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## *Trust and Betrayal*

### Trust

There is potential for great beauty in the emotional currents that run between adults and children: the adult's power can be expressed as love, while the child's dependence is the beginning of trust.

As a child learns that the people who provided for him yesterday will take care of him today, he learns not only that people affect him but that the same people affect him in the same ways, day after day. He's learning how people behave with one another. He doesn't know what the word *relationship* means, but he knows what a mommy is to him, or a daddy, or a teacher, or a cousin, or a coach. He doesn't know what the word *trust* means, but he is able to feel it.

By the time he reaches adulthood, trust not only gives him an expectation that people will behave in specific ways but also that people will be *who they are*, especially in relation to *who he is*. He learns who people are by remembering *who they've been*. He learns to trust in the enduring qualities of a person and a relationship.

That's the way it ought to be. The idea of relying on a person to be that person and to treat you for who you are is fundamental to the nature of trust. According to the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, trust is "the firm reliance on the integrity, ability, or character of a person." The word *trust* derives from words meaning help, firm, strong, comfort, support, and confidence. These words add up to what we know as love.

Trust is so important that you sense its presence or absence in virtually every one of your relationships. Of course, you can put limits on the trust you place in others. Often, these limitations are obvious and well defined by the role someone plays in your life. For example, you may trust your banker to keep your money safe, but you wouldn't necessarily trust her to design a new suspension bridge.

There are other reasons you sometimes limit the trust you place in others. For example, you aren't likely to trust someone who has lied to you or harmed other people. Fortunately, as an adult living in a free society, you can usually protect yourself from this type of person by exercising your rights and powers. You may live where you want, call law enforcement authorities for assistance, assert your constitutional rights, seek help from friends, and decide who you want to take care of your emotional and physical needs.

Your efforts may never be completely effective, but you possess the freedom as an adult to try to arrange your life so that you're surrounded by people you trust and you're protected from those you don't. You can accomplish this by reducing your dependence on untrustworthy people and increasing your reliance on those you can trust.

But what about a child? He has little choice about how to arrange his life. He isn't always able to protect himself from people he doesn't trust. Because he's completely dependent on those who are responsible for him, he trusts out of necessity. He trusts people to take care of him, to be who they are, to remain who they've been, to love him for his own good, to be attuned to his needs, and to cherish him as a person of worth.

When a child hopes for these things and they happen, then love and trust have worked their magic. They've combined into something beautiful. The child thrives. He begins to understand love and character. He grows in his relationships, believing that people are usually good and honorable, that authorities most often use their power to benefit others. At the same time, he learns, often with the help of these same benevolent authorities, to understand the difference between those who are trustworthy and those who are not.

Does a parent have to raise a child perfectly in order for him to thrive? Of course not. All parents make mistakes. Everybody has moods, and there is no blueprint for raising the perfect child or being the perfect parent. We do our best, knowing that sometimes we'll fail, hopefully in minor ways that won't damage our children. When relationships between adults and children—although sometimes imperfect—are basically hon-

est and free of exploitation, children are well equipped to overcome life's difficulties with resilience, promise, and a capacity to love. This is not to say, of course, that all children who are not sexually abused have happy lives. Any child, however, needs to develop some capacity to trust in order to face life's inevitable troubles, and sexual abuse interferes with attaining this ability.

Throughout your life, people will come and go, but you want to make sense of all of your relationships, however temporary they are. This may be as simple as understanding that your mailman is, indeed, a mailman. In your more enduring and personal relationships, however, there is more to figure out.

This need to understand others begins in childhood, when you learn to make sense of your life. If you had nonabusive relationships with your parents and caregivers that encouraged trust, you could make sense of them. You knew you would be taken care of. If you were raised under these circumstances, you developed a strong heart filled with a sense of self-esteem, competence, and the belief that you're worth loving. You could look forward to a basically trusting relationship with the world, a sense of optimism, even a faith about life itself.

