

Healing Sex: The Complete Guide to Sexual Wholeness, a DVD by Staci Haines
Interview Questions & Answers for Queer Folks-Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT)

1. Who is impacted by child sexual abuse and adult sexual assault?

Child sexual abuse and adult sexual assault affect people from a wide variety of backgrounds. Statistics show that sexual abuse crosses boundaries of race, class, culture, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. There is no one kind of person to whom sexual abuse happens. Sexual abuse affects boys and men, girls and women, and transgendered youth and adults. People from upper and middle class backgrounds as well as those below the poverty line all experience child sexual abuse. People are most likely to be sexually abused, both children and adults, by someone they know and trust, from their own community. Estimates show that a minimum of 30% of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by a family member.

Over 60million adults in the United States are survivors of child sexual abuse. The number grows when we add adult rape. While there are a wide variety of cultural beliefs about gender and sexuality, many cultures remain more comfortable perceiving girls and women as sexual victims than recognizing the sexual abuse of boys and men. Homophobia and sexism perpetuate the myth that “real” men are not sexually victimized, and because of this myth it seems highly likely that the sexual abuse of boys and men is under-reported across cultures.

2. Does sexual abuse and trauma affect your sexuality?

Absolutely. Sexual abuse and trauma affects people’s sexuality along with their sense of trust in themselves and others, their ability to be emotionally intimate, to set boundaries that take care of themselves and others, and much, much more. Sexual abuse impacts someone’s whole selves, body, mind, and spirit, and touches all aspects of their lives. If sexual trauma is not addressed and healed, the symptoms often worsen and get less and less connected to the original harm. For example, harmful drug or alcohol use is a typical survival strategy that many people use to try to get away from the pain of sexual abuse. Overtime the drugs and alcohol can be identified as the core problem, eclipsing the original trauma that drives the use. Sex is used as the way to harm and abuse children and adults in sexual abuse. Because it is *sexual* abuse, sex has to be untangled from abuse through the healing process.

3. Are people LGBT because they were sexually abused?

While child sexual abuse, as well as adult sexual assault, impacts people’s sexualities, sexual abuse does not “make” someone gay. Sexual abuse is an act of abuse misusing sex as the tool for harm. This often confuses sexuality with abuse, and people struggle to untangle this mess. Sexual abuse can leave someone suspicious about their own sexuality, confused about what sex is, and afraid to engage with their own sexual desires and wants. Some people do ask themselves the question, “Did my abuse make me LGBT?” This is part of that untangling. The important question is, “If I could define my sexuality, independent from abuse, what do I want? Who would I be?”

Stereotypes about gay people complicate the question about whether sexual abuse, particularly child sexual abuse, makes one gay. The misperception still exists that being LGBT is somehow “abnormal” and that something wrong must have happened to make people that way. The problem lies in the stereotype, not in facts about child sexual abuse.

4. Were a higher percentage of LGBT people sexually abused as children?

Nope. In tracking the statistics, about one on ten people identify as LGBT. Many more people have sexual experiences with others of the same gender, but do not identify as gay. There is no research to support that

LGBT people have a higher rate of experiences of sexual abuse. The negative social stereotypes about queer people's sexuality, however, do impact them in a similar way to sexual abuse, leaving shame that is not theirs.

Estimates are that 1 in 6 boys and 1 in 3 girls are sexually abused before they turn 18 years of age. Estimates of homosexuality are 1 in 10. The numbers don't add up.

5. Are gay men more likely to sexually abuse children than straight men?

No. Adult sexual orientation is irrelevant to the sexual abuse of children. The vast majority of adults who sexually abuse children identify as heterosexual, even those men who sexually abuse boys. Child sexual abuse and homosexuality are linked by a series of odd and unsettling connections in the public mind. Heterosexism, the belief that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural form of sexual expression, tends to reinforce the belief that homosexual people are somehow sexually deviant. Once this belief system is in place, it is just a quick step to thinking that homosexuals might be more likely to sexually abuse children.

Child sexual abuse is about the expression of sexual power rather than the expression of sexual preference for one gender or another. Some sexual offenders have a preference for children of one gender or the other, but this preference is not necessarily reflected in their adult sexual choices. This stereotype is part of broader cultural homophobia, which scapegoats gay men as sexual offenders.

If you looked at a graph that charted the profile and demographics of child sexual offenders in the United States, it would match the profile and demographics of the average man in this country. This does not mean that all men in the U.S. are sexual offenders. Rather, it underscores the fact that sexual abuse is committed by a wide range of people rather than by a stereotypical offender. But despite the fact that there is no single profile for a sexual offender, recent research in the field of sex offender treatment suggests that some key factors are often present: very low self esteem, feelings of extreme powerlessness, a tendency to relate more to children than adults, little to no empathic ability, and strong projections of accountability onto others (it is all someone else's fault).

6. Is it easier for LGBT people to talk about and/or admit they've been victims of sexual abuse?

Homophobia makes it difficult for gay men and women to disclose child sexual abuse or adult sexual assault because it might be used to explain their sexual orientation. Often this becomes an added barrier for LGBT people to speak about what happened to them as well as seek help. Too often people including therapists, doctors, family, and support agencies reinforce this negative stereotype, instead of responding supportively, with care and attention on the needs of the survivor.

7. How is child sexual abuse and adult rape an LGBT issue?

If you asked them, most people would tell you they think child sexual abuse is wrong. The majority of the population believes that sexual abuse is a terrible crime that happens to someone else, somewhere else. But child sexual abuse and adult rape is everyone's problem. Given the statistics, each of us knows someone whose life has been directly impacted by child sexual abuse or adult rape, which makes us all bystanders. Because of the silencing and shame that surrounds sexual abuse, frequently neither survivors nor offenders disclose their experience to those around them. Child sexual abuse continues at an enormous cost to society, not only in terms of public health, but also in terms of personal relationships. To address and prevent sexual abuse we must each develop our ability to face it and respond to it effectively.

8. How can partners and lovers help?

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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.