



Stop It Now!® Minnesota

Together We Can Prevent the Sexual Abuse of Children

True Stories of Finding Help and Hope

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True Stories of Finding Help and Hope



We invite you to read the following stories detailing the experiences of people who sexually abused children or contemplated doing so and who have received help, support and treatment to change their lives for the better.

These are true stories. Researchers working for Stop It Now! Minnesota spent 50 hours interviewing people who have been through treatment for sexual behaviors toward children, and wrote these stories based on the interviews.

People who participated in the interviews talked about what it's like to struggle with wanting to be sexual with children, and how miserable and alone that made them feel. Many said they also struggle with issues such as drug and alcohol abuse, depression and loneliness, pornography addiction, and relationship difficulties.

They also talked about having connected with helpful and understanding people to help them get control so they don't harm children.

Are you someone who wants to stop but doesn't know how? Are you worried about someone you know? At Stop It Now! we understand the struggle. We are ready to help with confidential information and referrals. People who get specialized help can and do learn to control their behavior. No more secrets. No more lies.

If you are concerned about your sexualized thoughts or behaviors towards children—or the behavior of someone you know and care about—please call Stop It Now!'s SAFE AND CONFIDENTIAL helpline at 1-888-PREVENT (1-888-773-8368).

Calls are answered by understanding people who will listen, discuss your options for getting help, and provide you with referrals to local resources.

Child sexual abuse is not inevitable. It's preventable.

“Evan’s” Story



An obsession with adult pornography and the “ultimate high” led “Evan” to cross the line to illegal images of children.

Editor’s Note: This is a true story based on an interview with “Evan” (not his real name).

I was a heavy drinker all of my adult life, basically since I got out of the military, and drank more and more as the years passed. Then my parents got ill and the burden of their care and decision making fell on me. I felt lost and overwhelmed and drank even more. Then a computer came into the house, and what had been a moderate interest in pornography became an addiction.

I was just doing porn all the time and drinking, always looking for the “ultimate high.” When you’re addicted to pornography, you’re always looking for the perfect picture, THE picture, and then forever you’ll be satisfied. Of course, it doesn’t exist. But you keep looking.

I hadn’t crossed the line yet—the adult pornography I was looking at was legal—but my wife found out, and so I started using my computer at work instead. I was a youth program director for more than two decades. I was crossing all kinds of boundaries using the work computer for porn. I was lying to my wife, spending a lot of money, damaging my relationship, my mental health, potentially my job. And I continued to do it. That’s the definition of addiction is when you continue to do those things and you know they’re harmful.

I was basically out of control. I felt disconnected from almost everything. I was secretive. I was in a dark, dark place. On the outside, I was always laughing and had a great sense of humor, but the darkness was inside of me.

One day, I got an email saying, you know, “I’ve got some hard-to-find child pornography I can sell you.” Now, I don’t excuse what I did because of alcohol, but I was not making good decisions, and I thought “what the hell.” I knew it was wrong. I knew it was terribly dangerous and illegal to buy child pornography, but it’s the same kind of thinking that goes into excessive drinking. “*You deserve it. Helps you relax. Gets you high. Makes you feel good.*” I thought the ultimate high would give me a sense of peace and comfort and love and warmth and all those other things that everybody wants. And so I bought the child porn—and got arrested.

I wish someone had come to me and said, “You’re getting yourself into huge trouble. If you do this you’re going to get arrested and go to jail. But you can get help so you don’t do this.” I think I would have taken it seriously. But no one did. This was my first offense ever, never even a speeding ticket. I lost my job, my career, my health and life insurance. My wife found out, people at work found out. It was on the news.

continued on next page

I went to jail. I went through treatment for alcohol addiction. I went through treatment for issues with child pornography and my sexual thoughts about children. I never touched any children, never wanted to because it was a boundary for me and because I didn't want to be close to anybody—I liked porn because it wasn't real, it didn't involve anyone else. But I sometimes worry what might have happened if I hadn't gotten help when I did. I've said many times that if I had not been arrested and gone to jail, I think I probably would be dead by now. I think that's where I was headed.

But I did get help. Now the drive for the ultimate high has been redirected to healthy things, biking and other physical things, and I feel better and I like myself better. I found a group where I can go talk about this stuff in a safe place, a non-judgmental setting, and have people listen and keep me on track.

Now I want to give something back to the community by encouraging others to get help before they get in big trouble and do things that affect the whole rest of their lives.