But maybe your earliest relationships didn't make sense. If your developing heart was broken by someone who you needed to trust, then it may be hard for you to get along in the world. Your current relationships may seem mysterious and tricky to manage. You may even have difficulty understanding your relationship with your own self.

## Betrayal

Even if everyone else in a boy's life loves and cherishes him, sometimes a single adult can wreak havoc in his heart and soul. If this happened to you, you may have been imprinted with the belief that no one in the world is trustworthy, that the character of life itself is false. Maybe you came to believe that life means being hurt, lied to, or exploited. Worse, this belief may have made you vulnerable to what you fear most: You may consciously or unconsciously send signals to others that you *expect* to be abused. Then ill-intentioned people may perceive you as a walking victim and select you for mistreatment.

If you were abused as a child, betrayal is your life's core issue. It ravages your self-concept as a man, especially if the betrayal was

sexual. It affects how you behave with your family, your parents, your partners, and your friends. Recovering from your betrayal must involve not only you but your relationships. Without understanding and help from those who love you, the prospect for your recovery and growth is diminished.

Betrayal is the violation and destruction of trust. Lying is an obvious and direct form of betrayal. But trust is also violated when an adult uses his relationship with a child to satisfy his own needs without regard for the child's needs. The adult may subject the child to violence, adult sexuality, or otherwise treat him as less than human. She may violate the child's trust by trying to take something from him that the child can't give. When any person who is ordinarily expected to protect a child from harm instead reverses his role and demands an "adult" relationship from the child, he destroys trust.

There are at least two kinds of trust between people. The first is formal, as in a written legal agreement or an oath of office. This is *explicit trust*. The second is unspoken and expected. This is *implicit trust*. It exists when it's so naturally part of a relationship that no contracts need to be signed and no words need to be spoken. A suckling infant, for example, doesn't need to ask his mother if he can trust her not to drop him. A parent trusts a teacher to educate a child. A boy trusts his coach to respect the boy's ownership of his own body.

If an adult used you when you were a boy to satisfy his sexual urges or romantic (i.e., "boy-loving") fantasies, that adult stopped treating you as a worthwhile, developing person. This betrayal may have led you to develop a tragic understanding of the way the world works. If you were physically abused, you learned that violence is a normal part of relationships. If you were sexually abused, you learned that in at least some relationships what people really want is your body. You may have deduced that your primary function in life is to provide sex to those who need it. You may have assumed that when anyone gives you affection, it's just a prelude to your having to "put out." You may have figured out that the only way you can get attention, protection, nurturing, and "love" is by offering your body for sex.

Betrayal creates immediate pain as well as a hurt that lives on. On the one hand, you may feel pain without any conscious memory of what caused it. On the other, the pain creates harmful connections, demolishing parts of life that ought to give you satisfaction: friendships, good

feelings toward the people who care about you, and loving, intimate relationships.

No matter what form betrayal took, no matter how seldom or how often it happened, it challenged and changed your perception of yourself as you grew into manhood. Your whole world may have shifted in cataclysmic ways. The connections you make with other people, in love, friendship, authority, and dependence, may all have been damaged by suspicions and fear. You may feel completely unable to control your own states of consciousness. At times, you may experience the intrusion of powerful, unwanted thoughts and feelings that leave you confused, afraid, and depressed.

## Sexual Betrayal

When we talk about adults' sexual misuse of children, we often use such expressions as *sexual abuse*, *incest*, and *sexual trauma*. In a moment, we'll talk about what each of these terms means. While all of them indicate some form of sexual violation, none conveys the great range of human experience suggested by the term *sexual betrayal*.

### MAURICE: Doing Good Means Feeling Bad

Looking back at his life with hard-earned insight, Maurice said his sexual betrayal by his father created a pattern that kept him from flourishing in any endeavor. This was most apparent in school, but it also affected his career. "Even if I liked my teachers and employers, at some point in the relationship I developed a resentment that I didn't understand," he told me. "Even if I knew they were sexually harmless toward me, even if I knew that what they wanted me to do was legitimate and for my own good, anything I did for them still felt bad. It was awful! It didn't matter whether I really thought they were sexually interested in me. It still felt like I had to 'put out' for them."

