

Video Prep: No gory details
LSIOR
Who-What I am.
History of Abuse
Impact on Family
How did I get help?
Why do this?

My name is Jim, and I am a Social Worker and Classification Counsellor for the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. I've been with the Ministry since 2005, and am presently working in one of the provincial jails providing social work and classification services to men on a Remand Unit.

I've been asked to speak to you about men who are survivors of sexual abuse. I know the course name uses the term "Victims", but that's a term that I am hesitant to use. My Oxford Dictionary defines the word "Victim" like this: A person who suffers, or dies as a result of an event or circumstance; a person injured, or destroyed as a result of their own or another's ambition, passion; a person fooled or taken advantage of; a person who has come to feel helpless and passive in the face of misfortune or ill-treatment. I would agree to a degree that the previously mentioned definitions do aptly describe what happens to men as boys when they were sexually abused or assaulted. But instead, I like to use the word "survivor", referring to a person who has endured things that might cause others to not survive. How they have endured sexual abuse and assault may not have often been terribly productive, and at times was destructive when compared to others coping skills. But when comparing the coping skills of survivors to others who have not endured the ravages of sexual abuse, the equity ends. The comparators cease to be equal. Nevertheless, the survivor is there, sitting across from you at your desk, despite what happened to them, and despite what happened to other men, who for many reasons did not survive. He is there, waiting for the penny to drop. Fear is in his eyes, his heart is racing, wondering, if you dare to ask the terrible question, how he will respond. Can he trust you? Will you believe him? Will you breach his confidentiality, and rob him of what few vestiges of dignity he has left? Or will you support him, listen to him, believe him, and allow him to cry when he tells you his story?

I remember the first man who disclosed to me. He didn't really intend to. He started to tell part of a story, and I just knew. I just knew. What he did say was part of an institutional abuse situation that gained public awareness in the media. After that story broke, many men came forward as well to tell their story of how they too were abused as boys in a school setting that was really a cover for

juveniles in trouble with the law. St. John's Training school in Uxbridge. The inmate I was working with did not come forward at that time. He couldn't. His disclosure to me was the first time he had ever said anything about his abuse. No one else knew. No one. He was alone. His pain was palpable, and obvious. His shame and guilt were profound. Never had he admitted to himself what had happened in that school, let alone admitted to a total stranger, until that very moment. I listened to his pain, tried to console him, just let him cry. Eventually, over the course of a couple of interviews, it became obvious to me why he was in jail. Any self-esteem that he had as boy or young man was destroyed by his abuse. His very essence was re-written by the men who abused him. Teens get into trouble. But they can also learn to later stay out of it by following the teachings of those they trust. But for this young man, his ability to trust was destroyed by the very people who were supposed to care for him, nurture him, and dare I say it, love him appropriately. What was even more tragic is that this man came from a culture that has low tolerance for anything that even remotely resembles homosexuality.

Being abused sent this man on a downward spiral that ultimately turned him into a drug addict; by his own admission -- a junkie who hated himself for what "he had done." His shame and guilt and culture prevented him saying anything about what happened. It cut him off from any legal action that took place, and removed any sort of financial compensation that he might gain as a result of his abuse. It eventually cut him off from his own family because his drug abuse prevented him from working and supporting his wife and family. It destroyed his ability to be a good dad and husband. A few years later, I saw him back in jail again.

That man's assessment was one of the first ones I did after being trained, and authorized to complete LISOR's. And although I knew, or at least had an inkling of what he was going to say, I dreaded every second leading up to his disclosure. To see him in that much pain, it caused me to be in the same pain.

Over the following months, and years even, I've heard stories that would make your hair stand on end after hearing what some of these men have endured. St. John's Training School guys, Brookside guys. Mount Cashel in Newfoundland guys, even a couple of guys who were abused in the scandal that rocked Maple Leaf Gardens a few years back. Not all the men I met and did assessments on were abused in institutional scenarios though. Many were abused by relatives, a parent, a sibling, a cousin, aunt, uncle, sister-in-law. Some were assaulted by people in positions of authority, a teacher, a trusted adult, a priest. Other times they were assaulted by strangers. But more often than not, they were hurt by people they knew, people they trusted, and people they loved. Its no wonder that

many of the men we see have trust issues, issues with authority, and an inability to form long lasting intimate relationships with significant others.

All the while, as I heard story after story, I began to falter. I was becoming increasingly uncomfortable hearing the stories knowing there was nothing I could do, or say to help them. No one wanted to address their issues. No one wanted to say they even had issues, valid issues, issues that affected who they were, who they had become. After all, if men cannot be victims, how could victims be men? I needed to learn more.

