isolation, embarrassment, shame and guilt**.

People who are abused will often not speak about it for many years – sometimes never. It's probably the biggest crime we have in this country but it's also the most secretive. It's a massive problem that needs a significant change on the part of the whole of society to **wage war against child abuse.**

Let us not limit ourselves by agreeing with those who say "*there will always be child abuse*".

At NAPAC we are determined to **enable survivors to become thrivers** who will lead good, wholesome, "normal" lives and we will fight to see childhood abuse eliminated.

**Nobody really knows why people abuse children** – certainly more research is needed to look at the causes of where abuse comes from, but one thing we do know is that people have always had a propensity to hurt others.

**Children are an easy target.**



---

# Abuse is always a choice.

**In order to justify this choice they come up with all sorts of nonsense.**

**For example...** “they need to hear negative things to toughen them up”, “they need to learn to defend themselves”, “In other countries girls are married at 13 and have babies”, “they deserved it, without proper discipline children get out of control”, “I’m expressing love”, “I am preparing them for sexual relationships when they are older”. **This is all nonsense.**

**Abuse is very much about power and control (or rather the misuse of power and control).**

Ultimately we need to get to grips with society’s failings to really understand where abuse comes from – it is a massive problem.

**Abuse is always a choice.  
Abusers always make a choice  
when it comes to abusing children.**

If we had the answer we would have done something about it a long time ago. As it stands we haven’t got an answer... but we know that with the



right **will abuse can be minimised and eliminated.**

**It is a myth that all those who were abused will become abusers.**

The **myth** is often peddled by abusers who want their victims to remain silent.

Survivors often end up worrying that they are destined to hurt children because of what happened to them.

**This is enough to stop many from seeking the support they need and deserve.**

# No excuse for abuse.

Abusers use this **myth** as an **excuse** when they get caught, hoping they will be let off the hook if they disclose that they were traumatised in childhood.

## **There is never an excuse for abuse.**

The overwhelming majority of people who are abused as children could never go on to abuse others.

We know that as survivors we sometimes have a tendency to want to save the world from abusers by making as much noise as possible.

There's certainly a lot we can all do to help prevent abuse.

We can report abusers if they are still at large and we can speak out in appropriate ways.

Literally screaming and shouting in the streets isn't always the best way of drawing attention to such a serious issue as it may alienate the general population further from what we are trying to achieve.

**We can make the world a better place with small steps and at our own pace.**

We have to remember that the majority of the population have not suffered child abuse. A significant minority have but we need to carry that majority with us in order to have an effective voice.

Let's not frighten them off by screaming at them – let's instead **engage them in important conversations** where solutions can be discussed.

**It's important that we take time to get help for ourselves first before trying to save the rest of the world.**

It's like being on a plane when the oxygen masks fall... we need to first fit our own mask before we help others fit theirs.

---

# A survivor...

...A survivor is strong because they have gotten through something really awful.

...A survivor can be whole again because there are people who care.

...A survivor has stamina and determination because they have made it this far.

...A survivor is courageous because they are raising their voice against abusers.

...A survivor is compassionate because they know the importance of being loving.

...A survivor is unique because there is no-one in the world just like them.

...A survivor is free because they have fought for that freedom.

...A survivor is extraordinary because they've survived.

..A survivor can be anyone they want to be because they have options.

...A survivor can make a difference to the world because they have willpower and strength.

...A survivor can take back control of their lives because it's their right.



*“I really need help as I was a victim of rape, I still have nightmares. Some days I feel I just can’t do it anymore as I have a 9 year old son and I have to remain strong for him. I would just like some help please as this is my last hope. Thanks for taking the time to read this.”*

Kindly sponsored by:  
Jeff Anderson Ann Olivarius Law



[www.aoadvocates.com](http://www.aoadvocates.com)  
Tel: 020 3080 3911

# napac

The National Association for  
People Abused in Childhood



If you are a survivor of abuse, or  
someone who supports a survivor,  
have a look at the NAPAC website  
for more information and support.

Or call our national freephone Support Line.

**0800 085 3330**

**[www.napac.org.uk](http://www.napac.org.uk)**

Sponsored by Jeff Anderson Ann Olivarius Law  
[www.aoadvocates.com](http://www.aoadvocates.com)

With grateful thanks to Johnny Mobasher at  
[streetphotography.co.uk](http://streetphotography.co.uk)

© NAPAC 2009

NAPAC is a registered charity No. 1069802

