Helping

Yourself Heal

A Recovering Man's Guide to Coping With the Effects of Childhood Abuse

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Substance Abuse Treatment
www.samhsa.gov

Acknowledgments
This brochure, based on *Substance Abuse Treatment for Persons With Child Abuse and Neglect Issues*, 36 in the Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) series, was produced and updated by JBS International, Inc., under Contract Nos. 270-99-7072 and 270-04-7049 with the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Andrea Kopstein, Ph.D., M.P.H., and Christina Currier served as Government Project Officers.

Disclaimer
The views and opinions in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of CSAT, SAMHSA, or DHHS.

Public Domain Notice
All material appearing in this booklet is in the public domain and may be reproduced or copied without permission from SAMHSA. Citation of the source is appreciated. However, this publication may not be reproduced or distributed for a fee without specific, written authorization from the Office of Communications, SAMHSA, DHHS.

Electronic Access and Copies of Publication
This product, the TIP series, and their collateral products are available from SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI). To receive free copies of all TIP products, call 800-729-6686 or 800-487-4889 TDD (for the hearing impaired), or visit www.ncadi.samhsa.gov.

Recommended Citation
Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. *Helping Yourself Heal: A Recovering Man's Guide to Coping With the Effects of Childhood Abuse.* DHHS Publication No. (SMA) 06-4134. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2004; reprinted 2005; updated and reprinted and 2006.

Originating Office
Practice Improvement Branch, Division of Services Improvement, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 1 Choke Cherry Road, Rockville, MD 20857.

DHHS Publication No. (SMA) 06-4134
Printed 2004
Reprinted 2005; updated and reprinted 2006

Introduction

Men who are in treatment for substance abuse experience many different feelings. Because of the way most men were brought up, it may be difficult for them to experience, express, understand, and cope with their feelings—or even admit to having them. Now that you are in treatment, you may feel relieved, optimistic, and proud of yourself for taking the first step toward recovery. Yet, at times, you also may feel

- Ashamed
- Anxious
- Embarrassed
- Depressed
- Angry
- Guilty
- Bad about yourself
- That you can't connect with family or friends
- That you're crazy
- Numbness or nothing at all
- Fearful
- Helpless.

Believe it or not, some of these feelings are common for any man who starts treatment for a substance use disorder, but for a man who also was abused in childhood these feelings can be even stronger. The feelings can be so painful or overwhelming that he may do many things to avoid them, including using drugs or alcohol or both.

Some men in treatment for substance abuse don't clearly remember being abused (or don't realize that the way they were treated as children was abusive), but they have some of the feelings mentioned here. Some men push their memories of abuse so far away that they can't explain why they have intense anger or fear, feel embarrassed around a particular person, have nightmares, or always feel as if

something bad is about to happen. Sometimes, after people stop drinking or using drugs and are in treatment, memories may surface that had been too painful to think about before or that were blocked from memory by drugs or alcohol.

Working through the bad memories and experiences from childhood you've tried to forget can help you when you're in substance abuse treatment because facing old feelings can help you focus on your present life.

What Is Childhood Abuse?

Child abuse can occur in any family, regardless of its race, religion, or income level.

Abuse has many definitions, and sometimes it can be hard to know whether what you went through as a child was abuse. At the time, the way you were punished or treated may have seemed normal because you were too young to know differently. Here are some questions to think about. *These questions ask about only a few experiences that are generally considered abuse.* You may have had other experiences that are not on this list but are still considered abuse. Do you remember anyone in a position of authority

- Using extreme discipline or punishment on you?
- Spanking or hitting you so hard that you had bruises, cuts, or broken bones?
- Beating or punching you?
- Acting in a way that made you feel uncomfortable or powerless?
- Calling you names or abusing you verbally?
- Criticizing or making fun of your physical characteristics, such as your hair, your skin color, your body type, or a disability?
- Talking to you in a sexual way, watching you undress or bathe, making you watch pornographic pictures or movies, or photographing you in inappropriate ways?

- Touching you sexually or making you touch yourself or someone else sexually?
- Forcing you to watch or talking you into watching others acting in a sexual way?
- Forcing you to have or talking you into having sex?

What Symptoms Could You Have If You Were Abused?

The effects of childhood abuse may still be with you as an adult. These effects might be part of the reason you feel angry, anxious, ashamed, or depressed and may be part of the reason you abuse substances. You may

- Have flashbacks of the abuse
- Have frequent nightmares
- Be sensitive to noise, being touched, or being close to people
- Always expect something bad to happen
- Become angry easily
- Not remember periods of your life
- Abuse others
- Feel numb
- Feel depressed, even suicidal
- Let people abuse or take advantage of you.

These problems may get worse or become more intense when you're stressed or in situations that trigger memories of the abuse, such as when you fight with someone close to you or see a movie or television program that reminds you of a past experience. Know that you are okay—the feelings

may seem overpowering, but you can get through them. *But, if you ever feel like hurting yourself or others or are thinking about suicide, tell your substance abuse counselor immediately, call 911, or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255 (TTY: 800-799-4889)*. These thoughts and feelings need immediate attention from your counselor or a mental health professional.

