

TELLING PEOPLE ABOUT YOUR ABUSE



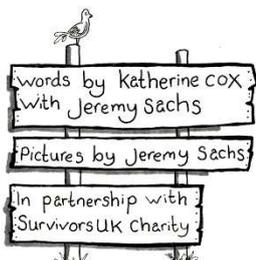
Do I have a responsibility to tell?

Do my friends deserve to know?

Does it help to share my experience?

If you are unsure whether to disclose an abuse, or you don't know how, use these questions to help think about who to tell, what to tell, when and why.

WHO?	WHAT?	HOW?
Work out who do you want to know and also who don't you want to know?	Work out what details you are willing to share and what you want to keep private	How do you want to practically tell someone. In your home, somewhere public, with a supportive friend or alone?
WHY?	WHEN?	SAFETY?
Why are you choosing to share your story now, what will you gain?	When is the best and safest time to tell someone?	What if it goes wrong, how will you keep yourself emotionally (and possibly physically) safe?



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Telling people about the abuse

Introduction

Whether to tell?

Everyone makes different decisions about whether and who they tell about the abuse, if anyone. We believe that it is everyone's right to make their own decision about whether or who they tell and we don't think there is a right or a wrong answer, but there may be a right answer for you. This support sheet looks at the sorts of questions which might be helpful to ask yourself when considering whether to speak about the abuse.

We do, however, want to work towards a world in which people can feel free to speak – or not - about their history of being sexually abused free of silence and shame.

Who to tell?

Some people decide that it's helpful to be entirely open about the abuse and to tell everyone in their lives and with whom they come into contact. The advantage of this is that you don't have to manage a partial disclosure to some and not others and you don't have to worry that the people you might tell may choose to tell other people you hadn't chosen to tell. You maintain control of your information inasmuch as you have decided it is not private or a secret from anyone. This can feel liberating and can also feel exposing. If you tell everyone you will probably have to manage some reactions which might be difficult.

Conversely, some people choose to tell no-one and of course we don't know how many men choose not to speak to anyone about what has happened to them.

Many survivors choose to tell some people. Some people tell a therapist or other professional involved in their care, or peer survivors in a support group. Others tell their partner and /or close and trusted friends, others tell some or several family members.

If the case goes to the police and then to court, then others may get to find out what happened. Court proceedings are public and can be reported in the press.

The choice of who to tell is a difficult one. It is worth considering the degree of trust and safety you feel with that person. You are giving them a part of yourself which is important, precious and vulnerable. Will they be able to hold that part of you with the care it deserves?

What to tell?

If you decide to tell someone you have been sexually abused, you then have a set of decisions – and have control over – what and how much you tell them. What you are not doing by speaking to someone about it is giving them the right to know everything. You may choose to tell them just that it happened, or who the perpetrator was or when it happened and the impact on you. You may choose to speak in detail about what happened but no-one has the right to ask that of you and you are under no obligation to share those details.

If your case goes to court, the details of what happened are given in court which is why many people who ask family and friends to come to court ask them to wait outside.

How to tell

It doesn't always work out this way because sometimes it just happens that we tell someone on the spur of the moment in an imperfect environment and in an unplanned way, but if you are considering speaking with someone about what happened, it can be worth considering how to tell them. Remember, you have lived with this being part of your experience for a long time and you have made the decision to speak about it, but the person you speak to won't be as prepared for this conversation as you are. Think about how you want to bring it up, what you might want to say and how you want the conversation to end. Think about how you might ask for what you need from the person.

It's worth having a think about where you want to tell them. You might want to be at home, in their home, somewhere neutral. Wherever you decide, it's important that you feel comfortable and safe.

When to tell

There is no right or wrong time to speak to someone about the abuse and it may be that many years have elapsed before you speak about it. That's OK. If you tell someone who has known you a long time, they may feel upset that you didn't feel able to tell them before now, but that's not their fault or yours. This is the right time for you now and that's OK.

Why tell?

You may be asking yourself why should I tell? It will change the relationship, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse, it can cause difficulties in families, especially if the perpetrator is also part of or known to the family and once you have told someone, you can't un-tell them. But there are also potential advantages to speaking about what has happened, here are some of the reasons other survivors have given for speaking about the abuse:

- I don't want it to continue to be a shameful secret
- It has become an elephant in the room
- They know something is wrong and they don't know the full picture, so they can't support me properly
- It's stopping me feeling closer to them
- I'm having to watch what I say all the time
- I need more support

If it goes wrong

Telling someone else that you trust and with whom you feel safe about the abuse can feel the most enormous relief but it sometimes can go wrong and people can react in a way which we didn't expect or hope for and which isn't helpful. Whilst you have every right to expect and deserve support and understanding, remember that this may well come as a shock to the person you tell and their initial reaction may be from a position of shock and ignorance. If you can, give them an opportunity to get their heads around what you have told them. It may help to give them our support sheet, 'Being an ally'. It will probably help them if you can say what you need from them and what will not be helpful – many people want to be supportive but simply don't know what to say or do.

If you have been sexually abused and are thinking of speaking about it with someone in your life, please do get in touch. You can chat in confidence to one of our helpliners on our webchat or textchat via our website

www.survivorsuk.org