

## **“Learning about Clergy Sexual Abuse and Surviving GG Nakayama – Healing for Survivors, Families and Community”**

### Program

- 10:00: Introduction of Wendy Matsubuchi Bremner and Judy Hanazawa. Presentation of background information about the community outreach work of the Japanese Canadian Working Group, the Anglican Church Apology and their follow up to support healing.
- 10:30: Being aware sexual abuse is difficult to talk about, provide general knowledge regarding clergy sexual abuse, effects of GG Nakayama's abuse upon survivors, families and community and encourage support for truth and open discussion. Introduce and show the DVD on the February 18, 2017 Vancouver workshop.
- 10:45: Cameron House DVD
- 11:00 Discussion about working with the effects of GG Nakayama's sexual crimes. Ensure that identity of people and any shared information during the meeting is confidential.
- In meeting community members we learned it is important to:
- Listen to and honour survivors, families and community members
  - Provide information with awareness knowledge is strength
  - Address misplaced shame
  - Encourage community connection, understanding and support, rather than isolation and misunderstanding about surviving the abuse by GG Nakayama
- 11:45: Information from the Right Reverend Riscylla Shaw, Bishop of Trent-Durham representing the Diocese of Toronto to provide information about Sexual Misconduct Policy of the Diocese of Toronto and the Diocese response about the June 15, 2015 Anglican Apology regarding GG Nakayama
- 12:00: Break for Lunch
- 12:45: Further Discussion
- Hearing People's thoughts and questions – having discussion upon viewing both the DVD's
  - Discussion about possible steps in healing
  - Obtain community recommendations about post Apology steps by the Anglican Church to facilitate healing, reconciliation and resolution for survivors, families and the Japanese Canadian community
- 2:30: Conclusion

## **Introduction:**

In 2014 upon expressing an apology to all those hurt by her father, Joy Kogawa consented to the community outreach work of the Japanese Canadian Working Group (JCWG). The working group are made up of concerned Japanese Canadian community members who support and offer a community process to address healing needs regarding the sexual abuse history of GG Nakayama. The working group worked over many months with the Anglican Church on their apology issued on 15 June, 2015.

On June 15, 2015 the Diocese of New Westminster and Diocese of Calgary issued a public Apology to survivors, families, friends and the Japanese Canadian community for the sexual abuse perpetrated upon Japanese-Canadian youth over decades from the 1930's to the 1970's, by past Anglican minister Goichi Gordon Nakayama. The Apology concluded, "We express our support to survivors, affected families, and community as a whole and deeply hope that this Apology encourages healing and wellness for all whose lives have been affected by Mr. Nakayama's actions. We commit to participation in a healing and reconciliation process with the members of the Japanese-Canadian community who were harmed by Mr. Nakayama."

Following the Apology, the Japanese-Canadian Working Group presented community education and outreach meetings in Vancouver in February 2017, then Lethbridge-Calgary during October 2017 and Winnipeg on March 17, 2018. Additional meetings for the national Japanese-Canadian community are considered necessary not only for offering education and support to survivors, families and community, but also to seek consultation regarding the healing process upon receiving the 2015 Apology from the Anglican Church.

We learned it made a difference to meet people in person, provide information, listen to what community members had to say and honour what they shared. It is a difficult matter but we also learned that being and talking together felt positive for people.

Working Group members Wendy Matsubuchi Bremner and Judy Hanazawa will be presenters at the gathering " Learning about Clergy Sexual Abuse and Surviving GG Nakayama - Healing for Survivors, Families and Community"

The event will take place on Saturday, April 21 from 10AM until 3PM at Momiji Health Care Society Community Centre, Toronto, 3555 Kingston Road, Scarborough, Ontario, M1M3W4. Tel: 416 261 6683

Wendy Matsubuchi Bremner whose uncles are survivors, and Judy Hanazawa will also be available for 1 to 1 or smaller group meetings as needed.

We encourage survivors, families, friends and community members to attend this gathering at the Momiji Centre. Please come so we can learn and listen together.

All the best, Judy Hanazawa, Japanese Canadian Working Group



# The Anglican Church of Canada / L'Eglise anglicane du Canada

The Primate's Office

80 Hayden Street, Toronto, ON M4Y 3G2  
Tel: (416) 924-9192 \* Fax: (416) 924-0211

Email: [primate@national.anglican.ca](mailto:primate@national.anglican.ca)  
[www.anglican.ca](http://www.anglican.ca)

January 24, 2018

Judy Hanazawa  
The Japanese Canadian Working Group

Dear Judy,

I write with a heavy heart mindful of Gordon Nakayama's sexual abuse of so many young Japanese children through the years that he served as a priest of The Anglican Church of Canada. Such crimes, born of someone's inability to control his sexual desires to seek gratification forcing innocent children into shameful sexual acts, are horrible and the trauma for the victims haunting, for years if not for a lifetime.

I am sorry that a priest of our Church behaved in such a manner, disgracing the sacred ministry entrusted to him in ordination, wreaking unimaginable havoc in the lives of these children, and bringing much pain to their families and much grief to the wider community of Japanese Canadians.

I am aware of the June 15, 2015 Apology made by Archbishop Gregory Kerr-Wilson (Diocese of Calgary) and Bishop Melissa Skelton (Diocese of New Westminster). I stand with them on all twelve points. The first six speak to Mr. Nakayama's immoral behaviour; the last six to the Church's remorse and commitment to "support survivors, affected families and the community as a whole" and "to participate in a healing and reconciliation process".

I have been apprised through formal conversations with Archbishop Kerr-Wilson and Bishop Skelton of gatherings held in Lethbridge, Alberta and Vancouver, British Columbia hosted by representatives of the Japanese Canadian Working Group reaching out to provide education events for Japanese Canadians with respect to the Apology and to consider appropriate actions with respect to enabling healing.

I know of commitments on the part of both dioceses, Calgary and New Westminster, to

- fund additional community outreach and educational workshops that the Working Group would like to offer in Winnipeg, Toronto, Hamilton, and Montreal in 2018;
- assume costs for counselling to survivors and their families in the hope of the healing of those harmed by Mr. Nakayama; and

- offer scholarship support for students of Japanese heritage in Calgary and in British Columbia.

I am engaged in a conversation with Archbishop Kerr-Wilson and Bishop Skelton with respect to a desire on their part “for the national Church to participate financially in responding to the requests of the Working Group in addressing the harm done by Mr. Nakayama”. In this instance, the national Church means “The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada”. Accordingly, I have brought this “desire” to the attention of our General Secretary, The Ven. Dr. Michael Thompson. I have every reason to be very hopeful of a positive and modest response in which the General Synod would support the Working Group’s efforts to create opportunities for gatherings across the country in 2018.

Finally I would like to assure you of my willingness to meet with you and other representatives of The Japanese Working Group along with Archbishop Kerr-Wilson and Bishop Skelton. It is right that I should come to you, - to listen and learn, to reiterate my support of the 2015 Apology, to speak of assistance with funding and to pray with you.

In the spirit of contrition for such harm as Mr. Nakayama inflicted through what he himself described in 1994 as his “sexual bad behaviour toward so many people”, in the commitment to integrity in actions that accompany apology, and in the hope of healing for those whose bodies, minds and spirits were assaulted with consequences for a lifetime.

May God help us and guide us.

With respect,

I am,

Sincerely yours,



Fred J. Hiltz  
Archbishop and Primate

Copied to:   - The Ven. Dr. Michael Thompson, General Secretary  
                  - Ms. Hanna Goschy, Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer  
                  - The Most. Rev. Greg Kerr-Wilson, Archbishop of the Diocese of Calgary  
                  - The Rt. Rev. Melissa Skelton, Bishop of the Diocese of New Westminster  
                  -

**Saturday, 28 October, 2017**

**Community Workshop on the Effects of Sexual Abuse**

9:30 am to 3pm, Multicultural Centre, 421-6th Avenue South, Lethbridge

Lunch will be served

The Japanese-Canadian Working Group is offering a free community workshop in Lethbridge:  
**The Effects of Clergy Sexual Abuse on Survivors, Families, Community**

Survivors, families, friends and the Japanese-Canadian community at large are affected by sexual abuse. In February, 2017, the Japanese-Canadian Working Group offered a workshop in Vancouver which discussed the effects of GG Nakayama's abuse of Japanese-Canadian youth, including in the Lethbridge/Coaldale area.

28 October, Pastor George Takashima, Social Worker Judy Hanazawa, Teacher/Survivor-Family Wendy Matsubuchi, a counsellor and others shall offer a similar workshop in Lethbridge. Archbishop Gregory Kerr-Wilson will participate and provide information from the Diocese of Calgary. Video from a similar situation at Cameron House in San Francisco, as well as from the Vancouver workshop, shall be shared. The purpose is to discuss Mr Nakayama's confession, the Anglican Church's apology, the feelings of survivors and their families--and redress.

Throughout the day, participants will be encouraged to air any comments and questions, with confidentiality and anonymity for all who do not specifically consent to the sharing of their names or words. Support shall be offered to any participant who requests it--both during and after the workshop.

