

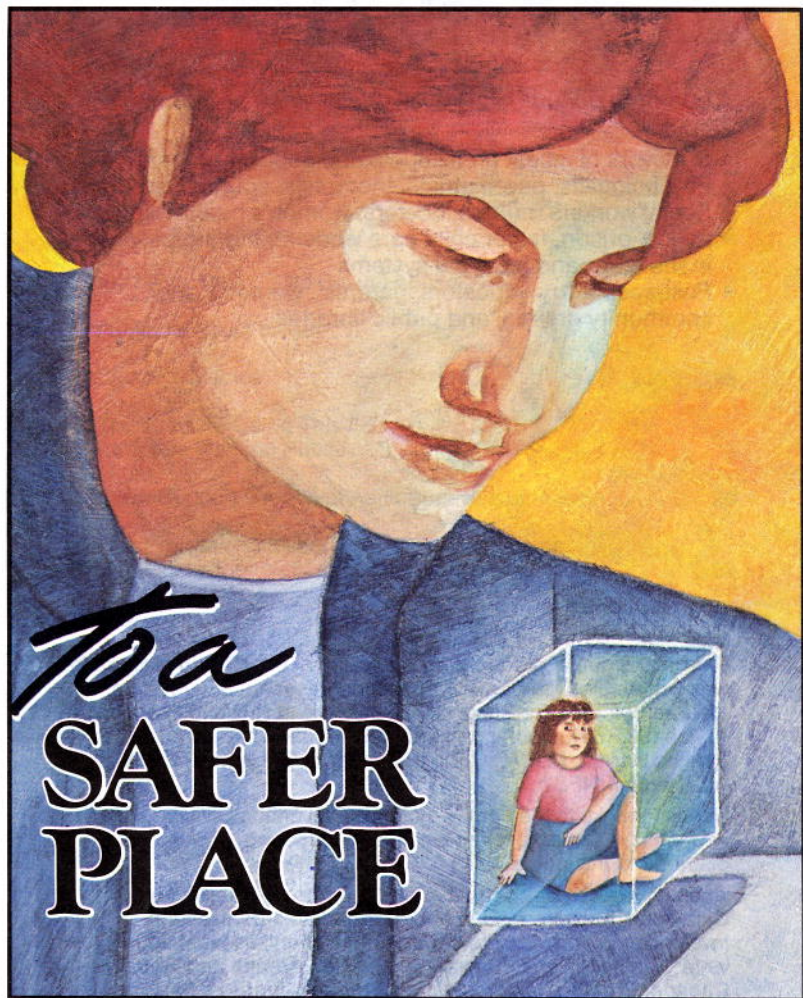
USER'S GUIDE

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30th American Film and Video Festival



To a
**SAFER
PLACE**

**One woman's account of her life as a
survivor of childhood incest**

Produced by Studio D, National Film Board of Canada



National
Film Board
of Canada

Office
national du film
du Canada

USER'S GUIDE

TO A SAFER PLACE

A one-hour documentary available in video and 16 mm film for:

- Survivors of incest (individuals and support groups)
- Psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists, counsellors
- Social workers, nurses, doctors, women's health clinics
- Police, prison, foster child care workers and professionals in the court and legal aid systems
- Post-secondary educators, parents', women's and community groups, and public libraries

This user's guide, produced by the National Film Board of Canada, was written by Olga Denisko. Additional research and revision: Maureen McEvoy for Support, Education and Prevention of Sexual Abuse (SEPSA), a non-profit Vancouver-based organization; Pauline Barrett, M.S.W., C.S.W., Member of O.A.A.M.F.T.; and Ann Vautier (NFB).

Special thanks to the Family Violence Prevention Division, Health and Welfare Canada, for assistance in preparing, printing and distributing this guide.

To obtain a free copy of the Family Violence Film Collection Catalogue, and information about Canadian organizations involved in the prevention and treatment of child sexual abuse, write: Family Violence Prevention Division, Health and Welfare Canada, Brooke Claxton Building, 7th floor, Tunney's Pasture, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0K9.

Please feel free to photocopy any part of this guide.

La version française de TO A SAFER PLACE intitulée L'ENFANT DANS LE MUR (106C 0287 067) est distribuée par l'Office national du film du Canada.

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TO A SAFER PLACE

One woman's account of her life as a survivor of childhood incest.

Produced by Studio D
National Film Board of Canada

TO A SAFER PLACE is an inspiring film. It is the story of how one woman has come to terms with her life as a survivor of incest.

Sexually abused by her father from infancy to early adolescence, Shirley Turcotte is now in her thirties and has succeeded in building a rich and full life. With the help of a caring psychiatrist and the support of other survivors, she has retrieved and worked through many memories of her past. In this film, she takes a further step to reconcile her present with her past.

