

When Your Spouse Was Abused

Survivors

- Individuals don't heal willingly. They do it because they're in pain. Some survivors may never be ready to heal.
- Most survivors struggle with the issue of trust—either trusting inappropriately or not trusting anyone.
- Some survivors develop an exaggerated need for control in their adult relationships—then they can feel safe.
- When survivors begin their journey of healing, their supporting spouses need to realize that healing takes place slowly. The beginning is the hardest.
- Survivors need healthy, safe people besides their spouses to whom they can talk honestly about the past.
- If survivors want full healing, they need to learn to forgive their perpetrators. They also need to be able to forgive their own failures as well as those of their spouses.

Spouses

- Sometimes spouses take in the information superficially and don't grasp the damage and pain of the survivors. They accept the facts but minimize the trauma.
- Spouses need to realize that they love someone whose sufferings they can't control.
- To help survivors, spouses need compassion and patience. They also need to understand they themselves have needs and limits.
- Nurturing spouses have to learn to accept where the survivors are and be committed to support and love them—without putting the condition of healing into the situation. *Not all spouses can do that.*
- Spouses need to know that once the survivors start dealing with their pain, the relationships will change. That change upsets the dynamics in their relationships.

- After changes occur, the supportive spouses may not like the transformation. If the couple makes it through the pain stages, the relationship becomes different. *The old relationship is dead.*

Both Survivors and Spouses

- Both survivors and spouses need to focus on accepting each other's pain. Survivors often fail to realize their spouses also hurt.
- As survivors deal with past abuse, they trigger the spouses' need to heal in a number of areas. If secondary survivors don't pursue their own healing, relational distances develop.
- Survivors need to keep the secondary survivors updated on their healing process and share frequently. Otherwise, the spouses are left out of the process—and they need to be part of it. Even more, they won't be prepared for the inevitable changes.
- If both are survivors, they can be either powerful allies or terrible. Their struggles are different and they can't assume their spouse has the same issues.
- Both survivors and spouses need to be aware of the emotional reflexes of the survivors, such as involuntary, automatic trigger-responses to certain stimuli. They need to recognize and work on them together.

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