Info shall be provided on specific topics:

- History of the Japanese Canadian Working Group
- Excerpts from "Clergy Sexual Abuse and its Effects on Survivors, Families, Community", the Vancouver workshop held 18 February 2017
- Cameron House: Chinese-American Presbyterian minister's abuse of boys for 40+ years, and the community's work toward healing
- GG Nakayama's history, intergenerational effects on families of survivors
- The Anglican Church's Apology 15 June, 2015
- Healing and redress, including local support in the Lethbridge/Coaldale area

Doors open 9am, with the workshop starting 9:30 and ending at 3pm. Refreshments, including lunch, shall be served, so please RSVP if you can.

The Multicultural Centre is located at [421 - 6 Avenue South](#), the northwest corner of 5th Street and 6th Avenue.

The entrance is on 6th Avenue, but enter the parking lot from 4th Street, south of 5th Avenue)

For more information, please contact the Japanese-Canadian Working Group, [jcworkinggroup@gmail.com](mailto:jcworkinggroup@gmail.com) or [604-808-6379](tel:604-808-6379).

## **The purpose of presenting a workshop on clergy sexual abuse and its effects upon survivor, families, community.**

Dear Community,

The Japanese Canadian working group is composed of community members who offer our advocacy to survivors, families and the community to support a just resolution and healing regarding the decades of sexual abuse of Japanese Canadian boys mostly, perpetrated by Gordon Goichi Nakayama.

### **About the Japanese Canadian Working Group:**

Our group member in alphabetical order are:

Connie Kadota, Daebin Im, Emi Kordyback, Joyce Chong, Judy Hanazawa, Lily Shinde, Lisa Uyeda, Lorene Oikawa, Naomi Shikaze, Wendy Matsubuchi

Here is some background about our activities:

- The effort of a community group to address Mr. Nakayama's history as a sexual abuser goes back to 2006 when a request on the group's behalf, through Wendy Fletcher-Marsh, then principal of the Vancouver School of Theology at UBC, was made to the Diocese of Calgary to share their file on Mr. Nakayama. There was no response.
- Our group has been working intensively since 2014 on reaching out to survivors, families and the community to determine what is the best kind of support and assistance to offer and what can be done to achieve a just resolution for those who suffered because of Mr. Nakayama's and the Anglican Church's wrongs.
- The working group also worked with representatives of the Diocese of New Westminster on terms of the Church's apology for Mr. Nakayama's sexual crimes to survivors, families friends and the Japanese Canadian community
- The Anglican Church apology was issued in 2015. Bishop Melissa Skelton of the Diocese of New Westminster and Archbishop Greg Kerr-Wilson of the Diocese of Calgary jointly expressed the apology. Since then, Bishop Melissa has been involved in community outreach in our community as a way to support healing for survivors, families and community and a meaningful resolution with the Diocese of New Westminster.
- On February 18, 2017 at Tonari Gumi, the Japanese Canadian working group presented a community education workshop called, "Clergy Sexual Abuse and its Effects upon Survivors, Families, Community". This workshop featured panel presentations by:
  - Anglican Bishop Melissa Skelton and Archdeacon Lynne McNaughton on Addressing and Preventing Clergy Sexual Abuse in the Diocese of New Westminster
  - Teal Maedel, Chief Psychologist, Community Correctional Services of Canada, on "An Introduction: Sex Offenders who Victimize Children"
  - Satsuki Ina, Professor Emeritus, California State University Sacramento, Psychotherapist, on Clergy Abuse from a Victim-Perpetrator-Witness Dynamic and how the Community and Secondary Trauma Victims are Impacted. What is required for the Healing Process to be Effective?"

- In March, 2017 the Japanese Canadian working Group wrote a letter to the Community to provide information about the Japanese Canadian working group and why events like the February 18, 2017 workshop were offered in the community. Reasons for offering community education are again presented below:

#### On Providing Community Education about the Effects of Clergy Sexual Abuse

- Sexuality and sexual abuse are really difficult subjects to openly discuss. Yet to support healing for those who were harmed by Mr. Nakayama and the Anglican Church, we felt it was critical to offer community education about clergy sexual abuse and its impact upon survivors, families and the community.
- Our working group also considered that survivors, families and community did not have important knowledge about what clergy sexual abuse is, its effects upon child survivors who grew up to form their families, and what might be intergenerational effects of the abuse.
- We were and are also aware individuals and families may need information about available specialized support such as therapy services. It is important these services are available if they are needed.
- The difficulty of this subject, the shame felt about it, and the lack of knowledge, might actually cause some people to withdraw or step back from survivors and families, rather than outreach to indicate they are standing by to support. We know many survivors themselves concluded it was best to withdraw in silence and lock in their abuse experience.
- *Bringing the community together to address this matter benefits survivors, families, friends, community members as well as the Anglican Church. It is important to offer knowledge as this is a benefit for all and it encourages connection rather than isolation.*

#### Here are guidelines adopted by the Japanese Canadian working group:

- The working group supports healing for survivors, families and community and a meaningful resolution with the church. As the working group, we will continue to seek direction from survivors and their families about the best way to work with, and advocate for them.
- We respect peoples' feelings
- We offer safe support where what people state will be respected and not repeated, unless there is consent to do so.
- Silence is not judged. Everyone has the right to manage issues in their own way.
- We recognize addressing and sharing the truth is not possible without openness.
- We are aware sharing, openness and truth are connected with healing
- When a person, family or community practice openness about a difficult matter which has not been openly addressed before, it is also critical for support to be available.
- Support is varied – it can include the important support offered and given by family, friends and the community. It can include support available through

professional therapists. It can include financial support available through the Anglican Church as compensation for the suffering caused.

### **About Support and Seeking Redress from the Anglican Church of Canada**

The matter of a collective financial redress for survivors, families and community from the Anglican Church needs to be addressed and resolved as part of the healing process referred to in the June 15, 2015 Anglican Church Apology. Many survivors have passed and remaining survivors are in their senior years. Time is of the essence for the redress process to reach as many survivors and families as possible. We would like to see resolution with the Anglican Church to be achieved by June 15, 2018.

It is important to consider and seek compensation for the suffering of survivors and families caused by Mr. Nakayama and the Anglican Church. We have asked for recommendations and to date, community members have said financial compensation from the Anglican Church should be available to:

- support ongoing community education, prevention, healing and support programs and events about the effects of sexual abuse on individuals, couples, intergenerational families and community.
- provide individual compensation to support the well-being of survivors and families as well as funding to access professional counselling therapy as needed;
- support a perpetual non denominational scholarship fund commemorating survivors and their families

We will continue to provide information about activities and sincerely welcome contact from the community. Please feel free to communicate, ask questions or express concerns. You can contact us by contacting Judy Hanazawa by telephone at 604 808 6379 or 604 876 9858, Emi Kordyback at 604 263 2690 or email the working group at [jcworkinggroup@gmail.com](mailto:jcworkinggroup@gmail.com). Thank you.

Yours sincerely

Judy Hanazawa, Chair, Japanese Canadian working group.



# 2016 Update – Bishops' Apology Regarding Gordon Nakayama



Randy Murray  
June 15, 2015

COPY

845 Semlin Drive,  
Vancouver, B.C.,  
Dec. 28, 1994.

Dear Friends,

I am very sorry to apologize what I did in the past. I made mistake. My moral life with my sexual bad behaviour. I sincerely sorry what I did to so many people. I hope you forgive me my past mistake.

I hope you live a happy life now.

Yours sincerely,

*G. G. Nakayama*  
G. G. Nakayama



In the early years of the 20th century, the area now known as Vancouver's downtown eastside was the bustling centre for Japanese Canadian culture in the young Canadian city. There are few remnants of those days remaining in that urban locale except for the Vancouver Japanese Language School facility constructed in 1906 and still going strong.

On Monday, June 15, 2015, The Vancouver Japanese Language School was the venue for a Gathering. An opportunity for people to hear and witness the Apology issued by the Right Reverend Gregory Kerr-Wilson, Bishop of the diocese of Calgary and the Right Reverend Melissa Skelton, Bishop of the diocese of New Westminster to all members of the Japanese Canadian Community affected by abuse perpetrated by the late Goichi Gordon Nakayama, former priest of the Anglican Church of Canada.

On this bright, sunny afternoon 60-70 participants and spectators and more than a half dozen representatives from the media sat on chairs positioned in a circle in the middle of the main auditorium of the venerable building to be part of the Apology and to hear the Response to the Apology given by Mary Kitagawa, a member of the Japanese Canadian Community with extensive knowledge of Nakayama's abuse and the damage it did to members of her family and her community.