It's not surprising that this intelligent, gifted man never "excelled" in school. He dropped out twice, finally graduating with a mediocre record. It was only years later that Maurice made a connection between the bad feelings he experienced when doing good things for himself and his childhood betrayal by a father who fed him, protected him, and encouraged him to be good in life, all the while violating him sexually.

## Sexual Abuse

Abuse is a potent form of betrayal. It occurs when one person exploits another. Abusers take advantage of their power in a relationship to satisfy their own needs without regard for the needs of the person being abused. For example, a drug dealer who tells his young brother to carry drugs across the street is endangering his brother in order to satisfy his own needs.

Sexual abuse (or sexual molestation) occurs when someone uses her power and control to coerce someone else to engage in sexual acts without regard for the other person's will or needs. If you were sexually abused, your abuser cared more about satisfying his own desires than about the fact that you were still developing and your development was being put at terrible risk.

Your abuser may have believed she loved you. But genuine love isn't simply a desire to be with a loved one. It certainly isn't a sexual desire *for* that loved one that ignores the loved one's needs and priorities. Loving someone requires sensitivity to what he needs in order to thrive in life and a willingness to temper your own wishes if satisfying them would harm him.

Why do people sexually abuse children? What is this need they have? Sometimes, of course, it's about sexual desire. But for many abusers sexual longing isn't an important factor. Sexual behavior may mask many motives. For example, adult abusers may be prompted by insecurity. They attempt to feel more secure by exercising power over someone who is weaker. Other abusers, unable to soothe themselves without being sexually aggressive, choose children because they're easy targets. There are also adults who feel an inner urgency to have a deeply personal connection with children, sometimes because they themselves are psychological children. Sometimes these adults have sadistic fantasies and may brutally act out their own early betrayal on a helpless child. But others yearn for something they can't have: a child lover. Children can't be lovers in the adult sense, not in the real world.

Sexual abuse can be violent when force and coercion are involved. But sometimes it seems loving. Some abusers create an atmosphere that seems safe. If the abuser senses a boy is attracted to him on some level, the abuser may appeal directly to this desire. It will appear that a seduction is taking place, even a mutual seduction. The boy may fall in love with his seducer, and the seducer may believe he is in love with the boy.

Understanding seductive experiences is complicated. Many men believe that as boys they had loving, pleasurable, nontraumatic sexual

initiations from adults. I don't dismiss this possibility. If this describes you, though, look at the rest of your life. Do you exhibit symptoms of sexual abuse described elsewhere in this book? Have you suffered from compulsions or addictions? Have you been able to maintain intimate relationships? Are they exploitative in some way? Think through your situation before deciding whether you were abused.

Abusers who don't try to seduce a boy directly may groom him slowly, perhaps over many months. Through grooming, they gain access, authority, and control over the boy. They may even groom the boy's family, convincing parents that it's safe to leave their child with this adult. We'll see in chapter 5 how Seth's abuser attached himself to a family with numerous sons, then abused several of them.

During grooming, the abuser may offer a relationship that the boy desperately needs, or show him pornography, sexualizing the relationship. An atmosphere of secrecy about what they are doing may be established. Gradually, physical contact is introduced. By the time overt sex is introduced, it may seem to be a natural outgrowth of all that came before. The boy may feel he should go along with it—even if he doesn't really want to—because he's gone along with previous sexualized activities. Or he may feel increasingly aroused by grooming behaviors (as well as from his own hormones), so sex feels welcome.

If you were abused, maybe you grew up believing you agreed to it or were even responsible for it. Maybe your abuser said you wanted it. It was easy for her to conclude this if you needed love and affection. In fact, in order to get what feels like love, you may have been willing to engage in sex. You may have even believed that sex is love.

But a child can't freely consent to sex with an adult. Children don't have the capacity to give informed consent to sexuality with adults. After all, it's hard enough for an adult to comprehend the meaning of a sexual encounter. Look at all the books, theories, movies, and everyday conversations between adults trying to understand sexual relationships. Children can't participate as equals in dialogues like these. They're simply not developmentally prepared to understand the consequences of a sexual relationship with an adult.