“Shawn’s” Story



“Shawn” wished he had known sooner that he had lied to himself for years. He thought he wasn't sexually assaulting children, but being affectionate.

Editor's Note: This is a true story based on an interview with “Shawn” (not his real name).

Getting help was a good idea because now I finally woke up to the fact that what people had been saying all along was true. That my spending a lot of time with children was at the very least highly inordinate or inappropriate, not something for adults to be doing and that my fascination with children was obsessive-compulsive, sexually addictive in nature, was really a problem.

I called it a “greed need.” That it was a need I shouldn't have had. It came out of greed. My family called it unnatural, not socially acceptable. I had a lot of resentment that I didn't see how intrinsically wrong, in and of itself, my fascination was. I thought that, well, it's society's problem. They have a problem with how they're looking at this.

I didn't get honest with myself about it, that it was pedophilia. No one ever called me those things except the psychiatric nurse I saw at an outpatient clinic at a hospital before I was sentenced for child sexual abuse. She said, “You're a pedophile based on what you're telling me. You fit the criteria for it.”

I was really devastated. For years I lied to myself, or deluded or deceived myself that I was not sexually assaulting children, but I was in a sense making love to them.

continued on next page

By holding them on my lap, by cuddling them, caressing them, snuggling with them, picking them up I was being affectionate to them.

Part of my anger at myself was that I didn't allow this realization to occur while I was abusing children. I found defenses against that, other things to call it. I believed that I was being nurturing and affectionate, what someone might call a strong delusion, like drinking, but back then I didn't believe it to be.

This was going on in my head and in my heart. As long as I'm careful not to show it in my eyes, my face, my voice, my mannerism, or actions, as long as I don't give a hint or a sign about what is going on in me, I can be nurturing and affectionate to kids and that's what I'm getting off on, the experience of being affectionate, etc. And nobody notices it. That will mean no harm, no foul. That's what I told myself.

I feared, as an evangelical, going to heaven and having the Lord tell me this, "You had this effect on these kids and that effect and that effect on those kids, those kids and those kids. You're going to pay the piper now." In churches I went to, and things I saw on Christian TV, I became aware of a concept called the Seat of Judgment, or the Benah seat, like the seat of authority. You're rewarded or you're consequenced based on your actions and behaviors and what those say about you as a person. So I had fears of how this is going to make me look both here on earth, over time, and in the after world.

Treatment is helping me to curb and control my problem with being infatuated with and enamored with children. If a guy like me came into my treatment program, I'd tell him, "Get honest. Get real. If you do, you will begin to change. You will become intimate with people your own age. You'll feel care, concern, and warmth. It's worth it to get honest."

"Brian's" Story



When "Brian" turned himself in, he thought he'd lose everything — his wife, his job, his friends. Instead, he got into programs that helped him. He feels like a new man.

Editor's Note: This is a true story based on an interview with "Brian" (not his real name).

I wanted to stop being sexual with children but I didn't know how. I felt like a man in a hole. That's what I called myself, the man in the hole. I was very depressed. I didn't realize the harm I was doing to kids.

continued on next page

It took an arrest and jail to do it, to get me to find help and change. I turned myself in, and when they put me in a cell, I cried all night long. I thought that I was never going to see daylight again. I thought my life was over. I was so scared. I thought I would lose everything—my wife, my job, my friends—but it didn't turn out that way.

I got a one-year sentence in the workhouse, and twenty years of probation. And the judge ordered me to get therapy. That snapped me out of it.

Treatment helped me out an awful lot. Before I got treatment, I didn't think what I was doing with kids was really that bad or serious. I always thought it was just like a "show and tell" and that's it. I believed I wasn't hurting anybody. But I was wrong.

In treatment I started reaching out for others, like my wife. She had been so angry when she found out I was molesting kids, but when I opened up about it, my wife accepted what I said. That helped me a lot. She stood by me a hundred percent, which I didn't think she would. To this day she stands by me, too. I'm very proud of that, very happy.

We did some couples therapy. The therapist asked her one time, "Why didn't you dump this guy? What are you hanging on to him for?" She looked at the therapist and said, "Because I love him." That hit me, right here, right in my heart.

I graduated from treatment a year ago. I've been in an aftercare group since. My group members are proud of how well I'm doing. I've also been in Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA) for three years. I feel now that I want to help people that have this problem. That's why I go to SAA. I'm a sponsor now. I feel comfortable in my SAA group because they know who I am. I know who they are. I feel that I'm not alone.

