

REVISED
EDITION

How Long Does It Hurt?

A Guide to
Recovering from
Incest and Sexual
Abuse for Teenagers,
Their Friends, and
Their Families

Cynthia L. [REDACTED]
with Kristin [REDACTED]

Foreword by Eliana Gil

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A Guide to Recovering From Incest and Sexual Abuse for Teenagers, Their Friends, and Their Families

Revised Edition

Cynthia L. Mather

with Kristina E. Debye

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HOW LONG DOES IT HURT?

*Dedicated to Kristen and all my younger
brothers and sisters who are hurting*

In loving memory of:

Richard W. Wood, Jr.

1931-1994

Elizabeth C. Darwe

1909-1994

THANK YOU

I WISH I COULD take full credit for writing this book. I can't. Too many people in my life have been a part of this labor for me to say, "I did it myself."

I must first give thanks to God, who has poured His love and healing all over the wounds of my life. To do that, He has used the people I have listed below and others who are no longer a part of my life but who have left their fingerprints all over it. There were many times during the writing of this work that I knew I was simply an instrument. I am grateful and humbled that He has used me in this way.

My fondest thanks to the "small group"—Jim and Ann, Don and Donna, Carl and Susan, Dick and Judy, Ham and Joann, Jim and Audrey—who listened with so much love as I told them my story and who have in so many different ways supported me through this work.

My gratitude to Kris Debye, my collaborator, who was the first professional to offer me encouragement and later the use of her experience and name. This book is a better book because of Kris's involvement. If there are any errors, I must claim them. Kris did her best in dealing with my strong will.

To the Reverend Faith Jongewaard, my thanks for the garden discussions about forgiveness. To the Reverend Carl vom Eigen, my thanks for teaching me a new idea of reconciliation. To Jennifer Nabet, thanks for pointing me in the right direction. To Dr. Audrey Gift, thanks for getting me started. To Jim Mather, thanks for giving life to the characters.

Every writer needs a push now and then. My "pushy" force was Susan Euker—she kept opening doors and pushing me through. Thank you, Susan.

In my life, I have known love that is a weapon and love that bears a price tag. But I have also been blessed with knowing love that is unconditional. For that I am grateful to the three most important men in my life: my husband, Dennis, and my sons, Jim and Chris. Without their support and encouragement, this book would not be. Thank you, guys, for understanding about the missed soccer games, the unwashed clothes,

and the uncooked meals. And to Denny, "thank you" will never cover what I feel for your steadfastness and love in my life.

Finally, my deepest thanks to the many kids who talked to me, wrote to me, shared with me. Your candor has been a gift, your encouragement an inspiration, your need a reason to keep going. Ultimately this book belongs to you.

C.L.M.

FOREWORD

THIS IS A BOOK for a special group of teenagers—young people who are facing all the usual problems of growing up but who are also unique in a different way: they are struggling to survive incest or sexual abuse.

If you are reading this, something in the title attracted your attention. You may be in a bad situation yourself right now. You may have been hurt when you were younger, or have a friend or relative who has been hurt. You may feel caught between wanting to think about it and wanting to forget. You probably have lots of questions on your mind, and this book can help you sort through some of the possible answers.

I say answers because there is no one way to think about, feel about, or work out incest or child sexual abuse. Just as each person is unique, so the solutions to each person's problems are also unique. That is one of the ways this book succeeds so well. It doesn't try to "fix things" for you. It helps you look at, and think about, lots of concerns. What works for you may not work for anyone else.

Incest and sexual abuse are very complicated problems. Incest occurs when an adult (or an older kid) in your family, or someone acting in the role of a family member, like a stepparent, does (or tries to do) something sexual with you. At first you may wonder if you did something wrong, or if you are imagining things. Later, you may still wonder if you are being bad in some way that causes the incest, or what to do to make it stop. But the fact that you love the person who is doing something wrong makes it more difficult for you to know what to do next.

In cases of sexual abuse that don't involve family members, you may still feel caught in a bind. You may trust, like, and want to spend time with the adult, and yet now you feel confused or frightened about this person's sexual behavior toward you.

You may not want to think of yourself as "abused." You might think that happens to other kids, not you. You might want to stay loyal to your parents or friends—after all, if you say you were abused, you are also saying they are abusers. You might feel guilty or ashamed to think of them in this way.

But everyone who has been hurt needs to heal. When your body is hurt, healing organisms go to the place that hurts until, together with prescribed medicine, they heal the injury—usually after some pain. Emotional hurts are the same—they heal with time, and you can often benefit from a helping hand.

