



napac

The National Association for  
People Abused in Childhood

# It wasn't your fault

Booklet 3

Supporting recovery from childhood abuse

# It wasn't your fault

*"I need to talk, I need to be heard, not to feel guilty or as if I must protect others from what happened to me. I need to come to terms with my sister's revelation that not only did my mother know, she put us into the situation so she could keep her husband (my 'father')."*



Was it my fault?

I feel like it was my fault...

I could have stopped it...

Could I have stopped it?

Was I really so unlovable?

Why didn't I know that it was wrong?

Could I have done something differently to make them love me?

Could I have done something differently to make them stop hurting me?

Could I have done something differently to make them stop having sex with me?

If I tell someone I just know they'll get mad at me. I feel guilty for not being able to protect others from being abused. I feel guilty for not telling sooner.

Have I caused irreparable damage by waiting for so long?

Do I have the right to tell if it will tear my family apart?

How do I tell those I love about what happened to me?

What will they think about me?

Why me and not my siblings?

## Child abuse is never the fault of the child

- Child abuse is never, under any circumstances, the fault of the child. If you were abused as a child then it most definitely wasn't your fault
- Abusers, because they are often known and loved by the child, will entice or manipulate a child into a situation where the child takes some sense of responsibility for what happens. That's the evil nature of abuse and the abuser's actions, sometimes called grooming
- Abusers want children to feel responsible. Abusers want children to carry the guilt of the abuse around with them for many years
- Abusers know that if they can make a child feel responsible for the abuse then they are less likely to tell anyone – and the abuser is less likely to get caught
- Therefore one of the reasons you may feel like it's your fault is because your abuser made you believe it was. It wasn't

*'We were children and child abuse is never the fault of the child.'*



# You were a child and child abuse is never the fault of the child

You may feel you could have stopped it but child abuse is such a complex and psychological minefield. Saying you could have stopped something with hindsight may seem possible but the reality is that you probably couldn't.

You couldn't have stopped it because you were a child. They were the adult and they controlled the **power**. Children cannot make decisions about abuse; only abusers can do that. They are the ones in **control**.

They are so much in control that they can very effectively pass the responsibility for their abuse onto their victims. That's why so many of us have kept quiet about it for so long. We have falsely believed it was our fault.

It wasn't. We were children and child abuse is never the fault of the child.

Children aren't responsible for knowing whether something is right or wrong. Being hit, being sexually abused, being verbally assaulted, being ignored, being tortured... when wrong things happen to children it is the responsibility of the abuser.

Children are learning about right and wrong from adults and older children around them. Even if a child instinctively knows that something is wrong, if they feel powerless to do anything about it then where do they turn?

If something wrong happens to children it's not their fault. We shouldn't be asking ourselves questions like 'was I really so unlovable' because it's turning away from the reality of abuse.

- Abuse isn't about the victim at all. It's all about the misuse of power and control
- Sexual abuse isn't about sex, it's about power and control
- Physical abuse isn't about hitting kids, it's about power and control.
- Emotional abuse isn't about insulting children, it's about power and control
- Neglect isn't about ignoring a child's needs, it's about power and control
- Organised abuse isn't about torturing children, it's about power and control

**Any kind of abuse is about power and control.**

- Perpetrators of abuse or neglect can create a situation where children feel unloved
- Everyone deserves to be loved. Nobody deserves to be abused. Abuse is all about the abuser and their needs. It was their choice to abuse or not. The abuse was for their benefit
- They used you to help get what they wanted out of the abuse
- There is nothing you could have done to have stopped it, even if you thought that there was – or even if they told you that you just needed to behave better... it was just a way to transfer their guilt and responsibility on to you

## They made a choice and you were a child

- You couldn't have done anything differently to make them love you and not hurt you. You adapted your own behaviour to do what you needed to do at the time as a child to keep yourself safe.
- We are left with a whole bunch of feelings and emotions which actually belong to the abuser
- Abuse is all about the abuser
- All of the feelings of guilt and responsibility belong to the abuser – not to us survivors
- Adults are physically stronger than children. Adults know what's right and what's wrong
- Adults who abuse children know that what they are doing is wrong. They are manipulative to make the abuse happen. They use manipulation to ensure that the abuse can happen
- Never forget that you were a child
- It wasn't your fault
- Child abuse is never the fault of the child

Most survivors of abuse who have had the courage to speak out have encountered people who struggled to cope (in one way or another) with what they were told.

