

Hello Reader,

My name is Abigail, or Abi for short. I am 13 years old and I live in a small town in Alaska. This is a book about some things that happened when I was in sixth grade and how I ended up learning more about dealing with hard feelings than I ever imagined I would need. My whole purpose in writing this is because I want something good to come out of all that confusion and weirdness. I don't want anyone to feel as lonely as I did. This book is partly about what happened to me and to the girls I met in my support group (they all gave me permission to share their stories with you), but it is mostly about the things we learned and did afterwards that helped us heal. I didn't include too many details about the actual sexual abuse experiences, because that can be really hard to read if you've been abused yourself.

You might be reading this book because someone you know has been sexually abused or you might be reading it because you've been sexually abused yourself. Either way, you could still have some uncomfortable, difficult, or scary feelings about what happened. Reading about other people's feelings might make your own feelings about the abuse come to the surface, which can feel overwhelming. Try to read little bits of this book at a time. My therapist suggests that it is best to read this sort of thing during the day, rather than at night or before you go to bed. And it's a good idea to have someone you trust in the house with you or near you while you are reading, in case you start to have big feelings. Try not to get so lost in the story that you forget to notice your own body and brain. If you start to notice that your breathing becomes uneven or really fast, or your heart feels like it is pounding in your chest or you get dizzy or feel unreal – please, put the book down, look at the things that are around you, and go find or call that trusted adult. (If you don't have an adult in your life that you can talk to, you can call Child Help USA. Their number is 1-800-4ACHILD, or 1-800-422-4453. The call is free and it won't show up on your regular phone bill, but it will show up on a cell phone

ABI'S INTRODUCTION

bill). Other reasons for putting the book down or taking a break and talking to someone, are having strong memories or flashbacks of the abuse, panic feelings, feeling as if you are outside of your own body, or noticing a major change in your eating habits. And if you have any thoughts about hurting or killing yourself, or feeling like you need to drink or use drugs, believe me, those are sure signs that your feelings are getting too big to handle on your own! These are all ways that your body and your brain are telling you that they are on overload.¹ These defenses are ways people try to cope with strong feelings. Even though they can feel weird and scary, strong feelings are totally normal and expected considering what you have been through. Give yourself a break, put the book down for a while, and go relax, exercise, or do something fun.

Recovering from abuse can be hard work. You may want to ignore it and try to get on with your life or to push yourself to heal really fast, but my therapist says that it's important to take it slowly and to really talk about all the feelings you're having. She says you can't get past the past unless you deal with it. If you have been abused, I hope that you will find a therapist or counselor to work with, or talk to yours if you already have one. It is best if you can read this book while you are meeting with a therapist, so that you can talk to him or her about your responses when you get together.



Before we get started, I want to tell you about the different parts of this book. First, there is my story itself. Along with the story you will find more facts and information that I got from my group leader and my therapist and stuff I looked up on the Internet. In the back of the book is a Glossary for words I didn't know or wasn't sure about before all of this happened, and a sort of handbook of more stuff you or your parents might need to know. If you have questions about a certain thing, look at the Index in the very back of the book. Hopefully, that will make it easier to find what you need. Feel free to jump around and read what interests you. Everybody is different and what is helpful to one person might not be what another person needs at all.

I am a fictional character, but I was created out of the very real feelings and experiences of the girls PeggyEllen and Kimber used to be, and the girls they have known.

We hope that this book will help you heal.

Abi, PeggyEllen, & Kimber