

# **There Is Hope!**

## **Practices and Interventions for Successful Treatment of Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse ©**

### **Introduction**

[Edited: 11/30/2016]

“Nonetheless, we are missing the boat!”

At this time in our history, as a society, we are finally addressing sexual issues and sexual abuse issues more openly. This is an important progress. At home, we are hopefully doing a better job of teaching about sexuality than past generations did. We are teaching children in their pre-schools and in kindergartens about “Good Touch, Bad Touch”®. Societally, we more frequently are talking to our children about maintaining personal safety from “them”, about avoiding those ‘bad strangers’ who may be out there.

“Even so, we are still missing the boat!”

Surely, there have been victims whose sexual assault was perpetrated by a primarily unknown or a completely unknown stranger. A little boy who was pulled into a stranger’s car. A teenager who is raped by someone who was breaking-and-entering into her home. A college woman assaulted by a stalker. A young partier, slipped a date-rape drug at a party or in a bar, is sexually assaulted. Certainly, there are some dangerous strangers out there. As a result, we all do have to be aware of our surroundings and be reasonably vigilant in unfamiliar settings. And we do need to teach our kids about maintaining their personal safety from strangers.

Nonetheless, while our society is warning children about ‘strangers’, we are still not providing them with adequate information about the dangers from molestation, rape, and incest by the ‘non-stranger’. The Bureau of Justice Statistics, on data for 1996-2000, indicates, “In

90% of rapes of children of less than 12 years old, the child knew the offender, according to the police-recorded incident data.”

These have been the titles of some of the “trusted roles” ...

“Father”      “Mother”      “Brother”      “Sister”      “Grandfather”      “Step-Father”  
“Uncle”      “Cousin”      “Mom’s Live-in Boy Friend”      “Foster brother”      “Babysitter”  
“Neighbor”      “Family Friend”      “Doctor”      “Teacher”      “Clergyman”      “Coach”  
“Scout Leader”      “Counselor”      “Policeman”      “Fireman”      “Bus Driver”      ...

... the titles of the “trusted roles” of the majority of perpetrators whose innocent victims we therapists have assisted in their healing in our counseling practices and agencies.

From my over fifty years of work in social services – working for the New Bedford YMCA, Waltham Boys’ Club, and Jewish Community Centers in Massachusetts and Connecticut, in Meriden Public Schools as a Certified School Social Worker, and in our private as Director and Licensed Clinical Social Worker -- I can regretfully attest to the fact that it is not ‘strangers’ who pose the greatest danger to our children. In the Adolescent & Family Counseling Center, our thirty-six year-old multi-disciplinary outpatient mental health private practice in Central Connecticut, dozens of our therapy cases have involved treating adult clients who have reported to their clinicians that they had been sexually molested, abused, or raped as children. Rather than being molested by ‘a stranger’, over 95% of the female clients who reported being sexually victimized were sexually abused by “a known and supposedly trustworthy” male. Of our male clients who shared with us having been sexually victimized, nearly every one reported that their sexual abuse was by “a known and supposedly trustworthy” person. Our skilled professional staff members -- with extensive and diverse experience working in public and parochial schools, hospitals and residential treatment centers, child guidance clinics, child

protection agencies, colleges and universities, the court system and in prisons, and at community recreational and social services agencies -- concur that this has been an accurate representation of what clients have reported to them, wherever they have served clients.

Certainly, it is not my intent to paint all of us men with the same, dark brush! Despite all the faults that we males may have, most of us men are appropriately honorable, trustworthy, and protective of children -- our own kids and the children of others. However, both as a man and clinical social worker, I have been very embarrassed and extremely apologetic for what some men have done to children. I am appalled that -- due to a combination of genetics, hormones, testosterone, societal messages, their own victimization, mental illness, or significant family-of-origin dysfunction -- some men have perpetrated great harm, trauma, and lifelong damage to the bodies, self-esteem, trust, and functioning of their victims. Many of these victims have been their own daughters or sons or their sisters or brothers ... and some of the initial sexual abuse had begun when these girls or boys were preschoolers, as young as 3 years of age.