This book is that helping hand. The author, Cynthia Mather, speaks knowingly about the confusion, fear, anger, sadness, and despair of incest and sexual abuse. She talks from the point of view of someone who knows, because she herself was hurt when she was young. Her perspective makes sense, and she discusses things in detail, using clear examples. She never suggests that you should figure stuff out on your own. She provides lots of alternatives. She's also very realistic, knowing that some of the suggestions are easier said than done. She wants you to see what your choices are. It's as if she lights up a dark road, so you can see where you are going rather than struggle alone in the dark.

The main thrust of this book is that you can transform this experience from something that scares, confuses, saddens, angers, or makes you feel unsafe or bad about yourself, into something that allows you to feel stronger and prouder about who you are. Cynthia Mather believes (as I do) that you can learn to help yourself by trusting your instincts, giving yourself credit for surviving the experience to begin with, and making choices designed to return the power where it belongs—to you!

Eliana Gil, Ph.D.

July 1994

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

MY NAME IS Cynthia Lynn Mather. I am thirty-nine years old, have been married to the same man for seventeen years, and have two sons aged twelve and nine. I am an amateur musician, a writer, and a lousy cook.

I am also a survivor of incest.

My biological father began sexually abusing me when I was six years old. The physical part ended when I was fourteen, but the verbal sexual abuse continued until I was seventeen.

In the past twenty-some years, I have spent a lot of time, energy, money, and tears trying to deal with the damage my father did to my life. I have finally achieved a place in my own healing where I feel able to reach out to other people who have been sexually abused.

This book started out to be a book for adult women who were trying to heal from the hurt of sexual abuse—until the night a teenage friend blurted out a story about her girlfriend who had been sexually abused by a grandfather. Allison had gone to the library to look for books about incest and sexual abuse so she would know how to help her friend. She couldn't find anything useful.

Suddenly a lightbulb went off in my head: teenagers need a book about sexual abuse and incest—a book that would talk to them about their own unique problems and issues, that would help them through the rough spots and get them started on the road to healing.

My hope is that this book will do just that for you. I have tried to answer many of the questions you may have about sexual abuse. I have also tried to provide basic information, like who are abusers, why do they do it, how can you make them stop, what do you say to your friends, what happens in court, and more.

It's important that as you read this book you remember that every teenager's situation is unique. What happened to one teen may not have happened to you. How you feel about the abuser may be different from what another teen feels. There is no "right" or "wrong" way to feel or be when it comes to sexual abuse. The purpose of this book is to help you see that what you're going through happens to a lot of kids, that however you are feeling is OK, and that there is life after sexual abuse.

There have been some very brave teens who allowed me to interview them and others who told me about their abuse through a questionnaire. Many of the comments in this book are either actual quotes from these kids or are combinations of their responses. Some of the comments are from survivors I know personally, have met, or have read about. All comments are based on actual events and conversations but have been changed in some way to protect the privacy of the victims.

My greatest wish is that you'll learn from this book that you are not alone, that you are not bad, that you didn't cause your own abuse, and that it's possible to move on from the pain.

You are a person of great courage, a person to be admired and respected. You may not believe that right now, but I hope you will after you've read this book.

Cynthia L. Mather

July 1994

PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

TEN YEARS HAVE PASSED since this book was first published. In that time, I have grown older (I will soon turn fifty); my husband and I have continued to stay committed to our marriage, which will be twenty-eight years old this spring; and my wonderful little boys have become incredible young men.

Since the time this book was first published, I have heard from many men and women, boys and girls who have been sexually abused. They write to me, come up to me after hearing me speak, or sit on my back porch and tell me their stories. When I wrote this book ten years ago and as I worked on the revision, I imagined *you* sitting on my back porch—as if we were together having a conversation. I hope you can hear my concern, my care, and my hugs in my words.

I am delighted that this book continues to be of help to those who are hurting, but I am also sad that the need for it still exists. Some of you who are reading this book were just babies ten years ago—just learning to crawl, just starting preschool. And here you are now looking for a way to deal with your pain—or maybe the pain of a friend.

Whatever has brought you to this book, I pray you will find comfort and encouragement; that you will truly come to believe that the abuse was not your fault; and that you will understand that even if the people who should have protected you or fought for you or believed you didn't, it doesn't mean you aren't worth protecting, fighting for, or believing. There are literally millions of us out here who have survived the hurt. We're rooting for you, believing in you, *knowing* that you can survive it too.

Blessings,

Cynthia L. Mather
P.O. Box 4001
Timonium, MD 21094

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HOW LONG DOES IT HURT?

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PART ONE

THE HURTING BEGINS
