

Wendy, Survivor of Childhood Sexual Abuse



Out of respect for the survivor who bravely came forward to share her nightmare with us, the name in this report has been changed. Each survivor who shared their story was given the choice as to how they would be identified.

I was sexually molested as a child by my father, my uncle, a family friend, and several babysitters. I was also exposed to classmates who acted out sexually. As an adult who has been educated about child sex abuse, I now understand my classmates were also victims of child sex abuse.

I told this to no one until I was an adult. I'm still (at 50 years old) not quite sure why not.

I came to Christ in third grade at an AWANA program at a Baptist Church. After a little growth in the Word, I was completely and totally immersed in secular life and a dysfunctional home. I had absolutely no idea how the sexual violation was intensely traumatic to all aspects of who I was. In fact, I remember thinking it was interesting how it hadn't had an impact on me at all.

I was terribly wrong.

I was promiscuous as a teen and through college. I knew it was wrong. I often wondered why even though I knew it was wrong and I had been taught by my mother (who knew nothing of my abuse) that my body was only mine and that God's design for sexuality was in marriage, that truth seemed to matter not at all. And the answer was not simply because I loved sin, it felt good (it didn't), and I wanted to defy God's plan.

The answer is far more complex. And the answer seems completely illogical to those who don't understand the effect of trauma. These issues aren't processed logically in the prefrontal cortex. They impact much deeper in a victim's neurology and in a different part of the brain.

The imprint of what was done to me was and is ever present, even when I'm not conscious of its effect. It affects my relationships into the present, including my marriage of 27 years. And this is true even though I am a new creation in Christ who knows her identity is in Him alone. This is true even though I have experienced much healing. It's deeper than most will ever realize. And God knows and understands and weeps with those who've been hurt. As is often the case with women I meet, it may seem to those on the outside looking in that we are overcomers in Christ (we are) who have it all together (we don't). I have a post undergraduate degree and have experienced professional, personal, and ministry success (all by God's grace, of course.) I say this only to highlight that women like me are everywhere around you in your churches. They are ministry and corporate leaders, moms, volunteers, and faithful church members.

So in order for the leaders of the SBC to understand how to become churches that *care* and families that support healing, you must understand the impact of trauma on the whole person: body, mind, spirit

(The Body Keeps the Score, Van der Kolk M.D.). And you must be places where full healing is embraced (medical, therapeutic, and spiritual).

You must not trivialize trauma's impact with Bible verse band-aids and call it good. God calls you to more. To become church families survivors can trust, you'll need to do the slow, hard work of education and of presence – with staying power. You must show survivors the never ending love of Jesus who wants to heal us from the inside out and whose patience and love never run out. We must be the compassion, gentleness, empathy, kindness, and long suffering of Jesus to those who need to heal.

And you must be churches who prioritize the safety of the children in your sacred charge far more than you prioritize risk mitigation, liability concerns, or reputational cover up.

I cannot emphasize this sufficiently. You must choose.

I believe God has allowed the curtain to be lifted so those in authority could *see, weep, lament, repent,* and *change*. I pray that within the power and structure dynamics of the SBC, you will lead out in *spiritual* ways, not in corporate modalities. I pray you will seek the face of God for wisdom for the way forward, that you will have courage beyond what you could imagine to take right action in the face of difficulty or those who are stuck in the ways of old.

Now that you've seen and you know, please don't avert your eyes or hedge on your resolve. Move forward by the power of the Spirit of the Living God.