

Five Growth Areas

Chapter Two

Last week, you considered the impact of sexual abuse on five areas at the core of your being. This week, we are going to look at five essential areas of growth—emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual and social. Though each of these areas can be significantly damaged by sexual abuse, you can experience profound healing in all of these vital aspects of life.

Core Healing Goal: to recognize potential for growth and choices you can make in five distinct areas of your life.

1. Day One: Emotional Growth

Pause and observe the emotions or feelings you're experiencing today. After reading the list of emotions below, circle the ones you're sensing:

| | | | |
|-------------|------------|----------------|------------|
| Excitement | Sadness | Numb | Happiness |
| Hope | Anger | Hurt | Irritation |
| Frustration | Depression | Disappointment | Fear |
| Bitterness | Anxiety | Offended | Grief |

Other emotions, moods or feelings I'm experiencing that are not listed include _____

Review the items you circled or listed. Check how often you experience them in the appropriate column below.

| Emotion/Mood/Feeling | Daily | Weekly | Often |
|----------------------|-------|--------|-------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |



This is where the healing starts

When you come to where you're broken within

The light meets the dark¹¹

Tenth Avenue North
Healing Begins (Lyrics)



Please read Henri Nouwen's statement, and describe any ways you relate to it: "A little criticism makes me angry, and a little rejection makes me depressed. A little praise raises my spirits, and a little success excites me. It takes very little to raise me up or thrust me down. Often I am like a small boat on the ocean, completely at the mercy of its waves. All the time and energy I spend in keeping some kind of balance and preventing myself from being tipped over and drowning shows my life is mostly a struggle for survival; not a holy struggle, but an anxious struggle resulting from the mistaken idea that it is the world that defines me."¹²

I relate to Henri Nouwen when I am _____

2. Day Two: **Intellectual Growth**

What have you been thinking about today? _____

Think about the connection between your thoughts and your feelings. Describe how *what* you have been thinking about could have influenced how you feel today. _____



Feelings must be engaged. They are meant to be involved. [Yet] our danger is to submit ourselves to our feelings and to allow them to dictate to us, to govern and to master us and to control the whole of our lives.¹³

Martyn Lloyd-Jones



Name Your Tyrant

Chapter Five

The focus of this chapter is **Security**, which indicates being safe and protected within a sanctuary or safe haven of some kind. A safe haven could be a tangible place like a house, an intellectual realization, a spiritual sense of comfort and peace, or an emotional context, such as a relationship.

“Home” is many people’s description of a secure, safe place, but “home” is not a secure place for people who have been abused within its walls. Insecurity, the opposite of security, suggests a lack of safety and/or a general feeling of instability, unpredictability, anxiety, uncertainty or fear.

As you read the preceding description of “security” and “insecurity,” do you notice any words or phrases in the paragraphs that relate to your life? As you note them below, please add additional words or phrases to describe your experience of security and insecurity.

Security: _____

Insecurity: _____

Because sexual abuse generates complex physical, emotional, mental, social and spiritual harm, its survivors often feel unsafe and unprotected long after the abuse ends. The child or adult who has been sexually abused—whether by inappropriate touch, violent molestation, exposure to pornography or nudity, or by any other form of sexual abuse—has been under someone else’s control. This week’s work is designed to help you become aware of ways in which you could still be experiencing negative influences from past abuse.

In this chapter, a sexual predator is referred to as a tyrant or dictator. Like a tyrant, a perpetrator of sexual abuse is someone who takes control over someone else. Many survivors live as though dominated by their abuser for years or even decades after the abuse stops. It is an essential part of your healing process to “name your tyrant” by determining how current thinking, feeling and actions are triggered by past sexual assault.

Core Healing Goal: to move from attitudes or actions shaped by abuse into the safety and security God provides by making healing choices each day.



The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.

Proverbs 18:10, NKJV



1. Day One: **From Insecurity to Security**

Insecurity can feel like anxiety and breeds self-doubt and uncertainty. If your past continues to create feelings of self-doubt, it is important to recognize those feelings so you can move out from under their control.