The programme began with Japanese Canadian Working Group (JCWG) Member and MC, Lorene Oikawa welcoming the panel and introducing Councilor Deborah Barker of the Squamish Nation who prior to offering a traditional blessing shared some personal reflections about apology and reconciliation in the context of Indian Residential Schools Survivors and the recent and ongoing focus of our nation on Truth and Reconciliation. Next to speak was Judy Hanazawa of the JCWG who gave detailed background about the process entered into by the JCWG and the representatives from the diocese of New Westminster who for the past eighteen months have met frequently in order to move towards today's apology. Judy began by thanking the members past and present of the JCWG many of whom were present and she also thanked the three representatives of the diocese of New Westminster: the Venerable Douglas Fenton, Executive Archdeacon of the diocese of New Westminster and Archdeacon of Burrard; the Reverend Father Daebin Im, rector, Holy Cross Japanese Canadian Anglican Church and the Very Reverend Peter Elliott, Dean of the Diocese and rector of Christ Church Cathedral. Judy presented some details about information that came forward from a number of voices in the Japanese Canadian Community in early 2014 about the abuse perpetrated by Mr. Nakayama and the need to involve the Church. She constructed a timeline of events regarding the ongoing meeting process with the focus on the apology really beginning to develop in May of 2014. All involved realized that having the truth about the abuse emerge within the context of apology was essential in order for healing and hopefully reconciliation to take place.

When it was time for the Apology the two bishops stood at the lectern and took turns reading the twelve points of the apology:

***Apology issued by the Anglican Bishop of Calgary and the Anglican Bishop of New Westminster to all members of the Japanese Canadian Community affected by abuse perpetrated by the Reverend Canon Gordon Goichi Nakayama (hereafter referred to as Mr. Nakayama).***

1. *Mr. Nakayama was a priest of the Anglican Diocese of Calgary. Some of his ministry was in the Anglican Diocese of New Westminster, and he travelled widely in Canada and in other parts of the world.*
2. *After he had retired, Mr. Nakayama confessed in person and in a letter dated December 28th 1994 to the then Archbishop of Calgary that he had engaged in 'sexual bad behavior . . . to so many people'.*
3. *Upon receipt of Mr. Nakayama's confession, the then Archbishop of Calgary formally brought forward the very serious charge of Immorality against Mr. Nakayama on February 10, 1995.*
4. *Upon receiving this charge, Mr. Nakayama voluntarily resigned on February 13, 1995, from the exercise of priestly ministry.*
5. *It is not known how many young people were affected, and no complaints were received at that time.*
6. *We have been made aware of the impact and effect of these past actions by some of today's survivors, whom we acknowledge and seek to support, along with those who have died, their families and friends.*

*7. We deeply regret that Mr. Nakayama while a priest committed these acts of immoral sexual behavior.*

*8. On behalf of our dioceses, we express our deep sorrow and grief for harm which Mr. Nakayama did, and we apologize to all whose lives have been affected by Mr. Nakayama's actions.*

*9. We deeply regret this Apology was not delivered to the Japanese Canadian Community at the time of Mr. Nakayama's confession, the charge of immorality, and his subsequent resignation from the exercise of priestly ministry.*

*10. We express our support to survivors, affected families, and community as a whole and deeply hope that this Apology encourages healing and wellness for all whose lives have been affected by Mr. Nakayama's actions.*

*11. We commit to participation in a healing and reconciliation process with the members of the Japanese Canadian Community who were harmed by Mr. Nakayama.*

*12. And we assure you that the Anglican Church takes these matters seriously, and takes steps to prevent this type of behaviour.*

Following the Apology, Bishop Greg Kerr-Wilson presented the signed apology document to Mary Kitagawa who gave her response.

She said that she accepted these words offered by the Church but said that she did not know how these words would be heard and understood by the survivors of the abuse. "These words are a good first step" she said. She went on to say that she hoped that the Church's acknowledgment of not taking the proper steps to address Mr. Nakayama's abuse will somehow bring some comfort to survivors. She said "the victims who are still alive are very elderly now..." Mary knows from personal contact with the survivors that they are still re-living the experiences, suffering silently, isolated...they were unable to share their experiences with their parents, they were and are very angry, filled with pain and frustration. Mary spoke of the suffering of four family members all survivors of Nakayama's abuse, one family member is still alive and is still greatly troubled by his experiences.

Mary asked some of the hard questions, "Why didn't the Archbishop report Nakayama to the authorities?" "Why did it take so long for the truth to emerge?"

Prior to the June 11th, 2015 publication of a story in the Vancouver Sun about the Apology which included information about Mr. Nakayama's history, the Church had not been directly contacted by any survivors of abuse. However, on June 14th, 2015, Bishop Skelton of the diocese of New Westminster received an email from a survivor who is not a member of the Japanese Canadian community. This survivor did not signal in any way that they would follow-up further but this may indicate that getting the story out in the open may urge other survivors to come forward, and when they do the Church is committed to offering pastoral care and support to all those who have been affected - survivors and their families.

At the event, the JCWG had arranged for two counsellors with experience in helping people (and/or families) who have been traumatized by various situations to be on site. There was also a list made available by the JCWG of counsellors for people to contact in the future.

Now that the Apology has been offered and heard the journey of healing begins.

**In June of 2016 now-Archbishop Greg Kerr-Wilson gave permission for Gordon Nakayama's 1994 "letter of confession" to be attached and available on the website of the Diocese of New Westminster.**

**It is available linked below.**

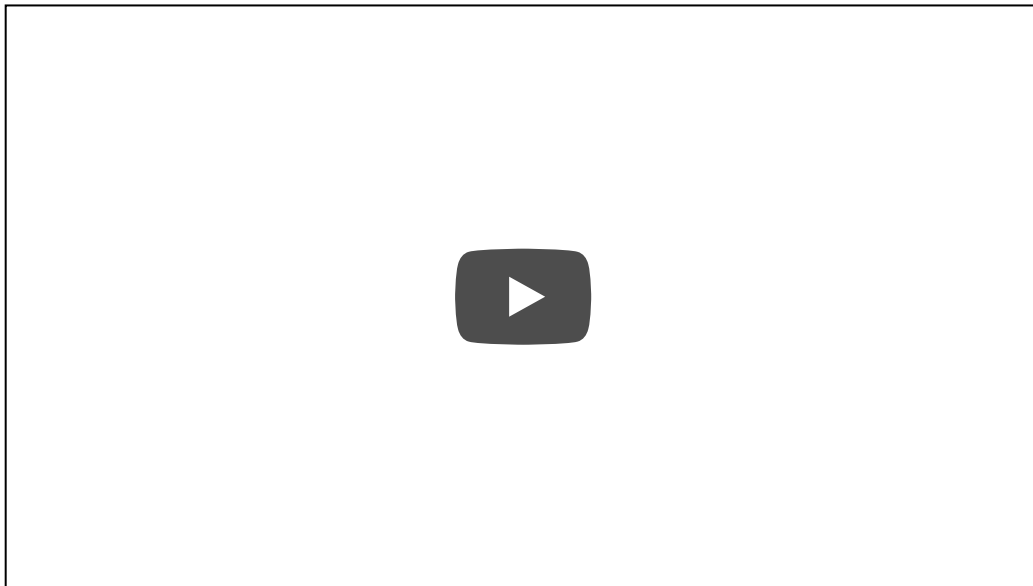
**PHOTOS:**

- ***1994 "Letter of Confession"***
- ***Bishop Melissa Skelton and Bishop Greg Kerr-Wilson offer the Apology***
- ***Lorene Oikawa MC and member of the JCWG***
- ***Councilor Deborah Baker of the Squamish Nation***
- ***Judy Hanazawa a principal member of the JCWG***
- ***Mary Kitagawa and Bishop Greg Kerr-Wilsonn***

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## Downloads

 Letter of Confession.pdf



## MENU

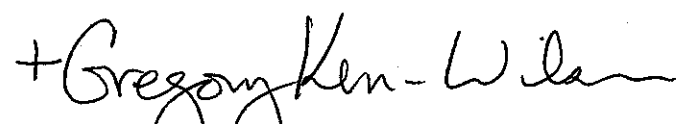
# AN APOLOGY

*Apology issued by the  
Anglican Bishop of Calgary and the Anglican Bishop of New Westminster  
to all members of the  
Japanese Canadian Community  
affected by abuse perpetrated by the Reverend Canon Gordon Goichi Nakayama  
(hereafter referred to as Mr. Nakayama):*

1. *Mr. Nakayama was a priest of the Anglican Diocese of Calgary. Some of his ministry was in the Anglican Diocese of New Westminster, and he travelled widely in Canada and in other parts of the world.*
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5. *It is not known how many young people were affected, and no complaints were received at that time.*
6. *We have been made aware of the impact and effect of these past actions by some of today's survivors, whom we acknowledge and seek to support, along with those who have died, their families and friends.*
7. *We deeply regret that Mr. Nakayama while a priest committed these acts of immoral sexual behavior.*
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11. *We commit to participation in a healing and reconciliation process with the members of the Japanese Canadian Community who were harmed by Mr. Nakayama.*
12. *And we assure you that the Anglican Church takes these matters seriously, and takes steps to prevent this type of behaviour.*

*Dated at Vancouver B.C, Monday, 15 June 2015*

  
*The Right Reverend Melissa M. Skelton  
Diocese of New Westminster*

  
*The Right Reverend Greg Kerr-Wilson  
Diocese of Calgary*

## Child Sexual Abuse in Canada

### Warning Signs, Steps to Take, Emotional Effects, Employment Effects, Adult Relationships, Criminal Charges

Child sexual abuse is one of the most misunderstood and underreported crimes in Canada. Most commonly the perpetrators of sexual abuse against children are not strangers, but those closest to the child. This includes family members, mentors, priests, teachers, etc. Because these abusers are in a position of trust toward the child, they have both the opportunity to abuse and are able to convince the child that:

- a) the behaviour is okay or normal
- b) not to report the behaviour (by using either threats or promises)
- c) if the child reports the behaviour they will not be believed

The relationship of influence and trust is the #1 reason child abuse is rarely reported. It is important to recognize this reality and identify **warning signs of child sexual abuse**:

#### Most Serious Warning Signs:

- trauma/pain in sexual areas
- infections, STDs
- interest in sexual acts
- sexual play with friends/others
- sophisticated knowledge of sex
- asking unusual sex related questions

#### Other Warning Signs:

- bed wetting
- insomnia, nightmares
- interest in sexual acts
- loss of appetite
- fear or a certain place or location
- aggressive behaviour

If you suspect a loved one is being sexually abused and/or you recognized some or many of the above noted warning signs, it's time to act now.

