

Discussing Abuse

Anyone who has experienced any sort of abuse knows that there are plenty of people who don't want to hear your story. They say things like it's too negative to talk about, stop being so dramatic, don't air your dirty laundry or it's an inappropriate topic of conversation. They may say you're lying or you need to just get over it. In any case, many people try to shut down abuse victims for talking about their situation. Or, they may even try to shame you if you're not talking to your abuser. They may remind you that is your mother (like you could forget that fact), or say your abuser misses you.

A person who would say such ridiculous things may have been abused as well, & doesn't want to be reminded of their situation. They're probably trying to ignore their own pain rather than deal with it, & by you talking about yours, you're making it hard for them.

Or, maybe the person knows the abuser, & refuses to accept that he would do such things. It is very hard to accept that a person you know, love & respect could be abusive.

Although both situations are understandable, don't let someone shut you down from sharing your story. Maybe you would be better off not discussing it with that one person, but don't let that stop you from talking about it with other people! Secrecy is a terrible thing! It helps abusers a great deal, never victims. Secrecy guarantees an abuser can continue abusing. It protects their reputation. It gives them power & removes all power from their victims.

Secrecy shames a victim into being silent, when she needs to discuss her pain in order to heal. A victim internalizes her pain when secrecy is demanded, & it makes her sick mentally & often physically as well.

Don't empower abusers! Empower yourself instead. Talk about your situation however you see fit to. You have nothing to be ashamed of for being abused. Your abuser is the one with plenty to be ashamed of. There is a fantastic quote by author Anne Lamott that says, "You own everything that happened to you. Tell your stories. If people wanted you to write warmly about them, they should have behaved better." While it says writing your story, it also is true for discussing your story. What happened to you isn't just about your abuser. It's your story too. You have every right to share it however you see fit. If it makes the abuser look bad, that isn't your fault. It's the abuser's fault for hurting you, not your fault for talking about it!

As someone who's written books about my experiences though, I feel I'd be remiss if I didn't tell you that you should be careful if you share your story via a public forum, such as this, a blog or writing a book. There are laws about slander. Slander is making accusations to damage or destroy someone's reputation. To avoid that, be careful how you tell your stories. It's best to avoid mentioning your abuser's name or

clues leading to it. In my work, I never have mentioned my parents' names or precise location.

Always stick to the facts. Don't say things like, "That jerk father of mine did such & such to me". Instead, say things in a factual way without name calling. Something like, "When I was 17, my father did such & such to me." See the difference?

Also, you can use a pen name when you write. A lot of people do that & there is no shame in that. It may be a very good option for you, especially if the one who abused you is dangerous. You have to protect yourself, & a pen name may be a very good option for doing that.