Adults encountering problems in a relationship can address them, and, if necessary, change or even end the relationship. But if you were dependent on your abuser for protection or survival, you couldn't just declare, "It's over. Take a walk." And it would be hard for you to find ways to express your feelings if you were afraid of punishment, abandonment, or the safety of your family.

## ANDREAS: Sex under Threat

Andreas was abused by a ring of child molesters for several years starting when he was eight. He can't forgive himself for obeying these men when they ordered him to wait at a convenience store at the same time every week so that they could pick him up and continue their sessions of sexual abuse. Weighed down by years of self-blame, Andreas asked himself why he met them weekly, why he never doubted their authority over him. Only after several years of therapy did he admit that his abusers warned him time and again, "We'll kill your mother if you don't show up!" No wonder he was terrified! But, although he acknowledged that he believed his mother's life was endangered, he nevertheless blamed himself for returning weekly for more abuse.

### *Sexual Excitement during Abuse*

If you experienced any sexual pleasure or desire during your molestation, you may blame yourself for the whole episode. But sexual behavior involves stimulating nerve endings that transmit pleasure. It excites the part of a child's brain that eventually develops his adult sexuality. As a little boy, however, you couldn't understand this. You couldn't understand that when your penis is rubbed—however it happens—you'll feel pleasure. Not knowing any better, maybe you grew up convinced you were responsible for what happened.

For these reasons, all sexual acts between children and people who have power over them are sexually abusive. This is true if the adult's power is legitimately recognized by other adults, as in the cases of babysitters, teachers, and parents who molest children. It's equally true, however, if your abuser was just older, bigger, or more powerful than you. For example, a seven-year-old might obey a teenage neighbor who invites him home simply because he's older and authoritative.

No matter how willingly you seemed to participate in sex acts, if the other person had power over you, it was an abusive situation. Willing or not, you were abused by having the natural developmental unfolding of your sexuality violated and hurried into awareness.

Occasionally, men tell me they weren't hurt by their childhood sexual experiences with adults, and sometimes even that they enjoyed them. They may be right, but even seemingly consensual situations may turn out to have long-term negative effects. For example, many gay men report that when they were children they enjoyed having sex with an



older man and even initiated their encounters. However, there can be both subtle and obvious aftereffects to adult–child sex. It may be decades before a man looks back and realizes, for example, that his life-consuming, insatiable, and ultimately unfulfilling need for anonymous sex began at an early age when he was molested by a school counselor who paid attention to him when no one else would.

That’s why adult–child sex is always abusive. There’s no way for an adult to know whether a particular child—even if he seems happy to participate—will be affected negatively by taking part in sex acts. And the very last person we can expect to be objective about the needs and best interests of a child is the adult who sexually desires him.

### *Incest*

Incest is perhaps the most psychologically catastrophic form of sexual betrayal. It can have even more far-reaching consequences than sexual abuse by adults who are unrelated to the child. This is especially likely when incest occurs regularly, often for years.

Even more destructive to the boy is that he’s living in a family that somehow supports incest. When the abuser is a parent, the child grows up chronically trapped in at least one twisted primary relationship. Stories about men abused as boys by their fathers appear throughout this book; abuse by mothers is discussed in chapter 7.

While the dictionary may define incest as sex between blood relatives, in the reality of a boy’s world it can be perpetrated by any older person who holds a position of power, trust, and protection over him. If you felt a family-like connection to an older caretaker who sexually betrayed you, the molestation may have been as traumatic as if you’d been betrayed by a blood relative: a shattering of the natural trust you had in the adults who cared for you.

### *Sexual Trauma*

Trauma is different from abuse. Abuse refers to what a victimizer does to a child. Trauma is the effect of the betrayal on the child. Sexual trauma specifically refers to the traumatic effects of abusive sexual behavior.

