



# **Sexual Assault Response Services**

## *of Southern Maine*

P.O. Box 1371  
Portland, ME 04104

P.O. Box 1605  
Sanford, ME 04073

**24-Hour Hotline: 1-800-313-9900**

infosars@sarsonline.org  
www.sarsonline.org

### **Emotional First Aid for Incest Survivors**

Incest and its aftermath can be a nightmare. Not only is incest an attack on your body, it is an assault on your personality as well. Because of this, your emotional well being is just as important as your physical well being. Incest is a betrayal of trust through overt and/or covert sexual contact or acts between people who are members of the actual family or perceived extended family.

Incest is about power because it involves the following elements:

- Age/power difference
- Implied or actual threats
- Forced secrecy – this is what allows the abuse to continue
- Manipulation to imply choice/content: Many perpetrators set up abusive situations in which child victims feel they have chosen the abuse
- Isolation: Isolating victims help to ensure secrecy and emotional dependence on the abuser
- Encouraging victim's guilt and shame – this intensifies the power relationship

Incest can affect many aspects of a survivor's life. Possible effects of incest include:

- Numbness
- Anger
- Sense of being different
- Fearfulness
- Amnesia
- Psychosomatic illnesses
- Flashbacks
- Feeling of shame
- Guilt
- Depression
- Low self-esteem, poor body image
- Relationship conflicts
- Sleep or eating disturbances
- Feelings of being out of control

Please read the rest of this page and think about each point. It might help you a great deal. If you are feeling any of these things, remember...

- The incest was not your fault.
- There is nothing to be ashamed about.
- You are not going crazy, even if you feel crazy sometimes...almost any reaction is normal.
- You may feel like crying and screaming, go ahead. You have every right to be as upset as you feel.

***Help, Hope, and Healing***

- Do whatever helps you feel better. You were in no way responsible for the assault even though you might feel that you were. Feeling responsible lets the attacker victimize you more. Don't blame yourself for something that someone else did to you.
- Feelings of fear, distrust, isolation, shame, guilt and danger are normal responses.
- You are a good person and valuable. You deserve all the help you can get; ask for it.
- There are organizations that can help you. In addition to SARS, there are rape crisis centers in almost every major city in the U.S.
- If you are really afraid that you are going crazy or feel that you can't handle yourself, go get professional care, no matter what anyone says. The SARS hotline can refer you to area therapists who specialize in treating incest survivors.
- Try to find a sympathetic person to talk to about it. Talking it out helps.
- Try to think as clearly as you can about what is good for you and do it.
- Sometimes people's reactions may hurt you and sometimes they don't understand. Try not to listen to things that make you feel bad. There are many people who do understand, who will listen, and who want to help.
- We know that there is more than one victim in sexual abuse. Your family and friends might benefit from talking with one of our advocates too.
- And finally, all the different phases of reaction to this trauma can and will pass. Believe this because you will survive.

There is no specific formula for recovery. Each individual's healing process is unique. Stages in a healing process may include...

- Believing
- Remembering
- Breaking the silence
- Letting go of the guilt and shame
- Healing the child within
- Trusting yourself
- Grieving and mourning
- Anger
- Disclosure and confrontation
- Resolution and moving on
- Trusting that you will survive

It helps many survivors to think of the healing process as a spiral with each subsequent stage building on strategies learned in previous stages. This hurtful time will not be erased from your mind completely, but you will make deep and lasting changes in your life. You will gain awareness, compassion, and power through healing to live your life to its fullest.

We at SARS understand how you may feel, and we want to help you. You deserve help because no one should have to recover alone.

Remember if you are a survivor, that the incest was not your fault. It is something that happened to you; it has also happened to many other people who understand and want to help.