In March 2008 I was able to attend the Men of Courage conference. This was the first provincial conference on Male Sexual Victimization ever to be held. It was sponsored by those wonderful people at The Men's Project in Ottawa. In attendance were clinicians, therapists, experts in the field of male sexual abuse and assault. People who knew what they were talking about. Also in attendance were Survivors. Many, many Survivors. Some told their stories, some presented a fabulous, and empowering video. Most were men that you could pass on the street and not suspect anything was untoward. One was a former NHL hockey player who recounted how as a teen, he had been groomed, and sexually abused by a man who was supposed to be his coach, his mentor, and his friend. It was really hard to listen to the pain in that room. And to look around at the pain the audience experienced as well. Really hard. At the beginning of that first break, I was out of that ballroom like a flash. I was starting to lose it. I retreated to my hotel room accompanied by a colleague. And I started to shake. And despite my best attempts at smoking my brains out, I just shook. My colleague was pretty rattled at what we had just heard as well. To this day, I have no idea why that moment was so important to me, but I had to say something about what I had just heard, and experienced. So I turned to my colleague and said, "That could have been my story as well". Thank God Matt was an understanding, and compassionate man. I guess I already knew that, and felt safe. But for the first time in my adult life I was able to say to someone that I too was sexually abused when I was a kid.

Oh man, just thinking about that moment, when I could finally utter those horrible words. "I was sexually abused". It was then and there that I decided that I was tired of being a victim, I was tired of carrying the shame that was never mine to begin with. I was tired of the guilt I felt, for like that first guy who disclosed to me, "for what I had done".

I can assure you all that no amount of professional experience could have prepared me to embark on what can only be called a Healing Journey. Despite knowing in my mind that I was not to blame, I carried that shame and guilt for 38 years. Even when I worked for a Children's Aid Society, I could not face what lay buried in my mind. Compartmentalized, and filed away, deep within my mind. But finally, I could somehow muster the strength to finally admit what I had avoided for a large portion of my adult life.

The abuse was committed by a man I met on my paper route. A customer. He lived alone, and had no family in Canada. He was a grandfatherly type, and just what I was looking for at that time. My grandmother had died just over a year before, and despite the passage of time, I was still very much in mourning. I grieved her death terribly. She and I were so close that when she died, I was left with this huge hole in my heart, and from that hole oozed sorrow and grief for a long time. Her passing was the first time in my life I had experienced death, and mourning. It was horrible. I can't say how many nights I would cry myself to sleep, just wanting to hug her, see her face, smell her perfume just one more time. To be "special" in someone else's life. The man who perpetrated against me knew this of course, and exploited my weakness, my innocence. He groomed me with lots of attention, acceptance, the ability to talk about anything I wanted to talk about. He enticed me into his life by offering me tips, pop, pornography and candy. The sexual abuse went on for two years. The emotional abuse went on for many years after that.

In the early 1970's there were no words to say, to describe, what was happening to me. And because of not being able to tell, I assumed it was my fault, or at the very least, that I was complicit. I blamed myself for a bloody long time for what he had done. Being a kid, I thought that because my body reacted to the abuse, I thought it was something I wanted. And because I was never physically hurt, well, I don't think I need to explain further.

As I grew a bit older, I would look back and wonder what the hell happened back then. And what did it mean? Not being able at that time to fully understand, or even come close to accept what had happened, well it affected my ability to trust others in intimate relationships. I had a few girl friends, but the ability to explore my growing sexuality was hampered by a past that was not of my choosing. It haunted me even into my married life, for even still I had not been able to tell anyone, not even my wife, what happened to me as a child. I still carried into adulthood the guilt, and shame that was put upon me years earlier.

Men are supposed to be in control of their emotions. They are supposed to be the pursuers, the go get'em guys in relationships, not allowing anyone to see weakness, or pain. They are also supposed to be in control of their bodies in all aspects of life. To look back on my life with adult eyes meant that I must have been weak, or needy, or wanted it in some sick, twisted way. The fact that my body reacted, and betrayed me to a predator must have meant something apart from just being a male. But what? At different times I suppose I subconsciously looked for the answers to that question, never coming up with anything particularly useful. And as a result I just continued to blame myself, to put myself down as weak, a worthless individual, submerging myself in maladaptive coping behaviours that in my case involved anger issues, lack of patience when trying to be heard, an inability to compromise on important issues. And I drank too much. I needed to numb my feelings so that I would not feel the rage within me about what happened to me as a kid. I needed to be numb to sleep, otherwise the nightmares, and flashbacks would terrorize me for days on end. I can't tell you how many nights sleep I have lost, or how many times I have wondered if I will ever have another decent night sleep in my life. Too many to count.

The effect it had on me as a married man was to remind me at different times that I was not who I really wanted to be in my marriage. I was different. I was different from every other man I knew. I did not want to be a man with a secret, living a great life with the woman I love, the mother of my two sons. Just who the hell was she married to after all? I felt like a fraud. A liar. Damaged goods, that had she known, at least she would have had an out earlier. Now two kids and 27 years later, how much damage have I caused because of something that was done TO me, not BY me?

