

# PART I

## UNDERSTANDING SEXUAL ABUSE

### What is abuse?

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Abuse occurs when one person inflicts physical, emotional, or psychological damage on another person, especially in a relationship where love is expected. There are forms of abuse other than sexual abuse:

1. *Verbal abuse*: may occur through name-calling, belittling, harsh criticism, sarcasm, mockery, condemnation, or threatening. The damage is done by words and felt in the heart.

## *Beauty for Ashes*

2. *Physical abuse*: may occur through excessive spanking, debilitating punishment, or hitting, pinching, etc., causing wounds or bruises. The damage is done by hands, feet, or other instruments and is felt in the body and in the heart.
3. *Emotional abuse*: may occur through inflicted guilt, rejection, playing on fears, abandonment, or playing the martyr. The damage is done by one person tweaking the emotions of guilt or fear in another person. This keeps the first person in control, and the controlled person in continued emotional distress.
4. *Sexual abuse*: may occur through rape, incest, fondling, spectator sex, exposing oneself to others, introducing others to pornography or sexually explicit materials, verbally invading another's sexuality (either in jest or manipulation).

Sometimes sexual abuse is accompanied by one or more of the other forms of abuse as well. This is especially likely when the abuser is an older person and the abused is a child. Verbal or emotional pressure or both are commonly used to enforce silence about the abuse.

## **What happened to Tamar?**

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To understand sexual abuse, we will look at an example in the Bible. What Amnon did to Tamar is recorded in 2 Samuel 13:1-20. The following points summarize the tragic story:

1. Amnon was a half brother to Tamar. Both were King David's children, but they had different mothers. Tamar's full brother was Absalom.
2. Amnon became infatuated with Tamar, but he knew he could not likely have her because he was her half brother. So he moped.
3. A friend of Amnon sympathized and suggested a scheme for getting what he wanted from Tamar.
4. Amnon pretended to be sick. When his father, David, visited him, Amnon asked David to tell Tamar to care for him in his sickness.
5. Tamar came to care for Amnon and took pains to serve him well.
6. When she brought food to Amnon, he asked all the servants to leave. Then he pulled Tamar into bed with him.
7. Tamar protested, but Amnon forced her and had sexual relations.

8. Afterwards, Amnon ordered Tamar out of the house. The Bible says his hatred for her then was stronger than the love he had had for her before.
9. Tamar was distressed beyond words. She had been forced. She had been violated. She had been shamed. She had been rejected. In her distress she put ashes on her head, tore her clothes, and went home weeping.
10. Absalom, Tamar's brother, found out what had happened. He was furious at Amnon (and later killed him in revenge), but he tried to comfort Tamar. His method, however, was typical of many well-meaning comforters. He downplayed the terrible situation. "Hath Amnon thy brother been with thee? but hold now thy peace, my sister: he is thy brother; regard not this thing" (2 Samuel 13:20).

## **What makes sexual abuse so devastating?**

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Tamar was emotionally devastated by what Amnon did to her. If we look closely at what happened, we can see a number of reasons why sexual abuse is so painful:

1. *Tamar's abuse was painful because it came from someone who should have protected and loved her. Amnon*

was Tamar's half brother. A brother should protect his sister. If anyone else would have made improper advances toward Tamar, Amnon would probably have protected her fiercely. He would have defended her against other dangers. But instead of caring for her, he sinned against her.

Most sexual abuse comes from an abused person's relatives. The closeness of the relationship is used as a means to intimacy. And that is exactly what worsens the pain. When a stranger hurts us, we have the hurt to deal with. When we are hurt by someone whom we know and trust, we have not only the hurt, but a wounded relationship besides. Any memories of good associations darken under the cloud of being used. The very closeness of the relationship deepens the pain of the abuse.

2. *Tamar's abuse was painful because it confused love and selfishness.* Amnon said he loved Tamar. Amnon probably thought he loved Tamar. Amnon actually may have once loved Tamar. But as his desire for her grew, his love for her diminished. He came to want her for himself. Somewhere his love turned to selfishness and hid behind a mask of love.

Besides, what Amnon did to Tamar was designed by God to be one of the deepest expressions of love between a man and a woman. In a marriage