

TAGS: Special Needs; Sexual Abuse

Should You Adopt a Child That Has Been Sexually Abused?

Adopting a child that has been sexually abused is scary for most prospective adoptive parents, especially if they already have children in their home. Families that are open to adopting a child with many other risk factors will often shy away from a child that is known to have suffered sexual abuse.

In fact, this fear is so strong that adoption social workers often report that any mention of sexual abuse or even a suspicion of sexual abuse in a child's file makes it incredibly hard for that child to ever be adopted. In many ways the young victims of sexual abuse are being doubly victimized--once by their abusers and now by family and agencies.

It's almost as if we believe that there is no hope for a child that has been sexually abused. Nothing could be further from the truth according to Dr. Jennifer Shaw, a clinical psychologist specializing in childhood sexual abuse at the [Gil Institute for Trauma Recovery and Education](#).

[In an interview with Creating a Family](#), Dr. Shaw spoke specifically about signs of sexual abuse, what to look for in the child's pre-adoption life that would indicate a higher likelihood that the child has been sexually abused, and the safeguards that need to be in place if there are other children in the family. The interview is a great resource to help both prospective and current adoptive parents think about how to facilitate healing and recovery for a child who has been abused.

What Helps Children Recover from Sexual Abuse

According to Dr. Shaw, in order to heal and go on to live healthy happy lives, a child needs one person:

- One person who tries to prevent the abuse or tries to help the child.
- One person who believes the child when he/she disclosed the abuse.
- One person who reaches out for professional counseling once child disclosed they were abused.
- One person who is willing to go the distance with the child and says "We're in this together."

When considering whether your family is right for a child who has experienced sexual abuse, it's important to ask yourself if you can be that "one person" for that child. It's a daunting question but asking yourself the question in advance sets you on the path to advocacy, seeking the resources necessary, and commitment to the child's healing.

What's the Prognosis for Child Who Has Been Sexually Abused

After the interview, Dr. Shaw was asked if it was possible for children to heal and live full, healthy, and happy lives after childhood sexual abuse. She responded, "The recovery process takes different forms as there are many abuse-specific factors that can impact the course of recovery including chronicity and frequency of the abuse, type of relationship with the abuser, child's capacity to cope pre-abuse, age at the time of the abuse, and absence or presence of protective factors following discovery of the abuse. For all children, full recovery depends primarily on how the world around them engages and supports them following discovery. With appropriate therapy, responsive and nurturing caregiving, and efforts to

create a world for the survivor that is safe and secure, children can and do heal.”

If you are parenting a child whom you suspect has been abused, the interview mentioned above will be of great help to you. There are also resources such as [Beyond Sexual Abuse: Families Can Promote Healing](#), from NACAC and [Strengthen Your Forever Family: A Step by Step Guide to Post Adoption, by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption](#) to guide you as you seek education and support.

These additional resources are recommended to help families:

[Child Trauma Academy](#)

[National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) (NCTSN)

[Association for Play Therapy](#) (APT) - can search for therapist by state

For books and resources, Dr. Shaw recommends [The Self Esteem Shop](#) because the owner is a therapist and available to assist in finding the best resource . They accept email inquiries.