I even like going to the group run by my probation officer because there's people there who've been through what I've been through. They've been what we call "sober" for a long time. We get together every three months. It's very helpful. I get suggestions from them. I can give them suggestions. It's a very good thing to do. So I'm not worried about committing another offense again.

I go to church a couple of times a week now. I volunteer there. I never had any religion before I got arrested—not when I was growing up, and not until I was in jail. I started going to Bible study in jail. I liked it. When I got out of jail, I kept it up. It's been helping me ever since. I've learned an awful lot about spirituality and about myself.

I knew what I had been doing was the wrong thing to do. The life I was leading was wrong. I had to change my life. It takes a lot of courage to change your life.

I learned how to pray. The Serenity Prayer was the first prayer I ever learned. Now I know other prayers. I pray for people. I pray for the children I hurt. I pray for others who are being hurt.

My conscience is free right now. I don't feel guilty like I used to. I'm doing the best I can. I feel good. I feel like a new man.

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“Carla’s” Story



“Carla” is finding that therapy and twelve-step groups have helped her work through the terrible feelings she has about abusing children when she was a teenager.

Editor’s Note: This is a true story based on an interview with “Carla” (not her real name).

I was like fourteen or something. It was kids that I took care of, neighbor kids, many years ago. It wasn’t until the last few years that I told anybody. I told my husband first. He was very understanding and talked with me about it. We both decided to get help.

I thought when you got to a certain age that those awful thoughts and feelings would just go away by themselves. I knew it wasn’t right for the children, that it wasn’t good for me. I think I was just so numb in those days. It really didn’t click how bad it was until later.

I decided it was bad when I became more aware of how what my dad did to me had affected my life in so many ways. I can be open about things that are done to me, but it’s different to talk about things I had done.

Talking about my own sexual abuse started fairly young, but it seemed like no one knew how to talk about it, or what to say. I can remember telling my best friend in my first year of college. I don’t remember her reacting at all. I told my first boyfriend. He didn’t really react one way or the other, either. It’s true that therapy is hard, because working through my problems means talking about what happened, and feeling the feelings again. It’s so hard to go there, but my therapist really listens and helps me.

I certainly demonize my father for what he did to me. Just the other day, I thought for a minute he could be human. It was such a shocking thought. It’s so hard not to demonize him when a big part of my surviving abuse is to make him be the bad guy.

So then what do you do when you do the same thing?

I’m trying to be open-minded or creative about how to make amends. You have to be so careful that everything else you do is right, that you don’t ever hurt anybody again.

Twelve-step groups have helped a lot. I go because my husband is a recovering addict. My own therapist has been just great in listening to what I have to say and not fixing it, but not being completely passive, either. To help put the pieces together. To say, “Here are some options. Here are some different ways to manage this.” A lot of it’s just about identifying the terrible feelings I have, and finding places to express them.

I really believe that stuff works. The basic tenets of talking about it, letting go of it, making amends, forgiving yourself, not doing it ever again, and going on with your life.

“Henry’s” Story



“Henry” realizes that his “sexual orientation” is to children. He knows that he can never be alone with a child again.

Editor’s Note: This is a true story based on an interview with “Henry” (not his real name).

When I was in kindergarten and also age seven or eight, I was abused by several people that were either family or people I knew. I began acting out in sexual ways right then. I mean it wasn’t something I waited until a teenager to do. I wouldn’t say it was consensual for a nine-year-old to perform a sex act on a five-year-old. I wouldn’t say that was consensual.

I think there was more guilt about the deceit than there was about the acts. I was deceiving my parents. They had always thought of me as the perfect child. I certainly wasn’t. I was deceiving myself, pretending that this didn’t really matter. Maybe I thought it didn’t matter. I’m not sure.

When I was a teenager, I would have responded most favorably to an adult who cared about me and knew about my behavior and wasn’t going to condemn me, just mentor me as a person. I could think of several people who did take on some of that mentoring role. I look back on those people as heroes, but they didn’t know about my behavior.

I think I was in denial about my behaviors, mostly. I knew it was wrong that I was doing this, but I didn’t see the wrong. I didn’t perceive it enough so that I could go seek out help.

A good share of my offenses were while the child was sleeping. I was telling myself, well, he doesn’t know about it, but I knew it was hurting me too.

A couple of them were family. Others were kids I had developed a relationship with. The youngest was about five, and the oldest was about fourteen. I know them through connections at church. I was involved with a boys’ group. None of the kids ever said anything that I’m aware of.