If people haven't been abused then it is something they may find hard to hear.

The repercussions of disclosure are also the responsibility of the abuser – because if they had not abused you then you would have nothing to disclose.

**The abuse is not your fault, the effects of the abuse are not your fault and the repercussions of the abuse are not your fault.**

*Abusers are responsible for all of the knock-on effects of abuse*

**One of the effects of abuse is that you have to tell someone...  
...a repercussion of that effect may be that they'll get angry.**

If they get angry then it's their responsibility to direct that anger at the right person; at the abuser and not at you.

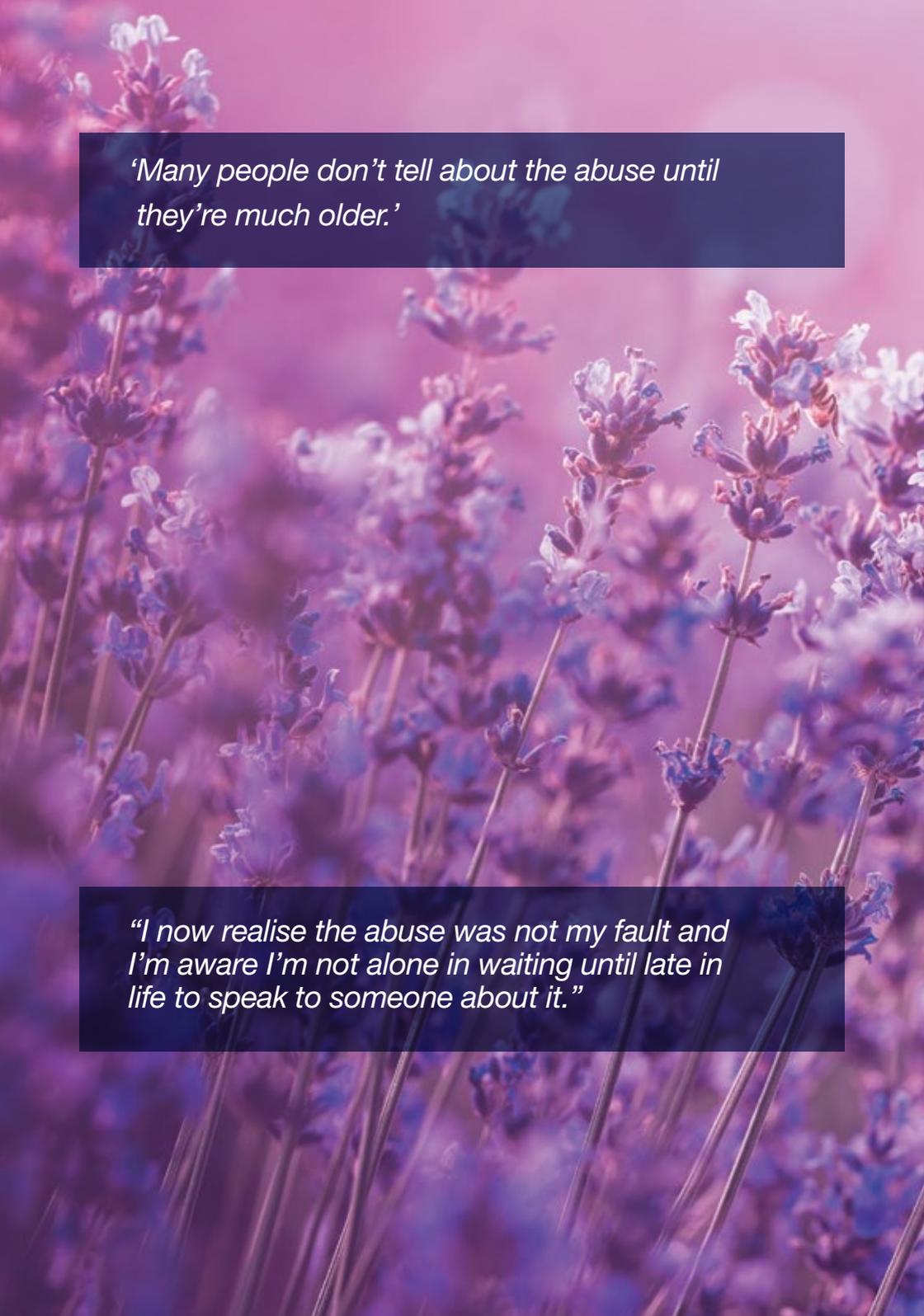
You may not want people to be angry at your abuser because you may love your abuser – that's when it's a tough call.