We usually think of trauma as a visible, physical injury, such as lacerations and bruising received in an automobile accident. We cannot see the human brain or psyche, but that doesn’t mean they’re invulnerable.

Far from it. They respond to betrayal in many ways, affecting your perception of the world and of yourself.

Trauma is a reaction to an overwhelming life experience that the brain cannot process. Traumatic events are unusual, often coming without warning. They surpass a person's capacity to deal with them, disrupting his frame of mind and psychological stability.

Some symptoms of trauma—such as the feeling that everything is unreal or dreamy—may appear immediately. Others—such as suddenly experiencing powerful feelings for unknown reasons—may not emerge until years later.

Sexual trauma, because it involves sexual acts, inflicts deep injury on a child's sexuality. Even if no coercion or force is used, the child's sexual development is traumatized. This means that traumatic symptoms are especially likely to affect the victim's capacity for intimacy and sexuality.

## Betrayal by Caretakers Who Are Not Relatives

In recent years the news has been filled with revelations of sexual abuse by caretakers other than relatives. Following are just some examples.

### *Clergy*

Historically, clergy have been more trusted than any other adults outside the family. They're often seen as individuals with a special relationship with God who therefore can be relied on to take responsible care of anyone put under their protection. If you grew up in a religiously observant family, perhaps you were taught that the religious authorities in your life were so completely trustworthy that they were almost incapable of misdeed. They may have become substitutes for family, and you may have addressed them as "Father," "Mother," "Sister," and "Brother." They may have even become stand-ins for God, people whose commands seem to come directly from heaven.

When an authority on whom a family bestows such trust, reverence, and familial closeness betrays a child, the extent of damage can seem infinite. It's hard to imagine feeling more abandoned, isolated, and worthless than a boy who believes in God, but also believes that God betrayed him.

The more a boy believes in the familial implications of calling someone Father, Mother, Sister, or Brother, the more incestuous are the acts

committed during sexual abuse. So, many victims of priests are psychologically dealing with the equivalent of incest.

For these reasons, abuse by clergy can be as devastating as incest. Through incest, the relationship of a father or mother to a son is compromised or twisted beyond remedy. So can the relationship between a boy and God be distorted and shattered if he's molested by a spiritual authority. Add that to the other wounds caused by sexual exploitation, and his suffering will be vast.

Without the sense of unity and love that so many religions offer, a boy betrayed by a member of the clergy may become spiritually isolated and cynical. When Lorenzo went to the Church seeking help because he was confused about previous sexual abuse and his sexual orientation, he was molested by a priest. He completely lost his spiritual bearings. As he put it, "It was a terrible thing to do. They knew how fucked up I was about sex with all those men and how unsure I was about being gay. I went to them for sanctuary, and they just helped me party. In those days, I really believed in the Catholic Church. No more."

There are no easy answers for a boy or man who was betrayed by clergy, but this does not mean there are no answers. His spiritual nightmare does not have to last forever. We'll talk more about sexual victimization by clergy in chapter 5.

### *Health Professionals*

Adults who have power and influence over a child set up a tragedy if they use their position to molest him. Because health professionals are sought out for advice and answers when a child is abused, they're among the last people you'd expect to be capable of betrayal. Yet it happens. It happens to children who were previously abused and to those who were never traumatized before. If health professionals engage in sexual activity with a patient or client, they are of course committing a crime. But they're also committing a terrible ethical and moral breach.

These betrayals can occur in the offices of physicians or mental health professionals. But nurses, nurses' aides, dentists, chiropractors, massage therapists, and other health professionals are also entrusted with the health of their patients. All of these professionals have enormous power over their charges and so the potential for an abuse of power is always present. Fortunately, this rarely occurs, but when it does the betrayal can be terribly damaging.

To add to the potential for catastrophe, people in distress are at a heightened risk for becoming romantically infatuated with people who betray them even as they seem to heal them. When the air clears and the professional goes back to her life, the abused boy or man is left stranded, doubly victimized, and far less likely to ever trust a professional again. Overcoming skepticism and anger toward health professionals can take years. In the meantime, the original wound of betrayal remains open and raw.

