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*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may
abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Romans 15:13, NKJV

Introduction

Opening a book is like beginning an adventure. This book is designed for survivors of sexual abuse, to provide an opportunity for you to begin a healing journey that can transform your life. As with any adventure, there might be some challenges—and some surprises—included in the experience.

If you are someone who is intimately acquainted with an abuse survivor, this book can help you understand your friend or family member and perhaps even open new avenues to hope and healing in your relationship. You can join us on our healing journey. Though the comments are written mainly to abuse survivors, gaining new insights and awareness can benefit anyone.

Sexual abuse is frequently misunderstood or ignored. Survivors are often afraid to speak up—or are told not to. Yet the problem of sexual abuse is endemic throughout the world. Every time someone is silenced, the problem continues to grow; like cancer, molestation delivers unrestrained destruction when it is silently left alone.

The majority of sexual abuse victims are molested by someone they know, not by a stranger. Sexual abuse is referred to as incest when the perpetrator—the person committing sexually-offending behavior—is a family member. Extreme damage similar to that of incestual abuse occurs when sexual abuse is committed by someone whose expected behavior is to protect children and youth, such as a family friend, teacher, club leader, pastor, priest, youth worker, or camp counselor. Sexual abuse delivers incalculable harm when those in a position of trust misuse their power and influence.

Sexual abuse occurs when an adult or adolescent uses a child, young person or adult for sexual gratification without that person's informed consent. Under no circumstance can a child or adolescent give informed consent to having his or her body used sexually by another human being, though perpetrators often manipulate children or teenagers to feel as though the abusive behavior is desirable. Any form of sexual molestation delivers devastating emotional, physical, spiritual and/or intellectual damage, because human beings were not designed to be used, coerced, manipulated, deceived or dominated by other human beings.

Survivors of sexual abuse are often referred to as “numb survivors” or “people with frozen emotions,” because they have so deadened their feelings that they aren't even aware how much healing needs to occur. If emotions were a child's paint box, survivors have perhaps learned to live at either the black or white end of the paint box, missing the spectrum of colors in between. If you are a survivor of abuse, you might not even realize you aren't feeling a full range of emotions. Perhaps you are one of the many survivors who have learned to deaden pain with activities, or something or someone else.

The extensive damage of sexual abuse occurs at the core of a person's being, which will be explained throughout this workbook. One complication of core damage is that it cannot be seen. If you were healing from fractured bones in both of your legs, your damage would mainly be “unseen,” also. However, you would not be expected to run a race with broken legs. No one would argue that you would need time to heal, or that you would likely need long-term medical care. But the extensive damage experienced by survivors of sexual abuse, invisible to the untrained eye, is often ignored. The survivors themselves don't know what is wrong, why they feel “different,” or why they can't seem to “fit in” with

others. Some force themselves to keep working, feeling like they have a low-grade emotional “fever” every day. Some feel shame; others feel sad. Some feel overwhelmed; others feel hopeless, bitter, guilty or angry. Many don’t feel at all.

If you want to become fully alive, the process begins with a choice to heal. That choice must be followed by consistent, intentional healing choices. Are you willing to make daily changes and take purposeful steps into all the “colors” of life? Your healing will be a unique experience, unlike anyone else’s healing in some ways and like others’ healing in other ways.

One reason it is difficult to persevere through the healing process is that loved ones and friends rarely understand the complexity or damage inherent in sexual abuse. If you are a family member or close friend of a survivor, it is important for you to realize he or she is not purposefully deadening emotions or ignoring the problem. It is simply too painful to allow oneself to feel without knowing *how* to move beyond the pain. If you are a survivor, you may have dismissed your own pain because you don’t know how to face it and move beyond it.

Another deterrent to healing is comparing your journey to others’ healing journeys. You are unique; so are they. You can make the choice to live your life, learning to make choices that will help you enjoy each moment. If you choose to avoid comparing your journey to anyone else’s journey, you will free up intellectual and emotional energy to help you go forward.

Core Healing helps you understand the areas impacted by sexual abuse—and provides measurable goals for each phase of your recovery. Don’t be afraid of the process; it is an opportunity for you to move forward in life. Each goal can be tailored to fit your needs and situation. Family members and friends of survivors can help *if they are asked* to come alongside in the healing process. However, the process needs to be chosen by and completed by the one who was abused. It is a private and personal healing process—and the healing journey is unique to each one completing it.

Each of the twelve chapters of this workbook has five sections; each section is designed for you to work on for about 30 minutes daily. Some chapters have a bonus section to be completed during the weekend or whenever you have time. The extra section explores the possible impact sexual abuse has during each developmental stage that can continue throughout other stages of development. It also gives ideas to help you experience restoration from developmental disruption.