TO A SAFER PLACE accompanies Shirley as she returns to the places and people of her childhood: her mother, sister and two brothers, all of whom were also victims of abuse; the next-door neighbors; and the farm house where the abuse took place. Standing in the basement, Shirley remembers her childhood, saying, "I would leave my body on the bed and take myself to a safer place in the wall, a place too hard and too cold for him to touch." Reintegrating the aspect of her inner child that has been hidden in the concrete wall all these years, she experiences a new-found strength and freedom.

Shirley describes her experiences as a victim and survivor of incest, and discusses with family members what it was like growing up in an environment of violence and abuse. Eloquently, she talks about the effects the abuse had on her and her siblings, and the struggle in adulthood to come to terms with her past. She remembers the terror and isolation, the loneliness and emotional confusion, the profound violation of her sense of self and her self-worth, and the desperate search for her silenced mother's love and support. She acknowledges her own reluctance in adulthood to bear children for fear that they too might become either abusers or victims.

Today, in addition to her career, Shirley guides a self-help therapy group for survivors of incest. In a scene from a group session, members discuss their common experience of isolation, denial and self-blame. The varied backgrounds of the members illustrate the fact that offenders are found in all classes of society.

TO A SAFER PLACE invites discussion on the social attitudes and assumptions that create a conspiracy of silence and perpetuate violence toward women and children. As Shirley's childhood neighbors point out, society blindly assumes that a father has the "right" to run "his" family as he sees fit. Another, more deeply embedded assumption is that children must honor and obey their parents. This unquestioned belief can ultimately lead to the betrayal of the child.

Through the frank disclosures of Shirley and her siblings, TO A SAFER PLACE shows how the deep psychic wounds inflicted on victims of incest can be healed. It encourages survivors to break through silence and betrayal to recover and develop a sense of self-worth and dignity.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

- Support groups of incest survivors
- Professionals who work with survivors of incest on an individual or group basis (psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists, counsellors, social workers, clergy)
- Police, prison and legal professionals; foster child care and women's shelter workers
- Doctors, nurses in family medicine, women's health centers and substance abuse clinics
- Community, women's and church groups
- Professionals working with abusers, other violent men and their spouses
- Secondary-school counsellors who work with individuals/ small groups of incest survivors
- Post-secondary education (psychology, psychiatry, social work, sociology, family systems, women's studies, medicine, criminology, law, comparative anthropology, mythology)

NOTE

Users of this documentary should be aware that incestuous behavior often takes subtler forms than that described in the film. For example, incest can also be defined as the occasional or repeated fondling of the breasts or genital area by a close family member. This behavior often evokes complex feelings of confusion and wounds the victim's sense of self and self-worth, but may not be perceived by the victim as being incestuous.

CAUTION

Some members of the audience may have been victims of incest in their childhood but have blocked the memory of this sexual abuse from their consciousness. Viewing this film may bring forth repressed feelings and result in intense emotional responses or painful disclosures. The section "Suggestions for Using This Film" outlines how to provide support to such individuals.

SOME FACTS ABOUT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child sexual abuse is sexual activity between a child and an adult or teenager. The activity may range from suggestive talk to voyeurism to genital fondling to penetration, and may or may not be accompanied by emotional manipulation, bribes, threats or actual physical violence. Usually the offender is well-known to the child – a family member, family friend, coach, teacher, community leader.

- Current Canadian statistics (The 1984 Report of The Committee on Sexual Offences Against Children and Youth: The Badgley Commission) indicate that one in two females and one in three males will experience unwanted sexual acts before the age of eighteen. The Commission broadly defines sexual abuse to include everything from exposure to incest.
- Although statistics indicate there are more female than male victims, many professionals believe boys fail to report their experiences for fear of being labeled a sissy or homosexual.
- The average age at which sexual abuse begins is four; however it is not uncommon for abuse to begin in infancy or during elementary school.
- The abuse often occurs on a weekly basis and may continue for years until the victim tells or runs away.
- The offender is usually male and often an adult known to the child – a family member: father, brother, uncle, grandfather; or trusted adult: coach, teacher, family friend, babysitter, clergy or community leader. The only characteristic offenders share is that they abuse children: education, religion, income and cultural backgrounds vary. Sexual abuse occurs in all types of families.
- Child sexual abuse has serious emotional and psychological consequences. Children are simply too young to understand or cope with adult sexual activities. They often sense that something is not right, but don't know how to express that. They feel betrayed and guilty.

TREATMENT AND RECOVERY

- The sooner abused children receive support and counselling, the faster they are able to begin the process of healing.

