



Sexual Abuse

Introduction

Welcome to the Sexual Abuse session of the *Living in Balance* program. This session deals with the very painful topics of rape, sexual assault, and childhood sexual abuse. This session defines these criminal acts and explains the lasting psychological damage that victims may experience. This session also presents information concerning prevention of and treatment for the lasting effects of rape and childhood sexual abuse, and it provides some contact information for groups that can help.

What is in this session?

This session has two major parts: (1) Rape and Sexual Assault and (2) Childhood Sexual Abuse.

- ✓ After participating in part 1, you will be able to
 - Understand how contrary and unrealistic messages about sex add to people's confusion about sex and sexuality
 - Understand what is defined as rape and what other types of sexual assault are
 - Understand that support is available to help rape victims deal with the police and recover from the trauma of the rape



**SESSION 28 HAS
TWO MAJOR PARTS:**

1. Rape and Sexual Assault
2. Childhood Sexual Abuse

Sex: Negative and Contradictory Messages

In contrast to a lot of media messages, which strongly promote sex, some people are taught at an early age that sex is wrong, dirty, selfish, or sinful. In many cases, parents who themselves received no sex education (or got bad information) went on to teach their negative attitudes to their children, who are now adults. Also, some adults were sexually abused while children, and they learned to fear sexual behavior and intimacy.

People will respond differently toward these negative attitudes about sex. For instance, some adults are aware of their dislike toward sex and try to “fake it” or hide their dislike from their partner. Others are unaware of their true feelings and experience fear, panic, or some physical problem before, during, or after sex.

Some adults have dangerous attitudes toward sex. They may use sex to bargain for other personal needs or to manipulate and hurt other people.



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EXERCISE 2

Please answer the following questions:

- Did you receive negative or contradictory messages about sex during your youth or later?
 Yes No

What were those negative or contradictory messages?

Dealing with Psychological and Physical Problems

Survivors of sexual abuse experience a wide variety of psychological problems, including depression, anxiety, panic attacks, low self-esteem, and self-destructive behaviors such as substance abuse and eating disorders.

Many survivors experience great shame and guilt because they feel responsible for their own sexual abuse, for not saying no to the abuser, or for not fighting back. They may feel guilty for keeping the abuse or the abuser's problems secret.

Since some sexually abused children felt both sexual pain and pleasure, they may feel confused about sexual feelings. Many feel bad about their bodies and feel dirty. Some feel isolated, fearful, abandoned, and distrustful of others. Some are openly angry and hostile. They may feel anger at themselves or turn their anger toward others and engage in aggressive and antisocial behavior.

People who have been sexually abused may also experience physical problems such as backaches, headaches, insomnia, and stomach problems. These are often related to ongoing stress and anxiety.



EXERCISE 10

Please answer the following questions:

1. Why do you think that someone who experienced childhood or later sexual abuse might experience psychological and emotional problems? In your own words, describe what kinds of problems the person might develop.