The International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation, of which I have become a member, announced the opening for the 2015 conference in Australia: "BROKEN STRUCTURES, BROKEN SELVES: COMPLEX TRAUMA IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup>CENTURY: Addressing Complex Trauma in children, adolescents, adults, families & society." The ISSTD described its goals in the announcement: "Increasing public awareness, empowering victims and sufferers, providing continuing education for clinicians who work in the field of relational trauma."<sup>1</sup> In this book, [There Is Hope!](#), my goals are very similar:

- ✓ To validate the dangers and experiences non-strangers have sexually posed to children;
- ✓ To share what we have learned from our clients whose trust we have earned;
- ✓ To describe some of the interventions -- traditional approaches and innovations -- we have

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.isst-d.org/default.asp?contentID=221> Drawn from website 08/22/2015.

found successful, offering tools which can assist therapists to better help their own clients;

- ✓ To encourage and assist clinicians to be caring and effective without being traumatized;
- ✓ To offer real Hope! that
  - therapists can utilize many valuable new tools to assist child sexual abuse survivors to heal from their losses and damage done to them,
  - clinicians can prevent burnout from assisting that healing, and
  - society must and can work to drastically reduce future child sexual abuse.

The current focus in the mental health field is 'evidence-based treatment'. There Is Hope! will provide therapists in the field with an orientation to this important area of treatment and introduce the reader to some demonstrably effective, successful non-traditional interventions into treatment of this target population. Supported by the significant successes we have achieved for over 3 decades of our assisting adult child sexual abuse survivor clients to heal, the reader who is a very experienced clinician -- and the relatively new clinicians -- will receive factual information, explore some altered perspectives, be afforded some new interventive tools, and perhaps to have the courage to make some ethical and effective modifications to some classic psychotherapy approaches.

In all our professional disciplines, we have been taught many valuable theories and tools in our formal programs and continuing education workshops. Unfortunately, rather than truly 'starting where the client is', too many of us have 'started where the traditional coursework, the insurance company rules, the financial remunerations, and agency directives have focused our treatment'. There Is Hope! will assist clinicians to provide more innovative, ethical, and successful individualized interventions that these injured female and male clients need and deserve in order gain healthier control over their life's ship and to heal from sexual abuse.

Commented [HJR1]:

*“Then it’s me and my machine, for the rest of the morning,  
for the rest of the afternoon, and for rest of my life.”*

In his song, “Millworker”,<sup>2</sup> James Taylor wrote and sings about a female millworker who is unhappily trapped in the boring, meaninglessness and repetitiveness of her life. Trapped! Stuck! Feeling hopeless! That is how most of our clients who have been sexually abused in their childhood or adolescence had felt about the burden and impact that they carry within themselves. Feeling trapped and powerless, worthless, and hopeless ... *“for the rest of my life.”* I want to convey real reasons for optimism to us therapists that There Is Hope! we can effectively assist clients ...

- ✓ to emotionally and intellectually better understand ‘what happened’,
- ✓ to gain empowerment over their past,
- ✓ to improve their body-image and self-esteem,
- ✓ to achieve more normalized, more balanced lifestyles,
- ✓ to participate in healthy intimate relationships, and
- ✓ to lead healthier, happier, more successful lives and futures!

This authorship endeavor is motivated by the many women and men who have allowed us to earn their trust, who have taught us how to be of assistance, and who have been successful in their gaining greater control over their life’s ship! I am very proud of them! My clients have taught me that there is real hope to achieve significant healing from childhood sexual abuse victimization, to move ahead from having been a ‘victim’ ... to having become a ‘survivor’ ... to becoming a ‘thrive-or’!

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<sup>2</sup> Taylor, James. “Millworker”. Sony BMG Music: “James Taylor Live” Album. 1993.

Let's all promptly get onboard the ship of effective healing for those have been abused, of helping as clinicians without burning ourselves out, and of significantly reducing future child sexual abuse in our local, regional, and international societies!

Let's not miss the boat anymore!

