

## ***Healing Sex: The Complete Guide to Sexual Wholeness, a DVD by Staci Haines*** **General Interview Questions & Answers**

### **1. Is healing possible?**

Healing is possible--emotional healing and sexual healing. I always tell survivors, "You're here. You survived. That means you're more powerful than what happened to you." Victimization is a terrible thing. Surviving it is very hard. But I try to impress upon survivors, "Now that you're an adult, you have the capacity to build the life, and the sex life, you choose."

In my experience, when survivors use a body-centered approach, the success rate is very high. Those who engage in only intellectual talk therapies tend to have a harder time because their bodies continue to respond in the same ways they did during the abuse. But healing is definitely possible. Survivors can have happy, fulfilling lives, and GREAT sex lives.

### **2. What is a trigger?**

Anything from sexual positions or acts, to smells, or something a lover says can act as a trigger. When one is triggered, the past rushes into the present and the person can't tell the difference between the two. For instance, they won't know the difference between their lover and their perpetrator.

### **3. What's the connection between desire and shame?**

The women I interviewed for my book, *The Survivor's Guide to Sex*, whether they were into vanilla sex, S/M, queer or straight sex, they agreed that they felt like something was fundamentally wrong or bad about them sexually. Also, if the sex they like as adults is similar to the type of sex during the abuse, they worried there was a connection. They were scared and ashamed.

### **4. How can partners and lovers help?**

Partners and lovers are often the first to know or notice that the person they love is deeply struggling with something. They may notice the symptoms of sexual abuse or struggle with how these symptoms are impacting their relationship. Because sexual abuse deeply impacts a survivor's trust, intimacy, and sexuality, often partners are the folks who live most closely with the results of child sexual abuse or adult rape. Survivors often confide in their partners and look to this relationship for key support. Your love, care, and presence are vital, and getting support outside of the relationship is also important. Healing from child sexual abuse or rape is an experience that needs a great deal of support to help hold it and heal it.

It's not easy being the partner of a survivor who is in the throes of healing. The major mistake I see partners make is that they try to become rescuers and martyrs, "I'll help you, even if I have to deny myself. I'll make things as easy as possible for you, even if that makes them harder for me." At first, this seems noble, but it doesn't work for either partner over time. No one can "save" anyone else from the emotions or pain of sexual abuse. The best ally a partner can be is one who supports the survivor in healing, which means going into and through the pain of sexual abuse.

It is important as a partner to stay connected to your own boundaries, needs and joys. While these needs may not get met all of the time, denying them tends to backfire. I have seen partners edit themselves out of the relationship because they are trying not to do or say anything that will cause their loved one to feel pain, remind them of their history, or make them feel afraid. These feelings are part of the healing.

Remaining as honest, sensitive, and authentic as you can be, while expressing your own boundaries, needs, and desires is the best bet as partner.

I urge partners working with healing from sexual abuse to engage others in this process. Who are your support people? Who else can you talk with honestly about the healing process? Your friends, family (when appropriate), and community play an important support role in healing.

It's hard to be in a relationship when one member is working to heal from sexual abuse. But those who hang in there usually find that the process is a major growth experience with a wonderful deepening of love and intimacy, and in the end, a better relationship with much better sex.

### **5. Why is good sex important?**

Sex is a normal and healthy part of being human. Having good sex--where you feel pleasure, intimacy, intensity, and longing--is one of the most powerful experiences anyone can have. Not having that can be as detrimental as sex can be powerful. Oftentimes, people who have been abused avoid sex so it doesn't bring up feelings about the abuse. To heal, they have to go toward, and eventually through, whatever triggers memories of the abuse--that's where freedom is.