- Professionals are only just beginning to develop adequate treatment programs for offenders; it is still too early to know if they will work.
- Because of the secretive nature of the crime, very few cases go to court. In the cases that do, it is very difficult to secure a conviction because children's testimonies are not always accepted.
- When the abuse is discovered early on and children are given support from family members and professionals, recovery seems to be more rapid.
- If the abuse continues unchecked, however, the long-term effects can be severe, including feelings of self-hatred, guilt, worthlessness, isolation, confusion and depression; distorted body image; repressed memories; flashbacks, nightmares; difficulty trusting or getting emotionally close to anyone; sexual difficulties; juvenile runaways; promiscuity and prostitution; alcohol and drug abuse; self-punishing behaviors; suicidal feelings and suicide attempts.
- Survivors need ongoing support to untangle confused feelings and to realize that the sexual abuse was not their fault.

SOME FACTS ABOUT INCEST

THE VICTIMS

Incest is sexual assault committed by a family member on another family member. Although we are increasingly becoming aware of male children who are sexually abused, the majority of reported cases are still of female children.

Since boys are taught by our society to enjoy sexual interactions, their having been abused may clash with their perception of masculinity and therefore they may tend to not report sexual abuse or incest.

The average age of the victim when incestuous abuse begins is four, but sexual assault also occurs in infancy – in the child's first or second year of life. Sexual violations of the child are most common between the ages of four and twelve, but often happen or continue beyond this age.

THE OFFENDERS

Both men and women can be offenders, but as men are most commonly reported, this guide uses the masculine pronoun when referring to offenders who, in cases of incest, may include a father, an older male sibling, an uncle, a grandfather or stepfather. One of the most clearly established facts about incest is that it takes place in all socio-economic levels of society. Sexual abuse happens to children of every class, culture, race, religion and gender.

WHY SEXUAL ABUSE OCCURS

Detailed research about what motivates some men to sexually abuse children is still quite sparse. The current theories about why sexual abuse occurs can be organized into the four following categories.

1. Some offenders do have unusual needs for power and domination, and have misconceptions about the nature of the child and misconceptions about body ownership.
2. Some offenders have deviant psychological sexual arousal patterns.
3. Many offenders have histories of being victims of sexual abuse themselves. Findings indicate many abusers have problems in their capacity for behavioral inhibitions; their having been abused as children may be a contributing factor to their lack of inhibition.

4. Abusers are blocked in their capacity to meet their sexual needs in more conventional ways.

HOW WIDESPREAD IS INCEST AND SEXUAL ABUSE

Current statistics in Canada* indicate that one third (34%) of our female population are victims and about one seventh (13%) of men have been victims of sexual abuse. Several factors suggest that incest may be even more pervasive. The most obvious factor is that incest is still a secret. Some of the reasons for such silence is that the offender typically uses threats of physical harm or subtle blackmail to swear the child to secrecy. Fear of physical punishment or even death, of breaking up the family, of hurting the mother, of not being believed, and crippling feelings of self-blame can result in a victim never speaking out. Even when a complaint is lodged against an offender, often it does not result in a conviction. Society's widespread denial of incest and our condoning the use of power and aggression continue to support a conspiracy of silence.

* The (Badgley) 1984 Report of the Committee on Sexual Offences Against Children and Youth, Ottawa, Canadian Government Publications, Hull, Quebec K1A 0S9, 1984.

EFFECTS OF INCEST ON VICTIMS

All forms of incest are damaging to the victim. Incestuous behavior ranges from rape that includes penetration, to seductive abuse such as occasional or repeated fondling of the breasts or genital areas, or both. It can also include invasive seductiveness not necessarily involving physical contact, such as suggestive talk; open voyeurism (e.g. watching a daughter or sister undress); suggestive commentary about a child's body and body parts; or leering looks. It includes, as well, the behavior of older family members who force their young male and female children to manipulate each other sexually.

All such forms of behavior constitute incestuous invasions of the developing infant, child or teenager's physical, emotional and psychic boundaries. All incest is a betrayal of the child.

Incest has drastic consequences for the lives of victims/survivors. Some of the short- and long-term effects experienced by them include:

- a profound violation of their sense of self
- a basic lack of self-worth
- extreme isolation, loneliness and emotional confusion
- self-hatred, guilt, self-blame
- distorted body images and splitting of personality aspects (e.g. selective numbing of body parts or of the whole body; repression or blocking out of consciousness certain feelings/experiences; projection)
- in some cases, schizophrenic-like tendencies and/or psychotic-like episodes that may include hallucinations during which the original terror of the child and the violence of the abuser are re-experienced (often called "flashbacks")
- a profound distrust of life
- repression or blocking of the experience that usually leads to an unconscious re-enactment or acting out of the victim's story. Basically, such re-enactment is telling, without words, what the sexual abuser did to the child and is a silent cry for help
- difficulties in relating to others and the inability to form close friendships and intimate relationships
- difficulty, later in life, to separate age-appropriate sexual experiences from the traumatic experience of the sexual assault(s) that occurred before the individual was sexually mature

- physical disabilities such as dislocated bones, crippled joints, ulcers, numbness, and paralysis
- suicide attempts, and suicide

The damage is severely compounded if the victim has experienced some sexual excitement or pleasurable feelings during the incestuous acts. Not knowing that feelings of excitement are a normal and automatic biological component, the young, sexually immature victim is overwhelmed by intense emotional confusion, feelings of guilt and complicity, and mistrusts all pleasurable feelings and her/his own body.

