**Child Sexual Abuse**

The effects of child sexual abuse are very often profoundly life-altering. Because this deep violation of self occurs in a time of the most vital fundamental growth, the child’s subsequent development is most often significantly affected.  The long-term effects of child sexual abuse affect nearly every area of functioning. And contrary to what we may wish to believe, the effects of sexual abuse do not lessen with time, but actually compound as the demands of adult life and function ensue. Common effects of sexual abuse often include the following;

* + **Emotional reactions.**
    - Depression
    - Anxiety
    - Flashbacks and nightmares
    - Shame
    - Guilt and Self-blame
    - Feelings of worthlessness and helplessness
    - Chronic or uncontrollable anger and rage
    - Withdrawal and isolation
  + **Self perception**
    - Bound by shame and self-blame – "It was my fault"
    - Contaminated – "There's something wrong with me"
    - Despair and hopelessness
    - Lack of personal efficacy and sense of powerlessness
  + **Physical effects**
    - Gastrointestinal disturbances
    - Respiratory distress
    - Gynecological problems
    - Immunological disturbances
    - Chronic pain including migraine headaches
    - Muscular tension
    - Stress reactions
  + **Sexual effects**
    - Sexual acting out in adolescence and early adulthood
    - Questions of sexual orientation and preference
    - Difficulties with sexual arousal, response and satisfaction
    - Distancing or "numbing out" during sex
    - Sex addiction
  + **Relationships with others**
    - Pervasive mistrust of others
    - Experiencing intimacy as entrapping, threatening or not satisfying
    - Continuing conflicted relationships and roles with parents and siblings
    - Lack of trust of own parenting skills
    - High need for control in relationships

Most often, adults who have been sexually abused as children come to seek professional psychotherapy to mitigate the life and relationship impact of the abuse. With skilled intervention, and often times after many years of therapy, adults can come to heal and re-gain the life and vitality that were lost as a consequence of sexual abuse.

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**Additional references:**

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