#### Steps to Take

The appropriate action to take depends on your relation to the child. If you are a third party that is aware of a child being sexually abused, you ought to report it to the local Children's Aid Society in your Province/County.

If you are the parent or guardian of a child who reports, or you suspects, is being sexually abused, it is crucial that you facilitate honest and open discussion with the child about exactly what happened. To do this effectively the child must feel comfortable in talking to you. Usually the most important thing you can do to make the child feel comfortable is to ensure the child that you believe what they are telling you (especially considering the child may have been told by their abuser that nobody would believe them). It is also crucial that you do not place blame on the child for the abuse. Remember not to place blame by asking questions that suggest fault on the part of the child, such as: "why didn't you tell me earlier?"

The next step is usually to contact a health professional (medical Doctor) to collect evidence and perform needed health tests (such as checking for STDs and other trauma/infections). Do not wash or bath the child before such medical examinations as this may destroy evidence.

Depending on the circumstances, and the Province you are in, the Doctor may also have a positive duty to report the abuse to the local Children's Aid Society for an investigation.

The Doctor may suggest the child see a mental health professional, or you as a parents, may decide it is beneficial to the child's recovery.

While we recognize that reporting sexual abuse to the police can be a traumatic experience for victims, we encourage reporting the crime to the police immediately (other children may be in significant danger). For more information on the criminal process, [click here](#).

#### Emotional Effects



lives.

The most common emotional effects/feelings include:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Aggression
- Intimacy problems
- Persistent Fear
- Deviant behaviour
- Self-doubt
- Shame
- Substance Abuse
- Flashbacks
- Difficulty sleeping
- Suicidal Thoughts

The emotional effects of child sexual abuse commonly persist long into adulthood. The victim commonly feels trapped by mental pain which lays the groundwork for significant life problems. While effects differ among individual victims, sexual abuse tends to dramatically damage the victim's ability to earn living and sustain adult relationships.

### Employment Effects

The loss of job and earning opportunities is often forgotten when discussing the impact of child sexual abuse. While not a direct effect, the indirect damage of childhood sexual abuse can significantly harm the victim's ability to earn a living as an adult.

Victims are commonly plagued by depression, lacking communication skills, frequent missed worked days for medical reasons, and an inability to forge relationships with bosses and managers. The effects of child sexual abuse can also compromise an individual's ability to gain marketable skills. Many victims drop out of school, or choose not to obtain a post secondary education, due to feeling unable to cope with the emotions of their past.

The alienation felt by victims also can lead to the development of substance abuse problems that not only directly effect one's ability to earn a living, but also can lead to criminal behaviour which itself is incredibly harmful to one's career.

The potential financial loss resulting from child sexual abuse is enormous, which has led many to file civil lawsuits against abusers to recoup some of these losses.

### Adult Relationships

The feelings of shame, humiliation, guilt, and mistrust towards other people felt by child sex abuse victims negatively impact their ability to form and maintain adult relationships. These feelings are compounded by a sense of isolation routed in the fact other people, who haven't been abused, are unable to comprehend and understand the damage it causes.

Driven by a fear and a perceived lack of understanding, many victims choose not to report the abuse or tell anybody about it - even their closest life partners in adulthood. As a result marital troubles, which are rooted in the emotional damage caused by the abuse, are attributed to other factors, such as commonly matrimonial disputes.

Many times, victims are unable to develop close relationships leading to marriage or wind up losing a marriage to a painful divorce. While we cannot correct all of the emotional damage caused by sexual abuse, we can promote the understanding of the magnitude of its impact on victims. This will help combat isolation and encourage victims to seek help.

If you suspect a loved may have been sexually abused as a child, educate yourself and consider talking to a professional counsellor before confronting or asking them about it. While communication could help matters significantly, mishandling the situation could also cause an incredible amount of pain for the victim.

### Criminal Charges

Assuming the assailant is still alive, it is possible to persue criminal charges against the assailant even if the assault occurred decades ago. While it remains possible to press charges, the ability to effectively prosecute such offenders may be diminished because of such things as dying witnesses and fading memories. That being said, there are numerous cases of successful prosecutions that occurred decades after abuse.

The decision to pursue criminal charges against an assailant is deeply personal and should not be forced upon the victim by anyone. To many victims, the thought of pressing charges is incredibly stressful and emotionally disturbing. Having a family member attempt to force them into pressing charges is perhaps the worst thing imaginable to them.

for sex offenders across Canada.

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# When Males Have Been Sexually Abused as Children: A Guide for Men

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## When Males Have Been Sexually Abused as Children A Guide for Men



PDF Document

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## This booklet answers these questions:

- Why this booklet?
- What is sexual abuse?
- Areas of your life that may be impacted by sexual abuse
- How Can I Get the Help I need?
- How Can a Counsellor Help?
- What kinds of questions are counsellors often asked?
- What should I do about the abuser?
- How much should I tell my partner?
- Is recovery possible?

## Why this booklet?

This booklet is addressed to the thousands of men in Canada who were sexually abused as young children or as teenagers. It is also addressed to the people who help these men face each new day with courage: their partners, friends and families.

If you experienced childhood sexual abuse, this booklet will help you understand how the abuse affects your life today.

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Many men find it difficult to admit they have been sexually abused. Our culture encourages males to believe they should be in charge of every aspect of their lives, so when boys are abused, they often think they should have been able to stop the abuser. Later, as adults, they may blame

themselves for having allowed the offender to have power over them. The information in this booklet will help you place the responsibility for the abuse on the abuser - where it belongs.

### **This booklet will:**

- **define and describe the impact of childhood sexual abuse;**
- **explain why males may have difficulty admitting they have been abused;**
- **discuss issues such as shame and fears about sexuality;**
- **explain how childhood sexual abuse can affect adult relationships;**
- **explain how counselling and support groups can help your recovery; and**
- **discuss the pros and cons of making a complaint that could result in charges being laid against the abuser.**

## **What is sexual abuse?**

If you experience sexual abuse, this booklet can help you understand what impact sexual abuse has had on your life today.

Sexual abuse is an abuse of power. If someone older, stronger or more experienced coerced you into sexual activity when you were a child or an adolescent, then you were sexually abused. The abuser may have won your trust, and then violated it by abusing you. He or she may have compounded the abuse by forcing you to keep it secret and by making you feel responsible.

Sexual abuse doesn't refer only to sexual touching. If you were forced as a child to watch sexual activity or pornography, this is a form of sexual abuse. If an adult continually invaded your privacy - by watching you shower, or

making sexualized comments about your body, this is another form of sexual abuse.

## Areas of your life that may be impacted by sexual abuse

Both heterosexual and homosexual men can have difficulty with sexual relationships as a result of their abuse.

- **Confusion about Sexual Orientation.** You may be confused about or question your sexual orientation. We're not really sure how sexual orientation is determined. We do know that it is **not** usually determined by the abuse - neither by the abuser's sexual orientation, nor by what he or she did to your body. If you felt "turned on" and disgusted at the same time by what the abuser did, you might feel as though you can't depend on your body. If you are homosexual and were abused by a male, you may wrongly believe, just as many heterosexuals do, that your sexual orientation was caused by the abuse. Both heterosexual and homosexual adult males suffer from similar kinds of sexual orientation confusion as a result of their abuse. For example, if the abuser performed oral sex on you, you may have been aroused as well as repelled by the experience. Whether you were abused by a male or a female doesn't make a difference. This is because your penis responds to stimulation regardless of the gender of the person who is stimulating it. Adolescents or adults who sexually abuse children do so because they are sexually attracted to *children*, and enjoy having sexual power over them.

*If the abuser was male*, you might have developed a fear of other males, especially if you believe they are homosexual. You may even avoid friendships with other men. Your fear of homosexuals may express itself in negative statements or jokes about homosexuals. This fear and these actions are called homophobia. However, *homophobia* is pervasive in our society, and is not an indicator of sexual abuse.

