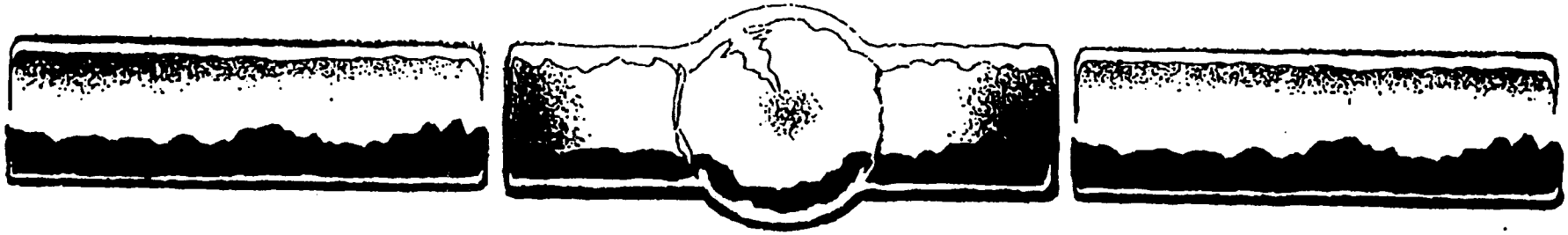

No Healing In Silence:
A workshop on Sexual Abuse

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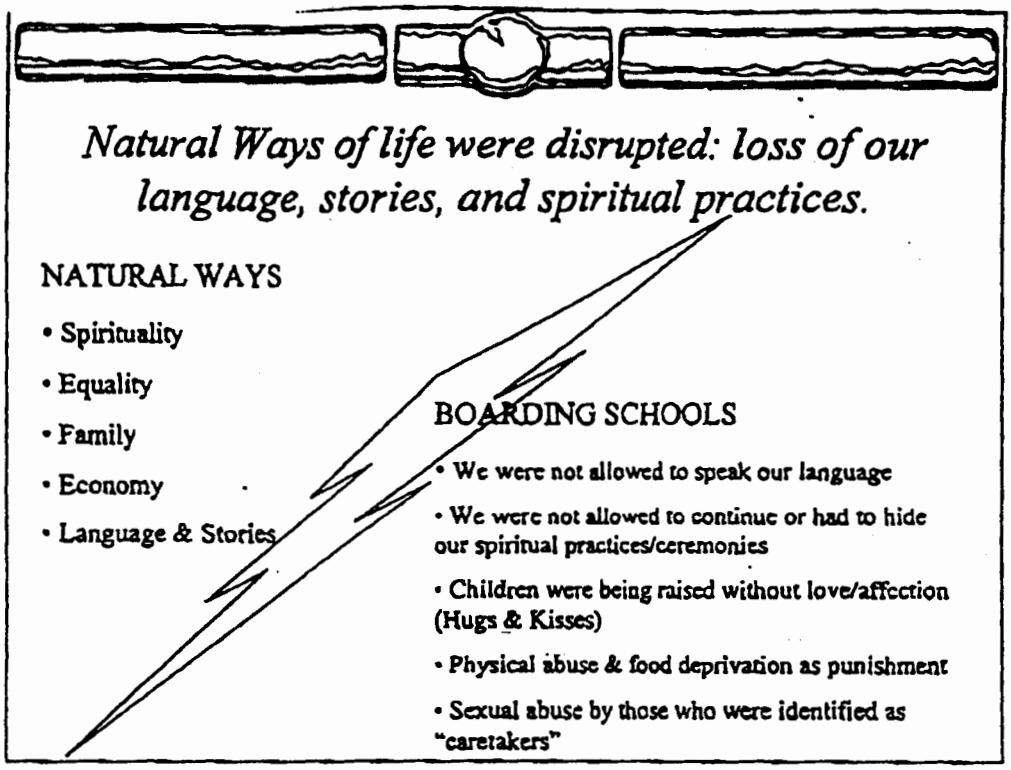
Inter-Tribal Council of California

