



BLAME & SHAME

Child Sexual Assault is *never* the child's fault.

Children learn about who they are in the context of their families, but with Child Sexual Assault the images are a bit blurred. Bray (1991) talks about shame not only because of what happened, but in the secrecy around what happened. This is one of the reasons why it is really hard and often painful to talk to anyone about it.

Bass and Davis (1992) talk about how it is easier to blame yourself and think you are bad, than it is to admit you were a helpless little child- a person who had no control. Feelings of blame and shame can be made bigger depending on how those around you judge or support you.

Bronson (1989) talks about shame, guilt & blame in terms of not having clear boundaries. It is difficult to know what is OK when the boundaries you have experienced have been so 'muddied'.

Some people have found going to groups to be helpful in looking at issues of blame and guilt. Herman (1992) talks about how blame is an issue that needs individual counselling to be resolved. Each person has different memories of what was said & what happened, but what is common is needing to sort out WHO is to blame for the abuse- which is not you.

Dealing with blame can be blurred by personal experience, the layers of blame, shame and guilt and what others have told you. The following is from young women involved in the Silent No More project:

"I wish someone had told me..."

- ✓ That it was not my fault, that a child cannot consent to 'sex' and that it was the responsibility of the abuser.
- ✓ That the things I experienced – nightmares, flashbacks, fear, were impacts of the assault – not something 'wrong' with me.
- ✓ That one day someone would listen, believe and support me.
- ✓ That I was just a little girl and did not 'deserve' to be assaulted.
- ✓ That I was a resilient, amazing woman because I survived and that I could reclaim my life from the abuse.