You might also try to prove yourself sexually by initiating a lot of short-term sexual relationships with women, in the hope that your fear of being homosexual will eventually disappear. No number of "conquests" can overcome this kind of insecurity, but you will succeed in destroying the trust of your partners.

*If you were abused by a female*, you might have felt overpowered and "less than male" when the abuse was happening. You might feel "different" because sexual abuse by women is less frequent. This in turn could make you feel more isolated and ashamed. You might believe that the abuse was a sexual opportunity, and not really abuse at all. Our culture often minimizes and even denies the seriousness and harm caused when boys are abused by older females.

- **Difficulties with Sexual Functioning.** You could at times experience problems with sexual functioning. Painful erections, difficulty maintaining erections, premature ejaculation, lack of desire, or an obsession with sex may all stem from childhood sexual abuse.
- **Difficulties with Intimacy.** If you once trusted someone who abused you when he/she should have been protecting you, you may now have difficulty trusting anyone enough to enjoy a longterm intimate relationship. If you can function sexually only during "one-night stands" or only in short-term relationships, it could be because the abuser was a family member or someone you trusted and depended

on, who had power over you for a long period of time. Long-term relationships may remind you of these feelings of powerlessness, so you might avoid them. You may have difficulty making commitments in other areas of your life for the same reason.

- **Dependency or Misuse of Drugs, Alcohol or Food.** If you have trouble regulating your use of drugs, alcohol, or food, it may mean that you are using these substances to mask the pain of sexual abuse. It could also mean that the abuser used these substances to lure you into sexual activity.

Because these substances can be addictive, they can block your recovery. There are a number of recovery programs available that serve as an important adjunct to sexual abuse counselling.

- **Self-Harm and Harm of Others.** If you feel worthless as a result of the abuse, you could turn these painful feelings against yourself. This might take the form of cutting, burning or harming yourself in some way. You may find yourself in situations or remain in relationships that are harmful to you, emotionally, physically, sexually or otherwise. If you find yourself thinking about or acting out your sexual abuse by becoming sexually aggressive, *you need to seek help immediately* because of the damage you could be doing to others. Contact your local crisis line, doctor, etc.
- **Flashbacks, Anxiety and Nightmares.** If you have unexplained anxiety or panic attacks you could be re-experiencing the trauma of being sexually abused. Flashbacks are sudden intrusive thoughts about the sexual abuse. They might come when you least want them, for example, when you and your partner are making love. When this happens it could mean that your sexual arousal is triggering memories of the abuse. You might

also experience recurring nightmares which remind you in some way of the abuse. A counsellor can work with you to reduce these symptoms.

- **Anger.** You might feel that, as a male, you're allowed to express and to act out your anger. If you feel only anger, you are probably not allowing yourself to have other feelings such as shame, fear or loneliness. A counsellor can help you to identify your feelings and learn ways to manage them.
- **Shame and Guilt.** If you were sexually abused as a child, the underlying emotion you might share with other people who have been sexually abused, both male and female, is a sense of shame. Shame is a deep sense of feeling 'bad' as a person. The abuser might have cut you off from the support of loved ones during the abuse by forcing you to keep the abuse secret. He might have told you that no one would want anything to do with you if they knew what you were doing. Guilt is related to shame. Guilt comes from the belief that you are *responsible* for the abuse. Remember, this happened when you were a child, and adults are supposed to protect children, not abuse them. *You are not responsible for the abuse you experienced.*

You could now be afraid that you will experience further shame if you talk about the abuse to a counsellor or anyone else. Shame can make you hold yourself apart from others in your adult life. A support group, where you can talk and listen to others who have had the same experience that you've had, can help you overcome your shame and the isolation that goes with it.

- **Physical Symptoms.** There are a number of physical symptoms that are sometimes related to child sexual abuse. If you suffer from frequent headaches, choking sensations, nausea in the presence of certain smells, blurred vision, floating sensations, or pains in the

genitals, buttocks or back, they might be related to your sexual abuse. If your physician can't find a medical reason for these symptoms, your counsellor might be able to help you understand the reason you have them.

## How can I get the help I need?

You might have difficulty acknowledging that you were sexually abused, and that another person had such power over you. You might even believe that being abused has made you less of a man. This belief comes from our patriarchal society which values power, seen as a male trait, and devalues vulnerability, which is seen as "weak" and as a female trait. As a result most men resist admitting they were once overpowered and helpless, and this is called "denial". Denial is an obstacle to getting help. Because of social values and attitudes, denial of vulnerability is usually stronger in men than in women.

It takes courage to acknowledge you've been sexually abused. A counsellor, a support group or both can be helpful. The best way to find a counsellor is by asking people you trust, such as a doctor or friend, for personal recommendations. If that isn't possible, professional counselling associations will provide names of people qualified to work with men who have been sexually abused. You can then check out those qualifications and find a counsellor you feel comfortable working with.

Sexual abuse is an abuse of power.

Individual counselling over a long period of time can be expensive, although some social services have a sliding fee scale for clients. Another option is to see a psychiatrist or psychologist who may be covered through your provincial medical plan or supplementary insurance plan. In some



provinces, when you file a police report against the abuser you may become eligible for counselling from a qualified psychologist, clinical counsellor or clinical social worker through a crime victim assistance program. If working with a counsellor isn't possible, a support group may be a good second choice.

## How can a counsellor help?

The first step to recovery is to admit to yourself that you have been sexually abused.

Once you acknowledge to your counsellor that you have been sexually abused, you have taken an important step to recovery.

**Even after you've acknowledged the abuse, you may:**

- **tell yourself it really didn't affect you;**
- **speak about the abuse in an intellectual, abstract way; and**
- **excuse some of the abuser's behaviour.**

It is not unusual for individuals to minimize or deny traumatic experiences and their impact as a way of coping.

A counsellor can help you work through any thoughts or feelings you may have. Then you can understand the ways in which you managed to cope with the abuse and begin to resolve the trauma of the abuse to decrease the negative effects it has on your life. Your counsellor may ask you about any symptoms of post-traumatic stress that are impacting you, for example, flashbacks, nightmares, depression, anxiety, or relationship difficulties. S/he will help you to develop skills to manage intrusive or overwhelming thoughts, feelings or sensations. These skills are an important step to help

you maintain control. Remembering too much or moving too quickly can feel overwhelming. Tell your counsellor when you need more time to understand and integrate what is happening. Your counsellor might also recommend that you read some articles or books written for men who have experienced sexual abuse. At your request, your counsellor may speak to your spouse or partner to suggest ways in which s/he can support you in your recovery. Your counsellor might also recommend that you join a support group for men who have experienced sexual abuse.

A counsellor will probably have to remind you repeatedly that you were neither responsible for nor guilty of the abuse.

Your relationship with your counsellor is a partnership. You'll decide together what subjects you will discuss, and when it's appropriate to slow down or end counselling. If you aren't happy with your counsellor, you have the right to express your concerns and to find a different counsellor.

## What kinds of questions are counsellors often asked?

**"I've heard of five-and six-year-old boys being abused, but I was ten when my babysitter made me perform oral sex on him. Wasn't I old enough to know better and shouldn't I have been able to tell him to take a hike?"**

Age has nothing to do with it, but power has everything to do with it. Boys who are dependent on an adult or an adolescent are vulnerable to being sexually abused.

**"I was 14 when my coach took the top players on the team camping. He let us drink around the campsite and I wasn't used to it, and all I can remember after that is waking up later with him lying beside me, passed out, with his hand between my legs. Shouldn't I have been smart enough and old enough to be able to figure out what he was up to?"**

A coach is in a position of power and can easily appeal to a boy's need for attention and approval. When teenage boys are sexually abused, they often feel even more ashamed and responsible than younger boys and have a hard time reporting the abuse. See booklet "*When Teenage Boys...*"

The boys in both of these stories grew into young men who believed that they were responsible for the abuse, and felt guilty as a result.

A counsellor will probably remind you that *children are never responsible for adults or older teens abusing them.*

**"I was 13 and on the Grade 7 basketball team when my teacher felt me up after the game. I told my Uncle Gordon, and he said the teacher was probably gay. Could that be true? Do you think there's something about me that turned him on?"**

Sexual orientation has nothing to do with sexual abuse. More importantly, it's not some quality about *you* that makes you responsible. Sexual abusers are people who want to exercise sexual power over children because they're smaller and less powerful. Uncle Gordon's response was misleading because of its anti-homosexual bias.

**"So if I was sexually abused as a kid, does that mean that sooner or later I'm going to start going after kids myself?"**

You might have disturbing feelings about children from time to time, and sexual fantasies about children are a warning sign. It is important that you keep your feelings and fantasies conscious and discuss them with a counsellor who is trained to work in this area to ensure that you do not act them out by offending.

Many convicted adolescent and adult sex offenders were themselves sexually abused as children. It *does not follow* from this that all boys who have been sexually abused grow up to be abusers.