How Can You Address Childhood Abuse Issues While You're in Treatment?

During the early stages of substance abuse treatment, you'll be focusing on getting the drugs or alcohol out of your system, clearing your head, and learning how to establish healthy patterns of thinking and behaving. You may want to put off addressing painful past abuse until you're comfortable being drug and alcohol free and have built relationships with your counselor, other clients, and others who are in recovery.

However, if the feelings are too overwhelming and painful or make you feel overly aggressive, you must address them right away. You can raise the issue with your counselor or other clients *whenever* you want or need to. No matter what stage of recovery you're in, help is available for you. And remember: Many other men have worked through these feelings and now lead happy, productive, substance-free lives.

It's up to you to decide when to discuss abuse with your counselor, but it is important for you to raise the subject *when you're ready*. This may be the first time you've ever told anyone about what happened to you as a child. You may feel embarrassed talking about what happened to you; you also may feel guilty or disloyal talking about a family member or another person close to you. You may fear how your family will react to you after you've talked about what happened. These feelings and fears are very normal; talk about them with your counselor.

Sometimes, it's hard to remember the difference between what you felt as a child who was abused and the choices you have as an adult in counseling. You couldn't protect yourself then, but you can now. As an adult, you *can* talk about what happened to you and you *can* begin to heal.

How Can Your Counselor Help?

In general, everything that you tell your counselor is confidential. Your counselor will inform you of the few situations in which he or she would have to break confidentiality. For example, if you were to tell your counselor that you intended to harm yourself or someone else, he or she would be required to take action. It's also important that you know that mental health and substance abuse counselors generally are required to report the abuse of children. If this concerns you and you are younger than 18, talk to your counselor about the guidelines he or she must follow. If you're an adult, your counselor generally is *not* required to report childhood abuse. The exception is when the abuser still has access to children and may harm them.

As you talk to your counselor or therapist about your experiences, you may find that your talks become more difficult when painful and embarrassing memories and feelings arise and you look more closely at the past. Sometimes, these overwhelming feelings contribute to a drug or alcohol relapse. Your counselor can help you understand the relationship between the abuse in your past and your substance use. He or she can help you understand and cope with your feelings and will help you find self-help groups, such as Survivors of Incest Anonymous. If you grew up in a family in which one or more people had substance use problems, groups like Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACA) or Co-Dependents Anonymous (CoDA) also might be very helpful to you (see page 7).

Your substance abuse counselor also may help you find a counselor or therapist who specializes in working with people who have been abused as children. Addressing childhood abuse issues takes time; you'll need to develop

a relationship with a therapist who can work with you now and who will continue to work with you after you've finished treatment for your substance use disorder.

A Final Note

As a man in recovery from substance use disorder, you've faced great challenges. It is a tribute to your strength that you have survived and have now made the courageous choice to enter a substance abuse treatment program. You deserve the chance to heal and to live a happy, healthy life.

You will face more challenges, but you will have the ability to cope with them, too. Remember: You are not alone. Use the many resources and support networks that are available to help you and to keep you moving toward your goal. As you stay sober, your options grow. As you create a trusting relationship with your counselor or therapist, you begin to heal. And the courage you find to help yourself heal might one day help another person who is lost in addiction and pain.

Be patient with yourself. Healing takes time, but it's worth it.

Federal Resources

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 800-273-8255 or 800-799-4889 (TTY)
- SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI), www.ncadi.samhsa.gov, 800-729-6686, or 800-487-4889 (TDD)
- SAMHSA's Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator, www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov, 800-662-HELP
- SAMHSA's National Mental Health Information Center, www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov, 800-789-2647
- National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, nccanch.acf.hhs.gov, 800-394-3366

Other Selected Resources

The following is a sampling, not a complete list, of available resources. Inclusion on this list does not imply endorsement by SAMHSA.

- Adult Children of Alcoholics, www.adultchildren.org, 310-534-1815
- American Psychiatric Association Public Information, www.healthyminds.org
- American Psychological Association Consumer Help Center, helping.apa.org, 800-964-2000
- Co-Dependents Anonymous (CoDA), www.codependents.org, 602-277-7991
- Dual Recovery Anonymous (DRA), www.draonline.org, 877-883-2332
- Emotions Anonymous International, www.emotionsanonymous.org, 651-647-9712

- National Mental Health Association, www.nmha.org, 800-969-6642
- National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse, www.mhselfhelp.org, 800-553-4539
- Parents Anonymous®, Inc., ww.parentsanonymous.org, 909-621-6184
- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Alliance, www.ptsdalliance.org, 877-507-PTSD
- Sidran Institute, www.sidran.org, 410-825-8888
- Survivors of Incest Anonymous, Inc., www.siawso.org, 410-893-3322

Notes

[Room here for clinic sticker and list of local resources]

DHHS Publication No. (SMA) 06-4134
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Printed 2004
Reprinted 2005; updated and reprinted 2006