Immediately after the Men of Courage Conference, I returned home and started to talk with someone about getting some help. And almost as quickly I dropped the whole idea. I put it back on the shelf. I'm a Social Worker for God's sake. I should be able to deal with this. Or at the very least figure out for myself what to do. And there it sat for another 6 months. Why 6 months? I have no idea. But in looking back, I feel that the conference ignited in me a very slow burning fuse. 6 months later I was with a bunch of guys I have known since high school. We were having a "Gentlemen's Weekend" at a friends cottage just like every other year for over the past 20 years or so. Its usually a lot of fun, and we enjoy each other's company. But this particular year I wasn't sure I wanted to go. I wasn't sure why, but I just wasn't sure I wanted to go. Despite feeling this way though, I did go. As the first evening progressed I had too many martinis. Not unusual for me when on one of these weekends. OK, way too many martinis. At around midnight, my

friend and host asked me how I was doing. For reasons which I still cannot explain, I started to cry. I lost it. I had a huge meltdown. I just started to bawl. And I told him the whole sordid story. Eventually, I told the other two guys that were there as well. Each in their turn hugged me, and told me they loved me, and that I had not done anything wrong, and that I should seek professional help. I made a promise to them that I would. The first day after the weekend I contacted that professional I had spoken to earlier in the year, right after the conference, and started seeing her on a regular basis. A couple of weeks later, just after our 27th wedding anniversary I told my wife about my abuse. I assure you that I have never been so scared in my life. I thought that was it, curtains to the marriage, adios muchacho. But no, as with just about everyone else so far, she was caring, and understanding, told me she still loved me. In fact, once I told her about me, she said that it helped explain some of my behaviour over the years. It helped her to better understand what I have been going through, and what I went through so long ago. I won't say that in the following months its been really easy. It hasn't been. Its like the old players, are playing in the old sandbox, but with new and different rules. I'm trying to be more attentive, and listen and be patient, and maintain a sense of sobriety. My wife says she has seen some good changes. At the same time though, I do not keep as much stuff bottled up. I am learning to let my feelings out. And after 27 years of marriage, to suddenly learn that your husband may have a different view? That can't be easy for her either. But we are managing to get through this together. Still together.

About a month and a half later I attended what is called a Weekend of Recovery, sponsored by www.malesurvivor.org in the States. The venue was just 45 minutes away from home, and despite being next to broke at the time, I applied for and received a scholarship to attend. Also attending were 18 other men, like me. 18 men who came from all over Ontario, the US, and one even from the UK, to meet each other, share experiences, and to learn how to overcome the shadows we have all experienced as a result of being sexually abused or assaulted earlier in our lives. I can't tell you how I felt, for the first time meeting someone like me. And to have 18 other men like me, Gawd! I felt normal! Like I fit in. No longer part of a different constituency, or even at times a different planet. It was amazing. Simply amazing. And the Therapist team, led by Dr. Howard Fradkin P.h.d. was equally amazing. I returned home from that weekend forever changed. I learned that I AM normal, but what happened to me was not. I stopped thinking it was my fault. I stopped believing that I was even partly to blame for what happened. IT WASN'T MY FAULT!!! I could finally, 38 years later cast off the shame and guilt that was never mine to begin with and replace it back where it belongs. On

him. I was freed from what used to feel like a life sentence filled with a blackness you do not want to imagine.

I have continued with my individual therapy for over a year now. I started with two sessions a week. Now I go once every two weeks. I've also started group therapy which helps alleviate the times when I feel alone with my history again. Not long ago I participated in a second Weekend of Recovery. This time there were 38 men. It was held in the mountains of Utah, and again my buddy from the UK attended. One of the things that struck me about this group of men was how articulate they were. I wondered where the less verbal guys were. The ones with less education, less access to funding, even though several of this year's group of guys attended on scholarship. The guys whose coping skills are not yet well developed. My friend suggested that some of those guys are the ones that have not survived. God, that hurt. While I am focusing on myself, and my own needs, there are also men out there whose needs exceed what is currently available to them. That really hurts to think they are shooting and sniffing drugs to ease their pain. They are drinking themselves into oblivion to help them sleep, and to ensure they do not experience night terrors. They are in jail because their anger and rage has overwhelmed them, and unfortunately hurt another person, or property. Then the worst of all. Those who have succumbed to the guilt, and shame, and taken their own life, feeling that the world was not interested in them as men, or what they had to say. That the world as a whole not only ignores men in pain, but also mocks what they have to say. How many Altar Boy jokes does one have to hear before you can't take it any more? If anyone thought about how many of us were Altar Boys, would they really want to make jokes of us?