**"Hey, don't talk to me about sexual abuse. When I was eight, my babysitter made me put my penis right into her vagina. I learned about sex long before the other kids, and to this day I'm still a hit with the older women."**

Males in our society are conditioned to think of *any* sexual experience with a female as an "opportunity". When young boys are sexually abused by women or teenage girls, they tend to deny their feelings of being overpowered, used and/or shamed. If you were sexually abused as a young boy by a woman or a teenage girl, you may use the experience to enhance your ego, and not understand how it may distort your adult relationships.

**"How long is this counselling going to take? I want to get it over with and get on with my life."**

Like many men, you were probably conditioned to act on a problem and get results fast. Dealing with sexual abuse is not like mowing the lawn or putting together a business deal. Personal change takes time, and if you were also subjected to physical and emotional abuse you'll need to work on those issues as well.

**"There's something else there. There's one important thing I haven't remembered, and I just can't get hold of it. Can you hypnotize me?"**

This type of question comes up when you think that just below the surface, there is a key that will unlock the whole puzzle, and once you discover it, you'll be instantly cured. Like the previous question, it comes from a common male desire for a "quick fix". As you continue working with your counsellor, you will begin to appreciate the value of gradual change.

## **Kevin's story**

**Kevin began counselling at the recommendation of his minister, who'd heard enough of his story to suspect that he had experienced severe childhood abuse. Kevin suffered from night sweats, and would often wake up with his bedsheets drenched. Sometimes he'd wake up screaming after dreaming that a large animal was overtaking him. His wife had urged him to speak to their minister because of his habit of breaking off sexual intercourse before he reached orgasm. He frequently complained that his penis hurt during intercourse, and that he would rather avoid sex altogether.**

**During the course of his marriage, Kevin had three short homosexual relationships in which he played a passive role. Kevin was ashamed of these relationships, and felt that he was dishonouring his marriage.**

**His wife was afraid that he would contract a sexually transmitted infection and infect her. She threatened to leave him if it happened again.**

**After Kevin started counselling he was able to explain that he had spent much of his childhood living with his mother and five brothers and sisters in a small logging town. After his parents separated, his mother started drinking and began a series of short-term relationships. Some of her new boyfriends were violent with her and with the children. One of them, a millworker named Willard, was not only a violent alcoholic but a child abuser as well. The children never knew when to expect Willard, so they were in a constant state of anxiety. Kevin recalled how Willard would climb into bed, drunk, and masturbate Kevin before passing out.**

**As the details emerged, Kevin's physical symptoms and his behaviour started to make sense. The night sweats, the nightmares about large animals, his hurting penis, his sexual avoidance and his homosexual encounters were related to his sexual abuse. The counsellor saw Kevin and his wife together for a session, and explained to her the connection between Kevin's symptoms and his abuse.**

**The counsellor suggested ways in which she could support Kevin. Kevin took the counsellor's suggestion to join a support group. Because he had spent so much of his time alone in a small community, and because shame of the sexual abuse made him feel separate from his brothers and sisters, he found the group especially helpful. He could talk in the group because he knew these people understood.**

**Kevin's recovery was gradual, but with the help of his counsellor, the support from the group, and his wife, his symptoms decreased. The nightmares do come back occasionally, but when he wakes up, he**

**understands where they came from, so it's easier to get back to sleep. Kevin is still tentative about sex, but his wife now talks excitedly about their "new relationship". Their children sense the change, and are much more relaxed when their parents are together.**

## What should I do about the abuser?

- **Pursue Criminal Charges.** Initiating criminal charges against the abuser is one option. This means reporting the matter to the police. The police will in turn bring the matter to a crown prosecutor, who must decide whether or not there is sufficient evidence to take the case before a provincial or federal court. A successful prosecution may be aided by corroborative evidence (such as photos taken by the abuser) or similar fact evidence (information provided by other victims).

Laying criminal charges has the advantage of placing retribution where it belongs - with society at large. Sexually abusing children is against the law: it's a crime against society as well as a personal crime against you. Criminal charges are also a way of channeling your anger in a constructive way, by obtaining justice. The problem with using the court system is that the court proceedings are often lengthy and may be very frustrating.

You could also sue the abuser in a civil court. The burden of proof is less in a civil court than in a criminal court, however, a criminal conviction would support your civil suit. In a civil suit, if the judge finds in your favour, the abuser might have to pay you money in compensation. This can help defray the cost of your therapy, and compensate you for work time you might have lost as the result of the abuse. However there is a cost to you to pursue this litigation. You'll

probably want to discuss these alternatives with your counselor, a victim services worker, your partner, a lawyer, or a friend, but your first responsibility is to yourself. The final decision is yours.

- **Confront the Abuser.** You may want to find the abuser, and tell him how the abuse has impacted your life. You might find this more difficult than you imagine, especially if, when you face the abuser, you suddenly feel like the same powerless little boy you once were. You might find it satisfying to confront him, but the risk is that he may deny the abuse or simply tell you he doesn't care. Your plan has to take the abuser's possible responses into account and what you hope to gain or may lose in confronting him.
- **Take Revenge.** You might find satisfaction in the thought of beating up or maiming the abuser. You might feel justified in doing it, but you can damage yourself by expressing your anger that way. You could do yourself further psychological harm, or even end up in jail.
- **Forgive the Abuser.** You might choose to forgive the abuser as part of your healing process. People in your community might pressure you to forgive the abuser. However, premature forgiveness can increase self-blame and block healing. If you can't personally forgive the abuser, you could look upon forgiveness as a process between the abuser and whatever deity he believes in. It's your choice, to forgive or not forgive, and either choice is valid.
- **Let Go.** "Letting go" means you have decided to do nothing about the abuser right now. You might decide to let go because you want to focus all of your energy on healing yourself. Letting go is not the same as forgiveness. After you've worked on your healing for a while, you might then decide to do something about the abuser.

## How much should I tell my partner?



If you're in a relationship, your partner can be an invaluable source of support. Support means your partner can empathize with your pain, offer you love and encouragement, and support your decisions. **But do not use your partner as a counsellor.** This places too great a strain on your relationship and it's unfair, if not impossible, to expect your partner to give you objective advice. Get support from your partner and counselling from your counsellor.

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It's important to talk to your partner about what's happening and what has happened. This can create both difficulties and opportunities. If your partner is also a sexual abuse survivor, your story may trigger painful memories for her/him. What may happen then is that both of you will be seeing counsellors and working on recovery at the same time. If you express the same emotional needs at the same time, you can strain the relationship. You help one another most if you can tell each other when you need support, when you're prepared to give support, and when you need to be left alone.

## Is recovery possible?

**YES**, but look on recovery as a process, not as a project with an end result. You can't expect that at some magic moment in the future your problems will all disappear and you will be forever happy. More likely, different issues will come up for you at different points in your life, and you may want to go back to your counsellor for more sessions.

What is possible in recovery is that the sexual abuse symptoms will diminish, your self-esteem will increase, and your relationship(s) will be

What is possible in recovery is that your sexual abuse symptoms will diminish, your self-esteem will increase and your relationships will be more satisfying. In other words, you can have a good life!

more satisfying. You'll feel more in charge of your life. In other words, instead of having the effects of sexual abuse run your life, you'll be running it yourself. You can have a good life!

It's reasonable to expect the kind of recovery described in Kevin's story. Kevin's symptoms decreased, his relationship with his wife improved, and his children were less anxious. That's not perfection, but it's better than the hell he was living before he began his recovery.


*Additional resources are available at your community resource centre, your local library or the Stop Family Violence.*

**Date modified:**

2015-04-14

# When Males Have Been Sexually Abused as Children

A Guide for Men



*If you experienced childhood sexual abuse, this booklet will help you understand how the abuse affects your life today.*

## Sexual Abuse Information Series 2008

This is one of ten booklets in the Sexual Abuse Information Series:

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National Clearinghouse on Family Violence  
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200 Eglantine Driveway

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Ottawa, ON K1A 0K9

TEL: 1.800.267.1291 or 613.957.2938

FAX: 1.613.941.8930

TTY: 1.800.561.5643 or 613.952.6396

E-MAIL: [ncfv-cnivf@phac-aspc.gc.ca](mailto:ncfv-cnivf@phac-aspc.gc.ca)

### CREDITS

Project Coordinator: Leonard Terhoch

Writer: John Napier-Hemy

Revisions: Christina Melnychuk & Louise Doyle

Editors : Joanne Broatch & Liz Scully

Design & Layout: Jager Design Inc.

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The opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

VISAC (Vancouver Incest and Sexual Abuse Centre) is a program of Family Services of Greater Vancouver. VISAC offers a wide range of services including specialized victim support services, individual and group therapy for children, youth, families, and adults who have experienced childhood sexual abuse and/or trauma.

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*If you experience sexual abuse, this booklet can help you understand what impact sexual abuse has had on your life today.*

## What is sexual abuse?

Sexual abuse is an abuse of power. If someone older, stronger or more experienced coerced you into sexual activity when you were a child or an adolescent, then you were sexually abused. The abuser may have won your trust, and then violated it by abusing you. He or she may have compounded the abuse by forcing you to keep it secret and by making you feel responsible.

