Childhood Sexual Abuse and Adult Relationships:
Spiritual Struggles and the Acceptance of God's Love

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### Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA) Defined

- Any sexual act that is forced and forbad by law to a person under the age of 18
- The act is not consensual due to the person's cognitive developmental stage
- One in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will experience a form of sexual abuse during the first 18 years of life
- 91 % of these victims are familiar with their perpetrator
- In the United States alone there are approximately 42 million adults who have experienced a CSA encounter.

## The Cost of CSA

- Relational instability and disordered behaviors
- Females who experienced CSA are twice as likely to be diagnosed with depression and three times as likely to have a psychiatric disorder and substance abuse compared to females with no history of CSA.
- Males who experienced CSA are almost three times as likely to suffer from substance abuse than those who had no history of CSA.
- Economic loss due to CSA has reached over 9 billion dollars





### CSA and Relational Issues

- CSA robs victims of meaningful relationships and healthy attachments
- Trusted adults did not protect and caused harm
- Friendships are difficult to maintain
- Innate attachment needs go unmet

McDonald et al., 2013; Neilson et al., 2018; Walker et al., 2011

### CSA, Religion, and Spirituality

- Distorted trust skews perception of God
- Spiritual connection is uncomfortable but desired
- Religious affiliations are intimidating
- Shame of CSA separates the victim from God and His church
- Relationships are fear-provoking
- Touch can be triggering



Koenig, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2017; Sansone et al., 2012; Song et al., 2016; Vaillencourt-Morel et al., 2019



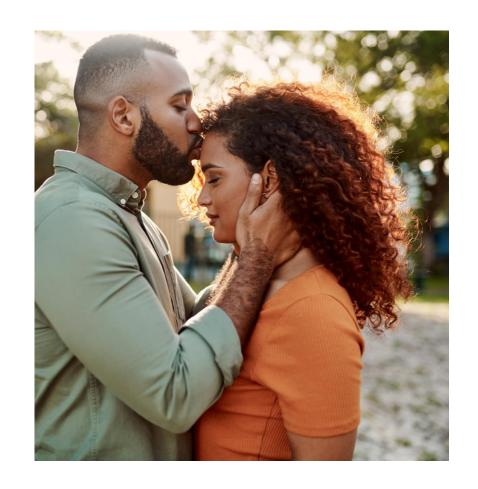
# CSA, Religion, and Spirituality

- A strong relationship with God safeguards from depression and anxiety
- Positive emotions and healthy coping is increased by a close relationship with God
- Bonds with others are improved with spirituality
- Faith-based activities are shown to decrease depression and anger
- Trusting God contributes to feelings of hope and acceptance
- Self-confidence is increased with practiced spirituality



### God and His Wounded Child

- A relationship with God increases marital satisfaction as well as any committed relationship
- With God, forgiveness comes more readily
- Religious community benefits relationship success
- Spirituality improves intimacy in couples
- With a strong faith, the non-CSA partner has a better ability to understand and find acceptance of partner's abuse
- The faithful couple can have meaningful engagement.



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