

ABUSE

What do we mean by Abuse?

'Abuse' is the name we give to behaviour which is felt to be inappropriate, intrusive and damaging, which the recipient feels powerless to stop. Very often when we talk of abuse, we think of this in relation to the actions of an older person misusing their position of trust in relation to a child or young person. But sometimes adults can find themselves in abusive relationships, or they may experience an attack or assault. Children who were habitually bullied at school, or felt they were made to do unpleasant things they didn't want to do, may also be affected.

Abuse can take different forms; it may have been physical, emotional or sexual or a mixture of all three, and it can happen to anyone regardless of gender, ethnic group, culture or age. It's not always easy to recognise that some of these experiences, particularly if you couldn't talk about them at the time, may be responsible for difficulties you are experiencing now.

Feelings and symptoms you may experience

- depression, low self-esteem: you may feel vulnerable and withdrawn, and be feeling bad about yourself; you may even feel suicidal from time to time
- anxious and panicky: in certain circumstances you may have flashbacks or panic attacks
- sleep disturbance: you may find getting to sleep or staying asleep difficult or you may have recurrent nightmares
- mistrustful: you may find your relationships, particularly sexual relationships, are affected
- difficulties in concentrating: it may be hard to think about your university work, or you may find that particular topics or materials you're working on remind you of what has happened
- self-destructive: sometimes these feelings may make you want to harm yourself in various ways; abuse may give rise to feelings about your body which result in urges to cut yourself, developing an eating disorder or misusing alcohol or drugs
- lonely, ashamed and embarrassed: these feelings are difficult to talk about and it may be hard to realise how widespread this problem is; you may even feel as though it is your fault

It is often hard to begin to talk about these issues, since you may have been threatened by the abuser and worried about getting him or her and yourself into

trouble. Often the situation is complicated by the fact that, much as you hated the abusive behaviour, the abuser was someone you loved and, initially, trusted.

What might help?

- ✓ remember to have come this far you have a lot of strengths and resources which can help you, if you can get in touch with them
- ✓ because of your experiences, you may feel embarrassed or scared to talk to someone else, but it is important not to bottle up your feelings; try to talk to someone you trust about what is troubling you
- ✓ you may be feeling that you are alone in having been through such experiences – sometimes it can help to know that abuse in childhood is unfortunately a lot more frequent than we might want to believe
- ✓ take time to look after yourself; make sure you get enough rest, relaxation, sleep, and that you eat properly; think about positive strategies you could use when you're feeling low, for example calling a friend, going for a walk, listening to music
- ✓ if you have been the victim of a recent attack, phone or go for help immediately; you could ask a friend or family to help you find appropriate help, for example, the police, Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre, Women's Aid
- ✓ take your feelings seriously – talk to the counsellor at your university, or health adviser, go to your GP or use the Helpline numbers listed below. This is particularly important if your experiences have led you to resort to self destructive ways of behaving that could affect your physical and emotional health.

If you have strong feelings of hopelessness, or are having suicidal thoughts and feelings, you should contact someone for help as soon as possible.

You can approach the University Counselling Service to ask for counselling. To do this contact our administrators: Tel: 01248 388520 or e-mail counselling@bangor.ac.uk for appointments for assessments or support sessions.

Within normal working hours you can contact your GP. For Bodnant Surgery Doctors, call 01248 364492

Outside normal working hours you can telephone your GP practice to see what arrangements are in place for emergencies, or phone NHS Direct on 0845 4647.

You could also:

- attend the Accident and Emergency Dept at Ysbyty Gwynedd
- contact the Hergest Unit 01248 384091

- contact North Wales Safeguarding Board
<http://www.northwalessafeguardingboard.wales/contact/>

Specialist agencies are listed below:

Live Fear Free – Advice on domestic abuse, sexual violence and violence against women

Helpline: **0808 8010 800**

<https://livefearfree.gov.wales/>

RASASC North Wales

<http://www.rasawales.org.uk/>

Amethyst North Wales Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) for information, forensic medical or health screening.

To talk to a crisis worker: **0808 156 3658**

https://www.north-wales.police.uk/amethyst_2012/english/index.html

Welsh Women's Aid

<http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/>

Victim Support North Wales

<https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help/support-near-you/wales/north-wales>

0300 30 30 159

Stepping Stones

<https://www.steppingstonesnorthwales.co.uk/>

for adults who have been sexually abused as children.

Books can help:

Breaking Free: Help for Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse, Ainscough, Carolyn & Toon, Kay, Sheldon

Self-Esteem for Women, Field, Lynda, Vermillion

Overcoming Traumatic Stress, Herbet, Claudia & Wetmore, Ann, Constable & Robinson

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