Only you can decide who you think is best to tell.

**It's ok to love your abuser but hate their behaviour at the same time.**

You have every right to feel angry at your abuser and you have every right to be talking about the abuse now. If they are still alive then they may be angry that you have spoken out – but that's not your responsibility.

**They are the one to blame for the abuse.** If they get angry then that's too bad for them.



*'Many people don't tell about the abuse until they're much older.'*

*"I now realise the abuse was not my fault and I'm aware I'm not alone in waiting until late in life to speak to someone about it."*

# None of the guilt belongs to you

The guilt for abuse can only ever be placed at the door of the abuser.

You have no reason to feel any guilt because it wasn't your fault.

If others have been abused by the same person then the responsibility lies entirely with the person who abused them.

# It's never too late to tell

**Many people don't tell about the abuse until they're much older.**

NAPAC hears from people who are in their sixties, seventies and even eighties who have never talked about the abuse before. Please don't feel bad. It's normal to wait many years before disclosing.

Not speaking about it before now was your way of coping. You couldn't have been expected to have spoken sooner.

It's not your responsibility to tell or not to tell.

You shouldn't have to tell at all because it shouldn't have happened.

Everyone speaks out when the time is right for them.

Some people never speak out.

There is no right or wrong time.

Everyone's on their own timescale because everyone's abuse is unique and everyone's experience is unique.

You are unique.



# Do what's right for you

The responsibility for anything that happens as a direct result of the abuse lies entirely with the abuser. It's not your fault.

Many of us have experienced family rifts once abuse has been disclosed. NAPAC will never tell you what to do. That includes disclosing to your family.

We know that it will often be hard and will cause pain – but again please note that it is ultimately the abuse that causes this pain and not your disclosure – the responsibility lies with the abuser for any repercussions of your disclosure. Even when it comes to families being torn apart. You have to do what's right for you.

You may find it useful to make a list; 'reasons to tell' vs. 'reasons not to tell'. Talking to people who love you is not always easy. Sometimes it's very hard for people to handle what they're hearing and it may help you to be aware of that. If you know the people you're going to tell very well, you might be able to consider what their reactions may be.

You may find it helpful to be prepared for them to be upset or angry. You may like to have some support resources prepared for them. Knowing that they have support available for them can help take the burden from you.

**It can be overwhelming for people who are only just finding out about abuse that has taken place.** You have known about it for years but for them it may come as a complete shock. You could direct them to the NAPAC website.

Many survivors feel anxious about what others will think of them once they disclose. You may find it easier to think about how others may feel about the abuse and the abuser rather than how they will think about you.

The abuse wasn't your fault but some people 'shoot the messenger' and get upset and angry at the survivor when they should be angry and upset at the situation instead. Again, hopefully some of the resources on the NAPAC website will help with this.

We hope to help supporters recognise the strength and courage it takes for survivors to disclose. We hope to equip them with ways of supporting

survivors. We understand that people aren't trained in how to support survivors so they won't necessarily know what to say or do. It may be helpful to tell them how they can best support you.

Abuse is a multi-faced, complex and very difficult issue. Only your abuser knows why you were abused. Only your abuser knows why your siblings or other children were or weren't abused.

## It shouldn't have been any of us

It shouldn't have been any of you.

Survivor guilt is thinking things like...

'If I'd have been abused more then maybe they'd have been abused less'.

You didn't do anything to stand out...

It was their choice to abuse you.

You weren't saying 'pick me' or 'pick them'. They were the ones in control and any decision they made with regards to who they were going to abuse could not have been influenced by you.

They were the ones with the power and control.





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

Support line 0808 801 0331

Free from landlines and mobiles

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