FACTS AND FALLACIES

Unquestioned attitudes and assumptions about power, the nature of children, the nature of children's sexuality, parental rights and roles, and male and female rights tend to maintain a widespread conspiracy of silence and perpetuate violence toward children and women. When examined, such attitudes and assumptions turn out to be founded in myth. Often, they are elaborate rationalizations that make it possible for offenders to evade responsibility. A few of these fallacies, and the facts, include:

FALLACY Many children lie.

FACT Research indicates that it is extremely rare for a child to lie about sexual abuse. Children do not imagine the sexually explicit assault they describe. Because of shock and trauma caused to the child when attacked by a trusted older person, the child may be confused in trying to tell her/his story, and needs time and encouragement to find words to express what happened.

FALLACY Most children fantasize about sexual relationships with the parent of the opposite sex.

FACT Children need physical and emotional attention, love and caring, but **not** sex. By the age of three, the child's consciousness has developed sufficiently for the child to become aware of the father's presence in the family in a heightened way. Naturally, the child wants attention from this member of the family. She is too physically and emotionally immature to fantasize having sex with him.

Much harm has been done by Freud's "sexual drive" theory, especially as applied to the oedipal stage (roughly three to five years of age). Initially, Freud believed the stories of his patients, most of whom recounted painful memories of being sexually assaulted by male family members at this young age. When his colleagues objected to his presentation of these findings, Freud retracted his statements and developed elaborate theories of infant sexuality, claiming that what his patients had recounted was pure fantasy. Psychoanalysts trained in the Freudian tradition often still adhere to Freud's theory. This theory's basic perception of the child and sexuality invites these psychiatrists **not** to believe their patients.

FALLACY Parents, especially fathers, have the right to do whatever they want to their children. Whatever they do is for the child's own good.

- FACT* Such a belief indicates a lack of rational discrimination and gives parents license to treat their children however they want. Far too often, male parents are motivated by their own sexual needs and desires. Parents are responsible for their child – they do not own the child. A child who has been encouraged to listen and trust her/his feelings knows what feels right and good in relation to her/his body.
- FALLACY* Children should love, honor and obey their parents, no matter what the parents do.
- FACT* The biblical fourth commandment assumes that parents are mature. Children naturally admire and idealize their parents. They do not need the injunction to honor and obey. Adults do need to learn how to love, honor and respect their children.
- FALLACY* Outsiders have no right to interfere if they suspect children may be suffering sexual abuse. The family unit is sacrosanct, and the father knows what is best for it.
- FACT* The issue of intervening (interfering) is a complex one in western societies. The family unit and what goes on within it is still largely a taboo area. The family unit is not sacrosanct and the father doesn't necessarily know what is best for it. Outsiders who are disturbed by the appearance and behavior of a child can find ways to ask the child what is wrong without frightening her/him. Only then can the outsider decide on further steps. If an outsider suspects that a child is being mistreated in any way by her/his family, she/he is obliged by law to report any suspected neglect, mistreatment or abuse of the child to local provincial social service or child welfare authorities (see section: Reporting Child Physical or Sexual Abuse).
- FALLACY* Fathers and other male family members do not commit incest because they want to. Rather, they are seduced by the female child or teenager.
- FACT* Not yet being sexually mature, the child is incapable of seduction. This rationalization of having been seduced is used by men to evade responsibility for their acts.
- FALLACY* Incest happens because the wife is cold and frigid, thus depriving the father. The incest is therefore not his fault.
- FACT* Regardless of the father's sexual relationship with the mother, the father is responsible for his own acts.
- FALLACY* If a mother decides to leave her husband and her family, and incest occurs, it is her fault.
- FACT* Again, this shifts responsibility for the father's action onto

the mother. The fact that a mother may decide she has to leave her family does not condone or give the father permission to commit incestuous crimes. As an adult, he is responsible for his own actions.

FALLACY Children and infants are too young to experience any serious emotional or physical damage. They quickly forget what was done to them.

FACT Incest is traumatic and damaging at any age. Infants experience intense, global emotions and are only beginning to learn that their bodies are separate from those of their mothers. Children experience both intense physical sensations and intense, differentiating emotions. Sexual assault is very damaging in either state of development. Children may block out the memory of a traumatic attack, but the memory lives on in their bodies and in their emotional disturbances.

