Molested as a child: Promiscuous as an adult? [1]

Dear Alice,

If a child is molested, what are the chances of them becoming very promiscuous?

Answer

Dear Reader,

It's hard to pin down the exact odds of this happening. Overall, survivors of sexual abuse may be more likely than non-survivors to use addiction as a coping mechanism, which may include an addiction to sex. That isn't to say, though, that all survivors become promiscuous. Actually, many survivors do just the opposite? they may avoid most, if not all, sexual activity.

Your question brings up a larger issue. According to experts, child and adult survivors of sexual abuse develop ways to cope with what happened to them. In the short-term, these ways of coping often help survivors deal with intolerable circumstances, thoughts, and feelings.

For instance, many survivors who don't get professional help right away find ways to numb their pain and confusion. Some turn to drugs and alcohol. Others turn to excessive sexual activity. Some retreat into tumultuous relationships or avoid connecting with other people altogether. While these diversions may provide some immediate relief, they often lead to more suffering. At the worst, survivors dip into addictions, sexual confusion, and unstable and erratic relationships. Some survivors enter into a cycle of victimization, repeatedly finding themselves in situations where they're sexually abused as adults. This creates shame, guilt, and even more confusion for the survivor.

At some point, survivors often realize their ways of coping are no longer working or are actually causing more problems for them. There are lots of resources available for those who're ready and willing to explore their ways of coping. And, it often helps survivors to talk with mental health professionals about their experiences and ways of coping. If you or someone you know is interested in finding professionals with special experience in the area of sexual abuse, the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists (AASECT) [2] provides referrals.

It's important not to stereotype survivors of sexual abuse or expect them to have certain characteristics. Each survivor has unique experiences, feelings, thoughts, and ways of coping. With this understanding, it's possible for survivors of sexual abuse to find peaceful resolve to
very hurtful stories. In fact, many survivors lead healthy, happy, and meaningful lives.

Alice!
Category:
Emotional Health
Child Abuse

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Resources

Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside)
Mental Health Service (CUMC)

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