MEN TOO

Intro & Aaron’s Story Part 1

A selected reading excerpt from MEN TOO: Unspoken Truths About Male Sexual Abuse

By Dr. Kelli Palfy

One of 13 men who shared their experiences.

Before you begin

Content advisory: This selection includes descriptions of child sexual abuse, grooming, shame, and distress. Please read at your own pace.

In the book, names are pseudonyms and identifying information has been changed or withheld.

Intro From the Author

My goal has been to provide you with a basic understanding of why males are sometimes reluctant to see themselves as victims of sexual offenders and their grooming techniques.

What follows are the personal stories of each of the men I interviewed. I discuss how their abuse began, their relationship to their abusers, and how the abuse was maintained. Also included are their specific explanations of why they did not disclose their abuse sooner. My hope is that as you learn about these men’s experiences, you become more aware of the fact that male sexual abuse happens far more commonly than most people understand—and that it is far more damaging than was previously understood.

Their deeply personal stories are intended to provide both context and insights into how, where and when male sexual abuse occurs. As you read their stories you will begin to see the barriers to seeking help faced by these boys and men. You will hear why many boys and men who have been abused don’t discuss it with anyone and learn how facing their trauma alone impacted them as children and as adults. You will also come to see that the long-term damage caused by sexual abuse can be profound.

The names used are pseudonyms and any personal information that would reveal an individual’s identity, or the identity of their abuser has been changed or withheld. However, the details of their abuse stories have not been altered or embellished. All of the stories are relayed as they were told to me.

Aaron: “I Didn’t Know Much About Sex”

Aaron was 55 at the time of his interview. Prior to his abuse, he had never spoken to his family or friends about sexual matters. By junior high he still didn’t know much about sex, and had very little interest in it compared to his peers. By most standards, he was a late bloomer. “When I started high school, I was the youngest kid in the class. I hadn’t developed yet. I hit puberty really late. I was 15.”

When Aaron was 14 he attended a week-long basketball camp about 60 miles from his home. His older brother had previously attended the same camp, and the coach who was the camp director was also a friend of the family. Aaron looked up to him. “He was a tough guy, he made us work really hard and be responsible for what we did. He sent us all these really good messages.” Aaron enjoyed being around him.

When camp was over his coach commended him for being the hardest working kid in camp and invited him to stay behind after everyone else left to help take the camp down. This meant Aaron would be alone with him for the next several days until the job was done. Aaron asked his parents if he could stay and admits he was excited but nervous when they agreed.

After everyone left Aaron’s coach began to treat him differently—less like a kid and more like an adult. He taught Aaron how to drive and let him drive a vehicle alone, even though he didn’t have a license. He gave him alcohol and then asked him what he knew about sex. No adult had ever talked to him about sex before.

His coach then introduced him to pornography. “He was telling me this is what it means to be a man, that he knows a lot about me, like that I’m already [masturbating] a few times a week. He basically said, ‘Take those magazines and go in the bathroom and do what you’re supposed to do.’” Although the conversation made him very nervous, Aaron enjoyed being treated like a man, and he complied. He didn’t know that the coach had peepholes in the bathroom, shower, and where he slept at night.

The next night the coach gave Aaron more magazines to take to his room. He watched Aaron through the peepholes, so he knew precisely when to walk in and catch him masturbating. The coach reassured him that what he was doing was natural, and then left him alone again with more magazines, which were more graphic and contained images of men engaging in sexual acts with other men.

The next time the coach walked in he told Aaron he was going to show him what guys really do when they’re alone, and he proceeded to fondle, masturbate, and engage in oral sex with Aaron. Aaron was shocked. “I didn’t know what molestation was. I didn’t know it could happen to boys.”

When Aaron attempted to protest by asking his coach if he was trying to “make him gay,” the coach got violently mad and told him not to talk like that. Aaron’s abuse continued for the next several days until the coach finally drove him home. The coach then insisted Aaron shake his hand, and said goodbye as if nothing happened. He even went inside and spoke to both of Aaron’s parents and shook their hands.

How Offenders prepare Themselves

Aside from grooming both the victim and the parent, offenders may also need to rationalize (to themselves) the crimes they are about to commit. They may try to convince themselves that the sexual acts they are about to commit are pleasurable or at least not harmful to the child. They may tell themselves that the child needs to understand sexual matters, or if they are young enough, that they won’t remember the acts. After, they may rationalize their behavior as an expression of their love, or tell themselves they are entitled to use them because of all the good they do for them.