Sexual abuse doesn't refer only to sexual touching. If you were forced as a child to watch sexual activity or pornography, this is a form of sexual abuse. If an adult continually invaded your privacy – by watching you shower, or making sexualized comments about your body, this is another form of sexual abuse.

## Areas of your life that may be impacted by sexual abuse

- **Confusion about Sexual Orientation.** You may be confused about or question your sexual orientation. We're not really sure how sexual orientation is determined. We do know that it is **not** usually determined by the abuse – neither by the abuser's sexual orientation, nor by what he or she did to your body. If you felt "turned on" and disgusted at the same time by what the abuser did, you might feel as though you can't depend on your body. If you are homosexual and were abused by a male, you may wrongly believe, just as many heterosexuals do, that your sexual orientation was caused by the abuse. Both heterosexual and homosexual adult males suffer from similar kinds of sexual orientation confusion as a result of their abuse.



For example, if the abuser performed oral sex on you, you may have been aroused as well as repelled by the experience. Whether you were abused by a male or a female doesn't make a difference. This is because your penis responds to stimulation regardless of the gender of the person who is stimulating it.

Adolescents or adults who sexually abuse children do so because they are sexually attracted to *children*, and enjoy having sexual power over them.

If the abuser was male, you might have developed a fear of other males, especially if you believe they are homosexual. You may even avoid friendships with other men. Your fear of homosexuals may express itself in negative statements or jokes about homosexuals. This fear and these actions are called homophobia. However, *homophobia* is pervasive in our society, and is not an indicator of sexual abuse.

You might also try to prove yourself sexually by initiating a lot of short-term sexual relationships with women, in the hope that your fear of being homosexual will eventually disappear. No number of "conquests" can overcome this kind of insecurity, but you will succeed in destroying the trust of your partners.

If you were abused by a female, you might have felt overpowered and "less than male" when the abuse was happening. You might feel "different" because sexual abuse by women is less frequent.

This in turn could make you feel more isolated and ashamed. You might believe that the abuse was a sexual opportunity, and not really abuse at all. Our culture often minimizes and even denies the seriousness and harm caused when boys are abused by older females.

- **Difficulties with Sexual Functioning.** You could at times experience problems with sexual functioning. Painful erections, difficulty maintaining erections, premature ejaculation, lack of desire, or an obsession with sex may all stem from childhood sexual abuse.

Both heterosexual and homosexual men can have difficulty with sexual relationships as a result of their abuse.

- **Difficulties with Intimacy.** If you once trusted someone who abused you when he/she should have been protecting you, you may now have difficulty trusting anyone enough to enjoy a long-term intimate relationship. If you can function sexually only during "one-night stands" or only in short-term relationships, it could be because the abuser was a family member or someone you trusted and depended on, who had power over you for a long period of time. Long-term relationships may remind you of these feelings of powerlessness, so you might avoid them. You may have difficulty making commitments in other areas of your life for the same reason.
- **Dependency or Misuse of Drugs, Alcohol or Food.** If you have trouble regulating your use of drugs, alcohol, or food, it may mean that you are using these substances to mask the pain of sexual abuse. It could also mean that the abuser used these substances to lure you into sexual activity.

Because these substances can be addictive, they can block your recovery. There are a number of recovery programs available that serve as an important adjunct to sexual abuse counselling.

- **Self-Harm and Harm of Others.** If you feel worthless as a result of the abuse, you could turn these painful feelings against yourself. This might take the form of cutting, burning or harming yourself in some way. You may find yourself in situations or remain in relationships that are harmful to you, emotionally, physically, sexually or otherwise.

Sexual abuse is an abuse of power.

If you find yourself thinking about or acting out your sexual abuse by becoming sexually aggressive, *you need to seek help immediately* because of the damage you could be doing to others. Contact your local crisis line, doctor, etc.

- **Flashbacks, Anxiety and Nightmares.** If you have unexplained anxiety or panic attacks you could be re-experiencing the trauma of being sexually abused.

Flashbacks are sudden intrusive thoughts about the sexual abuse. They might come when you least want them, for example, when you and your partner are making love. When this happens it could mean that your sexual arousal is triggering memories of the abuse. You might also experience recurring nightmares which remind you in some way of the abuse. A counsellor can work with you to reduce these symptoms.

- **Anger.** You might feel that, as a male, you're allowed to express and to act out your anger. If you feel only anger, you are probably not allowing yourself to have other feelings such as shame, fear or loneliness. A counsellor can help you to identify your feelings and learn ways to manage them.
- **Shame and Guilt.** If you were sexually abused as a child, the underlying emotion you might share with other people who have been sexually abused, both male and female, is a sense of shame. Shame is a deep sense of feeling 'bad' as a person. The abuser might have cut you off from the support of loved ones during the abuse by forcing you to keep the abuse secret. He might have told you that no one would want anything to do with you if they knew what you were doing. Guilt is related to shame. Guilt comes from the belief that you are *responsible* for the abuse. Remember, this happened when you were a child, and adults are supposed to protect children, not abuse them. *You are not responsible for the abuse you experienced.*

You could now be afraid that you will experience further shame if you talk about the abuse to a counsellor or anyone else. Shame can make you hold yourself apart from others in your adult life. A support group, where you can talk and listen to others who have had the same experience that you've had, can help you overcome your shame and the isolation that goes with it.

- **Physical Symptoms.** There are a number of physical symptoms that are sometimes related to child sexual abuse. If you suffer from frequent headaches, choking sensations, nausea in the presence of certain smells, blurred vision, floating sensations, or pains in the genitals, buttocks or back, they might be related

to your sexual abuse. If your physician can't find a medical reason for these symptoms, your counsellor might be able to help you understand the reason you have them.

### How can I get the help I need?

You might have difficulty acknowledging that you were sexually abused, and that another person had such power over you. You might even believe that being abused has made you less of a man. This belief comes from our patriarchal society which values power, seen as a male trait, and devalues vulnerability, which is seen as "weak" and as a female trait. As a result most men resist admitting they were once overpowered and helpless, and this is called "denial". Denial is an obstacle to getting help. Because of social values and attitudes, denial of vulnerability is usually stronger in men than in women.

It takes courage to acknowledge you've been sexually abused. A counsellor, a support group or both can be helpful. The best way to find a counsellor is by asking people you trust, such as a doctor or friend, for personal recommendations. If that isn't possible, professional counselling associations will provide names of people qualified to work with men who have been sexually abused. You can then check out those qualifications and find a counsellor you feel comfortable working with.

Individual counselling over a long period of time can be expensive, although some social services have a sliding fee scale for clients. Another option is to see a psychiatrist or psychologist who may be covered through your provincial medical plan or supplementary insurance plan. In some provinces, when you file a police report against the abuser you may become eligible for counselling from a qualified psychologist, clinical counsellor or clinical social worker through a crime victim assistance program. If working with a counsellor isn't possible, a support group may be a good second choice.

THE FIRST STEP  
TO RECOVERY IS  
TO ADMIT TO  
YOURSELF THAT  
YOU HAVE BEEN  
SEXUALLY ABUSED.



## How can a counsellor help?

Once you acknowledge to your counsellor that you have been sexually abused, you have taken an important step to recovery.

Even after you've acknowledged the abuse, you may:

- tell yourself it really didn't affect you;
- speak about the abuse in an intellectual, abstract way; and
- excuse some of the abuser's behaviour.

It is not unusual for individuals to minimize or deny traumatic experiences and their impact as a way of coping.

A counsellor can help you work through any thoughts or feelings you may have. Then you can understand the ways in which you managed to cope with the abuse and begin to resolve the trauma of the abuse to decrease the negative effects it has on your life. Your counsellor may ask you about any symptoms of post-traumatic stress that are impacting you, for example, flashbacks, nightmares, depression, anxiety, or relationship difficulties. S/he will help you to develop skills to manage intrusive or overwhelming thoughts, feelings or sensations. These skills are an important step to help you maintain control. Remembering too much or moving too quickly can feel overwhelming. Tell your counsellor when you need more time to understand and integrate what is happening. Your counsellor might also recommend that you read some articles or books written for men who have experienced sexual abuse. At your request,

*A counsellor will probably have to remind you repeatedly that you were neither responsible for nor guilty of the abuse.*

your counsellor may speak to your spouse or partner to suggest ways in which s/he can support you in your recovery. Your counsellor might also recommend that you join a support group for men who have experienced sexual abuse.

Your relationship with your counsellor is a partnership. You'll decide together what subjects you will discuss, and when it's appropriate to slow down or end counselling. If you aren't happy with your counsellor, you have the right to express your concerns and to find a different counsellor.

## What kinds of questions are counsellors often asked?

*"I've heard of five-and six-year-old boys being abused, but I was ten when my babysitter made me perform oral sex on him. Wasn't I old enough to know better and shouldn't I have been able to tell him to take a hike?"*

Age has nothing to do with it, but power has everything to do with it. Boys who are dependent on an adult or an adolescent are vulnerable to being sexually abused.