FALLACY Incest cannot be that harmful. It is often an authentic act of love and affection. It satisfies the child's need for physical affection.

FACT Incestuous assault is probably the most damaging act there is. Incest is never an act of authentic love and affection, but rather it entails the male's indulgence of his own sexual needs and desires. Incest is a profound violation; it never satisfies the child's need for physical affection in a healthy way.

FALLACY Incest gives the child pleasure and sexual experience in a safe environment.

FACT Some studies suggest that brothers who sexually assault their sisters were themselves victims of sexual abuse or grew up in an incestuous family, where incest is covertly or overtly encouraged; and/or where men's use of power and authority over women is modelled inappropriately. Whatever the reasons, brothers who sexually assault their sisters are not acting out of normal healthy curiosity. Such experience is damaging for both of them.

CONCLUSION

Many of the above fallacies appear to be based on a concept of power as "power over," of children as "property" (objects), and of the child's natural vitality and sensuality as being that of a sexually mature adult. None of the assumptions views the child as a person. All the assumptions shift responsibility away from the offender, and place blame on the child or the mother. All the fallacies either explicitly state or imply that incest is not traumatic for the victim.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THIS FILM

WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC

For General Public Awareness Screenings (including post-secondary education; women's groups; parent/teacher/community groups)

BEFORE THE SCREENING

Individuals planning to use this film with groups should preview it before use, be knowledgeable about the subject of incest, and have experience or have as a resource person someone with experience in dealing with the subject of incest who is familiar with local resources for victims of sexual assault.

Group animators should be aware that some members of the audience may have been victims of incest in their childhood but blocked the memory of this sexual abuse from consciousness. Viewing this film may bring out repressed or blocked out experiences and result in intense emotional responses or painful disclosures. In order to support and help such individuals, animators should:

- Prepare and hand out a sheet listing resources, including names and phone numbers of support groups for incest survivors, and of psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists and counsellors who work with survivors of incest.
- Provide a definition of incest and other factual material. (Photocopy the sections of this guide, "Some Facts About Child Sexual Abuse," "Some Facts About Incest," and "Facts and Fallacies.")
- Leave time for discussion, and include a discussion of some of the effects that incestuous abuse has on survivors' lives. Include, as well, some verbal information on typical survival/coping mechanisms (such as repression, denial, self-blame, etc.) that victims use in order to try to cope with an overwhelming, traumatic experience.
- Inform the audience of their own area of work, and identify resource persons who are present and their areas of knowledge and capabilities.
- Be prepared for one-to-one discussion with survivors.

In providing a definition of incest, group animators should stress the wide range of behavior that is incestuous and damaging. Because of the denial mechanisms that are called into play to deal with shock and severe emotional trauma, audience members who were subjected to subtler forms of incest may feel confused but may not consider themselves victims of incest.

AFTER THE SCREENING

Before starting the discussion, let the film roll until all the credits have passed. Then briefly allow people to sit quietly with their thoughts. Before dealing with factual details, most people will need to assimilate the film's emotional impact.

NOTE

Most audiences will be very moved, often to tears, by *TO A SAFER PLACE*. Some will view it as a positive, useful film, offering an example of recovery. Others will perceive it as a story of incomprehensible abuse; for some viewers it will be the first time they learn about incest and sexual abuse. But for many women and men, Shirley's story will be similar to their own.

The following are three common responses to *TO A SAFER PLACE*:

1. Viewers will identify with Shirley Turcotte, the subject of the film, because of similar experiences of childhood incest; they will have a strong need to share their personal story now that the taboo has been lifted by *TO A SAFER PLACE*. This will be particularly evident in groups of disabled persons and incarcerated individuals.
2. Survivors of incest, close friends and family members may state their anger toward offenders and their inability to understand such behavior. They will want to know where to seek help in reporting abuse, in overcoming their personal trauma, in choosing a therapist, in making contact with a support group, in finding out about prevention and treatment programs, in confronting suspected victims/abusers, in seeking prosecution and ensuring a conviction. They will want to know how long therapy will take and whether it is covered by Medicare. They may speak of frustration with the complexities of dealing with "the system" – the police, hospital, social service agencies and the courts.
3. The general public will seek more information on the subject of incest and sexual abuse – why does it happen, tell-tale signs, responsibility of reporting: how and to whom, treatment programs, dealing with repressed feelings of a sister, wife, child. How can friends help – especially in the case of adolescents? What prevention programs are available in schools?

You may want to have on hand someone from a local incest survivor support group, your local social service agency or sexual assault crisis center to answer questions. You may also wish to photocopy and hand out various sections of this guide.

POINTERS FOR INITIATING A DISCUSSION

It is strongly recommended that group animators include point (1) with every group. Animators should review the remaining points in order to select and perhaps adapt those that seem most relevant for use with a particular audience.

