

Child Sexual Abuse. Molestation. Those words alone bring about an eerie and numbing feeling. It's something that no one wants to talk about. It's shameful, embarrassing, and downright humiliating. But it's something that has gripped every family at some point in time. Therefore, we must talk about it. We must deal with this issue!

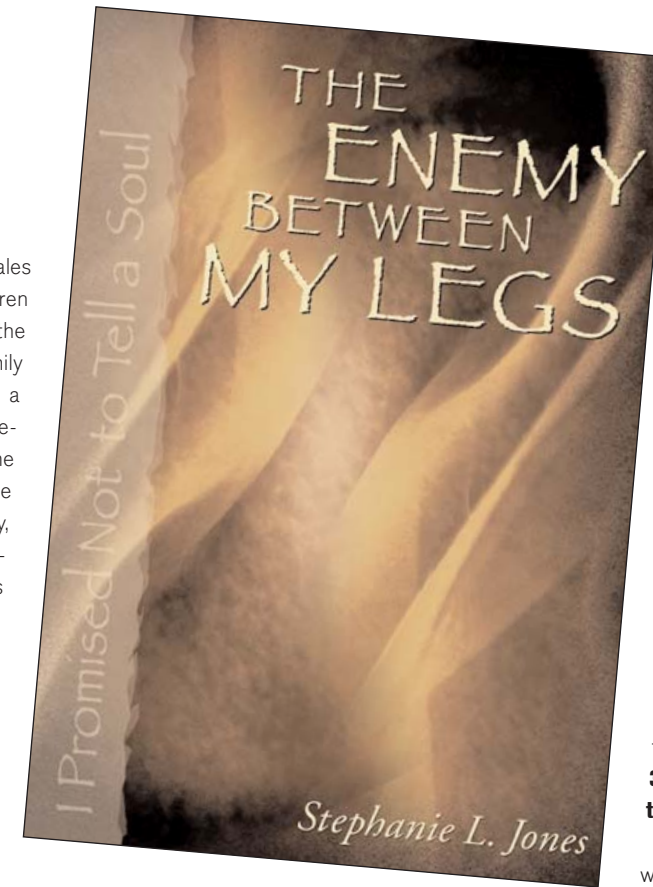
OVERCOMING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

One in 3 females and 1 in 5 males are sexually abused as children and 90% of the time it's at the hands of a family member, close family friend, or trusted leader. It's not a stranger on the street, but it's someone the victim loves and trust. Some of the results of sexual abuse include low self-esteem, sexual promiscuity, teenage pregnancy, abortion, excessive spending habits, and problems forming and maintaining relationships. According to leading organizations such as Darkness to Light and ChildHelp.com:

- 66% of teen pregnancies and abortions are preceded by sexual abuse.
- 96% of prostitutes were sexual abuse victims.
- 75% of rapists were sexual abuse victims.
- 60% of children who experience abuse and neglect are more likely to be arrested at some point in their lives.

I know what it's like to endure years of sexual abuse. I was sexually abused for over seven years, beginning at age five. I was touched, kissed, and fondled by some of the very same people who were supposed to love and protect me. Vowing within my heart to never tell a soul, I went about life as if all was well. Even as a young child, and especially as a teenager and young adult, I knew that I wasn't happy, but I didn't connect it to something that happened to me when I was a little girl. I hardly ever thought about the abuse. For the most part, it was as if it never happened.

It wasn't until I was 29 years old that I spoke up and addressed my past and how it affected my teenage and young adult life. I discovered how it had a major influence on the choices that I made throughout the years, especially when it came to my decisions about relationships and sex. Through prayer and spending time with God, I realized that what happened to me as a child didn't just go away, nor was it my fault. God showed me how it led to one bad decision after the next. Most importantly, I learned the steps to heal from it!



1. What are some steps abuse victims can take to begin the healing process?

First, the person should pray and ask God to show them how they're still being affected by it. There are side effects that seem to exist amongst all victims, but they do vary by person. While some people take drugs or drink alcohol to deal with their pain, that's not always the case. Another person may struggle with weight problems or trust issues. Each person needs to find a way to deal with their particular issues. Yes, sometimes that means talking to a counselor. Secondly, talk to someone who will be encouraging and non-judgmental toward all parties involved. Talking to someone allows for victims to release years of bottled-up hurt and pain. Keeping silent doesn't make it go away. Sexual abuse is a heavy burden to bear, especially alone. Last, forgive the offender. Forgiveness is a decision and something that a person purposes in their heart to do. It doesn't make the abuse right nor does it mean they must have a relationship with the offender. It means letting go of the anger and resentment in one's own heart. Surely, there may be other necessary steps. It really depends on where the victim/survivor is at in their life. But this is a great place to start!

2. Only 15% of abuse cases are ever revealed. Why don't victims tell?

There's no one answer to this question. But usually as a child, the victim is not aware of the seriousness of the situation. Sometimes they feel like participants and are afraid of getting in trouble themselves. Oftentimes it's an issue of fear. Ninety-percent of the time the offender is a family member or close family friend. No one wants someone they love or another family member to serve 10-25 years in prison for child molestation. We don't want those we love to get in trouble. Again, these are just a few reasons. Victims tend to have several and they may vary in each case.

3. What can other people do to help remedy this problem?

Parents can be more selective about where and with whom they allow their children to spend their time, including with family members, friends, and leaders. Everyone needs to pay better attention to their children's actions and conversations. Oftentimes the signs are right there: children playing sexually with toys, children naming their body parts, bed wetting, fear or uncommon attraction to certain adults, and sexually active at a young age. We must stop making sexual abuse the family secret! Keeping quiet only allows for it to go on generation after generation, because children are very likely to share their experience with one another. Also, get children help when child-on-child sexual abuse takes place. This will prevent them from becoming teenage and adult child molesters.

Stephanie L. Jones, author of *The Enemy Between My Legs*, is a highly sought after speaker for schools, organizations, and churches. A sexual abuse survivor, she knows and understands the effects that it has on a victim's life. She is committed to helping others, especially teenage girls and young women, find healing from the pain of their past. Purchase the book or connect with Stephanie confidentially at www.stephaniejones.com