*Scoutmasters, Teachers, Coaches, Nannies, Babysitters, Godparents, and Camp Counselors*

The list of potential abusers goes on and on. All of these people have positions that invite the trust not only of children but of their parents. They all have positions of authority over the child. Through betrayal, all of them can damage a child deeply. Most of these individuals are, of course, worthy of trust, and are committed to ensuring young people's health and well-being. In fact, for many children in distress and at risk of losing their life's direction completely, a relationship with such a person is a wonderful and helpful influence, perhaps a lifesaving connection. But overcoming the devastation caused by the few who betray children in their care is often as difficult as overcoming "real" incest.

## Sexually Abusive Behaviors

Sexually abusive behavior takes many forms. Some would be obviously abusive to anyone who heard about them. Others are subtler and at first might not be considered sexually abusive by an onlooker or even by the victim.

### Sexual Abuse with Touch

When sexual abuse involves physical contact, it's called *contact abuse*. Contact abuse can range from the seemingly accidental brushing of a hand against a fully clothed child's genital area, to sexual kissing, to actual penetration by a finger, an object, or a penis. Adults who molest children can be very adept at creating situations that allow them to make physical contact with a child. Masked as expressions of kindness and nurturing, molestations can occur when bathing a child, dressing him,

playing games with him, tickling him, sleeping with him, teaching him, holding him, or keeping him warm.

But how is appropriate, loving touch different from acts of sexual abuse? In most cases, the child knows. If it happened to you, you knew. You started to feel uncomfortable with the contact. You may have even suspected that the adult was making up an excuse to touch you sexually. There was no real nurturing purpose in the contact, and you sensed this. The adult focused more on the physical act than on you as a person. He may have ignored your signals that you were uncomfortable with the touching. The acts may have been hidden from other adults' view. She may have warned you not to talk about what happened. Or he may have found a less direct way to let you know to keep things secret. For example, an adult may not verbally acknowledge what happened but instead make believe you misinterpreted a loving touch.

In extreme cases of contact abuse, the adult physically forces a child into submission. Even to think about this can be disturbing. Regardless of whether force was used, contact abuse criminally violates a child's integrity.

## Sexual Abuse without Touch

Sexual abuse doesn't necessarily involve physically touching a child. For example, adults having sex in front of a child is a form of *noncontact abuse*. It is similarly abusive to encourage a child to have sex with others, or photograph him for sexual purposes, or show him pornography, or engage him in sexualized or seductive talk. Adults may also sexually abuse a child when they take too much interest in bath time, especially when the child is old enough to bathe himself. Too much attention to the child's sexual development, his sexual organs, or his private sexual behavior (asking him to describe how he masturbates, for example) can all be sexually abusive behaviors that don't involve physical contact. They may not be legally criminal acts, but they are destructive nonetheless.

## Covert Abuse

Adults who are interested in children for sex can be creative in the ways they obtain their pleasure. They may create a sexualized atmosphere so subtly that it's hard to accuse them of anything: a knowing look, a secret

smile, a slightly sexualized walk. Abusing covertly helps maintain a fiction that they're doing nothing wrong, assuaging the guilt they'd otherwise feel.

A child, however, is powerless to ignore the adult's efforts, and he may feel uneasy, embarrassed, angry, or afraid even though the adult isn't touching him. He may feel especially disturbed because there's no specific thing the adult did that he can point to as sexually abusive, yet he has a queasy feeling about the relationship. This kind of covert abuse is difficult to pin down. Yet the child knows and he hurts.

## Recovery

It's natural to want to recover from betrayal, and quickly. But recovery takes time. It requires patience with yourself. It calls on you to forgive yourself for your failures, accept your progress, and find ways to voice what you've never spoken about before.

Nothing has to be done immediately, nor can it be. There's no way to know what your life will be like when you've recovered. And there's no way to avoid discouragement and setbacks along the way. But the possibilities for human development don't lie in the past. Possessing a will to recover, to take charge of your life again, is a great indication that it's possible for you to succeed at it.