CHILD ABUSE

Why Real Guys Don't Tell

1. You Can Handle It. Real Guys Are Tough.

It refers to sexual assault by an older male or adult female. Since our society expects any male to rise above his feelings and overcome difficulties, many male children and adult survivors of sexual abuse are reluctant to tell. The attitude that sexual victimization is less traumatic for males than for females prevents many males from seeking help. Fear of appearing weak, needy or frail leads to avoidance of self-disclosure with other males.

2. It's Your Fault.

Males are supposed to be able to protect themselves from any danger. Males survivors of sexual abuse report self-directed anger at having failed to inflict serious physical harm on the offender. The male survivor may conceal his anxiety by using macho behaviors to reestablish a strong male image. He also may develop intensely anti-homosexual feelings or behaviors in reaction to sexual victimization.

3. You Must Be A Punk!

The male victim may assume that his failure to resist his assault shows passivity, and/or homosexuality. The molester of a male child is likely to be of the same sex (the majority of offenders are male) and any arousal or physical pleasure that was experienced may be misinterpreted by the victim as homosexual feelings. Normal male physiological responses during any sexual interaction (even a same-sex encounter) may conflict with the social message that sexual arousal should occur only in a male-female interaction.

4. Men Don't Have Feelings, Only Anger.

Our society encourages males to ignore feelings. It is okay for a man to act on emotions, but dangerous to feel them. It is also okay for a man to act out his feelings which often include abusing others. Thus certain male survivors have an increased risk to sexually offend. The risk for abusive behavior is further increased when the survivor feels extreme isolation - for example when he lacks a friend to whom he can confide his own abuse experience or when he fears that if he confides his victimization, other people may doubt his masculinity. Low self-esteem related to the failure to protect oneself may cause attempts to control all other aspects of one's life. Whereas a female often withdraws because of her victimization, a male is prone to use his
energy to rigidly control others.

5. No Big Deal. I'll Work It Out Or Drink It Out Or...

A lack of permission for men to display emotions may prompt some survivors to mask feelings through repetitive or compulsive behaviors. Although compulsive behaviors around work, materialism, sex, sports and competition are generally socially acceptable for men, such behaviors may indicate distress for the male survivor.

As with female survivors, males who have been sexually victimized often abuse food, alcohol and other chemical substances.

6. I Don't Need Any Help.

Many men will not readily use mental health services. Most male survivors of sexual abuse experience considerable conflict with the fact that a man can be a victim. Often a male survivor who asks for treatment will have been pushed to do so by a friend.

HOW TO REALLY PROTECT YOURSELF

- Use the buddy system. Go to activities with a friend and don't allow others to separate you. Use prearranged signals to indicate you want to leave.
- Always let family members know where you are and when you expect to return. If walking, call home just before you leaving to let someone know.
- Pay attention to your inner voice. When you have a bad feeling about a person or situation, leave immediately. Don't worry about being paranoid. Being safe is more important.
- Be cautious of adults who are overly friendly and try to isolate you. Remember the buddy system.
- Don't drink or use drugs. Using alcohol or drugs doesn't make you grown-up or macho. It does make you vulnerable to being abused by an adult or older adolescent. Alcohol and drugs also impair your judgement and decision-making skills.
- Make a phone call. Always carry change for a call to family or friends in an emergency. Call to 911 from any pay phone are free. Don't hitchhike. Even if it's late, call home or call a cab.
- Make your own decision rather than just going along with the crowd or an adult. Trust your judgement to know if certain behaviors are appropriate or safe. Don't be afraid of being call "chicken" or worse.

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