I did on a couple of occasions, when I was in the military, share with a roommate about what I had done. I don’t think anybody really believed me. My behavior was quite exemplary in that I don’t think they believed what I was saying. People think there’s a stereotype. There’s not. I told them because I was feeling guilty and I just wanted to get some of that out. Something needed to come out.

It wasn’t helpful when people didn’t believe me. For the moment it was helpful, just to have the chance to talk, but in terms of changing my behavior, absolutely not. I still fantasized about kids. I still do today.

My wife and I talked together before we were married. I shared with her where I was and what my

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desires were for children and what I had done sexually to children. The two of us decided that we would talk to a couple who were friends of ours and who had done some counseling. So we spent a couple of months talking with them.

I first asked for help when my children were in elementary school. I spent a year with a psychiatrist, but I got nowhere. I stopped going. Then one of my children went through some difficult times in high school. My wife and I did family counseling. After a while the kids didn't feel any need to go, but my wife and I continued. We built up trust with the counselor. I shared my story. He suggested I go to a gentleman who was more trained for that kind of counseling. That's how I ended up in specialized treatment.

It's been seven or eight years since I offended, and that was the only time since our marriage. The other events were previous to my marriage. So for the last 20 years, it was just eating at me. The guilt and the shame and not knowing how to handle myself on it at all except to stop it. That was what I was doing.

Until I got into specialized treatment a few years ago, I didn't see any hope for dealing with my behavior. I knew that society looks down upon my offense as really way underneath the table kind of thing. I knew that my behavior just wasn't accepted. I didn't see myself changing.

I still realize that that's basically my "sexual orientation" but I feel like through treatment I've gotten some handles on how to deal with that so that I'm not acting inappropriately and not hurting children. I want it understood that I am just an ordinary person, just someone who has dealt with some really awful stuff and done some awful things but still I have likes and dislikes. There are some positives about me.

“Neil’s” Story



“Neil” wished someone could have held up a crystal ball and showed him he was about to lose the person most precious to him: his daughter.

Editor’s Note: This is a true story based on an interview with “Neil” (not his real name).

When I was first arrested for abusing my young daughter, I denied it to everyone. I never wanted to tell anyone what I was doing—not about the sexual abuse or the drugs.

I held it in. I was in a lot of pain. I was so messed up at the time. My big concern was that nobody knows what I did. I didn't want anybody to know I was a pedophile. I thought, “That's the bottom of the totem pole,” not realizing that the only way I was NOT going to be a pedophile for life was to get help and to learn to change myself.

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So I said I didn't want treatment. I figured I would just do my time. One day my probation officer said to me, "Why are you always taking the easy way out?" That's what she said. And then she said, "You know, I've done this for many years and there's nothing I haven't heard." So I started to tell her bits and pieces. And it felt so good for someone to sit there and listen. It felt so good to just get rid of all that crap inside. And I eventually told her everything. We talked and she arranged for me to get treatment.

At that point I started feelin' a lot better, started lookin' at it in a different way. Realizing that, you know, I do have a problem, but there's people out there willin' to help me. Who are gonna accept me. That I don't have to be this way for the rest of my life.

Back when I was abusing, I did feel terrible for what I did, but it didn't stop me from having fantasies. After coming down from using meth and thinking about what I did, I thought, "My god, I can't believe I was touching my daughter," you know, and getting aroused to that. "Just, what the hell is wrong?" But I couldn't let it go. I needed help. I'm not the Lone Ranger.

But it was real hard for me. I had a tornado of emotions going through me. I really had to rebuild myself from the ground up. Change isn't easy. But right now, I have no secrets. I've never had that before. Honesty. That feels so good.

You know, I'm glad I'm not that person any more. In treatment I picked up tools, learned how to deal with being aroused by kids. But unfortunately it took hurting people and a huge chain reaction, not just for victims, but family, friends, a lot of shock to everybody. The victim takes the big part of it, but then you have so many consequences.

To this day I can't believe I did it. And I coulda never imagined anybody out there willing to talk. If there had been one of these crystal balls and someone could've shown me, "This is what's going to happen if you go one step further," and give me a glimpse of my future, that would've woken me up. But no one did.

Because of treatment, I got my life back. I've learned so much about myself. I have goals. And I love helping people. I get such good feelings off that. Even in jail I found out that I felt really good tutoring guys that can't read, to help them. I've been surprised that people I know have been pretty accepting because they know I'm working hard to change myself. They know I'm dealing with these issues. And as far as sexualizing a child, when I think about what children think, like how innocent they are and how fragile, I'd cry before I could ever touch one again.