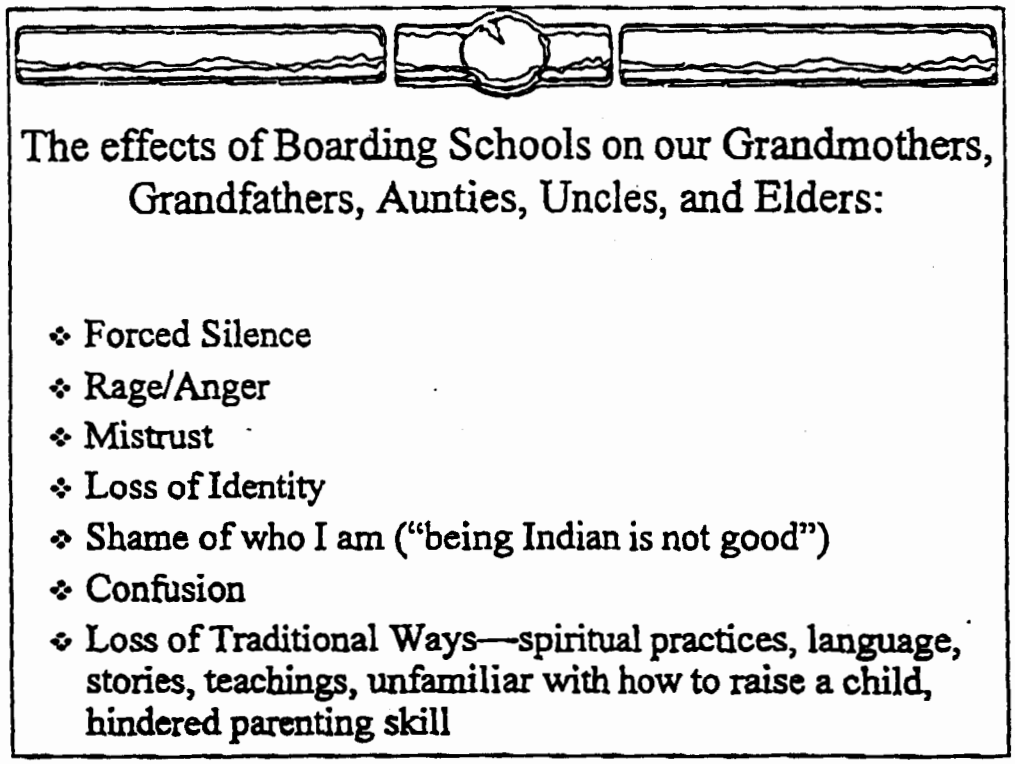
Lack of knowledge about Sexual Assault is the result of ***Silence.***

Common Myths

- Some think that rape could never happen to me.
- Some think that *only strangers* commit rape.
- Rape victim's who do not fight back during an assault are at fault or are to blame.
- It is *not* possible for a husband to rape his wife.
- Some think that women are asking to be raped by the way they behave or the way they dress.
- There are actions you can take to guarantee that you will *NEVER* be sexually assaulted.
- If she says yes in the beginning and then changes her mind, it is *not* considered rape.



Indian children were taken from their families and tribes—usually by force or deception—to federally run boarding schools approximately 70-80 years ago; many of our elders alive today remember living in this boarding school system.

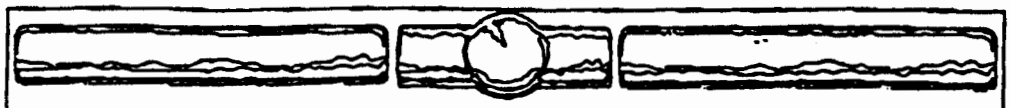


These are the ones who may have raised you or are raising our children. How do you think being raised in the Boarding School environment affected the elders in your family?

The effects on the Children being raised by survivors of the Boarding School system:

- Disconnected from Traditional Ways
- Strained parent/child relationships
- Not pursuing physical, emotional, and spiritual health
- Learned Silence
- Detatched from feelings
- Lack of trust
- Unaware of ways to be safe due to loss of language, traditional stories, and teachings

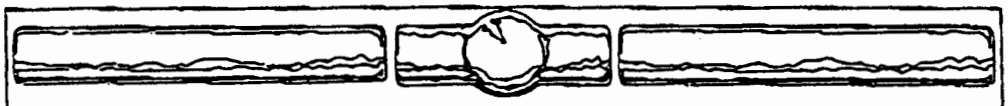
How did the legacy of the Boarding Schools affect your parents, yourselves, or your children?