Rank the following statements using a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being “neutral or none” and 10 being “as much as I can imagine.”

_____ When I’m feeling insecure, I look for people who will show me love and affection. But I always feel like either they can’t get it right or I can’t. I still feel unloved.

_____ When I’m stressed I turn to alcohol, drugs, food, or _____ (circle your answer), as a means of coping with the situation.

_____ I am not able to set boundaries and people take advantage of me.

_____ When I feel rejected, I turn my anger inward and withdraw.

_____ I don’t feel safe anywhere.

_____ I try to be perfect so other people will like me.

_____ My insecurity often expresses itself as anger.

_____ When I’m in a group, I am afraid to speak; I know I’ll say or do something stupid.

_____ No one would listen to me when I was being molested; no one will help me now.

If you ranked the majority of your answers as “6” or higher, please describe your concerns to a counselor, physician, pastor, priest, rabbi or other professional trained in helping people who have been sexually abused.

What circumstances, people or events trigger insecurities in you now? _____

When you walk into a room, do you feel confident or do you feel hesitant, wondering whether you’ll say or do the “right” thing? Explain: _____



If you look at the world, you'll be distressed. If you look within, you'll be depressed. If you look at God you'll be at rest.³⁷

Corrie Ten Boom



Think about your relationships and interactions at work or home. Describe what might change if you felt safe in everyday life: _____



Explore - Though your past can't be changed, it doesn't have to dictate your present or your future. Your present and future will be shaped by what you choose to believe now.

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.

Psalm 91:1-6, NIV

Write down key words or phrases from this Psalm that portray the security that can be yours for the rest of your life: _____

2. Day Two: ID Your Tyrant

At its essence, sexual abuse is about power and control—not about love and certainly not about healthy sexuality. When you were molested, you likely felt powerless. Most survivors couldn't stop the people who abused their bodies and lied about what was happening. One problem of living in a tyrant's lies is that they can become a person's "normal." If that was your life, you likely learned to rationalize what was happening in order to survive. Every time you rationalized, you inexplicably learned to believe "rational lies." The lies of the past can keep you trapped and feeling unsafe in the present.

Some perpetrators say things like, "What we are doing is our secret. If you tell anyone, I'll hurt [your dog, cat, brother, mother, friend, etc.]." Some children have been told, "Your mom will divorce me if you tell her about this—and it will be your fault." Since a child's brain cannot sift through the lies of abuse, the result is often that the victim believes the perpetrator when he or she says that the molestation is the child's fault. The child



For thirty years Satan used my past in various ways. I finally began to wake up to the fact that Satan was going to use my past until I allowed God to snatch it from him and use it for Himself.³⁸

Beth Moore



often lives in constant terror that s/he could cause harm to someone else. Often children suffer molestation for years to protect a sibling from their tormentor.

When a perpetrator of sexual abuse says something like, “This is only tickling. Everybody loves to be tickled,” and won’t listen when a child protests, the child learns to feel helpless and quits trying to object to what is happening. Teenagers report being told, “You know you wanted it,” after they have been manipulated to do something that leaves them feeling alone, empty, and robbed.

Your perpetrator may have told you it was a “game” or that it was “OK because this is how to be a grown-up.” Some sexual abusers even tell their victims “this is the mommy and daddy game.” How perplexing for a child to be told that something so confusing—and often painful—is “good.”

The good news for you today is this—you can learn a completely different way of thinking and living now that will free you from what happened then. Moving away from the lies of sexual abuse is challenging because of the incredible confusion already delivered to your mind, body and soul. A child’s mind cannot comprehend when a person he or she should be able to trust is saying something is “good” when it feels anything but that. Another type of confusion is experienced by children when the only time they are told they are “special” is when their bodies are used for someone’s selfish sexual gratification. A person who once seemed safe proved he or she is not safe at all.

You can terminate your abuser’s lies by consciously choosing not to believe them in your mind, emotions, soul or behavior. First, though, you’ll need to bring the lies to the surface so you can replace them with Truth.