Aaron didn’t say anything.

“There was a bathroom on the first floor. It didn’t have any windows. I got in there, closed the door, turned the lights off, turned the shower on and just … cried.” Aaron tried to “wash off” his abuse, but he couldn’t.

Although Aaron had wanted to tell his parents, he was too ashamed, too afraid, too upset, and too confused. He especially wanted to tell his father but felt he couldn’t. He knew his parents thought very highly of the coach. He also knew that he had participated in several activities he knew his parents wouldn’t approve of.

“I was a perfect victim because my parents didn’t talk to me about sex,” Aaron said.” I wanted to tell my father, but I knew that if I told him he’d tell my mother, and I’d get in trouble.”

Aaron also was confused. He felt as if his body had betrayed him. He hadn’t had any previous sexual interest in males, but since he’d experienced erections and orgasm several times, he questioned whether he’d participated willingly.

After returning home Aaron distanced himself from his mother. Although they had previously been very close and he loved his mother, he feared he might accidentally tell her what happened or that she would somehow figure it out. He knew that if she found out she’d be devastated. He didn’t want to hurt her so he remained silent.

“My mother kept saying, ‘What’s wrong?’ and ‘You were always such a happy kid. What happened? Why are you so sad?’” Aaron recalled. “I just pushed her away. I was afraid of her finding out.”

When Aaron went back to school he went to see his guidance counselor, a priest.

“I was trying to talk to him about it, but I wasn’t saying it, just, you know, you have to warn the kids that go to that camp about the director,” Aaron said. “And he was like, ‘Why? What are you talking about?’ I was like, ‘You just got to warn them about him.’”

Aaron didn’t actually tell the priest what happened, but he believes the priest understood what he was implying. The counselor’s response was to ‘absolve’ Aaron of his sins and tell him never to discuss it with anyone again. Looking back, Aaron believes, “He knew exactly what I meant and he wanted me to shut up about it. He’s the one that sent me to the camp in the first place.” Aaron’s guidance counselor was later determined to also be abusing young boys.

As a young man, Aaron didn’t understand or recognize this. Instead, he was left with the sense it was somehow his fault. Confused and upset, Aaron didn’t talk about his abuse again for several years. He became negative, isolated himself, and avoided serious or emotional conversations. He dressed in oversized clothes and tried to hide. Fortunately, Aaron found track and field and was very good at it. He became the MVP of his school’s track team, which he said helped balance out his feelings of confusion.

In his later years of high school, his relationships remained shallow. He preferred to talk to girls on the phone rather than take them out on dates because he worried they would somehow “know” and out him for being “damaged goods.”

Years later, when Aaron was in college, his abuser contacted his mother to “check up” on Aaron. She innocently gave him Aaron’s new number, telling her son, “That nice man, that director from camp wanted your number, so I gave it to him. What a nice guy to be following up with you all these years later.” Aaron cringed. “I just felt so disgusted, horrible, invaded. I thought I had gotten away from it, and then it became like I’m never going to escape this. I felt terrible. My mother innocently thought, oh, here’s this man of God trying to reach out to me and be a good person. It was just so disgusting.”

Aaron’s mother passed away a short while later. She never learned the truth about why Aaron had chosen to distance himself from her.

Aaron's story doesn't end here.

What happened to Aaron shaped years of his life.

Would you like to understand what happened in his life and how those experiences shaped the person he became as he grew older?

Aaron’s experience is more than one man’s account of abuse and silence. By sharing his journey, he helps others understanding what is necessary for healing and what struggles look like. The latter part of Aaron's story explores how his abuse also impacted how his adult life unfolded. Yet Aaron is one of 13 brave men whose shared their experiences in MEN TOO, so that others can understand the magnitude and depth of the problem. Twelve other men offer their own unique trauma responses, experiences, perspective, and struggles all of which outline why they remained silent for so long. It is through understanding and combatting the barriers they face that healing is possible.

The next part of Aaron's story explores what happened as his life unfolded. Continue reading Aaron’s story – Part 2 is available FREE by email.

Visit _____to request the continuation of Aaron’s story.

No purchase necessary.