Child Sexual Abuse

- Physical:
  - Any kind of inappropriate touching
  - Rape or attempted rape
  - Using a child to create pornography

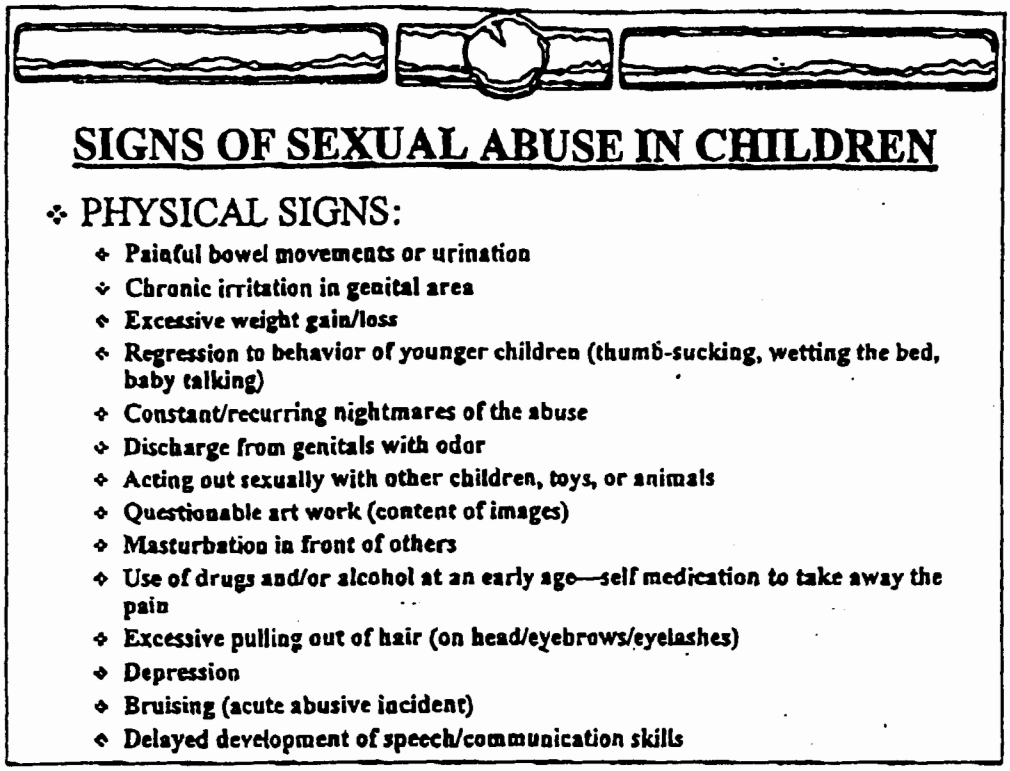
What are some physical forms of sexual abuse?