No one in Western Society really believes that women who are sexually assaulted as girls, or woman are at fault. Not any more. We have progressed past that dreadful blame the victim stance that we used to have. No more do we hear, "well, she asked for it! Look at the clothes she was wearing". Thank God for that. Sex crimes are just that. Crimes. Violent crimes no matter who does what, or how it felt at the time. Without the ability, and the willingness to consent, it's a crime. Yet where men are concerned, Society plays a different tune. Recently a woman in my community was convicted of sexual assault against a boy. He was 13 when it started, and 14 when it ended. She was 35. She got 45 days in jail. I respectfully suggest that had the sex roles been reversed that a very different sentence would have been handed down. Are boys and men really that less valued in our society? Or are boys and men seen still as being unable to be victimized? That any sexual opportunity that befalls a young adolescent is seen as "getting lucky" as long as it is done by a woman? I didn't feel lucky at 14, and I'll wager that the young man

in this recent example doesn't feel lucky either. In any event, it may be years down the road when this soon to be adult realizes that the debut of his sexual life was at the hands of a predator, and not with someone of his own choosing, and able to consent.

And I guess that is why I am choosing to speak out now. I kept my secret for 38 years not realizing that there are a few resources out there that are specifically designed to work with male survivors. And, again I say survivors, because I did survive to tell my story, and to take my life out of the victim hole and to put myself in a better light. Valued, and worthy of getting better. I didn't end my life by jumping off a bridge, taking an overdose, or driving into a concrete pylon. Although to say I never ever thought about it would be a lie. I am choosing to fight back, to retake control of my life, and to try and undo some of the damage that was done. As mid-life crises go, this one sux for sure. I'd rather have a Mazda Miata thanks very much. But being a survivor is the card I was dealt, so its the card I will play. Make no mistake though, this game is about life, and about death. I recently lost a friend who took his own life because he could not afford to get the medication he needed to help him cope with his fear, his anxiety, and his depression. Everything in his life was a trigger for him. He couldn't cope any longer. And when a survivor takes his own life out of desperation for a feeling of peace, guess who really won that battle? No. I am choosing to fight back, to reclaim my life, my dignity, my sexual health, my children, and my wife. I am a SURVIVOR and I am choosing to speak out now, because what happened to me, and approximately 2.7 million other Canadian men was never our fault. Yet, how long can we allow men to sit and blame themselves because the rest of us are just too squeamish to talk about the sexual abuse and assault of boys and men? How many men, their families, their lovers will continue to be affected negatively because we bury our collective heads in the sand? No thanks. I've been there, seen it, done it, and I've even got a t-shirt. I can't do that anymore. I know too well what it has cost me. 38 years of my life. For something I never did.

In closing, let me say just this. It would not have been conceivable to me just two years ago that I would be saying anything about male sexual abuse or assault. Inconceivable. In looking back though, I guess it was my time to start healing.

There is no magic time, or age when a man will be willing to try to come to terms with the abuse he suffered and disclose to you. . He just has to be ready at the same time you are listening. To encourage this, I have posters up in my office about male sexual abuse. They are strategically placed, on two walls. If a man doesn't want to look at me directly when speaking, he will have to look at the

posters. This gives the man a message that the subject of male sexual abuse is ok to be discussed. That my office is a safe zone. Nothing said in my office will go outside of it unless the man wishes it to be so. When I have men in my office disclosing to me, I try and leave four things for them to remember. (1) That I believe them and will not judge them. (2) It was not then, or now, their fault. (3) They are not alone. 1 in 6 men in this country will be sexually abused by the time they are 18. (4) That there is hope. The fact that you are all here taking this training is a testament to this. Tell them about The Men's Project in Ottawa. Tell them about the Gatehouse in Toronto. Tell them they can check out their own local Sexual Assault Centres and Rape Crisis Centres. Some do provide services to men. That's how I found my therapist. Tell them about www.malesurvivor.org and how there is an online support system with several thousand members, all with similar histories. Tell them about Weekends of Recovery, offered by MaleSurvivor and that by meeting men who were just like me it helped me regain control of my life. Tell them about the newsletters of MaleSurvivor for that is how I found a therapeutic men's group of survivors to connect with, and process issues unique to us. Its at the Shoniker Clinic in Scarbrough. MaleSurvivor also has a directory of Therapists skilled in the issues of Male Sexual Abuse. If we can manage to do all this together, the man has a chance. Mike Lew, author of Victims No Longer said earlier this year at a meeting we both attended that working with Male Survivors is not too hard. He said "Create safety, and get the hell out of the way."

None of the preceding would have been possible without the love and support of my wife and our sons. They all know about me now. And I am so thankful that we live in a secret free home. A home where I can be, just me.