Developing a comfortable climate for discussion is important. To help viewers express their feelings, the following questions may be useful:

- How do you feel about the film?
 - What stands out for you after seeing the film; is there a particular image, idea, person, or issue that remains with you?
1. Allow ample time for individuals to respond to the film and to ask questions. You may wish to divide your audience into small groups so that everyone has a chance to express feelings and thoughts generated by the film. Include time for discussion in the larger group.
 2. If initiating a discussion needs some animation on your part, present and discuss some misconceptions listed in this guide under the heading "Facts and Fallacies". Invite the audience to think of other unquestioned assumptions that lead to the betrayal of the child and maintain social structures that, usually unwittingly, promote silence and violence.
 3. Discuss various reasons why parents and other adults often do not believe children. Consider how a child, with limited language and life experience, might try to tell or act out the story of traumatic, sexual abuse by a family member. Ask audience members how you might begin to work toward understanding what the child is trying to communicate.
 4. Include a discussion of the sexuality of children: the facts and the fallacies. Emphasize the fact that although a child is, by nature, a vital and sensual being, with intense awareness of physical sensations, she/he is **not** yet sexually mature. On the physiological level, sexual maturity comes only after physical maturation – after puberty. Emotional sexual maturity takes longer to develop, and is as severely disturbed if the pubescent child is sexually violated at her/his most vulnerable period of physical development as it is if the child is assaulted at a younger age. Unfortunately, adults can misconstrue the normal vitality of an infant, child or teenager and use their younger family members in the service of their own sexual needs, **not** the child's.

NOTE

To be able to lead a discussion on the sexuality of children, including a careful re-thinking of Freud's drive theory (especially as it was interpreted to apply to children's sexuality, i.e., the oedipal state), group animators may wish to read Freudian-trained psychiatrist Alice Miller's *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child*, listed in the bibliography of this guide.

5. In the film, Shirley Turcotte expresses anger that, as in her case, sexually assaulted children are rarely helped by those outside the family, and rarely questioned about what is happening. Consider the complex issue of how society (neighbors, police, educators) can intervene. Children who have been or are being abused are usually very frightened, and may also be either belligerent or withdrawn. Discuss the type of approach that might help an abused child express what has happened or is happening. Discuss what steps can be taken to have an offender removed from the home and to provide a safe environment for the child.
6. The group may wish to discuss the concept of power: its uses and abuses. What common practices, within our institutions, appear to promote "power over" behavior? What can we do to promote, instead, dignity and empowerment? What types of education might begin to affect institutions that are caught up in practices that promote misuse of power?

Share your insights in the larger group.

7. Court cases can result in a good deal of trauma for the survivor and her/his family. This should not, however, be an excuse for not attempting to charge an offender. Discuss what support systems for the child-victim and the non-offending parent(s) might help them face the offender and his lawyer in a courtroom, e.g. a thorough explanation of the court system; sufficient therapy to help the child regain a level of self-esteem and assertiveness; advocating age-appropriate ways of testifying by children in court (see Bibliography).

SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THIS FILM

WITH SUPPORT GROUPS OF ADULT SURVIVORS OF INCEST

TO A SAFER PLACE is a powerful catalyst for individual response and work in a supportive group environment, and for intense group discussion and involvement. The film includes many details about incestuous abuse, the effects such abuse has on the lives of survivors, and the steps to recovery. Individuals within the support group may respond to different details and in different ways. In order to honor and support the experiences of each individual, the group leader should be knowledgeable about the complex effects of incest, including typical stages through which survivors pass, and also be capable of handling the diversity of responses that may occur in a group setting.

TO A SAFER PLACE will evoke responses on a personal level and also offer an opportunity to clarify factual information.

WHAT ADULT SURVIVORS MAY EXPERIENCE

Because of the basic betrayal of trust that occurs in incest, survivors need ongoing support to disentangle confused feelings, to work through shock and paralysis, and often, to accept that incest did occur and that it was not their fault. Screening this film in a support group can, among other things, help to:

- emphasize that incest is a widespread problem and that survivors are not alone (such information is an important factor in the steps toward healing)
- open up discussion of the confused feelings experienced by victims, and thus help to identify and disentangle complex knots of feelings
- facilitate discussion of how the incestuous abuse took place for each survivor
- facilitate discussion of the various survival techniques the individual had to use in order to cope with the sexual abuse
- call up repressed (blocked-out) memories into consciousness, where they can be worked through
- provide a model of the growth and change that are possible for survivors

ON A FACTUAL LEVEL

Widespread misconception about the child, and about parental rights in relation to the child have been absorbed by the survivor and are factors in her/his deeply wounded sense of self, lack of self-worth, and emotional confusion. On a factual level, TO A SAFER PLACE provides a basis for clarifying:

- what constitutes incest
- what constitutes children's sensuality and vitality. What is abnormal is an adult who violates the child's normal curiosity and sexuality
- the responsibilities of adults in relation to their children
- the kind of honor and respect children should be able to expect from their parents and older family members as a natural right
- the profound shock and trauma that incestuous attacks engender in the young victim, who naturally idealizes and even idolizes adult members of her/his family. Shock, trauma, and profound emotional confusion are normal responses to such violations
- the infant, child or teenager is never to blame for the incestuous behavior
- typical patterns of denial, self-blame, etc.