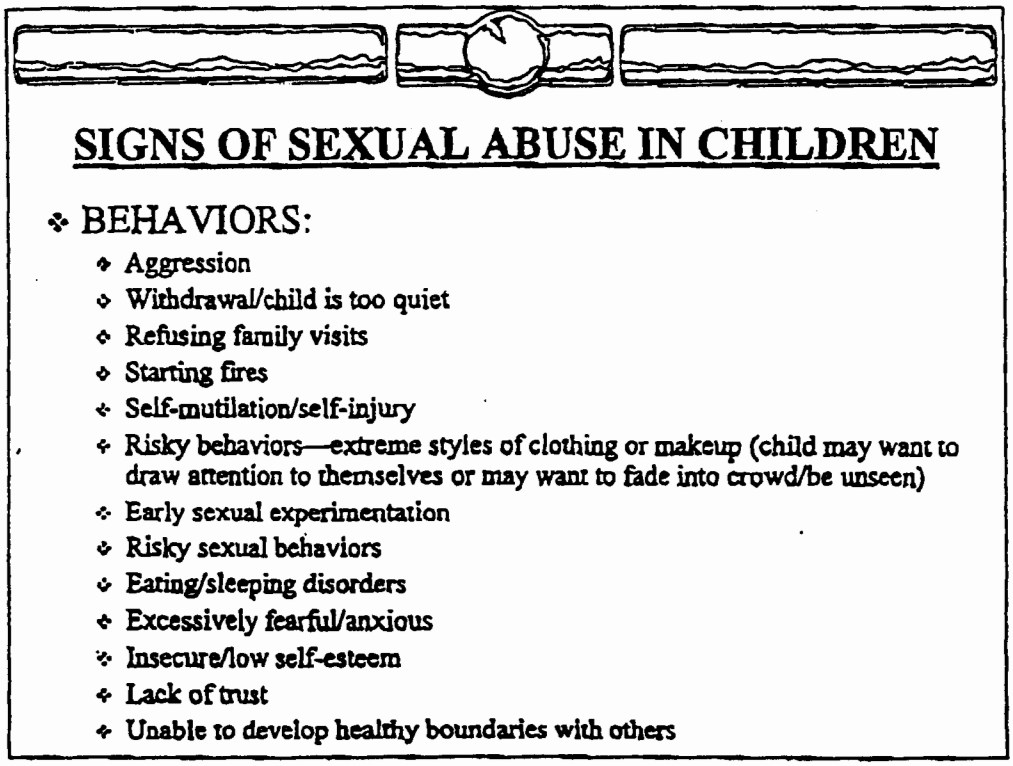
Child Sexual Abuse

- Non-Physical:
  - Inappropriate conversation, sexual content
  - Exposure to body parts in a sexual way
  - Sexually explicit language—used to shock or cause the child to become curious
  - A child being exposed to adults or other children engaging in sexual acts
  - Peeping Toms—watching a child undress, go to the bathroom, take a bath for the sexual gratification of the observer
  - Pornography—TV, magazines, Internet, etc.

What are some non-physical ways someone might sexually abuse a child?

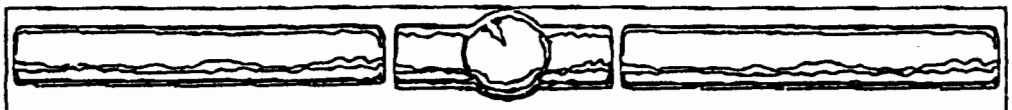


Describe some physical signs of sexual abuse in children.



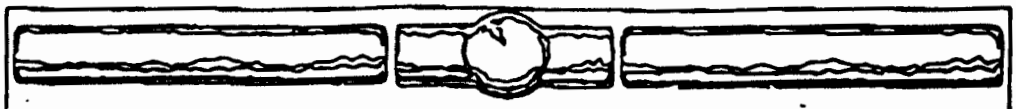
What behaviors in a child might reveal that the child has experienced sexual abuse?

Behavioral indicators include ANY drastic changes in the child's behavior and should be investigated.



To understand child sexual abuse, we must understand that the reasons for the abuse differ from perpetrator to perpetrator. Some common factors are:

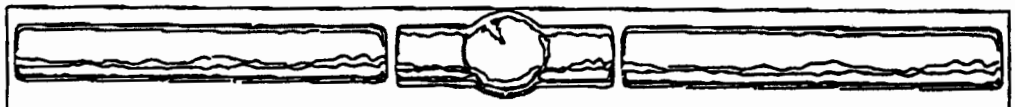
- Sexual abuse is often the result of emotional problems. People with low self-esteem or those who feel the need to control others may sexually abuse a child to feel powerful or to gain a sense of control. Sometimes people with sexual problems may turn to a child to meet their needs, as the child would be less able to reject their advances.
- Abuse may begin as an impulse—at first it may be a response to a stressful event or situation. This can develop into a pattern of sexual disorders.
- The use of substances such as alcohol or other drugs can alter a person's ability to use self-control, which can result in a higher risk of perpetrating child sexual abuse.
- Someone who commits sexual abuse on a child may themselves have been sexually abused; this is a cycle that can continue from one generation to another.



A child can be sexually abused anywhere and at any time.

- At home—when no one else is around
- At school
- In the city or in the country
- During the night or in broad daylight
- Computer networks (Internet) are used to attract children for pornography

Describe some environments in which abuse of a child might take place.



Ways that an Abuser may try to control the child:

- Intimidation—force, power, and authority (using fear, threats, telling the child what to do)
- Deceit—trick or play a "fun game" which results in inappropriate touching
- Bribes—promising gifts or favors if the child does what they say
- Participation—getting the child to participate to ensure that they will feel guilty and not tell

What things might an abuser do to gain power/control over the child and keep the child silent?

Teens & Sexual Abuse

- Risky behaviors/experimenting (drugs/alcohol, sex)
- Peer pressure
- More free time—unsupervised
- Exposure to media/internet
- Easier to control
- Less likely to report—often are not where they told their parents they would be (guilt)
- Lack of communication with adults/parents
- May feel they are invincible
- Perpetrator has access to teen through school, activities (someone known to teen for a long time)
- Unsure of what abuse is or how to recognize abuse
- Adult's body and child's mind/understanding (naïve)
- May have already been abused sexually as young child
- Parents in denial about what the teen is doing

Why are teens at greater risk of Sexual Assault than adults?