Write down any “rational lies” from your past that are hindering your sense of safety now: _____

To get a small sense of the massive inner erosion caused by sexual abuse, think about a child who is told that pink, yellow, and blue paper play money is real money. S/he might see people paying for things with a different kind of money—green paper bills—and still believe the lie she has been told—because it was someone she should be able to trust who told her real things can be bought with the money that came in a game box.



The good news for you today is this—you can learn a completely different way of thinking and living now that will free you from what happened then.



Imagine the same child at age six, trying to pay for school lunch with play money. She would be confused when her classmates laughed. Though ultimately she'd figure out she had been duped, the trauma of being tricked into spending play money would leave her with a lack confidence, a sense of insecurity.

Indescribable confusion emerges because the body God created to experience sexual pleasure in marriage didn't know how to "shut down" when your perpetrator touched you and told you it was "good." On the one hand, some part of a child's body might have felt good; on the other hand, he or she felt horrible. Even while being raped, women can experience orgasm, which can result in years of bewilderment about what really happened. You can know rape is rape; it is a violent crime, whether any part of it felt "good" or not. If your perpetrator molested you repeatedly, you might think you didn't resist him enough for it to be called rape. Sadly, a survivor of sexual abuse is groomed to act powerless after being threatened with dire consequences for resistance.

Catastrophic, staggering insecurity is fostered when a child or an adult is out of control of his or her own body! Ordinary things, like feeling safe in bed at night, are not possible for a child who is molested when he or she tries to sleep. A child whose predator is a family member, teacher, family friend or club leader develops intangible fears about being with people. Sometimes the fears are so overwhelming that, by adulthood, "numbing-out behaviors"—like substance abuse, constant activity, eating disorders, sexual acting-out or other obsessions become a part of daily life used to silence hidden pain. Survivors of sexual abuse often have numbed out their emotions so thoroughly that they are "frozen," with an inability to feel a normal range of human emotions like love, sadness, hope, peace, joy, etc.

Can you think of anything you are doing or have done to silence the pain of your abuse? _____

Many abuse survivors are hushed by family members who demand, "Don't ever tell anyone!" when they find out about the molestation. Others are accused of lying about what happened. Still others are not heard when they try to tell someone what happened to them. That forced silence increases the survivor's pain and feelings of worthlessness. When the one who tells a child or teenager *not to tell* is someone who should be protecting that person, additional confusion and hopelessness ensue. Sometimes the adults who say "don't tell" are survivors of abuse who never dealt with the pain in their own lives.



A child whose predator is a family member, teacher, family friend or club leader develops intangible fears about being with people.



What, if anything, did people do or say to keep you silent? _____

Your silence can end now, whether it was caused by numbing your emotions or demanded by others who didn't hear, care or understand your pain. You can tell a trusted counselor, pastor, rabbi, friend or law enforcement officer. And you can open your heart to God as the Shepherd who cares and hears you when you cry. The psalmist understood needing someone to care when he wrote:



Explore - *I look for someone to come and help me, but no one gives me a passing thought! No one will help me; no one cares a bit what happens to me. Then I pray to you, O Lord. I say, "You are my place of refuge. You are all I really want in life. Hear my cry, for I am very low. Rescue me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me. Bring me out of prison so I can thank you. The godly will crowd around me, for you are good to me.*

Psalm 142:4-7, NLT

A vital step to eliminating the obstacles to your well-being is to repeatedly remind yourself, "I am no longer in that situation." **[If you are currently in an abusive situation, please call your local police or 800.96ABUSE (800.962.2873) as soon as you are in a safe place where your call won't be overheard by your abuser.]**

Will you make the choice to stop shutting out or numbing emotions (sorrow, fear, hurt, etc.) with activities, alcohol, drugs, inappropriate sexuality, etc.? Will you entrust your sorrow to God and begin to believe in His gift of hope and healing? _____ Yes _____ No

If your answer is "Yes," explain when and how. If "No," explain what is holding you back from making this critical decision.



Satan, the ultimate Mr. Unclean, hates that mortal creatures have been made clean through the grace of Calvary and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. If he can't make us unclean, he will at least do everything he can to make us *feel* unclean.³⁹

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