Group leaders can refer to and photocopy the earlier sections of this guide, "Some Facts about Incest," "Effects of Incest on Victims," and "Facts and Fallacies" for other points that this film can help clarify.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THIS FILM

FOR PROFESSIONALS LEADING SUPPORT GROUPS OR PROVIDING TREATMENT TO INCEST SURVIVORS

- In order to gain confidence in working with group members' powerful re-experiencing of traumatic events (including psychotic-like episodes), the person leading the support group may need to have as consultant a resource person who is more knowledgeable in this area.
- For many people, work within the support group may need to be supplemented by one-to-one sessions with a professional. The group leader should compile a list of professionals who work with survivors of incest. Individuals within the group should be urged to keep looking until they find a professional whom they trust and with whom they feel comfortable working on the complex traumatic issues that incest creates. They should be reassured that recovery need not necessarily take almost ten years of therapy, as in Shirley's case.
- Ensure there is ample time for each individual to respond to the material in her/his own way. Remembering that growth is more effectively fostered when the truth of the individual's experience is honored will help group leaders remain open to and supportive of diverse responses.
- Ensuring ample time for each individual's response may mean several group sessions will be spent processing the material presented in this film.
- Remember to acknowledge and validate each individual's response. Survivors of incest usually come from family contexts where there was almost no communication or where communication was distorted, one-sided or incomplete. The experience of open communication, where each person is heard, is one of the important contributions that group work can make.
- Victims of incest tend to experience some common responses, such as feelings of powerlessness, various forms of denial, self-blame, and guilt. Those in a survivors' support group will likely exhibit different degrees of these and other effects of incest.

Each individual needs to be supported wherever she/he is, and eventually, needs to be confronted with her/his misconceptions about the past and with the realities of how an older, trusted member of the family should have behaved with her/him. Usually, only after the individual has fully accepted that incest did occur and that she/he was not to blame, can the individual move beyond guilt and helplessness to connect with her/his rage.

- Some individuals cannot contact and express their rage at the offenders until ambiguous feelings toward their mothers have been worked through. Even though in many cases the mother was also a victim, the child-part of the individual often does not know that, and therefore feels betrayal and anger.

There are several reasons for complex feelings toward the mother, even when she was unaware of the incest. During extreme trauma, such as that occurring in incestuous behavior, the victim often regresses to an earlier psychic state: for example, one where the child assumes that the mother knows everything that is happening. Since it is with the mother that children typically form the first, primary attachment, both female and male victims of incest will often experience confused emotions toward her as well as toward the offender. Children who are sexually abused by a male adult member of the family are often left in terror of this offender. To experience anger at him is too overwhelming. Thus, anger is often displaced onto the mother.

Anger at the mother, if it is there, most frequently must be allowed and worked through before the deep anger at the offender can be accessed.

- The working through of rage and anger usually takes many sessions and is usually layered with pain and grief. Group leaders need to help the individual to express actively, and to repeat the re-living of core memories, until complex feelings are disentangled. Beliefs about oneself, as a result of abuse, must be recognized, understood, and changed. One common signal of such change is that the individual begins to develop determination and assertiveness.
- Group leaders should remember that once rage has been adequately worked through, individuals may experience a period of deep grieving over their profound betrayal as children and loss of childhood and adolescence.
- Group leaders need to help individuals who are in this process to contain their anger, grief and other strong emotions to appropriate places, like the group meetings, in order that the individual can continue a "normal" life at work and in other daily situations.
- As overwhelming memories begin to surface, some individuals may experience psychotic or psychotic-like episodes. Such episodes need to be calmly received, with the group leader open to opportunities to remind the individual of the current reality, and serving, at times, as the individual's observing ego.

RESOURCES

NOTE

Those interested in starting or joining support groups of survivors should refer to the resource groups listed in the national inventory of sexual abuse support services available from: National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Family Violence Prevention Division, Health and Welfare Canada, Brooke Claxton Building, 7th floor, Tunney's Pasture, Ottawa, K1A 1B5.

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Child Sexual Abuse: The Untold Secret C 0182 119. 30 minutes, 16 mm and video, color, 1982. Content: Uses testimonial of five sexually abused girls and critiques current treatment and management.

Child Sexual Abuse: A Socio-historical Perspective
C 0185 125.

Child Sexual Abuse: Prevalence and Effects C 0185 126.