Teens & Sexual Abuse:

Special Issues faced by Teen Survivors

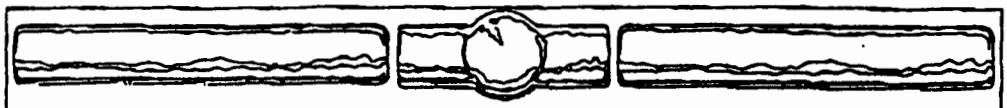
- Authorities and crisis service providers may see survivor through negative stereotypes of teens
- Fearful that they will be ostracized/not accepted by peers
- May have to face abuser/assailant at school or at home
- Peers may verbally/physically assault survivor if the perpetrator is "one of their own"
- May be forced to change schools/move
- More difficult to integrate trauma (developmental stages)
- Unaware that help is available/unable to identify experience as assault

What additional barriers might a teen survivor of sexual abuse/assault face in coming forward and seeking help?

Emotional & Physical Effects of Sexual Assault on Adults/Teens

- **Stage 1** (Immediately after assault)
  - Shock: "I feel so numb."
  - Disbelief/Confusion: "Did this really happen to me?"
  - Shame: "I feel so dirty," "Everyone must know," "I must be bad for this to happen to me."
  - Guilt: "If only I had/had not..."
- **Stage 2** (Days, weeks, months after assault)
  - Depression: "I'm so tired," "This will never get better," "I'm all alone—no one will understand or believe me" (thoughts of suicide)
  - Powerless: "I will never feel safe again"
  - Triggering: Flashbacks & nightmares
  - Anxiety: Nervous, eating/sleeping disorders, problems being alone
- **Stage 3** (Months, sometimes years after assault)
  - Awareness: Increased clarity of goals for healing, no longer living "in a fog"
  - Empowerment: Regaining sense of control, personal power
  - Self-knowledge: No longer blaming themselves, greater sense of what is important to them

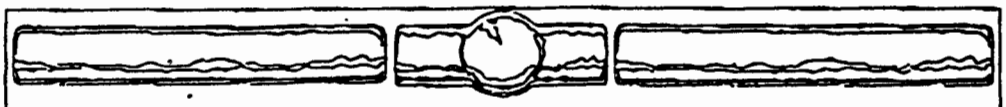
It is important to know that everyone is different; we are all unique and so is our healing journey



What are the effects of SILENCE within your community?

- Acceptance of abuse as normal
- Lack of involvement/apathy
- Isolation of survivors continues
- The cycle of abuse continues
- Low self-esteem of community members
- Loss of spiritual practices
- Increase in drug/alcohol use to ease pain, disconnect
- Increased risk of early teen parenthood—high risk sexual behaviors
- Lack of support services—because there doesn't seem to be a problem, no one is speaking out
- Validates perpetrators' behavior—or condones it
- Blame is placed on families—lack of adequate resources
- Division of the community/families
- Children left without support, validation, encouragement, and justice
- Unsafe communities
- Sexual abuse can lead to shattered families, increased crime rates, and other social problems
- A generation that does not understand safe boundaries in turn cannot teach their children to be safe
- Continued unhealthy behaviors, addictions, and violence
- Children not feeling protected, safe, and supported

How has keeping the silence around sexual abuse affected your community?



Steps Toward Healing

- Honor your feelings—give yourself permission to feel
- Admit to yourself what has happened
- Validation of your feelings is very important
- Seek medical care to address possible STDs, pregnancy, injuries
- Find someone you can trust to talk to—support person(s)
- Forgive yourself
- Seek out elders
- Attend ceremonies/spiritual practices
- Seek inner strength and peace
- Family time, community activities
- Accept that your family may be uncomfortable with and/or uncertain how to support you in your healing process
- Writing, drawing—allow yourself to touch on your creativity
- Focus on goals
- Realize that you are NOT to blame for the abuse
- Recognize that although others may judge your growth or progress by their standards, your path is unique and only you know what is important to your healing
- Understand that healing takes time (and your "time" will be different from another's)
- Find support where you can feel safe

What are some things we can do to take care of ourselves or address our need to heal?

Self Care Strategies

- Creating Balance—spiritual, emotional, and physical
- Tend to yourself/your needs
- Realize that it is O.K. to say "No"
- Making time for what you want
- Ask for what you want
- Have some FUN!!