*"I was 14 when my coach took the top players on the team camping. He let us drink around the campsite and I wasn't used to it, and all I can remember after that is waking up later with him lying beside me, passed out, with his hand between my legs. Shouldn't I have been smart enough and old enough to be able to figure out what he was up to?"*

A coach is in a position of power and can easily appeal to a boy's need for attention and approval. When teenage boys are sexually abused, they often feel even more ashamed and responsible than younger boys and have a hard time reporting the abuse. See booklet *"When Teenage Boys..."*

The boys in both of these stories grew into young men who believed that they were responsible for the abuse, and felt guilty as a result.

A counsellor will probably remind you that *children are never responsible for adults or older teens abusing them.*

*"I was 13 and on the Grade 7 basketball team when my teacher felt me up after the game. I told my Uncle Gordon, and he said the teacher was probably gay. Could that be true? Do you think there's something about me that turned him on?"*

Sexual orientation has nothing to do with sexual abuse. More importantly, it's not some quality about you that makes you responsible. Sexual abusers are people who want to exercise sexual power over children because they're smaller and less powerful. Uncle Gordon's response was misleading because of its anti-homosexual bias.



**“So if I was sexually abused as a kid, does that mean that sooner or later I’m going to start going after kids myself?”**

You might have disturbing feelings about children from time to time, and sexual fantasies about children are a warning sign. It is important that you keep your feelings and fantasies conscious and discuss them with a counsellor who is trained to work in this area to ensure that you do not act them out by offending.

Many convicted adolescent and adult sex offenders were themselves sexually abused as children. It *does not follow* from this that all boys who have been sexually abused grow up to be abusers.

**“Hey, don’t talk to me about sexual abuse. When I was eight, my babysitter made me put my penis right into her vagina. I learned about sex long before the other kids, and to this day I’m still a hit with the older women.”**

Males in our society are conditioned to think of any sexual experience with a female as an “opportunity”. When young boys are sexually abused by women or teenage girls, they tend to deny their feelings of being overpowered, used and/or shamed. If you were sexually abused as a young boy by a woman or a teenage girl, you may use the experience to enhance your ego, and not understand how it may distort your adult relationships.

**“How long is this counselling going to take? I want to get it over with and get on with my life.”**

Like many men, you were probably conditioned to act on a problem and get results fast. Dealing with sexual abuse is not like mowing the lawn or putting together a business deal. Personal change takes time, and if you were also subjected to physical and emotional abuse you’ll need to work on those issues as well.

**“There’s something else there. There’s one important thing I haven’t remembered, and I just can’t get hold of it. Can you hypnotize me?”**

This type of question comes up when you think that just below the surface, there is a key that will unlock the whole puzzle, and once you discover it, you’ll be instantly cured. Like the previous question, it comes from a common male desire for a “quick fix”. As you continue working with your counsellor, you will begin to appreciate the value of gradual change.

## **Kevin’s story**

Kevin began counselling at the recommendation of his minister, who’d heard enough of his story to suspect that he had experienced severe childhood abuse. Kevin suffered from night sweats, and would often wake up with his bedsheets drenched. Sometimes he’d wake up screaming after dreaming that a large animal was overtaking him. His wife had urged him to speak to their minister because of his habit of breaking off sexual intercourse before he reached orgasm. He frequently complained that his penis hurt during intercourse, and that he would rather avoid sex altogether.

During the course of his marriage, Kevin had three short homosexual relationships in which he played a passive role. Kevin was ashamed of these relationships, and felt that he was dishonouring his marriage. His wife was afraid that he would contract a sexually transmitted infection and infect her. She threatened to leave him if it happened again.

After Kevin started counselling he was able to explain that he had spent much of his childhood living with his mother and five brothers and sisters in a small logging town. After his parents separated, his mother started drinking and began a series of short-term relationships. Some of her new boyfriends were violent with her and with the children. One of them, a millworker named Willard, was not only a violent alcoholic but a child abuser as well. The children never knew when to expect Willard, so they were in a constant state of anxiety. Kevin recalled how Willard would climb into bed, drunk, and masturbate Kevin before passing out.

As the details emerged, Kevin’s physical symptoms and his behaviour started to make sense. The night sweats, the nightmares about large animals, his hurting penis, his sexual avoidance and his homosexual encounters were related to his sexual abuse. The counsellor saw Kevin and his wife together for a session, and explained to her the connection between Kevin’s symptoms and his abuse.

The counsellor suggested ways in which she could support Kevin. Kevin took the counsellor’s suggestion to join a support group. Because he had spent so much of his time alone in a small community, and because shame of the sexual abuse made him feel separate from

his brothers and sisters, he found the group especially helpful. He could talk in the group because he knew these people understood.

Kevin's recovery was gradual, but with the help of his counsellor, the support from the group, and his wife, his symptoms decreased. The nightmares do come back occasionally, but when he wakes up, he understands where they came from, so it's easier to get back to sleep. Kevin is still tentative about sex, but his wife now talks excitedly about their "new relationship". Their children sense the change, and are much more relaxed when their parents are together.

### What should I do about the abuser?

- **Pursue Criminal Charges.** Initiating criminal charges against the abuser is one option. This means reporting the matter to the police. The police will in turn bring the matter to a crown prosecutor, who must decide whether or not there is sufficient evidence to take the case before a provincial or federal court. A successful prosecution may be aided by corroborative evidence (such as photos taken by the abuser) or similar fact evidence (information provided by other victims).

Laying criminal charges has the advantage of placing retribution where it belongs – with society at large. Sexually abusing children is against the law: it's a crime against society as well as

a personal crime against you. Criminal charges are also a way of channeling your anger in a constructive way, by obtaining justice. The problem with using the court system is that the court proceedings are often lengthy and may be very frustrating.

You could also sue the abuser in a civil court. The burden of proof is less in a civil court than in a criminal court, however, a criminal conviction would support your civil suit. In a civil suit, if the judge finds in your favour, the abuser might have to pay you money

in compensation. This can help defray the cost of your therapy, and compensate you for work time you might have lost as the result of the abuse. However there is a cost to you to pursue this litigation. You'll probably want to discuss these alternatives with your counselor, a victim services worker, your partner, a lawyer, or a friend, but your first responsibility is to yourself. The final decision is yours.

- **Confront the Abuser.** You may want to find the abuser, and tell him how the abuse has impacted your life. You might find this more difficult than you imagine, especially if, when you face the abuser, you suddenly feel like the same powerless little boy you once were. You might find it satisfying to confront him, but the risk is that he may deny the abuse or simply tell you he doesn't care. Your plan has to take the abuser's possible responses into account and what you hope to gain or may lose in confronting him.
- **Take Revenge.** You might find satisfaction in the thought of beating up or maiming the abuser. You might feel justified in doing it, but you can damage yourself by expressing your anger that way. You could do yourself further psychological harm, or even end up in jail.
- **Forgive the Abuser.** You might choose to forgive the abuser as part of your healing process. People in your community might pressure you to forgive the abuser. However, premature forgiveness can increase self-blame and block healing. If you can't personally forgive the abuser, you could look upon forgiveness as a process between the abuser and whatever deity he believes in. It's your choice, to forgive or not forgive, and either choice is valid.
- **Let Go.** "Letting go" means you have decided to do nothing about the abuser right now. You might decide to let go because you want to focus all of your energy on healing yourself. Letting go is not the same as forgiveness. After you've worked on your healing for a while, you might then decide to do something about the abuser.



## How much should I tell my partner?

If you're in a relationship, your partner can be an invaluable source of support. Support means your partner can empathize with your pain,



Get support from your partner and counselling from your counsellor.

offer you love and encouragement, and support your decisions. **But do not use your partner as a counsellor.** This places too great a strain on your relationship and it's unfair, if not impossible, to expect your partner to give you objective advice. Get support from your partner and counselling from your counsellor.

It's important to talk to your partner about what's happening and what has happened. This can create both difficulties and opportunities. If your partner is also a sexual abuse survivor, your story may trigger painful memories for her/him. What may happen then is that both of you will be seeing counsellors and working on recovery at the same time. If you express the same emotional needs at the same time, you can strain the relationship. You help one another most if you can tell each other when you need support, when you're prepared to give support, and when you need to be left alone.

### Is recovery possible?

**YES**, but look on recovery as a process, not as a project with an end result. You can't expect that at some magic moment in the future your problems will all disappear and

you will be forever happy. More likely, different issues will come up for you at different points in your life, and you may want to go back to your counsellor for more sessions.

What is possible in recovery is that the sexual abuse symptoms will diminish, your self-esteem will increase, and your relationship(s) will be more satisfying. You'll feel more in charge of your life. In other words,

instead of having the effects of sexual abuse run your life, you'll be running it yourself. You can have a good life!

It's reasonable to expect the kind of recovery described in Kevin's story. Kevin's symptoms decreased, his relationship with his wife improved, and his children were less anxious. That's not perfection, but it's better than the hell he was living before he began his recovery.

*Additional resources are available at your community resource centre, your local library or the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence.*

What is possible in recovery is that your sexual abuse symptoms will diminish, your self-esteem will increase and your relationships will be more satisfying. In other words, you can have a good life!