Counselling the Sexual Abuse Survivor: A New Perspective
C 0185 127.

VHS and Beta video, color, 1985. Content: A series of three half-hour video tapes recorded at the Conference on Counselling the Sexual Abuse Survivor, February, 1985.

Feeling Yes/Feeling No C 0184 069, C 0184 071. Three 15-minute films for children, one 25-minute film for adults, 16 mm, VHS and Beta video, also home package, color, 1986.

Content: A highly popular sexual assault prevention program used in school curricula by most Canadian provinces. Based on a performance of the Green Thumb Theatre at a Vancouver School, it teaches children the concept of "yes" and "no" feelings, provides three questions children should ask when wanting to go with a stranger, and plays "what if...?" games for situations involving both strangers and family members and friends. User's guide for teachers and parents.

Finding Out: Incest and Family Sexual Abuse C 0184 103. 25 minutes, 16 mm, color, 1984. Content: Deals, in a frank and open way, with the disclosure of incest within a family and the subsequent emotional events; concentrates on the role of the mother in handling the problem.

No More Secrets C 0182 122. 13 minutes, 16 mm, color, 1982. Content: Intended for children 7-12. Explicit but not alarming portrayals of sexual abuse within the family. Children show how to talk about incest to someone they can trust, and how to say no to intrusion. Comes with instructional guide for parents.

Sexual Abuse of Children: A Time for Caring C 0179 390. 27 minutes, 16 mm, color, 1979. Content: This film, designed for school personnel, opens with an interview of a young woman who was abused as a child and emphasizes the point that most American states now have laws that make it mandatory to report sexual abuse of children. Indicators are discussed and illustrated in reasonably graphic detail.

- Sexual Abuse – The Family* C 0177 157. 28 minutes, 16 mm, color, 1977. Content: An overview of intra-family sexual abuse; how to conduct examination and investigation without adversely affecting the child.
- To a Safer Place* C 0187 067. 58 minutes, 16 mm, VHS and Beta video, color, 1987. Content: One woman's account of her life as a survivor of incest. User's guide. French version: *L'Enfant dans le mur* (106C 0287 067).
- Who Do you Tell?* C 0179 387. 11 minutes, 16 mm and U-matic video cassette, color, 1979. Content: Animation undercut with live footage of children talking honestly about who they would tell if confronted by a serious or frightening problem. Problems discussed include fires in the home, discovering that a friend has been severely beaten by her parents, and an adult touching you in a way that makes you uncomfortable. Ages 7-12.

NOTE The new 1988/89 Family Violence Film Collection Catalogue contains descriptions of some 325 films and videos including 40 on the subject of incest. For a free copy, write: National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Family Violence Prevention Division, Health and Welfare Canada, Brooke Claxton Building, 7th floor, Tunney's Pasture, Ottawa, K1A 1B5.

FOR SUPPORT GROUPS

ARTICLES

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by Joan Delighton and Phil McPeck in *Social Casework: The Journal of Contemporary Social Work*, September 1985.
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FOR SUPPORT GROUPS

BOOKS

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REPORTING CHILD PHYSICAL OR SEXUAL ABUSE

Canadian law ensures that children are protected from physical, emotional or sexual abuse both through the Criminal Code and through Child Welfare legislation or authority. The criminal law which is enacted by the federal government is designed to punish the offender while child welfare legislation which is enacted by the provinces is there to protect children. Under provincial legislation, provision is made for the intervention of a public authority when a child appears to be in need of protection due to abuse or neglect.

All provinces and territories in Canada have child protection legislation or ordinances. Usually this legislation requires every person who has reasonable grounds to believe that a child is being sexually abused to report this suspicion or belief to the child welfare authorities. It is then up to these authorities to investigate this belief or suspicion and, where necessary, to call on the police for assistance. Where there is sufficient evidence, criminal charges will be laid. However, even if they are not, the child protection authorities have responsibility for ensuring that the child is protected.

Since provincial child welfare legislation varies from province to province, there are variations in both the content of the legislation and the way in which the law is administered. For instance, not all provinces require the persons reporting to identify themselves. In some provinces, professional persons have a special responsibility to disclose and to report abuse even though they may be involved in a professional relationship in which confidentiality is ensured under normal circumstances. In others, failure to report is a punishable offence. In all cases, however, the person reporting is protected from any kind of legal action provided the report was not made out of malice rather than out of concern for the child.

In summary, all Canadians who have reasonable grounds to believe or to suspect that a child is being sexually exploited, molested or abused should report this belief or suspicion and should do so promptly. The report can be made by contacting local provincial social service departments, children's aid societies or family and child service centers. Check your telephone directory for these numbers.

TO A SAFER PLACE

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With the collaboration of
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VHS: 113C 0187 067

Beta: 114C 0187 067

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