

Group Treatment Approaches for Working with Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

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Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse**

What is CSA?

- **Childhood Sexual Abuse [CSA] is defined as “sexual contact, ranging from fondling to intercourse by someone at least five years older than them” (McGregor, 2000)**
- **Results in physical and psychological boundary violations**
- **Between 7.7% & 38% of the population in the United States has been victims of CSA (Salter, 1988).**
- **40% of victims were incestuously abused**
 - **These victims often have more complex psychological effects because they were violated by a caretaker**

Impact of CSA on a Child's Development

- **Childhood is a critical period when the child is developing physiologically, psychologically and socially.**
- **The 'self' is being shaped.**
 - **Relations to one's own internal states are established.**
 - **Coping and interpersonal skills are developed**
 - **Assumptions about the self, others and the world are formed**

Impact of CSA on a Child's Development

- **CSA's effects on children (Briere, 1996):**
 - 1. Disrupts a child's development by altering their early attachment dynamics**
 - 2. Distorts a child's cognitive understanding of themselves, others and the future**
 - 3. The child is forced to develop primitive coping strategies**
 - 4. There are effects from early post-traumatic stress on the child's development**

Effects of CSA into Adulthood

- **A community study found that 78% of women that were survivors of CSA reported long-term psychological effects (Russell, 1986)**
- **Many survivors develop maladaptive coping strategies that function during the abuse, but negatively impact them later**
- **40% of survivors require therapy as adults, but millions of survivors lead successful lives without therapy**

Presenting Concerns for Survivors

- **Multiplicity of Diagnoses**
- **Most common presenting diagnoses:**
 - **Depression**
 - **PTSD and Complex PTSD**
 - **Personality Disorders**
 - **Somatization & Physical Effects**
 - **Anxiety Disorders**
 - **Eating Disorders**
 - **Alcohol & Substance Abuse**
 - **Suicidality & Self-Harm Behaviors**
 - **Memory Impairment**
 - **Psychiatric Symptoms**
 - **Intimacy, Relationship & Parenting Difficulty**
 - **Revictimization**
 - **High-Risk Sexual Behavior**
 - **Dissociation**

Long-term effects of CSA in adulthood

- **Other symptoms include feelings of**
 - **Isolation**
 - **Stigmatization**
 - **Negative self-concept and self-esteem**
 - **Inability to trust**

- **Adult survivors often alternate between feeling helpless and powerless, and malignantly powerful (Courtois, 1999).**

Group Therapy for ASCSA

- **Complexity of treatment**
 - Individual and Group Therapy
- **Benefits**
 - Provides empathy, support, and insight from others
 - Alleviates the sense of uniqueness, shame and isolation
- **Groups can offer a place to**
 - Talk about experiences
 - Recognize negative messages from the past
 - Regain a sense of control
 - Learn to trust self and others
 - Develop healthy skills to cope with the environment and interpersonal relationships

Resilience in Survivors of CSA

- **Most models have focused on combating symptoms that result in adulthood**
- **Individual and environmental factors of resilience**
- **Examining resilience in therapy can help identify protective factors that may:**
 - **reduce risk of sexual abuse**
 - **enhance coping skills if it does occur**

Feminist Therapy with Adult Survivors

- **Feminist Theoretical Orientation**
 - **Safety and self-work**
 - **Exploration and integration**
 - **Empowerment and reconnection**
- **The Courage To Heal**
- **Establishing Trust & Coping Skills**
- **Writing exercises/Drawings**
- **Exploring effects into adulthood**
 - **Revictimization**
 - **Intimacy/sex/relationships**
 - **Societal messages of objectification**
 - **Coping with family/abuser interactions**